

Fabio Tutrone (Palermo)

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Seneca's Naturalism and
the Problem of Animal Rights

1. Debating the Limits of Interspecific Violence: Ancient and Modern Bioethics

In the public debate of our times, scientific researchers and supporters of animal rights seem sometimes to pursue conflicting goals. Wide-ranging controversies have arisen over the bioethical implications of the use of animals in medical research, and a rift has apparently developed between two noble purposes: on the one hand, the discovery or refinement of therapeutic methods for human diseases; on the other, the respect for animal life and dignity. Seen from a similar perspective, human happiness and ecological behavior – the good of animals and that of men – run on parallel, if not diverging, tracks.

No doubt, many contemporary theorists would argue that it is logically wrong to draw such a general conclusion from a very particular case, since there are plenty of other situations in which human and non-human animals help (and depend on) each other. The standard concept of *ecosystem*, for instance, relies on the well-grounded assumption that every component of an environment – men, animals, plants, and even non-living beings like minerals – contributes to a delicate systemic balance creating mutual interrelations.¹ Admittedly, the condition of mankind and the fate

¹ As Norton, 1992, 26, pointed out, 'an ecological system has maintained its integrity – a stronger concept that includes the conditions of health – if it retains (1) the total diversity of the system – the sum total of the species and associations that have held sway historically – and (2) the systematic organization which maintains that diversity, including, especially, the system's multiple layers of complexity through time'.

of animals are connected through a highly complex network of relationships, which gives rise to puzzling, multi-faceted questions.

It is notorious that many ancient authors were well aware of such morally significant issues. Even if the Greek and Roman world did not know genetic engineering, large-scale animal experiments, and industrial farming, its most sensitive intellectuals devoted careful reflection to the connection between knowledge, violence and the order of nature.² In the present paper, I will take into account the particularly intriguing case of Seneca the Younger – a philosopher, poet, and man of power often assumed to pay exclusive attention to *human* matters.³ Far from ignoring the importance of man's relationship to the environment and other living beings, Seneca wrote a wide-ranging treatise on natural sciences – the *Naturales Quaestiones* – which attests his profound awareness of the ethical meaning of physics.⁴ Most importantly, the whole conception of human life and moral self-improvement emerging from the writer's works reflects the centrality of cosmology as an essential knowledge area allowing man to fulfil his natural vocation (in the terms of Stoic teleology).⁵ In Seneca's

Notably, while the present-day ecosystemic approach sees man as part of the natural environment, the first upholders of ecological theories – such as the German biologist Ernst Heinrich Haeckel (1834-1919) – did not go so far. Only in the twentieth century (especially after the studies of the so-called Chicago School of Sociology, also known as the 'Ecological School'), researchers became accustomed to a comprehensive consideration of human life in its biological context. Nevertheless, as McIntosh 1985, 12, remarked, the search for answers to some basic questions of modern ecology 'was based on the yearning for order and purpose in nature which pervades Western religion and philosophy'. Of course, the theoretical reflections carried out by classical thinkers played a prominent role in this respect, and in the present paper we will take into account cosmological views such as that of the Pythagorean school, which supposed a 'circle of life' of eschatological significance.

² The ethical-cultural relevance of human-animal interactions, in particular, was the object of thorough (and frequently conflicting) investigations: see the far-reaching surveys of Dierauer, 1977, Sorabji, 1993, and Osborne, 2007.

³ As is well-known, an eminent part of traditional Senecan scholarship focused on the author's original *humanism*, variously compared to later Christian attitudes: see e. g. Grimal, 1978 and Chaumartin, 1985.

⁴ See now the penetrating analysis of Williams, 2012, 3: 'a (perhaps *the*) dominating principle in the *Natural Questions* is that the study of nature is inseparable from reflection on human nature. For Seneca, by studying nature we free the mind from the restrictions and involvements of this life, liberating it to observe, and luxuriate in, the undifferentiated cosmic wholeness that is so distant from the fragmentations and the disruptions of our everyday experience'.

⁵ Cf. especially Inwood, 2005, 157-200, and, from an even larger perspective, Wildberger, 2006, who remarks on Seneca's peculiar inclination to use the description of man's role in the cosmos for paraenetic purposes (241-243).

view, no contradiction can arise between scientific research and ethical concerns, provided that both these fields of interest are correctly understood. In fact, while the investigation of physical phenomena (including, of course, zoological evidence) should mainly be aimed at a deeper understanding of nature's plans, the spiritual liberation of mankind is expected to ensue from cognitive enhancement.

According to the Stoic tradition taken up and revived by Seneca, man is a kind of transitional being overtly favored by divine providence. As a fetus hiding in his mother's womb, he resembles a plant endowed with mere vegetative functions (φύσις), but when he grows into a child, he acquires those sensory motor skills (ψυχή) which qualify him as an animal (ζῷον). Following Aristotle, however, Seneca and the Stoics see man as a linguistic and rational animal, for adulthood would entail the development of communication and logical abilities (λόγος).⁶ Remarkably, these abilities are not an unchangeable endowment acquired by man in a finished state; rather, the purpose of human existence – its own *telos* – is to perfect reason to such an extent that no difference but mortality divides man and god.⁷ Only the wise man, of course, succeeds in reaching such a

⁶ Indeed, the Stoic philosophy of nature narrowed and specified Aristotle's anthropological paradigm by emphasizing the preeminence of internal reasoning over external language and sociability. In the Stoics' view, it is logical consciousness (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) – an exclusive prerogative of gods and men – which gives true meaning to phonatory abilities (λόγος προφορικὸς) and social inclinations. Thus, even if other animals, too, produce articulated sounds (e. g. crows and parrots) or tend to be gregarious (e. g. ants and bees), a genuine political community based on reason (and reasoned speech) can solely be found among men and gods (cf. Dierauer, 1977, 224-238, Sorabji, 1993, 122-133, Labarrière 2005a). Moreover, as Labarrière, 2005b, 11-12, pointed out, a striking theoretical gap separates Aristotle's 'scientific' approach to animal life from the Stoic ethics-centred investigation of biological matters: in other words, the Aristotelian standpoint 'consiste à soutenir qu'il faut s'intéresser aux capacités animales de très près, ne serait-ce qu'afin de savoir en que l'homme se différencie exactement des "autres animaux". Je qualifierai cette attitude de "scientifique" parce que ca visée n'est d'emblée ni morale, ni religieuse, mais plutôt "épistémologique" ou "gneséologique" [...]. By contrast, the Stoic approach 'inscrit dans une polémique sur l'art de vivre du sage et, plus généralement, sur l'attitude que nous devons adopter vis-à-vis des autres animaux en fonction de la place de l'homme dans le *cosmos* [...]. Refuser aux animaux la raison, toute forme d'intelligence ou de conscience, renforce ainsi la dimension clairement apologétique d'une doctrine s'enracinant elle-même dans une théorie de la Providence que nous ne saurions confondre avec la téléologie aristotélicienne à l'oeuvre dans la science de la nature du Stagirite'.

⁷ On the transitional nature of man in Stoic theory see Wildberger, 2006, 243: 'während alles übrige was lebt, sein Dasein auf einer Pneuma-Stufe beginnt und auch auf dieser Stufe beendet, während also eine Pflanze immer nur Leben hat, ein Tier (seit seiner

high goal, and his cognitive-moral status ideally coincides with the perfect rationality of the divine cosmos. That is why the sage (ὁ σοφός) is said to be the model of a life in accordance with nature (ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν) – the most alluring and at the same time the most problematic Stoic precept.⁸

Patently, the world conceived by the Stoics – the world at the centre of Seneca's scientific investigations and moral exhortations – is a very hierarchical, selective and anthropocentric one. As a rule, animals are excluded from any form of justice, since this is reputed to originate from the possession of reason.⁹ It is on the basis of their rationality that men and gods participate in a universal political community – a transnational (and indeed *trans-human*) cosmopolis which nonetheless rules out children and mentally impaired persons.¹⁰ Admittedly, in the lofty and dynamic form

Geburt) immer nur eine Seele ohne Sprache und ein göttlicher Himmelskörper immer nur eine Seele mit vollkommener Sprache, ist der Mensch ein Zwischenwesen'. On Seneca's reception of such a morally relevant doctrine see especially the discussion of *Ep.* 124 (but cf. also *Ep.* 41.7-8; 74.14-18; 76.8-11; 118.12-14).

⁸ Though admirably envisioned on a theoretical level, the Stoic overlapping of *rationalism* and *naturalism* inevitably involves a series of practical and logical ambiguities. See e. g. Long, 1996a, 150-151: 'if Stoic moral theory is unintelligible when divorced from Nature, how practicable is their system when Nature is placed in its true perspective? A human being is to live as Nature wills, that is: obedient to reason. But reason here means a sound reason, reason that accords consistently with Nature. How is one to know whether one's reason meets this condition? As far I can see, the Stoics gave no satisfactory answer to this question. What they did was to offer the sage as a paradigm'.

⁹ For a sound account of the Stoic theory of justice, with special regard to the status of non-human animals, see Sorabji, 1993, 122-133 and Wildberger, 2006, 244-275. From a wider perspective, see instead Inwood, 1985 and Schofield, 1995.

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that Seneca himself provides us with meaningful evidence on this matter, for it has been often assumed that later Stoic thinkers (the Roman Stoics in particular) adopted a much more inclusive model of cosmopolitanism than Zeno and the first scholars (see Schofield, 1991, whose 'developmental' interpretation has been reasonably questioned by Sellars, 2007 and Vogt, 2008). While one may fruitfully discuss the differences between Zeno's city of sages and Epictetus' universal community, there is indeed no doubt about the Stoic exclusion of *irrational* and *pre-rational* beings from justice and moral life. In *Ep.* 124-7-10, for instance, Seneca assimilates children and embryos to plants and animals, stating that they all ignore the true good attained by reason; in particular, the child is said to be 'an animal not yet endowed with reason' (*nondum rationale animal*), inherently incapable of reaching goodness. Even more eloquent is the discussion of legal punishments in *De ira* 1.15-1-2, where the death penalty for irredeemable criminals is justified through a striking comparison with the killing of sick animals and deformed infants. Significantly, all these acts are described as necessary 'removals' based on reason and not on anger (*nec*

given to it by Stoic theory, reason or *logos* is a very demanding attribute. It is clearly not sufficient to belong to the human race (in a static, taxonomic sense) to be worth of the highest cosmological standing, since, as Katja Vogt remarked, even rational adults are mere *inhabitants* of the Stoic cosmopolis, the only true *citizens* being gods and wise men.¹¹

What is more relevant to our present concern, however, is that the exclusion of irrational animals from the field of justice is presented as a necessary condition for the existence of human society. As Plutarch puts

ira sed ratio est a sanis inutilia secernere). Likewise, in *De ira* 2.26.4-6, the Latin writer blames those who get angry with beasts, children and mentally impaired people (*pueris et non multum a puerorum prudentia distantibus*), arguing that, due to their unawareness (*imprudencia*), the behavior of such agents has no moral relevance.

- ¹¹ See Vogt, 2008 (esp. 65-110): according to Stoic philosophy, 'the law regulates the cosmos, and thus it ties all human beings together. But the law is identified with *perfect reason*, not with reason. A human being who is not wise does not live up to the law; she does not live a lawful life' (14). Since the Stoics have been frequently regarded as the first upholders of a theory of human rights (see e. g. Hadot, 1998, 311, or Mitsis, 1999), similar assertions can probably appear surprising. However, as Bett, 2012 has pointed out through a careful re-examination of the Stoics' accounts on this matter, while it is true that 'there is a strand in their thinking that is encouraging to the notion of human rights, there are other strands that point in a very different direction, and that could not be abandoned without abandoning Stoicism itself'. In particular, 'despite the evidence for a Stoic notion of community among all human beings, we cannot deny that the Stoics assign a very special status to one type of human being, namely the sage. The sage's wise or virtuous demeanour, and the actions that flow from it, are of a value that is on a wholly different level from anything that the non-wise can hope to achieve. And this gulf between sages and everyone else has a number of consequences that make it very difficult to hold on to any notion of universal human rights'. In Derridean terms one could say that the Stoics' *logocentric* approach to ethical issues and their emphasis on a sort of *ascensional* anthropological paradigm are intrinsically discriminating. By appealing to the classificatory relevance of cognitive criteria, in fact, a close connection is established between denigration of animals and marginalization of 'minor' humans. If one considers the profound influence of Stoic thought on later political conceptions, one might reasonably agree with Lévi-Strauss's famous (and controversial) claims about the origins of Western racism: 'by isolating man from the rest of creation and defining too narrowly the boundaries separating him from other living beings, the Western humanism inherited from antiquity and the Renaissance has deprived him of a bulwark; and, as the experiences of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have proved, has allowed him to be exposed and defenseless to attacks stirred up within the stronghold itself. This humanism has allowed even closer segments of humanity to be cast outside arbitrary frontiers to which it was all the easier to deny the same dignity as the rest of humanity, since man had forgotten that he is worthy of respect more as a living being than as the lord and master of creation – a primary insight that should have induced him to show his respect for all living beings' (Lévi-Strauss, 1985, 23).

it in his lively dialogue *On the Intelligence of Animals*:

The Stoics and Peripatetics strenuously agree on the other side, to the effect that justice could not then come into existence, but would remain completely without form or substance, if all the beasts partake of reason. For either we are necessarily unjust if we do not spare them; or, if we do not take them for food, life becomes impracticable or impossible; in a sense we shall be living the life of beasts once we give up the use of beasts.¹²

Even though, as mentioned earlier, a sharp distinction should be maintained between Stoic and Aristotelian natural philosophy,¹³ the general theoretical framework outlined by Plutarch with regard to the Stoics is indeed accurate and revealing. In particular, the connection established between anthropocentric rationalism and ethical-political theory reflects a focal point of Stoic doctrine. Notably, when describing the ruin of justice resulting from the inclusion of animals, Plutarch employs two rather uncommon adjectives (ἀσυστατος and ἀνυπόπαρκτος), which emphatically refer to the issue of social stability: if non-human beings were recognized to be rational – and thus to be endowed with natural rights, in accordance with the above-mentioned Stoic tenet – justice as a whole (δικαιοσύνη) would lack consistency (συστασις) and truthfulness (ὑπαρ). In such an execrated catastrophic scenario, men would be forced to regress to the earliest stages of social evolution, the 'beastly' way of life (θηριώδης βίος) which is the object of various imaginative reconstructions among ancient philosophers.¹⁴

Plutarch's work portrays a spirited conversation between supporters and detractors of animal intelligence which should have taken place a few

¹² Plutarch, *Soll. An.* 963F-964A: οἱ γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς καὶ τοῦ Περιπάτου μάλιστα πρὸς τοῦναντίον ἐντέίνονται τῷ λόγῳ, τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἕτεραν γένεσιν οὐκ ἔχουσης, ἀλλὰ παντάπασιν ἀσυστάτου καὶ ἀνυπόπαρκτου γιγνομένης. | εἰ πᾶσι τοῖς ζῴοις λόγου μέτεστι· γίγνεται γὰρ ἢ τὸ ἀδικεῖν ἀναγκαῖον ἡμῖν ἀφειδοῦσιν αὐτῶν, ἢ μὴ χρωμένων αὐτοῖς τὸ ζῆν ἀδύνατον καὶ ἄπορον· καὶ τρόπον τινὰ θηρίων βίον βιωσόμεθα, τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν θηρίων προέμενοι χρεῖας (transl. Cherniss-Hembold, 1957).

¹³ See above n. 6.

¹⁴ On the literary and philosophical topos of the primitive men's beastly life see especially Dierauer, 1977, 25-39, who points out the influential role of Presocratic and sophistic reflections on this matter. The profound anthropological significance of the ancient accounts of primitive history comes out very clearly from the classical survey of Lovejoy-Boas, 1935 (260-286 on Seneca and Stocism). It is certainly no accident that Latin authors showed special interest in the subject and investigated consistently the transition from savagery to civilization: as the discussions of Cicero (*Inv.* 1.1-5), Sallust (*Cat.* 6.1-3; *Iug.* 18.1-2), and Lucretius (5.925-1010) indicate, it was the process itself of political aggregation – its nature, limits, and potential dangers – which attracted the attention of Roman intellectuals from the time of the Republican crisis onwards.

decades after Seneca's death.¹⁵ At that time – in the prosperous years of the early Imperial period – the position of the most eminent philosophical traditions concerning the nature of man, the origin of justice, and the status of non-human animals was relatively well-defined. In the eyes of Plutarch, who was an intellectually engaged Middle Platonist,¹⁶ the anthropocentric denigration of animals was a typical feature of Stoicism, in the same way as the defence of animal faculties was peculiar to Academic Skepticism (and, for different reasons, to Pythagoreanism). Of course, Plutarch's literary representation reshaped the contents of such traditions for specific ideological purposes, and even the pro-animals arguments dating back to Neo-Academic polemics – which the Greek writer notoriously embraced and revitalized – inevitably underwent a process of rearrangement.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Plutarch's dialogues dealing with the pro-

¹⁵ As is well-known, Plutarch belonged to the generation which followed Seneca's one. He was born between 46 and 48 AD, while Seneca died in 65. To all appearances, most of Plutarch's works were composed in his later years (cf. Jones, 1966 and Delvaux, 1995), and they thus reflect the cultural climate of the Roman empire at the time of the so-called Nerva-Antonine dynasty. Interestingly enough, however, Plutarch could personally see Nero, Seneca's rebel pupil, in 67, when the Roman emperor competed in the Pythian games at Delphi and the Greek writer was already in his twenties (cf. *De E ap. Delph.* 385B). As concerns, more specifically, the date of composition of *De sollertia animalium*, no definite pronouncement seems to be possible. Though consistent efforts have been devoted to establish the dialogue's 'dramatic' date on the basis of a reference to the 'old Vespasianus' (ὁ γέρον Οὔεσπασιανός, 474A), Bouffartigue, 2012, XX-XXI, is certainly right in saying that similar elements (which might induce to place the conversation in the 80s-90s AD) 'ne nous permettent nullement de déterminer la date de la composition du dialogue'.

¹⁶ On Plutarch's relevance in the context of ancient Platonism see Dörrie, 1971, Froideford, 1987 and Opsomer, 2007. As several scholarly surveys have pointed out, one of the most interesting aspects of Plutarch's philosophical reflection – one which challenges the old stereotyped division between New Academy and Middle Platonism – is the attempt to combine typical skeptic polemics (such as the claim of animal rationality) with dogmatic interpretations of Plato's texts: see e. g. Tarrant, 1985 and Opsomer, 1998.

¹⁷ Cf. Labarrière, 2005b, 24-25: 'malheureusement pour nous, nous ne connaissons qu'indirectement cette polémique au sujet de la raison des animaux, et il serait donc aussi téméraire que vain de chercher à savoir ce que professaient exactement, à supposer qu'ils aient explicitement professé quelque chose au sujet des animaux, des philosophes dont nombre d'entre eux, à commencer par Carnéade, se refusaient, tel Socrate, à écrire. [...] S'il est sage de ne pas poursuivre plus loin cette petite reconstruction, on doit en revanche insister sur l'utilisation de cette polémique par Plutarque et par Porphyre, deux de nos auteurs sources au sujet de cette polémique, les deux autre étant Philon d'Alexandrie et Sextus Empiricus, seul Philon prenant le parti des Stoïciens tandis que Sextus est peut-être le plus proche des Néo-Académiciens'.

blem of animal dignity and flesh-eating¹⁸ provide a highly eloquent (and globally reliable) framework to approach the early Imperial discussion on such themes – a discussion to which, as is well-known, Seneca made a thoughtful and original contribution.¹⁹

In the present paper, I will focus on an interesting passage of Seneca's treatise *On Clemency* (*De Clementia*) where the topic of animal rights is explicitly mentioned. To all appearances, this is the only passage in which the Latin philosopher employs the juridically and philosophically significant expression *ius animantium*, thus referring to a form of nature-based 'animal right'.²⁰ Indeed, the intellectual relevance of such an expression and its incontrovertible connection to the topic of the 'extension' of justice are further highlighted by the use of the adjective *commune*. In Seneca's words, there would be a *common* right of living beings – *commune ius animantium* – forbidding to perpetrate certain acts of violence. On the whole, however, the passage seems to aim at maintaining the inviolability of *human* rights, paying special attention to the pitiful condition of slaves. Notoriously, one of the most typical aspects of Seneca's Neo-Stoic humanism is precisely the call for a mild treatment of slaves – a call based on the philosophical (and physiological) notion of human nature.²¹ Given the presence of such a

¹⁸ That is to say, *De sollertia animalium*, *Bruta animalia ratione uti*, and *De esu carnium* (which includes two different discourses and was even larger in its original form). Further references to animals-related issues can be found in *De tuenda sanitate praecepta* as well as in the *Quaestiones Convivales*. For a comprehensive discussion of these Plutarchean works in light of ancient and modern ethical debates see Tsekourakis, 1987, Del Corno, 2001 and Newmyer, 2005.

¹⁹ I have tried to offer a general interpretation of Seneca's views on animals and man-animal relationships in Tutrone 2012. Stimulating remarks on this subject, however, can also be found in Torre, 1995a, 1995b, and 1997.

²⁰ As far as I can see, this is even the only occurrence of such a notable *iunctura* in classical Latin.

²¹ As the famous discussions of *Ben.* 3.18-28 and *Ep.* 47 show, Seneca's polemic against the cruel treatment of slaves relies on the Stoic ideal of a shared human nature (an ideal eloquently summarized by the opening maxim of *Ep.* 47: '*Servi sunt*'. *Immo homines*). As mentioned earlier, the Stoics held that all human adults are naturally endowed with reason, a substantive quality that everyone should bring to completion by reaching wisdom. This is said to be possible irrespective of one's social status or material conditions, so both slaves and masters, kings and subjects, are portrayed as the actors of a common struggle for virtue. However, since the achievement of such a purely spiritual goal is considered the only crucial issue of human existence, scholars have justly remarked that the improvement of the slaves' condition cannot be regarded as a central matter *per se* by any Stoic philosopher (see, most recently, Bett, 2012, 160-168). For the Stoa, life and death, richness and poverty, are mere *indifferents* (*ἀδιάφορα*); and as Seneca himself observes (*Ben.* 3.28.4-5), those enslaved by lust or

man-centered context, scholars have often overlooked the writer's explicit reference to the moral status of animals, although other meaningful details than the simple mention of a *ius animantium* point out the importance of this matter to our passage. As I shall try to show, Seneca's paraenetic argument succeeds in combining a peculiarly Stoic concern for the respect of human dignity with a more general defense of the natural order. This second aspect of the author's discourse includes an original consideration of the role of animals which echoes Sextian-Pythagorean views, but is organically integrated into the framework of Stoic cosmology.

What follows should thus be taken as a representative case study, pointing to Seneca's insightful connection of *humanism* and *naturalism*. I will argue that the Roman philosopher's idea of nature and cosmic order reflects the characteristic ambiguity of the Stoic reflection on this matter – an ambiguity which opens the way to assimilating more general concepts of biological integrity. A particularly influential role in this respect seems to have been played by Seneca's deep-rooted inclination for ascetic moralism, ostensibly relying on his early adoption of Pythagorean doctrines. Indeed, not only did Seneca believe in a close relationship between ethics and observation of nature, but he also saw a theoretical continuity between the defence of man and the preservation of every animal's status.

2. Kings, Slaves, and Moray Eels: Seneca on Nature and the Degeneration of Power
 Seneca's *De Clementia* is one of the birth acts of the long-lasting tradition of *Fürstenspiegel* or *specula principis* – the handbooks composed by educated advisers to instruct young princes at the beginning of their reign.²² Given

gluttony are the real slaves, solely the sage being free. Indeed, Seneca's celebrated exhortations to brotherhood among masters and slaves, which have frequently been seen as enlightened anticipations of liberal attitudes (see e. g. Richter, 1958, Grimal, 1978, 180-183 or Schirok, 2006), are more likely directed to an audience of Roman aristocrats (that is, to the author's peers) for the sake of their moral enhancement. And it is indisputable that such exhortations do not contain any allusion to a prospective abolition of slavery as an institution. As Bradley, 1986, 167, pointed out, 'since Seneca had no conception of solving the problem through encouraging a radical change in Rome's social structure, the course of action he took was to resist the common use of violence for cowing slaves into submissive acceptance of their condition in favour of an alternative which produced the same result, namely, the encouragement of servile acquiescence through token recognition of the slave's humanity'. After all, Finley, 1980, 121-122, did not go too far by saying that 'the *humanitas* of Seneca and Pliny [...] served to reinforce the institution, not to weaken it'. And, once again, we should resist the temptation of teleological arguments, taking cognizance of the *cultural* difference between ancient and modern approaches to ethics.

²² Though Seneca himself was deeply influenced by the Greek tradition of writings on

the obvious importance of sociopolitical issues to the argumentative construction of such works, it cannot be surprising that the author pays special attention to defining the limits of the ruler's action as well as the extent of the citizens' rights. Seneca was an experienced member of the senatorial elite, and his prime concern was to exhort Nero, his imperial pupil, to act in view of the general stability, that is to say, in accord with the prerogatives of old and new social agents. The so-called Julio-Claudian dynasty had already offered remarkable examples of autocratic government, making substantial changes to the traditional structure of Roman institutions, and it was quite understandable that Nero's newly started principate, overtly influenced by the mentorship of Seneca and Afranius Burrus, was regarded as a valuable opportunity of civic regeneration. The Senate and the heirs of the republican *nobilitas* were, of course, particularly keen to take advantage of this situation, but as far as we can judge from the text of *De Clementia*, Seneca believed that an effective solution to the early empire's political dilemmas could not be based on strategies of political restoration.²³ As an original Stoic thinker, he tried to apply the theoretical inputs of Greek philosophy to the thorny problems arising from Rome's transition to a principate, even at the cost of readjusting (and integrating) the standard system of Stoic ethics.²⁴

As regards, in particular, the *De Clementia*, it has been persuasively pointed out that the Latin writer endeavors to combine at least three lines

monarchy (*περι βασιλείας*) – a tradition including Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and Isocrates' *To Nicocles* as well as a wide-ranging corpus of Hellenistic works – the *De Clementia* played a decisive role in the development of such a peculiar genre. Above all, while most Greek treatises did not survive the end of classical antiquity (or reappeared at a significantly later time), Seneca's paraenetic speech shaped the reflection of both medieval and Renaissance theorists: see now Stacey, 2007. On the Latin philosopher's debt to Hellenistic political thought see instead Adam, 1970, who nonetheless underrates the philosophical complexity of *De Clementia*.

²³ As Griffin, 1976, 100-103, remarked, Seneca's political program as an *amicus principis* differed consistently from the intransigent attitude of the senatorial opposition, although this was frequently inspired by Stoic principles as well: 'basing their entire conception of politics on the Senate', men like Thrasea Paetus or Barea Soranus 'appreciated and used what *libertas senatoria* the new regime provided, but they could not accept Seneca's new ideology for the Principate, framed in terms of Greek kinship, nor his exclusively moral admiration of Cato and disapproval of Caesar's murder. Finally, they disagreed on the kind of Stoic justification to use for political retreat'.

²⁴ The general relevance of this point to a full understanding of Seneca's thought has been perceptively shown by Inwood, 2005. By contrast, as is well-known, an age-old scholarly trend tended to see Seneca's works as a late (and often unfaithful) testimony to Greek philosophy.

of thought: firstly, the Roman view of clemency as a public virtue, which had already been turned into a central issue of political life by Cicero's Caesarian speeches, with enduring effects on the subsequent imperial propaganda; secondly, the Hellenistic idea of kingship and monarchic evergetism, which had been at the centre of different theoretical elaborations; thirdly, the Stoic conception of moral virtues, whose traditional systematization was conveniently revised by Seneca.²⁵ The philosopher's main innovation, in this respect, concerns the transformation of *clementia* into a (if not *the*) fundamental virtue of human life. To the best of our knowledge, such a view reflects an original position of Seneca, for none of the Greek equivalents to *clementia* previously attested in Stoic sources seems to share a similar preeminence – neither φιλανθρωπία nor πραότης nor the Aristotelian-flavored ἐμεικεία.²⁶ Given the limited state of our evidence, however, it may suffice to highlight Seneca's ability in adapting

²⁵ See Griffin, 1976, 141-171 and Malaspina, 2003. The highly influential role of Cicero's Caesarian speeches in the constitution of the Roman panegyric tradition had already been noticed by Romano, 1965. Most importantly, there is clear evidence that Julius Caesar himself conceived clemency as a calculated political strategy (cf. Cicero, *Att.* 9.7c). A long-term perspective on the conceptual construction of *clementia* and its moral features has been adopted in Picone, 2008a, where proper attention is paid to the socio-anthropological implications of the theme (see, in particular, the contributions of Beltrami, 2008, Picone, 2008b and Casamento, 2008). On Seneca's debt to Cicero, however, see also Borgo, 1990, Malaspina, 2001 and 2005. It is worth mentioning that, as Griffin, 1976, 149-150, pointed out, after the battle of Actium the value of *clementia* became a foundational element of Augustan ideology, expressly recalled in official documents and artistic representations: an attitude which Nero and his shrewd entourage attempted to resume for their own purposes.

²⁶ Cf. Griffin, 1976, 154-171. Though Griffin offers a very sensible discussion of Seneca's relationship to Stoic and Aristotelian doctrines, much work is still to be done to fully understand the writer's conceptual endeavor. For instance, there is good reason to think that Aristotle's meta-judicial idea of *equity* (ἐμεικεία) and its reception in Hellenistic thought had a much stronger impact on *De Clementia* than Griffin is led to assume. Indeed, even if it is true that 'Seneca's *clementia* bears a very ambiguous relation to law' (160), scholars like Giacotti, 1955 and Bellincioni, 1984 are right in pointing to the author's belief in a universal ideal of justice: an ideal overstepping the limits of positive law and requiring the rational practice of clemency (cf. e. g. 1.20.1-2, where *clementia* is described as a necessary improvement of the more basic virtue of *iustitia*; or 1.19.1-4, where clemency is said to derive from a *naturae lex* which is inherently higher than any particular *ius*). As Schettino, 1998, 216, remarked, 'la *clementia* ha, secondo Seneca, un valore superiore in quanto attraverso essa il principe si conforma alla legge di natura. Il diritto di natura, perfetto, si contrappone in Seneca al diritto positivo, imperfetto. [...] La *clementia* è quindi l'attitudine al perdono che permette di superare i limiti posti dal diritto positivo e ciò in nome di una *iustitia* perfetta superiore appunto alle convenzioni, alle formule delle leggi'.

the principles of Stoic moral to the needs of Rome's new social order. Remarkably, this intellectual undertaking is carried out without going beyond the borders of the Stoic definition of virtue as a typically *human* and *rational* achievement. Already in the first section of *De Clementia*, Seneca makes clear his adherence to the Stoa's ethical rationalism:

That clemency, which is the most humane of virtues, is that which best befits a man, is necessarily an axiom, not only among our own sect, which regards man as a social animal, born for the good of the whole community, but even among those philosophers who give him up entirely to pleasure, and whose words and actions have no other aim than their own personal advantage. If man, as they argue, seeks for quiet and repose, what virtue is there which is more agreeable to his nature than clemency, which loves peace and restrains him from violence? Now clemency becomes no one more than a king or a prince; for great power is glorious and admirable only when it is beneficent; since to be powerful only for mischief is the power of a pestilence.²⁷

According to the Roman philosopher, even the Epicureans should agree that clemency is the most humane (and thus the most *human*, in a physiological sense) of moral virtues. Indeed, irrespective of Seneca's deliberate simplifications, it is true that both the Stoic and the Epicurean schools see the attainment of virtue or wisdom (the two terms being substantially synonymous) as a product of rational perfection, resulting in correct choices and behaviors.²⁸ Consequently, only man *qua* rational being is reputed to be capable of ethical improvement and all-embracing social feelings. And, in turn, virtue has distinctively human features.²⁹ In

²⁷ *Clem.* 1.3.2-3: "Nullam ex omnibus virtutibus homini magis convenire, cum sit nulla humanior, constet necesse est non solum inter nos, qui hominem sociale animal communi bono genitum videri volumus, sed etiam inter illos, qui hominem voluptati donant, quorum omnia dicta factaque ad utilitates suas spectant; nam si quietem petit et otium, hanc virtutem naturae suae nactus est, quae pacem amat et manus retinet. Nullum tamen clementia ex omnibus magis quam regem aut principem decet. Ita enim magnae vires decori gloriaeque sunt, si illis salutaris potentia est; nam pestifera vis est valere ad nocendum" (transl. Stewart, 1889).

²⁸ On the basically *rationalist* character of Epicurus' ethics see Nussbaum, 1994, 102-279, and Konstan, 2008. As Nussbaum, 1994, 114, observes resorting to the typical medical imagery of Epicureanism, 'Epicurus' diagnosis implies that there is a job of great urgency to be done. And since false belief is the root of the illness, the curative art must be an art that is equipped to challenge and conquer false belief. It must, then, be an art of reasoning' (cf. e. g. *KD* 20-21; *Ep. Men.* 124-125). Since nothing else but a correct use of reason in accordance with Epicurean philosophy can release from errors and lead to wisdom, it is clear that irrational animals cannot make substantive moral progress: see Dierauer, 1977, 194-198, and Dombrowski, 1984, 82, who both remark on Epicurus' peculiar form of anthropocentric rationalism.

²⁹ Cf. Seneca's thorough treatment of the subject in *Ep.* 121 and 124. Both these epistles

the Stoic system, as mentioned above, such an approach is emphasized by the ascription of a virtuous rationality to the gods and the cosmos.

Thus, when Seneca asserts that clemency denotes the highest degree of *humanitas*, he is clearly describing it as the acme of Stoic virtue. Moreover, he is implicitly highlighting the *rational* character of *clementia* – a character inherent in the very definition of virtue and repeatedly recalled in the treatise. For a Stoic like Seneca, virtue is the teleological fulfilment of man's rational nature, and the humanness of *clementia* derives precisely from its genuine status of *virtus*. Far from being an irrational concession based on inner weakness, Seneca's notion of clemency requires a conscious process of deliberation, demonstrating the agent's moderation and self-control.³⁰ The Latin philosopher is careful to specify that clemency does not contradict the traditional *severitas* (αὐστηρότης) of the Stoic sage – and this, of course, should be regarded as the main model of a wise ruler. *Crudelitas*, not *severitas*, would be the opposite of *clementia*, since the first is said to be a form of intemperance leading to excessive punishment (*in poenis exigendis intemperantia animi*).³¹

More importantly, in the second book of the work (which is particularly concerned with theoretical issues and employs a technical philosophical vocabulary), clemency is sharply distinguished from *venia* or *misericordia*, the forgetful indulgence caused by emotional perturbation which the Stoic tradition considered a vice.³² As Seneca himself puts it,

are discussed, with special regard to Seneca's ethics-based cosmology, in Tutrone, 2012, 174-195.

³⁰ See especially the famous definitions of 2.3, which expressly connect clemency to the traditional Stoic virtues of *temperantia animi* and *moderatio*. Cf. Griffin, 1976, 157-158: 'virtue, to a Stoic, is the exercise of reason. Seneca uses the words *temperamentum*, *modus*, and *moderatio*; his examples show he is thinking of the process of arriving at a decision based on reasons'.

³¹ See 2.4.1-3.

³² The last section of what survives of *De Clementia* (2.4-7) is devoted to establish such a fundamental distinction (a distinction which, of course, was of paramount importance to Seneca's integration of *clementia* into the conceptual framework of Stoic ethics). The Greek equivalents to *venia* and *misericordia* recurring in Stoic texts are εἰλεος and συγγνώμη (see Diogenes Laertius, 7.123; Stobaeus, 2.7 pp. 95.24-96.9 W.), and such terms had already been translated as *misericordia* in Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes* (3.20-21; 4.16-18; 4.56), a work which exerted a profound influence on Seneca's philosophical vocabulary (see Moreschini, 1977). Like Seneca, Cicero included impulsive mercy among the *aegritudines animi* and maintained that this was ill-suited to a wise man. Cf. Ramelli, 1998, 191-199, Schettino, 1998, 212-214, Konstan, 2001, 96-104, and 2010, 31-32. Interestingly, according to Konstan, 2005, Seneca's identification of *clementia* with a stable and conscious state of mind, giving rise to coherent behaviors,

differently from *misericordia*, clemency 'accedes to reason' (*clementia rationi accedit*) and agrees with the Stoic sage's proverbial gravity (*cum severitate illi convenit*).³³

In light of such a basic ideological framework, there can be little doubt that the view of justice and social responsibility underlying the *De Clementia* concerns primarily (if not exclusively) mankind. The author envisages an orderly society ruled by an utterly rational king. In a similar society, the clemency displayed by the monarch reflects his superior reason and shapes the citizens' equally balanced attitude.³⁴ Justice, then, arises from a thoughtful feeling of philanthropy and reciprocal connection embodying the axioms of Stoic *oikeiosis*.³⁵ It may thus appear surprising that in one of his most vehement arguments against the violation of social integrity (that is, against the predominance of *crudelitas* over *clementia*), Seneca evokes the authority of an extra-human right affecting every living being. This is indeed the passage I intend to focus on in the present paper – a passage which has aroused a certain amount of discomfort among Senecan scholars. In order to appreciate the proper meaning of the writer's statements, however, it is necessary to see them in their actual context, paying sufficient attention to what precedes and what follows Seneca's 'animal rights' claim:

It is creditable to a man to keep within reasonable bounds in his treatment of his slaves. Even in the case of a human chattel one ought to consider, not how much one can torture him with impunity, but how far such treatment is permitted by natural goodness and justice, which prompts us to act kindly towards even prisoners of war and slaves bought for a price (how much more towards free-born, respectable gentlemen?), and not to treat them with scornful brutality as human chattels, but as persons somewhat below ourselves in station, who have been placed

relies on the common understanding of this word in late Republican and Imperial Latin: '*clementia* was not regarded as a whimsical or arbitrary sentiment, like *misericordia*, with which it is sometimes paired, but rather as a stable disposition; hence it was naturally considered a virtue, like the Greek *πραότης* and *ἐπιείκεια*' (344).

³³ Cf. 2.4.3 - 2.5.1.

³⁴ The idea that a clement and sound government induces all the members of the community to lead a peaceful and tidy life is clearly expressed in 1.13 and 1.16. Of course, such a view is used as an argument to convince Nero of clemency's importance, in accordance with a paraenetic strategy which is central to the treatise: see Beltrami, 2008.

³⁵ The so-called *οἰκειωσις* theory – the doctrine on self-appropriation and social inclination which lays the foundations of Stoic ethical-political philosophy – has been at the centre of several scholarly reconstructions: see e. g. Engberg-Pedersen, 1990, Pemproke, 1996, Long, 1996b, Radice, 2000, and Bees, 2004.

under our protection rather than assigned to us as servants. Slaves are allowed to run and take sanctuary at the statue of a god, though the laws allow a slave to be ill-treated to any extent, there are nevertheless some things which the common laws of living beings forbid us to do to a man. Who does not hate Vedius Pollio more even than his own slaves did, because he used to fatten his moray eels with human blood, and ordered those who had offended him in any way to be cast into his fish-pond, or rather snake-pond? That man deserved to die a thousand deaths, both for throwing his slaves to be devoured by the morays which he himself meant to eat, and for keeping morays just in order to feed them in such a fashion.³⁶

In her careful treatment of Seneca's cosmology and political philosophy, Julia Wildberger remarked on the unusual ('ungewöhnlich') nature of Seneca's appeal to animal rights in light of the standard Stoic view. However, she wisely observed that the argumentative context of such an appeal reveals the author's primary interest in human dignity – a fact that I consider almost indisputable.³⁷

At the same time, it is clear that Seneca could have easily avoided an explicit inclusion of non-human animals into the field of rights without altering the essence of his humanitarian claim. Instead, he chose to employ the word *animans*, which is virtually the broadest definition of living

³⁶ Clem. 1.18.1-2: "Servis imperare moderate laus est. Et in mancipio cogitandum est, non quantum illud inpine possit pati, sed quantum tibi permittat aequi bonique natura, quae parcere etiam captivis et pretio paratis iubet. Quanto iustus iubet hominibus liberis, ingenuis, honestis non ut mancipiis abuti sed ut his, quos gradu antecedas quorumque tibi non servitus tradita sit, sed tutela. Servis ad statuam licet confugere; cum in servum omnia liceant, est aliquid, quod in hominem licere commune ius animantium vetet. Quis non Vedium Pollionem peius oderat quam servi sui, quod muraenas sanguine humano saginabat et eos, qui se aliquid offenderant, in vivarium, quid aliud quam serpentium, abici iubebat? O hominem mille mortibus dignum, sive devorandos servos obiciebat muraenis, quas esurus erat, sive in hoc tantum illas alebat, ut sic aleret." I have slightly revised the rendering of Stewart, 1889, who, like many other modern editors, translated the Latin *muraena* as 'lamprey'. Since lampreys (*Petromyzon marinus*) are not able to eat or severely harm human beings, it is clear that Seneca's text refers to moray eels (most likely to the so-called *Muraena helena*), which can actually chop off human limbs. Even more remarkable is the fact that Stewart chose to translate the crucial expression *commune ius animantium* as 'the common laws of life'. 'Life' sounds more generic, and therefore more theoretically acceptable, than 'animals' or 'living creatures' in the work of a Stoic supporter of anthropocentrism – and it is true that, as we shall see, Seneca's overall argument has a strong *humanistic* character. Nonetheless, it is not a broad concept of *lex vitae* which is recalled in our passage, neither is it methodologically correct to obscure Seneca's reference to a comprehensive biological category (*animantes*).

³⁷ Cf. Wildberger, 2006, II, 844-845 n. 1245: 'der Sache nach geht es aber auch hier um eine besondere Verpflichtung gegenüber Menschen und nicht gegenüber Lebewesen generell'.

beings available in Latin, as well as the expression *commune ius* that typically hints at the juridical notion of shared rights. Cicero, for instance, employs the same *iunctura* when he wants to refer to everyone's right to change citizenship (*commune ius mutandarum civitatum*),³⁸ or, more generally, to a communal kind of right.³⁹ Most importantly, like many other concepts of the Roman legal vocabulary, the expression finds application in the area of moral philosophy. When explaining the Stoic doctrine of a universal cosmopolis including all human beings, Seneca himself asserts that the basis of such a large society is 'a common right of mankind' (*aliquod commune ius generis humani*), clearly resulting from the above-mentioned process of *oikeiosis*.⁴⁰

Hence, we should be prepared to cope with the fact that in *De Clementia* the author deliberately extended the range of his discourse. My main point, in this regard, is that the Stoic reflection on nature and its ethically binding rules leaves sufficient room for appeals to respect every animal's natural end. As is well-known, the teleological notion of natural law characterizing Stoic thought assumes that all animals, and the cosmos as a whole, are committed to fulfil their inherent physiological purpose.⁴¹

³⁸ *Balb.* 30-31.

³⁹ See e. g. *Caec.* 94. In the later juridical tradition, and especially in the *Digest*, *ius commune* is repeatedly used to indicate a law (or a system of laws) regarding a wide-ranging group, often in contrast with more restricted contexts: see e. g. *Dig.* 17.1.56; 29.1.25; 29.1.36; 49.14.37. It is also worth mentioning that Roman legal writers are remarkably keen to debate the problem of animal rights as part of the central question of natural law: see Onida, 2002.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ep.* 48.3. See also Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.8; *Apol.* 86, who attests the diffusion of this idea in non-philosophical contexts. As many scholars have pointed out, the texts of Seneca and later Stoic thinkers tend to eclipse the inherently exclusive character of Stoic cosmopolitanism, thus creating rhetorically powerful appeals for fellowship and brotherhood. It is certainly significant, however, that in the passage just mentioned Seneca's main point concerns the value of interpersonal friendship. And, as the Latin philosopher frequently declares, a true feeling of friendship can solely arise among sages (see e. g. *Ep.* 9.5; 81.12; 123.15; *Ben.* 7.12.2) – which is the standard Stoic view (cf. Konstan, 1997, 113). On the prominent role played by the Roman legal vocabulary in the construction of Seneca's thought see, instead, Inwood, 2005, 224-248.

⁴¹ On the Stoic idea of natural law and its controversial ideological features see the accounts provided by Mitsis, 1994, 2003, and Vander Waerd, 1994, 2003. Both scholars stress the pivotal role of nature in the conceptual structure of Stoic ethics, but they disagree on the interpretation of the Stoic attitude to natural norms. While Vander Waerd contends that the Stoics appealed to a purely dispositional moral, free from external rules and based on the sage's perfect rationality, Mitsis argues for an intrinsic connection between inner intentions and externally imposed prescriptions. However, such an intellectually engaging debate does not seem to have relevant

This means that an immanent rational order underlies the existence of the different components of the world, including those which are not properly *rational*. As Seneca makes clear in one of his most 'technical' epistles, all animals but man are directed by a compelling instinct teleologically inspired by nature.⁴² Human beings are called to the superior exercise of reason, and it is a harmful infraction of the providential plans to betray this expectation. But it is equally dangerous to invert or distort the projects of nature through a vicious abuse of animal life, for in so doing man proves to misunderstand the cosmic order, and therefore to fail his rational mission. Of course, only man has the freedom to commit such cosmological transgressions by using the gift of reason for immoral aims, while irrational animals can simply comply with their vocation.⁴³

In the passage of *De Clementia* under consideration here, Seneca seems to discuss precisely a paradigmatic case of *unnatural* behavior infringing upon the dignity of both animals and humans. The historical character at the centre of the apologue, the infamous Vedius Pollio,⁴⁴ incarnates the

repercussions on the research path we are now following for the case of Seneca (whose original perspective on the notion of natural law has been usefully investigated by Inwood, 2005, 224-248).

⁴² *Ep.* 121 (see especially 7-9 and 17-24). Cf. Wildberger, 2006, I, 241-243; 313-315.

⁴³ Interestingly enough, in Seneca's works the pre-defined instinctual condition of animals may sometimes appear as morally commendable, especially if compared to man's cruel and vicious behavior (see e. g. *Ep.* 60.2-4; 66.26-27). In *De ira*, 1.3.3-8, in particular, both virtues and passions are said to be an exclusive prerogative of man, who is thus charged with much more complex ethical responsibilities than animals. The same picture is drawn, with special reference to the problem of virtue, in *Ep.* 124.13-20, where non-human animals are recognized to achieve their own peculiar (and limited) form of moral perfection (*in sua natura perfecta sunt*). Such views, of course, reflect the traditional rationalistic approach of Stoicism to the whole sphere of inner life.

⁴⁴ From Seneca's age onwards, the cruelty and luxury of Vedius Pollio became a topos of historiography and moralizing literature (cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 9.77; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.10; Cassius Dio, 54.23). Seneca himself provides a more detailed account of Pollio's merciless custom in *De ira* 3.40.2-5, where Augustus is said to have prevented such a wicked man from tossing a slave into his fishpond. The slave had broken a crystal cup during the dinner, and in order to dissuade Pollio from inflicting his shocking punishment, Augustus ordered that all the crystal cups were broken before his eyes. He also ordered that Vedius' deadly *piscina* was buried. Although the passage in *De ira* does not allude to any form of human or animal right, it, too, highlights Pollio's metaphorical transformation into a bloody beast (*fera immanis sanguinaria*), desirous to see new kinds of torment. With some meaningful variations, the story is reported also by Cassius Dio, who relates Augustus' attempt of *damnatio memoriae* following Vedius' death. Similar to Seneca, Pliny the Elder points instead to the character's lust for sadistic contemplation. What both Seneca and Dio tend to overshadow, however, is

conscious subversion of man's physiological *telos* I have just mentioned – what the Stoic tradition defined as a διαστροφή τοῦ λόγου.⁴⁵ Clearly, Pollio's deviation regards, first of all, his relationship to other men. As mentioned earlier, Seneca and the Stoa believed that the fullest expression of human reason is a wide-ranging sociability, which in the case of wise men reaches a truly cosmopolitan dimension. On the contrary, this wicked Roman notable directed his ingenious efforts to the establishment of a bloody, anti-human practice. Instead of developing a conscious feeling of reciprocal fellowship – that in Seneca's view should also include slaves – he devised a frightening (but fully rational) strategy of sadistic self-satisfaction. As several scholars pointed out, in all of Seneca's works such an intentionally aggressive attitude characterizes a specific anthropological type, underlying the description of different individuals: the tyrant. Indeed, from a Senecan perspective, tyrants are *sensu lato* all those men who exploit their position of power to enjoy deliberate acts of violence. As both the *De Clementia* and the *De Ira* show, such men get accustomed to brutality to the extent that they exercise it for mere hedonic purposes.⁴⁶

that Pollio was a friend and a political ally of the emperor, charged with thorny tasks concerning the province of Asia. As Syme 1961 has shown, he was one of those 'valuable partisans of dubious morality', whom 'it may be expedient to curb or discard in the season of peace and ostensibly normal government' (28). Of course, as Syme makes clear contrasting literary and epigraphic evidence, the 'standard tradition knew nothing of the financial expert who set in order the affairs of Asia, and Cassius Dio can affirm that Vedius had performed no service of any note'. See also Africa, 1995, who remarks on Adam Smith's ideological reinterpretation of the Pollio episode.

⁴⁵ As Bellincioni, 1978, 33-36, remarked, Seneca's view of vices and passions is totally in line with the Stoic idea of 'subversion of reason': 'per Seneca il male è conseguenza di una διαστροφή nel senso stoico più tradizionale, nasce dal pervertimento di una condizione naturale buona. [...] Come per la componente animale il provvido insegnamento della natura può essere dagli uomini frainteso, sì che il piacere destinato alla conservazione della vita, viene ricercato per se stesso, così anche la *pars rationalis* può essere distolta dal suo fine [...]. Anziché avvalersi dell'intelligenza per i fini conoscitivi a cui è destinata, per imparare a distinguere il bene e il male, e più ancora per indagare, sin oltre i confini del mondo, donde abbia tratto origine e a che tenda il moto incessante dell'universo, gli uomini l'hanno prostituita asservendola alla propria sete di possesso'. As is well-known, the concept of διαστροφή dates back to the origins of Stoicism. Zeno himself, the founder of the school, seems to have established such a close connection between misuse of reason and betrayal of nature, a connection consistently echoed by the Roman Stoics. Cf. Grilli, 1963, who recalls the cultural and lexical roots of this original Stoic tenet, and Adorno, 1998, who maintains that in Zeno 'la virtuosità e il vizio non sono dovuti a non sapere agire bene (prassi), ma sono dovuti ad una deviazione teoretica' (145).

⁴⁶ See especially the discussion of Bäumer, 1982, who focuses on the definition of *feritas*

A few chapters after our passage, the author asserts that tyrants are led by their *feritas/crudelitas* to excogitate new kinds of crimes, since they develop a perverse taste for the observation of human sufferings which is the exact opposite of the *oikeiosis*-based fellow-feeling.⁴⁷ At first, Seneca adopts the peculiarly Platonic pattern of the tyrant's transformation into a wild beast,⁴⁸ but then he goes as far as to claim that such an intentional cruelty is much worse than irrational beastliness. As the writer notices, in fact, bears, lions, serpents and other noxious animals show respect for their own species – thus staying within the boundaries of *nature* – while degenerated humans appear to take special pleasure in assaulting their fellow men.⁴⁹

From the traditional point of view of Stoicism, Seneca might have restricted himself to denouncing similar behaviors as immoral infractions of *human* nature. And indeed the main purpose of the passage on Vedius Pollio is to exhort to the respect of man's dignity, by appealing to 'the

in *De ira*, and makes a stimulating comparison between Seneca's approach and Erich Fromm's theories on aggressiveness. Likewise, Mantovanelli 2001 remarks on the Roman thinker's depiction of sadistic attitudes (with special reference to powerful and wealthy men) and employs specific psychoanalytical categories. Moreover, scholars have rightly insisted on Seneca's rationalist reading of similar vicious degenerations in accordance with the Stoic theory of passions. The topic is remarkably prominent in the *Naturales Quaestiones* (a work in which the relationship between natural order and moral laws is of central importance), but emerges from *De Clementia* as well. Before providing the above-cited presentation of *clementia* as the pinnacle of human virtues, for instance, Seneca observes that one should be careful in identifying clemency through its external signs, for 'there are some vices imitating virtues' (*cum sint vitia quaedam virtutes imitantia*, 1.3.1). Such a deceptive form of ethical imitation relies on the common rational character of both virtues and vices, and Berno, 2003 has perceptively pointed out that in many passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones* the author constructs a symmetrical or 'specular' representation of good and bad moral behaviors. Finally, it is perhaps worth mentioning that in Seneca's tragedies the tyrant figure is characterized by the same hedonistic and lucid use of violence: see e. g. the case of *Thyestes*, discussed in Picone, 1996 (but cf. also Mantovanelli, 1996, and Schiesaro, 2003).

⁴⁷ See 1.25-26.

⁴⁸ Cf. 1.25.1: *ferina ista rabies est sanguine gaudere ac vulneribus et abiecto homine in silvestre animal transire*. On Plato's representation of the tyrant's symbolic metamorphosis see especially *Rep.* 565D-566A. Plato's description of tyrannical anthropophagy had a great impact on the subsequent literary tradition, and on Roman culture in particular: see Citroni Marchetti, 1991, 139.

⁴⁹ See 1.26.4-5. The idea that, due to his abuse of violence, man turns into an abnormous creature, much more dangerous than the wild beasts, is indeed a topos of early Imperial literature. Cf. Bäumer, 1982 and Tutrone, 2010.

nature of the right and the good' (*aequi bonique natura*). The philosopher's prime concern is to remind Nero of the value of his subjects, who are still defined as 'free men' according to the Roman classical terminology (*homines liberi, ingenui, honesti*). As a Stoic, however, Seneca bases his exhortation on a general notion of human status and mutual affinity which includes prisoners and slaves as well (*captivi et pretio parati*). A sort of step-by-step argumentative structure underlies the whole passage, and it is clear that the writer's final goal is to reaffirm the rights of citizens against the abuse of monarchic power. At the same time, both the political defense of free men and the humanistic concern for the condition of slaves rely on a foundational ideological level, namely on a highly comprehensive conception of nature.

As the last section of our passage reveals, Vedius Pollio's crime affects the status of both human and non-human animals, for it derives from an impious misunderstanding of the entire natural order. Not only did Pollio repudiate his rational vocation to inter-human sociability, but he also forced other living beings to support his unnatural and macabre hedonism. The syntactic coordination at the end of the text clearly points to the character's multi-faceted violation: in Seneca's terms, 'that man deserved to die a thousand deaths, *both (sive)* for throwing his slaves to be devoured by the morays which he himself meant to eat, *and (sive)* for keeping morays just in order to feed them in such a fashion'. Seneca's first censure clearly hints at Pollio's *symbolic cannibalism* as a tyrant – a point influentially stressed by Plato and used by the Latin author to emphasize the tyrannical distortion of human relationships. When eating the moray eels of his *vivarium*, as Roman luxurious aristocrats used to do, Pollio actually consumed the flesh of other men. He resorted to morays as to a medium enabling him to satisfy his conscious cannibalistic inclinations.⁵⁰ Pollio's rearing of animals for such a perverse and unnatural purpose, however, is explicitly blamed by Seneca as a second, equally atrocious crime. In my view, it is this further explanation of Vedius Pollio's immorality that gives full meaning to the writer's claim of a *ius animantium*, as it testifies to Seneca's belief in a physical teleology regarding all living beings.

In truth, as far as we can judge from its most common expositions, the Stoic finalistic cosmology did not pay much attention to the intrinsic *telos*

⁵⁰ As Citroni Marchetti, 1991, 139-140 observed, 'le murene che Vedio Pollione alleva e che nutre con il corpo dei suoi schiavi non sono che un tramite per il divoramento da parte di Pollione stesso, un contenitore provvisorio attraverso cui il corpo del servo possa giungere al contenitore definitivo, il corpo di un altro uomo'.

of animals other than humans. As a rule, the Stoics put emphasis on the fact that irrational animals exist for man's sake, the whole cosmos being, in Chrysippus' words, 'a system constituted by gods and humans and all things created for their sake'.⁵¹ As Cicero's philosophical works show, this radically anthropocentric view met with considerable success among Roman thinkers. Cicero's dialogue *De Finibus*, for instance, took up Chrysippus' highly representative opinion on animal soul: the pig, Chrysippus argued, has been given a soul which serves as salt and keeps its flesh from going bad.⁵² Generally speaking, the Stoa seems to have seen in the animals' usefulness to man their basic goal as components of nature.⁵³

At the very end of his *Epistle* 121, however, Seneca asserts a much more specific view of biological finalism which has been sometimes thought to entail original elements. After elucidating the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* and its moral significance through various zoological examples, the Latin philosopher states that, at least in some cases, self-affection and self-preservation should be considered the only *telos* of animal life.⁵⁴ As the writer notices, all living beings, even the most elementary ones (*taciti quoque et bruti*), possess a natural inclination to love and protect themselves, and some of them fulfil their teleological duty simply by taking care of themselves, for they are in no way useful to other beings.⁵⁵ This means that the cosmos includes certain animals which are of no use to man, the allegedly predestined beneficiary of natural resources. Given the Stoics' decidedly anthropocentric approach to such issues, Seneca's claim is certainly worth of careful consideration, especially as we know that major Stoic thinkers endeavored to demonstrate the usefulness of apparently unpurposed animals like bedbugs and predators.⁵⁶ In his highly proble-

⁵¹ Cf. Stobaeus, 1.21 p. 184.8-11 W. (= SVF 2.527). See Sorabji, 1993, 123-126.

⁵² *Fin.* 5.38. Cicero recalls Chrysippus' view also in *Nat. Deor.* 2.160, and the attribution is confirmed by several Greek and Roman authors (cf. Varro, *Re Rust.* 2.4.10; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 8.207; Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.*, 685C; Porphyry, *Abst.* 3.20; Philo, *Opif.* 66). The relevance of Stoic anthropocentrism to the construction of Cicero's ideal of *humanitas* has been properly highlighted by Rocca 2003, who focuses on the Roman orator's readaptation of Stoic cosmology and Peripatetic zoology in the second book of *De Natura Deorum*. On the Latin reception of anthropocentric philosophical patterns see, more generally, Lanata 1994.

⁵³ See Dierauer, 1977, 238-245.

⁵⁴ *Ep.*, 121.24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: *Videbis quae aliis inutilia sunt sibi ipsa non deesse.*

⁵⁶ According to Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1044D (= SVF 2.1163), Chrysippus maintained that bedbugs work as natural alarm clocks for men. Similarly, Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* 2.161, reports the Stoic view that wild and dangerous beasts help man exercise his courage.

matic reconstruction of Posidonius' thought, Karl Reinhardt argued that similar 'intra-organic' views of biological finalism, sometimes emerging also from Cicero's presentations, should be traced back to Posidonius (whom Reinhardt saw as a largely heterodox Stoic).⁵⁷ More wisely, Urs Dierauer pointed out that in Stoic philosophy non-anthropocentric forms of physical teleology, clearly founded on the doctrine of *oikeiosis*, could coexist with fundamentally anthropocentric explanations. At least in some respects, the originally Aristotelian idea of internal organic *telos* would have been combined with the Stoic anthropocentric providentialism.⁵⁸ Seneca's striking assertion on the uselessness of elementary beings, however, induced Dierauer to remark on the Roman author's conceptual originality⁵⁹ – a possibility which should not sound so unlikely in light of Seneca's deep-rooted scientific interests.⁶⁰

Whether or not Seneca enriched his school's physiology with personal

⁵⁷ Cf. Reinhardt, 1926, 139-141. According to Reinhardt, Cicero's discussion of Stoic providential theology in the second book of *De Natura Deorum* is indebted to two different sources: the first one, highlighting the importance of 'internal' teleology in the life of organisms, is Posidonius, while the second one, pointing to the centrality of man in nature's plans, is an unnamed Stoic writer. Like many other exponents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries *Quellenforschung*, however, Reinhardt relies for the most part on purely hypothetical assumptions – not to mention the fact that the focus of our investigations on Latin texts should be the Latin authors' own *reception* of previous debates for original purposes.

⁵⁸ See Dierauer, 1977, 241: 'anzunehmen ist vielmehr, dass eine stärker naturwissenschaftlich-teleologische Betrachtungsweise, wie sie wohl Poseidonios geübt hat, ganz im Sinne des Aristoteles in erster Linie für die eigene Erhaltung der einzelnen Tiergattung dienende Zweckmässigkeit des Körperbaus und Verhaltens hervorhob, ohne aber prinzipielle Zweifel an der universalen, anthropozentrischen Teleologie der Stoiker zu hegen'.

⁵⁹ Dierauer, 1977, 241, n. 12: 'wahrscheinlich handelt es sich hier um einen Gedanken von Seneca selber; darauf weist die zugespitzt antithetische Formulierung'.

⁶⁰ As Romano, 1994, 22, pointed out, Seneca's passion for naturalistic research dated back to a much earlier time than his encyclopedic *Naturales Quaestiones*. We know for sure that at a young age he wrote a treatise on earthquakes (*De Motu Terrarum*), which probably served as basis for the sixth book of *Naturales Quaestiones* (cf. *Nat. Quaest.* 6.4.2 = fr. 5 Haase). Likewise, he published field-specific works dealing with astronomy, mineralogy, and zoology (*De Forma Mundi*, *De Lapidum Natura*, *De Piscium Natura*). One should not forget that one of Seneca's most influential teachers was Papirius Fabianus, a rhetorician and philosopher belonging to the Sextian school whom Pliny the Elder defines as *naturae rerum peritissimus* (cf. *Nat. Hist.* 36.125). Fabianus wrote a book on animals (*De Animalibus*), and as far as we know, his lost *Causae Naturales* (at least in three books) are the only systematic treatise in Latin dealing with natural sciences before Seneca's own *Naturales Quaestiones* (cf. Lana, 1992, 117-122).

insights, he was certainly aware that the *oikeiosis* theory entailed an individual-based consideration of the notion of teleology. Though the Latin philosopher, too, believed that animals, plants, and the cosmos as a whole, exist for man's sake,⁶¹ he exhorted to take into proper account the vocation of each living being to fulfil its special aim. A large section of *Epistle* 121 is devoted to illustrate how different kinds of animals are providentially led to maintain and develop their natural status. An upturned turtle, Seneca argues, does not strive to return to its normal position because it feels pain. Rather, it is nature's immanent design which instills in the animal a compelling desire to reach its physiological condition (*desiderium naturalis status*).⁶² In an analogous way, bees and spiders are driven to complete their admirable creations by the influence of an internal teleological force. According to Seneca, the regularity and promptness of such animals' behavior attest the fact that non-human beings act in compliance with nature's instinctual indications, and not on the basis of reason.⁶³ On the one hand, of course, a similar approach belittles the moral value of animal agency – a point perfectly consistent with the Stoic view of ethics and justice – but on the other hand, it confirms the existence of pre-defined natural goals which are meant to shape the life of every living being.

If we try to apply the basic tenets of this doctrine to the case of Vedius Pollio's morays, we can easily realize the character's culpability in respect to animal physiology (and to Stoic cosmology more generally). By transforming his *vicarium* into a bloody set for his own sadistic pleasures, Pollio originated a twofold subversion of nature's plans, for he forced the morays to become customary anthropophagists and departed from his natural inclination to rational sociability. He ceased to be 'a social animal, born for the common good' (*socialis animal communi bono genitum*), in the proper sense of Seneca's above-mentioned definition,⁶⁴ and developed a paradoxical taste for the infringement of natural laws.⁶⁵

⁶¹ See e. g. *Ben.* 2.29.1-4; 4.5.1-2

⁶² Cf. *Ep.* 121.8-9.

⁶³ *Ep.* 121.20-24.

⁶⁴ *Clem.* 1.3.2.

⁶⁵ The symbolic association between man's moral degradation and his *unnatural* use of animals is indeed recurrent in Seneca's works. In a long and impressive passage of *Naturales Quaestiones* (3.17-18), for instance, the writer describes the perverse attitude of Roman banqueters, who enjoy observing the gradual death of surmullets: such voluptuaries are said to be totally forgetful of their human and social duties (including the participation in their kins' funeral, 3.18.6), while their lust for gastronomic pleasures results in a voyeuristic contemplation of animal suffering (cf.

It is no accident that the theme of natural law underpins the whole section of *De Clementia* which frames Pollio's story. In chapter 19, in particular, the author declares that the use of power should conform to nature's norms (*naturae lex*), avoiding inappropriate recourse to violence.⁶⁶ In order to demonstrate this assumption, Seneca employs a canonical argument of ancient political theory (an argument particularly befitting the case of monarchic government): the social organization of bees.⁶⁷ According to the Latin writer, nature has wisely deprived the queen bee of any sting, so as to provide a virtuous model (*exemplar*) for human kings. Nature, Seneca says, 'is wont to practice herself in small matters, and to scatter abroad tiny models of the hugest structures'. Hence, we humans 'ought to be ashamed of not learning a lesson in behavior from these small creatures', especially in view of man's much more significant potential of aggressiveness.⁶⁸ Clearly, if readers think back on the apologue of Vedius

Citroni Marchetti, 1991, 161-166; Torre, 1997; Berno, 2003, 73-80, Gauly, 2004, 96-104). Similarly, in *De Brevitate Vitae* (13.6-7), Pompey's slaughter of elephants on the occasion of lavish circus games (cf. Cicero, *Fam.* 7.1; *Pis.* 65; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 8.7.20-21; Cassius Dio, 39.38) is presented as a presage of the civil wars (and of Pompey's own death in Alexandria). Seneca explicitly remarks that the Roman general changed the natural order of things (*supra rerum naturam tunc esse credidit*), by bringing to Rome 'beasts born under a different sky' (*beluae sub alio caelo natae*) and by arranging an unequal fight between men and animals (*bellum inter tam disparia animalia*). Of course, in all of these cases, Seneca appeals to a notion of natural law primarily affecting man and his *asymmetrical* relationship to other living beings. The abuse of animals and natural resources is interpreted, first of all, as a sign of mankind's deviance from virtue and rationality.

⁶⁶ Cf. 1.19.1: *Eo scilicet formosius id (scil. clementia) esse magnificentiusque fatebimur, quo in maiore praestabitur potestate, quam non oportet noxiam esse, si ad naturae legem componitur.*

⁶⁷ The example of bees' orderly society has recurred in the Graeco-Roman political discussion at least since the time of Plato (*Polit.* 310D-E; *Rep.* 520B) and Xenophon (*Cyrop.* 5.1.24). A few decades after Seneca, Quintilian (*Inst. or.* 5.11.24) suggests using the image of bees and ants in the exhortations to take care of the State (*si ad curam rei publicae hortaris*), thus proving to consider it a standard rhetorical *topos*. See Nicolay, 2008.

⁶⁸ Cf. 1.19.2-4: "Exemplar hoc magnis regibus ingens; est enim illi (scil. naturae) mos exercere se in parvis et ingentium rerum documenta in minima parere. Pudeat ab exiguis animalibus non trahere mores, cum tanto hominum moderatior esse animus debeat, quanto vehementius nocet." Similar assertions denote the inherent ambiguity of the Stoc idea of nature as a system involving both universal and particular dimensions – that is to say, both rational and instinctual life forms. Cf. Grimal, 1978, 357: 'la notion de *natura* est ambiguë. Elle comprend, d'une part, l'être de tout ce qui existe, l'ensemble de ce que nous appelons la "création", et, d'autre part, la nature personnelle, propre à chaque être particulier. Zénon, déjà, semble ne pas avoir expliqué bien clairement sur ce point le sens qu'il donnait à sa formule. Cléanthe, lui, refusait

Pollio reported in the preceding chapter, they will be struck by the character's inversion of physiological rules: in fact, not only did he scorn the example of animals, but he also used such beings to break the cosmic law.

Though we can admit that Seneca saw a subtle link between the abuse of animals and man's immorality, however, his appeal to the value of *justice* with special reference to animals still needs full explanation. As stated earlier, the uncommon expression *commune ius animantium*, with its implicit connections to the Latin juridical vocabulary, openly hints at a broad view of justice and reciprocal duties. And even if other Stoic thinkers might have agreed that irrational beings should never be deviated from their natural goal, they would have hardly discussed such an issue in terms of rights and mutual obligations. In Stoic theory, reason is the necessary requirement to exercise any form of right, and animals are said to be irremediably devoid of logical faculties. I suggest that in our case (as well as in several other parts of Seneca's philosophical work) a further ideological element has contributed to extend the author's typically Stoic naturalism. In order to identify such an element, we must go back over Seneca's early training as a thinker, namely over his enthusiastic adherence to Neopythagorean asceticism.

As is well-known, the very beginnings of Seneca's interest in philosophy coincided with his initiation into the rigorist school of the Sextii, a school deeply influenced by Pythagorean ethical and cosmological doctrines.⁶⁹ Although Seneca was too young to listen to Quintus Sextius, the founder of the school and father of Sextius Niger, he repeatedly expressed admiration for Sextius' teachings in his writings, remarking on the substantial similarities between Sextian and Stoic principles.⁷⁰ Most

de prendre en considération les natures individuelles, affirmant que la fin suprême consistait à vivre en accord avec l'ensemble de l'univers. Chrysippe, au contraire, assimile le deux aspects, sans établir entre eux la moindre distinction'.

⁶⁹ For a comprehensive reconstruction of the Sextian school's history and thought see Lana, 1973 and 1992. The influence of Sextian thinkers like Papirius Fabianus, Sotion of Alexandria, and Quintus Sextus himself, on Seneca's philosophical views has been properly highlighted by Mazzoli, 1967, Griffin, 1976, 36-41, and Inwood, 2005, 7-22.

⁷⁰ See *De ira*, 2.36.1; 3.36.1; *Ep.* 59.7; 64.2-5; 73.12-15; 98.13; 108.17-19; *Nat. Quaest.* 7.32.2. The impact of Sextius' approach on Seneca's thought is even more evident if one thinks that most of the works just cited were composed by Seneca in his old age, while the writer's *tirocinium* took place in his early youth (cf. Mazzoli, 1967, 252-259). Remarkably, in *Ep.* 64.2 Seneca goes as far as to notice that Quintus Sextius was a Stoic *malgré lui*. Although Sextius denied to be an adherent of Stoicism, Seneca deliberately connected his intellectual firmness – his *vigor* and *animus* – to the traditional ethics of the Stoa (*lectus est deinde liber Quinti Sextii patris, magni, si quid mihi credis, viri, et licet*

importantly, when he was still in his teens, Seneca became a passionate follower of two eminent Sextian thinkers, Sotion of Alexandria and Papirius Fabianus. As Seneca himself reports in *Epistle* 108, Sotion was particularly inclined to Pythagorean doctrines and practices, and he managed to instil in the young Lucius an ardent 'love for Pythagoras' (*amor Pythagoras*).⁷¹ Like Quintus Sextius, Sotion was a convinced vegetarian and his inspired argumentations induced Seneca to adopt a vegetarian diet. Seneca later gave up such a habit because of political and family reasons,⁷² but as he expressly points out in his epistle, all of the ascetic practices he embraced in his youth left a permanent mark in his view of life:

Other resolutions have been broken, but after all in such a way that, in cases where I ceased to practice abstinence, I have observed a limit which is indeed next door to abstinence; perhaps it is even a little more difficult, because it is easier for the will to cut off certain things utterly than to use them with restraint.⁷³

Before starting to describe his adoption of vegetarianism following Sotion's exhortation, Seneca refers to a series of rigoristic practices (including dietary restrictions) he had learned from the Stoic Attalus – one of the three teachers of philosophy who shaped his approach to ethics, the other two being Sotion and Fabianus.⁷⁴ While the Roman writer admits

neget Stoici). Needless to say, Seneca's attempt of cultural assimilation denotes his Stoic-centred paraenetic attitude as well as his typical inclination to theoretical synthesis. At the same time, however, such a sharp remark relies on Sextius' actual acceptance of several Stoic tenets (cf. Lana, 1992, 110-115). And as we shall see, it was the Sextian careful integration of Stoic and Pythagorean doctrines which served as a model for Seneca's own extension of the idea of justice.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ep.* 108.17. Interestingly, in *Ep.* 49.2 Seneca says that when he attended Sotion's lectures, he was still a *puer*. And all our evidence on such chronological matters (Jerome, *Chron.* 171B H.; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.32; 85; Suetonius, *Tib.* 36) leads to suppose that the Roman writer followed his Alexandrian teacher between 13 and 19 AD. See Mazzoli, 1967, 354-355 and Griffin, 1976, 37.

⁷² In *Ep.* 108.22 the author mentions Tiberius' persecution of foreign rituals (*alienigena sacra*), which placed abstinence from meat under suspicion. Seneca's father, the famous rhetorician and *odiator philosophiae*, would have used this fact to divert his son from vegetarianism. Indeed, both Tacitus and Suetonius (see above n. 71) confirm Seneca's assertions on Tiberius' oppressive attitude, and they explicitly refer to the banishment of *mathematici* and *magi* – two terms perfectly according with the traditional description of Pythagorean philosophers.

⁷³ *Ep.* 108.16: *Cetera proiecta redierunt, ita tamen ut quorum abstinentiam interrupti modum servem et quidem abstinentiae proximiorum, nescio an difficiliorum, quoniam quaedam absciduntur facilius animo quam temperantur* (transl. Gummere, 1917-25).

⁷⁴ *Ep.* 108.13-16. Mazzoli, 1967, 258-259, has persuasively argued that Seneca became a pupil of Attalus *after* attending the lectures of Sotion and Fabianus. It is quite natural

that he later abandoned some intransigent forms of abstinence, he specifies that such resolute self-denials served as preparatory steps towards reaching moral maturity. In Latin literature, the term *abstinentia* often characterizes the renunciative and frugal attitude of virtuous men, with special regard to ascetic abstentions based on ethical beliefs,⁷⁵ and since in the very next chapter Seneca starts retracing his adhesion to Pythagoreanism, the use of this word is far from being accidental.

It is worth noticing that Seneca provides quite a detailed account of both Quintus Sextius' and Sotion's reasons for abstaining from meat. In the text of the epistle, Sotion acts as a *persona loquens* delivering a speech in support of vegetarianism – the allegedly original speech which convinced the young Seneca to become a vegetarian.⁷⁶ Sotion distinguishes his own philosophical arguments from those of Sextius, inasmuch he admits his fascination with Pythagoras' theory of metempsychosis and considers flesh-eating a hazardous habit. Using other animals as food, he argues, can virtually lead to patricide, since a kind of cosmological kinship (*inter omnia cognatio*), founded on the circular transmigration of souls, connects human and non-human beings. This is, of course, a rhetorically elaborated presentation of the traditional Pythagorean view that men owe justice to animals on the basis of a common psychological condition – a view largely shared by Empedocles as well.⁷⁷ According to the Pythagoreans – both

to think that, as a genuine Stoic, Attalus induced his enthusiastic student (cf. *Ep.* 108.3) to definitely embrace Stoicism. He could, of course, rely on Seneca's acquaintance with several Stoic doctrines due to the Sextian school's strong inclination to Stoic rigorism. And Attalus himself showed deep-rooted ascetic tendencies, which resembled the Sextian approach familiar to Seneca. Above all, the Latin author's statement that he returned to political life after following Attalus' teachings (*deinde ad civitatis vitam reductus*, *Ep.* 108.15) leads to see the Stoic instructor as the last step of Seneca's philosophical training.

⁷⁵ It may suffice to recall the common Latin translation of Porphyry's *Περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων* as *De Abstinentia*. In its general meaning of 'moral integrity', the term recurs in several literary texts (e. g. Cicero, *Q. Rosc.* 17; *Off.* 2.76; Sallust, *Cat.* 54.6; Tacitus, *Agr.* 9.4), but in the Imperial age the reference to ascetic restrictions seems to become predominant (e. g. Seneca, *Ep.* 49.12; Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* 26.13; Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.7.9; Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 7.1.6). Most importantly, when dealing with Tiberius' persecution of foreign cults, Seneca himself connects *abstinentia* and flesh-eating (*quorundam animalium abstinentia*, *Ep.* 108.22).

⁷⁶ *Ep.* 108.17-23.

⁷⁷ On the attitude of Pythagoras and later Pythagoreans towards the problem of justice and vegetarianism see Detienne, 1970 and 1972, Burkert, 1972, 120-166 and Cornelli, 2013, 69-71. Even though different lines of thought seem to have emerged during the history of the school, affecting especially its view of animal sacrifice, Pythagora's

Greek and Roman – a 'common right of living beings' actually exists and has a solid natural foundation.⁷⁸ Notably, when Seneca introduces his Alexandrian teacher's argumentations, he asserts that both Sotion's and Sextius' reasons for vegetarianism were high-minded (*mirifica*), thus showing his long-standing appreciation for Pythagorean ethics.⁷⁹

It is especially interesting to analyze Sextius' own explanations, for they reveal striking similarities with Seneca's ideas on the nature of vice and aggressiveness. Sextius is said to have proposed four different reasons for abstaining from animal food, none of them directly involving the doctrine of metempsychosis:

Sextius believed that man had enough sustenance without resorting to blood (1), and that a habit of cruelty is formed whenever butchery is practised for pleasure (2). Moreover, he thought we should curtail the sources of our luxury (3); he argued that a varied diet was contrary to the laws of health, and was unsuited to our constitution (4).⁸⁰

Although, broadly conceived, Sextius' philosophy was very much indebted to Pythagoreanism,⁸¹ his arguments for a flesh-free diet seem to

belief in a fundamental cosmological kinship is indeed well-attested. See e. g. Porphyry's remark (*Vit. Pyth.* 19) that according to the Samian philosopher 'all animated beings should be regarded as kindred (ὁμογενῆ)'. On Empedocles' acceptance of metempsychosis and refusal of bloody sacrifices see, instead, Balaudé, 1997 and Steiner, 2005, 50-52.

⁷⁸ Significantly, Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 8.13, connects Pythagoras' prohibition of killing or eating animals to the philosopher's more general claim that animals share with us the 'common right of the soul' (κοινὸν δικαίον ψυχῆς) – a concept very close to Seneca's *commune ius animantium*.

⁷⁹ It is probably no accident that in *Brev. vit.* 14.5 Pythagoras is the second thinker cited among the 'masters of liberal studies' (*antistites bonarum artium*), immediately after Zeno. Likewise, still in his late treatise *De Beneficiis* (7.21), Seneca regards the Pythagorean belief in metempsychosis as ethically fruitful (cf. Mazzoli, 1984, 955-956). As Griffin, 1976, 39, pointed out, 'in his old age, Seneca credited his conversion to both types of argument, still held the medical one true, but described his experience as "falling in love with Pythagoras"'. It should also be noted that the adjective *mirificus* is often used by late Republican and early Imperial writers to describe morally admirable acts or persons (see e. g. Cicero, *Off.* 1.79; Sallust., *Cat.* 9.2; 51.5; Livy, 1.10.5).

⁸⁰ *Ep.* 108.18 (my numbering): "Hic (scil. Sextius) homini satis alimentorum citra sanguinem esse credebat et crudelitatis consuetudinem fieri ubi in voluptatem esset adducta laceratio. Adiciebat contrahendam materiam esse luxuriae; colligebat bonae valetudini contraria esse alimenta varia et nostris aliena corporibus."

⁸¹ Seneca, *De ira* 3.36, notoriously refers to Sextius' daily practice of self-examination – a practice commonly traced back to Pythagorean asceticism (cf. Porphyry, *Vit. Pith.* 40; Cicero, *Sen.* 38; and the comments of Riedweg, 2002, 33-34). Moreover, Griffin, 1976, 39, observes that when debating the issue of vegetarianism, 'Sextius probably did not deny

have been based on moral and medical considerations. Compared to that of Sotion, Sextius' approach was definitely more man-centered and avoided resorting to mystical eschatologies. Generally speaking, as Giancarlo Mazzoli pointed out, the paraenetic power of Sextian thought derived from a form of *ethical* eschatology, since, as far as we can see, the sublime goal envisioned by the school's founder was moral virtue and not an abstract metaphysical ideal.⁸² Clearly, this distinctive inclination to present the attainment of virtue in eschatological terms – that is, through vigorous exhortations to reach ethical goodness as an inherently divine status – was taken up by Seneca, since it perfectly accorded with Stoicism (and probably denoted the Stoic flavor of Sextius' own philosophy).⁸³ Furthermore, as the passage just quoted shows, Seneca also inherited Sextius' view of meat-eating as a spur to vice and luxury (*materia luxuriae*).

the classic Pythagorean arguments, and those he preferred were now also ascribed to that sage' (see the famous speech of Pythagoras in Ovid, *Metam.* 15.60-478, as well as Plutarch, *Esu carn.* 995D-E; 999, and Clemens of Alexandria, *Strom.* 7.6.33, mentioning the Pythagorean Androcides). Finally, closer attention should perhaps be paid to Claudianus Mamertus' claim (*De Statu Animae* 2.8) that both Quintus Sextius and his son Sextius Niger conceived of the soul as *incorporalis, illocalis* and *sine spatio capax*. To all appearances, von Arnim (*RE* II A, 2041) was not far from the truth when he connected Sextian psychology to the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition, since all of Mamertus' description may well refer to the view that, as immaterial substances, souls are not bound to single bodies. And we should always be aware that late-antique authors had access to a considerable number of sources which did not survive to us.

⁸² See especially Seneca's comments on Sextius' hortatory writings in *Ep.* 64.2-6. As the author makes clear, the focus of Sextius' discourse was happiness (*beata vita*), and this was depicted as both lofty (*in excelso*) and accessible to willing men (*volenti penetrabilis*). Cf. Mazzoli, 1967, 234: 'ecco dunque in che veramente consiste [...] la *novitas* filosofica, la romanità stessa di Sestio e della sua *secta*: nell'aver collocato al vertice dello sforzo escatologico umano non le astratte entità metafisiche della tradizione pitagorica e platonica, ma la *sapientia*, intesa come supremo ideale etico, verso cui conduce la *voluntas*, non la δῖάνοια'.

⁸³ One should also add, however, that the Stoic idea of a virtuous imitation of the gods, originating from the claim that divine beings provide a model of perfect rationality, was largely influenced by Pythagorean-Platonic ideals. The concepts of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ and ὁμιλία πρὸς τὸν θεὸν stemmed from the thought of early Greek philosophers, and even Roman thinkers like Cicero (*Fin.* 3.73) and Seneca (*Vit. Beat.* 15.5) referred to such tenets as to *vetera praecepta*, thus hinting at their clearly pre-Stoic origin. On Seneca's significant use of the topos of *imitatio deorum*, in particular, see Grimal, 1978, 393-397, Mazzoli, 1984, 962-972 and Setaioli, 2007, 356-357. Remarkable evidence on this matter is provided also by Epictetus (e. g. *Diss.* 1.12.7-8; 2.14.12-13; cf. Long, 2002, 144-147), though the Stoic assimilation of Pythagoras' maxim 'follow god' (ἔπov θεῷ) in the framework of natural theology seems to date back to Zeno (*SVF* 1.182 = Epict. *Diss.* 1.20.14-16).

Seneca's philosophical works are full of polemic attacks against the morally degenerated practice of ostentatious banquets, and the *unnatural* sophistication of meat plays a prominent symbolic role in this respect.⁸⁴ Again, the Stoic appeal to a life in accordance with nature and the ascetic tendencies of Roman Pythagoreanism appear to be strictly related in the Latin writer's thought.

Even more relevant is the connection established by Sextius between carnivorous diet and habituation to cruelty. As we have seen, in *De Clementia* (as well as in *De Ira*) Seneca offered an insightful interpretation of the origin of gratuitous violence which has been perceptively compared to Erich Fromm's psychoanalytic explanation.⁸⁵ A crucial element of this interpretation is the distinction between *ira* and *feritas/crudelitas*, a distinction drawn in light of a progressive psychopathological theory. According to Seneca, anger and aggressivity are wrong rational responses to external inputs. They are rational because in Stoic theory all passions (πάθη) originate from a conscious assent of reason (συγκατάθεσις) during the process of knowledge. Nonetheless, they are wrong since they undercut the hieratic impassivity (ἀπάθεια) of the sage – a spiritual condition to which every human being should aspire in order to fulfil his natural vocation.⁸⁶ In so far as anger or *ira* remains within the boundaries of this definition, it depends on recognizable triggering factors and can be therapeutically treated. As mentioned earlier, however, Seneca's progressive reading of the phenomenology of aggressiveness contemplates a further step, characterized by assuefaction to violence. At such a stage, man's harmful behavior is no more roused by external events, but results

⁸⁴ See e. g. *Cons. Helv.* 10; *Prov.* 3.6; *Vit. Beat.* 11.4; *Brev. Vit.* 12.5; *Ep.* 59.13; 89.22; 110.12-13; 122.4; *Nat. Quaest.* 13.17-18. As Gourévitch, 1974 remarks, Seneca devotes careful reflection to the ethical implications of nutrition and digestion, enhancing his theoretical arguments through specific medical notions.

⁸⁵ See Bäumer, 1984, 96: 'Fromm differenziert parallel zu Seneca zwischen Aggression (*ira* bei Seneca) und einer nur dem Menschen eigenen Leidenschaft zu zerstören 'Destruktivität' (*feritas*). Sowohl Seneca als auch Fromm sehen Aggression (*ira*) als reaktives Verhalten, während Destruktivität (*feritas*) durch Ursachenlosigkeit charakterisiert wird' (cf. Fromm, 1975, 11).

⁸⁶ See e. g. Sorabji, 2000, 45-46: 'The Stoics not only talk of will, but also, relatedly, represent the emotions as voluntary, though for quite different reasons from those of Sartre in modern times. Seneca introduces his analysis of anger by saying that its whole point is to show whether anger is controllable, and it will be controllable, on his view, only if it is a judgement dependent on assent and will. [...] It is necessary for those who claim to be able to attain freedom from emotion to treat the emotions as in some sense voluntary. Accordingly, this happens not only with the Stoics, but with the Pyrrhonian sceptics, who also aspire to freedom from emotion'.

from a perverse taste for cruelty. This is the stage labelled as *feritas* or *crudelitas*, powerfully exemplified by the case of Vedius Pollio and bloody tyrants.

In Seneca's view, a fundamental element for the development of *crudelitas* is indeed the transformation of brutality into a *pleasure (voluptas)*.⁸⁷ It is therefore remarkable that an analogous process of habituation to aggressiveness, arising from the discovery of a peculiar pleasure, is identified by Sextius in meat-eating. As Seneca's epistle puts it, the laceration of animal flesh easily turns into a pleasure and generates a deep-seated inclination to cruelty (*crudelitatis consuetudo*). As is well-known, such an argument figured prominently amongst the moral claims advanced by ancient vegetarians, and, to all appearances, Sextius himself had derived it from his Pythagorean background.⁸⁸ What is more relevant to our present concern is that Seneca apparently retained the basic ideological structure of Sextian-Pythagorean reasonings and applied it to wider ethical-political issues. Of course, the author of *De Clementia* integrated the idea of a gradual degeneration of vice into the more complex framework of Stoic philosophy, thus substantially changing and enriching its intellectual meaning. Nevertheless, it is very interesting to notice how the Sextian-Pythagorean approach to the problem of violence found an echo in central theoretical principles of *De Clementia* and *De Ira*, contributing to define Seneca's highly original view of rage, power, and psycho-physiological involutions.

Give the long-term influence of Sextius' Neopythagorean doctrines on Senecan thought,⁸⁹ it seems very likely that also the passage on Pollio in

⁸⁷ Cf. especially *Clem.* 1.25.2: 'the reason why cruelty (*saevitia*) is the most hateful of all vices is that it goes first beyond the ordinary limits, and then beyond those of humanity (*excedit fines primum solitos, deinde humanos*); that it devises new kinds of punishments, calls ingenuity to aid it in inventing devices for varying and lengthening men's torture, and takes delight in their sufferings (*delectatur malis hominum*): this accursed disease of the mind reaches its highest pitch of madness when cruelty itself turns into pleasure, and the act of killing a man becomes enjoyment (*cum crudelitas versa est in voluptatem et iam occidere hominem iuvat*).

⁸⁸ See e. g. Plutarch, *Soll. An.* 959D-960A; *Esu Carn.* 998A-C, and Porphyry, *Abst.* 1.47, who clearly rearrange a much older tradition of polemical arguments. Cf. Li Causi, 2010.

⁸⁹ See Mazzoli, 1967, 239-240: 'prodotta e caratterizzata da giovanile entusiasmo, superata appunto perciò in breve volger d'anni da più organiche e razionali esigenze filosofiche, la fase pitagorica di Seneca non si esaurì tuttavia senza lasciare - come tutte le profonde passioni della giovinezza - un'orma riposta nel memore spirito del pensatore. E' un'orma ch'egli avverte sempre e che talvolta confessa, non senza un certo diverdito imbarazzo' (cf. e. g. *Ep.* 102.2). Similarly, Griffin, 1976, 37-42, notes that

De Clementia betrays the traces of such an influence. Seneca's enlargement of the traditional Stoic concept of *ius naturae* and his fascinating depiction of a two-sided violence – affecting both men and animals – may thus imply a suggestive rhetorical combination of different ideas of nature. The humanistic selective concern of Stoic ethics has been cleverly merged with a more inclusive and symbolically appealing notion of natural right, resembling the Pythagorean belief in a cosmological inter-specific justice. Such a claim shall appear even less unusual if one bears in mind that the impact of popular Neopythagorean views on *De Clementia* has long been identified by scholars. Above all, it has been remarked that the very representation of the ruler as 'law embodied' or 'living law' (νόμος ἔμψυχος), skilfully employed by Seneca in the first part of his treatise, is a typical feature of Platonic-Pythagorean political theories, as attested, for instance, by the chronologically controversial writing *On Law and Justice* of Pseudo-Archytas.⁹⁰ Notoriously, in the philosophical debate of the late Republic and the Imperial period, the connection between Platonism and Pythagoreanism becomes even stronger than in the past centuries,⁹¹ and

'even in the last year of his life, he (*scil.* Seneca) found Sextius' writings deeply moving, and bitterly lamented the premature death of this *nova et Romani roboris secta*' (cf. *Nat. Quaest.* 7.32.2). Additionally, 'Fabianus' influence on Seneca was certainly lasting. [...] From his Sextian days, Seneca retained throughout his life the habit of examining his conscience every night, and his great interest in medicine may have received its first impulse then'.

⁹⁰ See Adam, 1970, 45-56. Adam regards *On Law and Justice* (*Περὶ νόμον καὶ δικαιοσύνης*) as an authentic work of the fourth century BC philosopher Archytas of Tarentum, while she refers to the Neopythagorean writers Diotogenes, Ecphantos and Sthenidas (cf. Stobaeus, 4.7 pp. 263.14-279.20 W.) as to a 'Zeugnis einer hellenistischen Richtung der Werke *περὶ βασιλείας*' (14). In recent times, however, several scholars have inclined to connect all such authors to the tradition of Post-Hellenistic Pythagoreanism (see e. g. Haake, 2003 and Murray, 2007), a tradition which, as we have seen, was of central importance to Seneca's *Bildung*. As van Nuffelen 2011, 116, observed, 'it is significant, and not merely an accident of survival, that the formula of *nomos empsychos* itself surfaces for the first time in Pseudo-Archytas, dated after 50 BC, and become very popular later on' (cf. also Aalders, 1969). Interesting notes on Seneca's reception of the Pythagorean-Platonic notion of νόμος ἔμψυχος can also be found in Ramelli, 2006, 96-102, who nonetheless applies to the Latin thinker the old-fashioned (and rather confusing) label of 'eclectic' Stoic.

⁹¹ As Centrone, 2005, 569, pointed out in his discussion of the Pseudo-Pythagorean political treatises, 'the symbiosis of Platonic and Pythagorean ideas in the philosophies of the early Academy make it difficult to separate out elements in these texts that might ultimately be of Pythagorean origin. Distinctively Platonist doctrines come to be presented as Pythagorean, and it is difficult to establish whether the authors of the treatises considered themselves Platonists rather than Pythagoreans'.

the school of the Sextii cogently exemplifies such a multi-faceted process of doctrinal assimilation.

Interestingly enough, Quintus Sextius' son and successor, the physician Sextius Niger, who wrote a book *On Materia Medica* (Περὶ ὕλης) in Greek, is said to have credited the folk view that eating salamanders stimulates sexual desire.⁹² In all likelihood, when providing pharmacological advice, Niger did not conform to his father's vegetarian discipline. Nevertheless, he is mentioned as a follower of Asclepiades of Bithynia,⁹³ and thus as an adherent of the Empiric school of medicine which, as Celsus makes clear,⁹⁴ considered vivisection a uselessly cruel practice. On the whole, the philosophical profile of Sextius Niger seems to suggest that in the lively environment of the Sextian school cultural beliefs and interests could vary, vanish, or adapt to different contexts. It is more than reasonable to imagine that something analogous happened also in the case of Seneca, formerly a *tirunculus* of Sotion and Fabianus.⁹⁵ Among other things, Seneca never lost sight of the strict relationship between ethics, cosmology, and naturalistic research, occasionally inclining to a rhetorically alluring enlargement of his anthropocentric moral.

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⁹² Cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 29.76, who repeatedly cites Niger as one of his sources and defines him as *diligentissimus medicinae* (32.26). See Lana, 1992, 115-116. Since the term ὕλη, 'subject-matter', occurs in medical literature as a synonym of ὕλη ἰατρικὴ, 'materia medica' (cf. Galen, *In Hipp. Epidem. Comm.* 17b.181 K.), it is very likely that, similar to Dioscorides' well-known work Περὶ ὕλης ἰατρικῆς, Sextius' treatise was a comprehensive discussion of therapeutic issues, with special regard to the pharmacological use of plants and animals.

⁹³ Dioscorides, *Mat. Med.* 1. pr. 2. See Wellmann, 1889, and Capitani, 1991.

⁹⁴ Celsus, *Med.* 1. pr. 40-44. Notably, Celsus had himself been a member of the school of the Sextii (cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.124), but, as Lana, 1992, 122-123, persuasively argued, he had already left the school when he wrote his *De Medicina* (in which Niger is never mentioned).

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ep.* 108.23.

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