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Ethical Intellectualism in Seneca and the Roman Stoics: A Philosophical Trajectory From Plato's Socrates to Patristic Philosophy[1]

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Abstract – This article explores the meaning and role of ethical intellectualism in Seneca (in connection with his gnoseology and ethics) and, contextually, other Roman Stoics (Musonius, Persius, Hierocles, and Epictetus), against the background of ethical intellectualism in Plato's Socrates, Plato himself, and ancient Stoicism. Some glimpses will be offered into the reception of ethical intellectualism in Patristic thought. The essay traces the chain of thought of this key theory in ancient philosophy, with attention to Stoicism and particularly Seneca, through to Patristic philosophy (especially here, scholars contrast ethical intellectualism with voluntarism, but not always on the basis of a careful assessment).

Ethical Intellectualism, Plato, and the Stoics

Ethical intellectualism is a philosophical (ethical or meta-ethical) doctrine, widespread in ancient philosophy and patristic thought, that regards moral choices as based primarily on one's intellect (νοῦς, *mens*/*intellectus*/*animus*). The faculty of will on this interpretation depends directly on the intellect; hence its name, ethical intellectualism, a modern term: it means that ethical choices and behaviour depend on the intellect. Thus, in a broad-stroke picture, ethical intellectualism can be

[1] Many thanks to the Editors for their invitation and the anonymous readers for their suggestions.

opposed to voluntarism.[2] Origen of Alexandria, for instance, the philosophical theologian and exegete who died around 255 CE and in fact constructed a Christian Platonism (Patristic Platonism, with marked Stoic and some Aristotelian influences),[3] expressed the basic principle of ethical intellectualism in the formula, *sicut e mente voluntas*: 'as will comes from the intellect'.[4]

That this statement, and much other support of ethical intellectualism, is by a Patristic Platonist is not fortuitous. For the theory of ethical intellectualism goes back to Socrates, at least as represented by Plato, and Plato himself.[5] The Stoics, who belonged to a Socratic school of philosophy, made the most of this theory and maintained that ethical failure is due to wrong judgment.[6] The good is only virtue and evil is only vice, and the identification of virtue with the good is the quintessence of eudaemonism. Its link with ethical intellectualism lies in the tenet that ethical success is based on right judgments; that is to say, it depends on knowledge. Virtue is knowledge. Within the Stoic framework, this entails the imperative to obey the gods or Fate virtuously, namely with the knowledge of Fate/the Logos/the supreme god, and not forcedly, without that awareness.[7]

In the perspective of ethical intellectualism, moral subjects can only love and choose the good; one chooses evil only if one in fact mistakes it for a good, choosing a minor or apparent good, as Socrates and Plato stressed.[8] The problem is indeed a wrong judgment, thus a lack of

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[2] Adams (2014).

[3] Ramelli (2009; 2017; forthcoming).

[4] *Princ*. 4.4.1: *voluntas a mente*; 1.2.6 = 1.2.9: *voluntas ex mente.* Indeed, Origen argues: *Si enim omnia quae facit pater, haec et filius, facit similiter in eo quod omnia ita facit filius sicut pater, imago patris deformatur in filio, qui utique natus ex eo est velut quaedam voluntas eius ex mente procedens. Et ideo ego arbitror quod sufficere debeat voluntas patris ad subsistendum hoc, quod vult pater. Volens enim non alia via utitur, nisi quae consilio voluntas profertur. Ita ergo et filii ab eo subsistentia generatur* (1.2.6).

[5] See, e.g., Segvic (2000); Pangle (2014); Agaton (2017). According to Gerson (2013), Plato's Socrates expresses Plato's views; ethical intellectualism is Plato's, not Socrates'. For a partial influence on Aristotle: Santa-María (2008). Evans (2010) 6-7 calls ethical intellectualism "the Knowledge Argument"; see also Brickhouse/Smith (2010), who read Socratic ethical intellectualism as less intellectualist than usually assumed.

[6] Ramelli (2008), esp. Introduction and Philosophical key concepts of the Roman Stoics (2599-2626).

[7] See my (2012): 205-231.

[8] *Men.* 77ce; cf. *Gorg.* 468b; 466c-467b; 509c; *Symp.* 205e-206a; *Rep.* 505de; *Philb.* 20d.

knowledge. 'No one willingly goes towards evil or what one deems evil' (*Prot.* 345ce). What one deems evil is obviously a matter of knowledge. Again, virtue is knowledge; if one knows what is good, one will do it (*Prot*. 352c). Evil is chosen in account of a wrong judgment, a darkening or blurring of one's intellectual discernment. This is why whoever commits injustice—or acts wrongly or sins—does not do so really freely, but in fact out of ignorance.[9] Ignorance cannot be counted as freedom, but is rather a lack of knowledge and thence of freedom, since one is free if one acts voluntarily, in the awareness of what one chooses and does. Christopher Rowe questioned the standard narrative, according to which Plato advanced from his early, naïve idea that vice is ignorance (as in *Protagoras*, quoted above) to the more sophisticated psychology of the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, where vice is understood in terms of conflict between psychic parts. Rowe points out that in fact Plato's later dialogues, such as *Sophist* or *Timaeus*, reassert the identification of vice with ignorance and abandons the model of intra-psychic conflict.[10] Thus, Plato stuck to ethical intellectualism until the end.

In Plato, ethical intellectualism is connected with the principle of theodicy and responsibility. God is not responsible for evil, being entirely good and not causing any evil, as Plato claims in the myth of Er: 'virtue has no master [ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον] … the responsibility is with the one who makes the moral choice; God is not responsible [αἰτία ἑλομένου, θεὸς ἀναίτιος]' (*Rep.* 10.617e). The responsibility for one's actions lies with each moral subject, but in order for one to make a choice and be responsible for it and accountable for it, one must make such a choice freely and voluntarily, which means knowingly. If one does not know what one is doing, or is forced to do it, one cannot be regarded as responsible or accountable for it. This is clearly expressed, for instance, by the words attributed to Jesus of Nazareth in Luke 23:34a and later Jesus' follower Stephen in Acts 7:60 respectively (although the New Testament is not exactly a philosophical ethical treatise[11]): 'Father, do not impute them this sin, since they do not know what they are doing'.[12]

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[9] *Prot.* 357d-358d; *Rep.* 382a; *Tim.* 86d; *Leg.* 860d; cf. *Lach*. 194d; *Lys*. 210ab; *IAlc*. 134c-135c.

[10] Rowe (2020) 95-113.

[11] However, it may reflect philosophical (especially Stoic) ethical issues: Thorsteinsson (2018); Ramelli (2010)a, (2011)b, (2019)a.

[12] See Ramelli (2010) 233-247; (2011) 30-48.

Ethical intellectualism (virtue is knowledge) in Socrates immediately implies intellectual eudaemonism (virtue, which derives from knowledge, is happiness). Socrates in the *Euthydemus* argues that, if one knows what happiness is, one will pursue it (ethical intellectualism), and wisdom, which is knowledge, is necessary and sufficient for happiness (intellectual eudaemonism). By way of analogy, a carpenter must not only have tools, but must *know* how to use them (*Euthyd*. 280bd). Likewise, one must have wisdom, the only unconditional good, to *know* how to use one's assets and thus act well (281be). Wisdom, which is a kind of knowledge, is happiness or the gist thereof (282ab). This is intellectual eudaemonism. Intellectual eudaemonism (from reason descends happiness) was key to Stoicism[13] and is different from ethical intellectualism but is related to it.

The basically Platonic and Stoic heritage of ethical intellectualism is found again in Patristic thought: in Irenaeus, for instance, who saw sin (what would later be called the original sin) as the result of deception and ignorance; in Origen, who traced sin back to ignorance, claiming that sin is rightly called 'ignorance' in some Scriptural passages,[14] and especially in Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius.[15] Gregory, an admirer of Origen and a Patristic Platonist, even explained the sin of the protoplasts in the perspective of ethical intellectualism: Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit because it appeared good, but in fact it was evil. They were deceived in their judgment.

The present investigation will focus on Seneca's ethical intellectualism, its antecedents, and some important parallels in Roman Stoicism. It is important to trace the chain of thought of this key philosophical theory in ancient philosophy (Stoicism has the lion's share) through to Patristic philosophy (especially here scholars oppose it to voluntarism, but not always on the basis of a careful assessment) and beyond. Ethical intellectualism is a useful category contemporary philosophers can think with, even today. Some may find it valid. So, this analysis yields up new understanding and knowledge.

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13 Inwood (2005) 249-270 on Seneca's intellectual eudaemonism (from reason descends happiness), although not named so.

14 E.g. *Recte autem hic peccatum insipientiam nominavit* (*H.* 1 *Ps*. 37.4).

15 Ramelli (2022) 363-388.

The Stoics made the most of ethical intellectualism and its equation between virtue and knowledge.[16] This is already clear in the famous Hymn to Zeus by the second Stoic scholarch, Cleanthes, who has wickedness derive from lack of knowledge and intelligence:

> (*SVF* 1.537): Without you, O God, nothing occurs on earth
> nor in the divine and ethereal heaven nor in the sea,
> apart from the plans that *wicked people* [κακοί] in their *lack of intelligence* [ἄνοια] set in motion.
> But you know how to reduce excesses to due measure, disorder to order, and make what is inimical friendly.
> Thus you have resolved all things in unity, both good and evil,
> affirming a single eternal Logos for all things.
> But some mortals, who are *evil* [κακοί], abandon and flee this *Logos* […]
> Behold them, foolishly wandering from *evil to evil* [κακόν] […]
> But you, O Zeus, who dispense all gifts, who thicken the clouds, you of the bright lightning,
> free humanity from its *ruinous ignorance* [ἀπειροσύνη],
> chase it from the soul, and at last let that *wisdom* [γνώμη] be found,
> trusting in which you yourself govern the world with justice.

Ethical failure and evil come from ruinous ignorance, foolishness, wrong judgment, and lack of *nous*, of wisdom, and of the recognition of the Logos that Stoically governs all. This is a tenet of ethical intellectualism. Even in logic, according to Diogenes Laertius 7.45, the Stoics recommended studying syllogisms, because these reveal what is demonstrative, which 'contributes a great deal towards making one's judgment right'. This is the key to ethics: right judgments are the premise of any good ethical choice and a successful ethical life.

On sin as irrationality (ἀλογία) or against reason (παρὰ τὸν λόγον), which is a pivotal identification in ethical intellectualism, several fragments are collected by von Arnim under Chrysippus' ethical fragments, although they are referred generally to the Stoics. Especially important are *SVF* 2.445, 500, 501, which I set out to address briefly.

SVF 2.445 is reported by Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.13: 'whatever is against the right reason, this is an error' (πᾶν τὸ *παρὰ τὸν λόγον τὸν ὀρθὸν* τοῦτο ἁμάρτημά ἐστιν). Clement had already stated that the impulses contrary to right reason are called πάθη, 'passions'

[16] Løkke (2015).

or 'bad emotions' (*Strom.* 2.59.6; good and acceptable emotions are εὐπάθειαι); whether to give them free rein or not, depends on rational assent: in the former case, errors/sins ensue, in the latter they do not. *SVF* 2.500 and 501 are preserved by Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.93, 14 Wachsmuth and 2.96, 18 Wachsmuth respectively. They are both listed under Chrysippus' ethical fragments, although the reference in Stobaeus is a plural referring to the Stoics in general (λέγουσι). *SVF* 2.500 describes an error (ἁμάρτημα) as 'an action performed *against the right reason*' (ἁμάρτημά τε τὸ *παρὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον* πραττόμενον).

Analogously, *SVF* 2.501, after defining perfect actions (κατορθώματα) as 'all those which are performed *according to the right reason*' (πάνθ᾽ ὅσα *κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον* πράττεται), defines their opposite, errors or bad actions (ἁμαρτήματα) as 'those which are performed *against the right reason*' (καθόλου ὅσα παρὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον πράττεται). The definition of ἁμάρτημα in the Stoic epitome by Stobaeus 2.85.13-86.16, perhaps from Arius Didymus, states that an error or bad action is whatever occurs against moral duty or appropriateness (τὸ καθῆκον): Πᾶν δὲ τὸ παρὰ τὸ καθῆκον ἐν λογικῷ γιγνόμενον, *ἁμάρτημα* εἶναι· τὸ δὲ καθῆκον τελειωθὲν κατόρθωμα γίγνεσθαι. ('Every deed contrary to duty / prescribed actions that happens in a rational being is a [moral] error. But a duty, when accomplished, becomes a right action'). In this sentence, τὸ καθῆκον replaces the notion of 'right reason' in the previous fragment. The translation of τὸ καθῆκον as 'duty' or 'prescribed action' (corresponding to Latin *officium*), which in the last decades has often been replaced by 'appropriate acts', has been recently defended by Jack Visnjic.[17]

Cicero, with whose work Seneca was familiar,[18] was a Neo-Academic and was influenced by Stoicism, especially in ethics. He suggests the importance of ethical intellectualism in a rhetorical treatise devoted to the construction of rhetorical discourses in court. The person who is accused of something can admit that he did wrong deliberately (*consulto*

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[17] Visnjic (2021), esp. 77-100, examines Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius on καθήκοντα. On Hierocles, not in the focus here, see the next note. In Visnjic (2021) 139-152, the meaning of καθήκοντα before Stoicism also points to 'duties, obligations', being strongly prescriptive, unlike προσῆκον/πρέπον, 'appropriate'. This is reflected in Visnjic's translation of the Stoic epitomes by Diogenes Laertius 7.108-110, and Stobaeus 2.85.13-86.16, on τέλεια καθήκοντα and μέσα καθήκοντα, 'perfect duties' and 'middle duties', the latter including marrying, conversing etc. (153-158).

[18] Moreschini (1977); Degl'Innocenti Pierini (2018), (2020); De Paolis (2016).

peccasse), but will have to specify that he acted foolishly (*stultitia*), or at the instigation of someone else (*inpulsu alicuius*), or for some decent and upright reason (*aliqua honesta aut probabili causa*, *De inventione* 2.106). These three excuses seem precisely to indicate that either the wrongful deed was committed without reason (namely, foolishly) or the reason should be attributed to someone else (namely, the instigator), or else the misdeed has indeed a reason, but a good one: a decent reason.

Cicero also reports the Stoic theory concerning will or intention, *voluntas*, which translates βούλησις. This does not really amount to what we call 'voluntarism', since will, according to the Stoics, depends heavily on reason:

> (Cic. *Tusc.* 4.6.12 = *SVF* 3.438): *Stoici βούλησιν appellant, nos appellamus voluntatem. Eam illi putant in solo esse sapientem, quam sic definiunt: voluntas est quae quis cum ratione desiderat.*
>
> What the Stoics call βούλησις or intention, we call will [*voluntas*]. They think that it is present in the wise alone, since they define it as follows: Will [*voluntas*] is the faculty that desires something rationally [*cum ratione*].

If will directs itself to its objects rationally, it strictly depends on reason—which is ethical intellectualism. This is also suggested by the fact that *voluntas* here translates βούλησις or intention, conceived as rational intention. When one desires anything irrationally, this is no longer βούλησις. This amounts to what I was explaining earlier about freedom: whoever acts irrationally, out of ignorance, cannot be counted as free. Likewise, such an agent cannot be counted as willing or having an intention.

Seneca

Seneca followed Stoicism, although with openness to Epicureanism,[19] Platonism,[20] and other trends. He declared himself a Stoic, but he also claimed that he was free to disagree with Stoicism, if he deemed it fit (*Ep.* 90; *Ot.* 3.1; *Q. Nat.* 7.22.1).[21] Stoicism, in its self-understanding of what philosophy is, defined philosophy as knowledge: 'wisdom of

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[19] Gigante (1998); Ramelli (2020) 582-612.

[20] Reydams-Schils (2010) 196-214.

[21] Reale/Ramelli (2001); Reydams-Schils (2018) 143-156; Ramelli (2013-2021).

things divine and human' (*Ep*. 89.5); 'knowledge of oneself and of nature' (*sui naturaeque cognitio*, *Ep*. 82.6). In *Ep*. 8.2-3 Seneca acknowledges that he has come to know (*cognovi*) the 'right path' of philosophy rather late in life and that now with the *Epistles to Lucilius* he is transmitting it to others (*aliis monstro*). Philosophy is again described as knowledge and its end is virtue and happiness. This notion perfectly inscribes itself against the backdrop of ethical intellectualism (virtue comes from knowledge) and eudaemonism (virtue produces happiness).[22]

Using *animus* basically as the translation of νοῦς, Seneca offers a clear expression of the pre-eminence of the intellect, voicing a position of intellectualism: 'keep in mind [*cogitate*] that nothing but the intellect [*animum*] is marvellous, that to the great mind [*magnus animus*], nothing else is great' (*Ep.* 8.5). The centrality of knowledge also appears at the beginning of *Naturales Quaestiones*, *Praef.* 3.1: 'I have decided to go all around and through the universe, to seek its causes and secrets, and to present them to others, so that they can learn them' (*mundum circuire ... et causas secretaque eius eruere atque aliis noscenda producere*). Ethical intellectualism kicks in at this point. For knowledge, in Seneca's view, produces good choices and conduct: the visible phenomena of nature 'are learned because their knowledge works against our wickedness and madness' (*contra nequitiam nostram furoremque discuntur*). Good moral choices depend on knowledge. The faculty of will is an expression of one's intellect.[23] One's will must be *consilio adductus* (*Ep*. 37.5); *voluntas* is deliberation upon reflection and comes close to βούλησις.

In the preface to *Q. Nat.* 3, Seneca focuses on the intellect (*animus*) as common to both humans and gods; this is a typical element of Stoicism, from the ancient Stoa onwards. It also grounded the concept of the 'city of Zeus', the 'theopolis' common to both humans and deities.[24] Thus, νοῦς / *animus* should devote time entirely to itself, turning to the contemplation of itself, at least in the final stages of philosophy (*sibi totus animus vacet, et ad contemplationem sui saltim in ipso fine respiciat*, *Q. Nat.* 3 *praef.* 2). This will have an ethical consequence: freedom, as

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[22] Ethical intellectualism lacks in several overviews or specific studies of Seneca's philosophical thought, e.g. the excellent Borgo (1998).

[23] On *voluntas* in Seneca see Inwood (2005) 132-156, rightly against a 'voluntaristic' interpretation of Seneca. Seneca, indeed, had no special faculty of will independent of the intellect.

[24] Ramelli (2005)a, (2011)a, (2021) 257-276.

a result of liberation from moral enslavement (ibidem 16-17).[25] Seneca's argument connects again ethical intellectualism and freedom; if one's choices are not guided by knowledge, by one's intellect, one is not free. Indeed, passions, or bad emotions, which are not guided by knowledge, are never free but are rather the real enslavement—much worse than the social condition of being a legal slave, which in the Stoic perspective can coexist with a morally free soul (and vice versa, a slave owner can well be enslaved to passions).[26]

The tenet of ethical intellectualism, that virtue depends on knowledge, is repeated once again in *Ir.* 3.36. Here, in connection with the examination of one's conscience that Seneca seems to have learnt from the Sextii,[27] and that will surface again in Epictetus (*Diss*. 3.10.1), Seneca observes that only through self-knowledge—namely the examination of one's *animus* or intellect and the actions it decides and the passions it fails to expel—will it be possible to become better and act successfully from the moral point of view. Knowledge that guides ethics, in the framework of ethical intellectualism, indeed, is first of all self-knowledge; Seneca was mindful of the Sages' Delphic maxim 'Know Yourself' that Socrates appropriated and taught.[28]

Knowledge of human mortality, to be meditated in one's intellect (*in animo*), leads to moral tranquillity and peace of mind (*placidi, Ep*. 4.9). This is another instance in which knowledge, and particularly self-knowledge, leads to a good ethical state, as in a further example: 'You will not understand what you should do [*faciendum*] and what you should avoid [*vitandum*] until you have learnt what you owe to your own nature [*naturae tuae*]' (*Ep*. 121.3; see also *Ad Marc.* 11.3). What emerges is that self-knowledge is an indispensable precondition for ethics. And this is ethical intellectualism. Here self-knowledge is the knowledge of one's nature, both as a human being and possibly as an individual. Similarly, in *Ep*. 82.4-6 Seneca discusses how philosophy, understood in terms of knowledge of self and nature (*sui naturaeque cognitio*, 82.6), helps human beings in their ethical life. Knowledge enables virtues and is indispensable to one's moral life:

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25 Detailed treatment in Ramelli (2016) 49-52.

26 Ramelli (2016) 45-60.

27 On this passage see also Ker (2015) 109-121. On Seneca's notion of conscience, see Inwood (2005) 322-352; Torre (2021) 73-110, esp. 99-106.

28 Holtz (2023); cf. Ramelli (2005)a.

(*Ep.* 82.6): *.. sui naturaeque cognitio. Sciat quo iturus sit, unde ortus, quod illi bonum, quod malum sit, quod petat, quid evitet, quae sit illa ratio quae adpetenda ac fugienda discernat.*

> The knowledge of oneself and nature (consists in the following:) human beings must *know* the aim to reach, the origin from which they come, what is good and what is evil, what to aspire to, what to avoid, the rational criterion to separate what must be sought after and what must be fled.

Knowledge and rationality is the key to preventing desires and passions from overtaking the mind (intellect or rational soul: *animus*). It is able to 'exclude (*excludere*) harmful [passions] ... and ... deny them admittance (*non admittere*)', against the backdrop for the Stoic preference for ἀπάθεια over μετριοπάθεια (*Ir.* 1.7.2). To that end reason must distinguish objects of pursuit and avoidance. The process of distinguishing orientates itself to the ethical good and bad that decides what is to be desired or avoided. These mental processes are of utmost importance, 'for when (the passions) have established themselves in possession, they are stronger than their ruler [*sc.* reason] and do not permit themselves to be restrained or reduced' (ibidem).

In *Ep.* 94.18-69 Seneca reasons again on the basis of ethical intellectualism: it is what we know, our convictions, that determine our choices and conduct. Responding to the objections of the philosopher Aristo, Seneca argues that our intellect (*animus*) needs 'many precepts in order to know what to do in life' (94.19); they help to 'eradicate wrong convictions' (94.21), which are the basis of bad moral life. Seneca offers as an example a situation that at first sight might seem to contradict ethical intellectualism: a man knows what he should do, but he does not do so; for instance, one knows that it is immoral to demand chastity of one's wife and at the same time keeping a mistress, and yet he does the opposite (namely, he demands chastity of his wife but continues to have a mistress himself: the same example was interestingly used by the Roman Stoic Musonius Rufus, a contemporary of Seneca, who deprecated this situation in *Diss.* 12; we shall see in the next section that Musonius also supported ethical intellectualism strongly). But the explanation and remedy that Seneca suggests do not contradict ethical intellectualism, but rather reinforce it, for he does not say that will decides independently of one's knowledge, or in flat contradiction of it, but he declares instead that it is necessary to reiterate our knowledge of

what is good and what should be done, thereby refreshing our memory and therefore our gnoseological awareness: 'from time to time, it is necessary to refresh one's memory: philosophical precepts should not be stored away, but kept at hand' (94.26).

Thus, ethical intellectualism, far from being disproved or rejected, is in fact reinstated. Wrongdoing comes from 'false opinions'; if one eliminates them, one will know what to do (94.36). One's intellect (*animus*) must be liberated from bad discourses; we must unroot 'falsity' in order to have instead 'truth' and 'virtue' (94.68). These are again expressions of ethical intellectualism, which joins truth and virtue because the latter depends on the knowledge of the former. Ethical intellectualism also helps to explain the reason why Seneca did not have great sympathy towards Judaism or even towards traditional 'pagan' cults either: he saw them as essentially irrational.[29]

Sometimes rational knowledge may suggest to the wise extreme but resolving acts such as committing suicide. Seneca accepted the Stoic doctrine of suicide essentially as a means to defeat necessity when indispensable. He observed how easy it is for a person to commit suicide and thereby 'renounce nature and throw back in its face its gift', that is, the gift of life (*Prov.* 6.8). This exhortation comes within an argument for theodicy: why does God allow that evil touches the good? God answers that virtuous people never suffer moral evil, since they reject vice, passions, and all that is really evil; God (the Logos/Nomos) protects the good from real evil (6.1). Material or external losses such as poverty, the death of dear ones, exiles, or even being killed are not evil at all (6.2-5). While God is exempt from suffering evil, virtuous people are superior to it; they disdain poverty, contemn pain, and scorn death and chance (6.6). No one can keep humans in this life against their will: if they do not want to fight, they can flee; suicide is very easy to commit and at hand: it takes very little to separate one's soul from one's body (6.7-9) On many other occasions, too, Seneca approved of suicide when strictly indispensable.[30] Suicide is a means to disdain death and preserve one's honourability.[31] Seneca insisted on the necessity of 'dying honourably', reporting the words of a Stoic friend to his acquaintance Tullius Marcellinus, who was thinking of committing suicide owing

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29 Ramelli (2002), (2018), (2019).

30 *Ep.* 58.32-36; 70; 77; 91.15; 120.14-15; *Prov.* 2-10; 6.9.

31 *Ep.* 24.6-8; 67.12-13; *Prov.* 2.9.12; *Tranq.* 16.1.

to a long and painful malady (*Ep.* 77.6). In this letter he recounts the 'sweet' way Marcellinus committed suicide—and Seneca was finally forced to commit suicide himself by Nero, mainly for political reasons, when, after being the counsellor of Nero for many years, once Nero's course changed, he was disgraced.[32] Epictetus would also approve of suicide (*Diss.* 1.2.25-28).[33]

Human beings are endowed with reason, which they share with the gods, although the latter have a perfect one (*consummata*), while humans have a perfectible one (*consummabilis*), and reason is the driving force of good ethical life; on the other hand, humans also have a penchant for vice, which produces misery.[34] Given human frailty and openness to vice, virtue is not innate, but must be learnt[35] through personal engagement and effort (*cura*) in philosophy.[36] Moral evil, according to the Stoic classification that Seneca follows,[37] is the only bad thing (*malum, mala*), virtue is good, and the rest is all indifferent things (*indifferens*, ἀδιάφορον). Moral evil is thus sin and vice (*Prov.* 6.1). In *Ben.* 1.10 Seneca[38] expresses a famously negative conviction concerning the moral character of human beings—one that ends up in the declaration of universal culpability, which is one aspect in which Seneca uses ethical intellectualism in a particularly interesting way:

> (*Ben.* 1.10): *Ceterum idem semper de nobis pronuntiare debebimus: malos esse nos, malos fuisse, invitus adiciam, et futuros esse.*
>
> We will always have to proclaim the following about us: we are wicked, we were wicked, and—I unwillingly add—we shall be wicked.

Seneca here does not identify the root of all evil in historical devolution, as Posidonius did,[39] but in the intrinsic nature of humanity, which

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[32] For the socio-political aspect of Seneca's philosophy, see Seal (2021), who explores political engagement, social circles, philosophical school, and Seneca's relation to Epicureanism and its groups of friends; Dross (2022).

[33] Hill (2004); Ramelli (2008) Introduction.

[34] *Ad desperationem nos vitia nostra perducunt*, *Ep.* 92.27-28.

[35] *Ep.* 123.16; 76.6; 90.46.

[36] *Ep.* 124.14.

[37] *Ep.* 117.9; for the Stoic view, e.g., Cic. *Fin.* 3.50-53.

[38] On Book 1 of this treatise see Picone (2013), and my review in *Latomus* 75 (2016) 525-527.

[39] Posidonius was classified as a 'Middle Stoic'. The ancient Stoics had a different view;

has evil implanted in it, although it develops after birth. Seneca insists that sin results from ignorance (*imperitia*), which enslaves humans to vice, while virtue offers true freedom (*Ep.* 31.6; 85.28). Humans are innocent at birth, since 'nature generated us upright and free', *integros ac liberos*, but they soon join in producing 'a vast mass of wickedness', *ingens illa nequitia*, because other people turn them toward vice, as each one 'learns what is bad and in turn teaches it' (*didicit deteriora, dein docuit*). Indeed, 'vices are not born with us [*nobiscum vitia nasci*], but came after [*supervenerunt*]: we absorbed them', *ingesta sunt* (*Ep.* 94.54-56).

Other declarations by Seneca confirm this view of universal culpability, for instance in *Ir.* 2.9.1. Even in Letter 9 of the Seneca-Paul pseudepigraphic correspondence,[40] there is a statement concerning the presence of culpability in human nature:

> (Ps. Sen. *Ep.* 9 [71 Bocciolini Palagi]): *Natura rerum, quae ita mentes hominum ab omnibus artibus et moribus rectis revocat, ut non hodie admirer, quippe ut is qui multis documentis hoc iam notissimum habeam.*
>
> Nature keeps the mind of humans far from all righteous arts and deeds; I have wondered about this for a long time, as I can realise this very well from plenty of evidence.

This statement is perfectly in line with the authentic Seneca, who often declared that every human is sinful, has *vitium* (a fault, a moral defect, vice), or is no harmless: 'How unknown innocence is!' (*quam ignota innocentia*, *Tranq.* 15.1-2: *innocentia* is being harmless, doing no harm); 'nature defends moral fault … it is not the case that innocence is rare: it does not exist' (*vitium natura defendit … innocentia non rara, sed nulla, Ir.* 26; 9.1). Now, the explanation of universal culpability lies in the obnubilation or darkness, obscurity, blurring of minds:

> (Sen. *Ir.* 10.1-3): *Caligo mentium, nec tantum necessitas errandi, sed errorum amor … hac condicione nati sumus.*[41]

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see Blackson (2017) 121-140, on how the Stoics accounted for the origins of κακία, especially in the formulation by Chrysippus, corrected by Posidonius.

40 On this correspondence see Ramelli (2014)b, (2023)a.

41 Cfr. *Ben.* 1.9.2-10.4; 5.15-17; 7.26; *Ep.* 95:15-33; 97:1-11.

> The obnubilation of minds and not so much the necessity of erring/sinning, but loving error/sin … We were born in such a condition.

Note the mention of the obnubilation of the mind in all humans: this explains the omnipresence of vice and a propensity for error in ethical intellectualistic terms.

At first sight, universal culpability might seem at odds with ethical intellectualism, but Seneca reduces it to ethical intellectualism by assuming that all humans' minds suffer from *caligo.* Moral error (ἁμαρτία = *error*) is chosen out of love or desire; now, humans choose it, that is, evil, because of an obnubilation of the mind, which is something innate in humans at birth. This is why at every new cosmic cycle, culpability spreads to all humanity again, as Seneca makes it clear just after speaking of the cosmic catastrophe and the beginning of a new cycle:

> (Sen. *Q. Nat.* 3.30.8): *Omne ex integro animal generabitur dabiturque terris homo inscius scelerum et melioribus auspiciis natus. Sed illis quoque innocentia non durabit, nisi dum noui sunt; cito nequitia subrepit. Uirtus difficilis inuentu est, rectorem ducemque desiderat: etiam sine magistro uitia discuntur.*
>
> Every animated being will be generated anew and a human being that knows no crimes and is born under better auspices will be given to earth. But even in this case, human harmlessness will not last long, only at the very beginning; soon, depravity will slip in. Virtue is very difficult to find and needs one who points to it and governs it, while vices can be learnt even without a teacher.

Necessity is not really ruled out, although Seneca wants to emphasise the human agent and the reason why he chooses evil. In the Stoic framework, evil exists necessarily as a by-product of the cosmos (κατὰ παρακολούθησιν, Chrysippus, *De providentia SVF* 2.1170; 2.1176 and 1178).[42] Bart Ehrman once surmised that Seneca's 'philosophy may have played little role in the development of Christian thought'.[43] This seems to be the case on the whole; however, the idea of universal culpability and the absence of innocence in humanity probably influenced, if not Origen and the Greek Patristic side,[44] at least exponents of

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[42] See Bryan (2013) 59-79.

[43] Ehrman (2013) 527.

[44] Origen insists a great deal on universal culpability (but not original sin and traducianism), although he does not derive it from Seneca, but mainly from Scripture.

the Latin side of Patristics, especially Hilary of Poitiers and Augustine of Hippo, and contributed to the birth of the notion of 'original sin'.[45]

This is in line with an ethical intellectualistic outlook. The human penchant towards vice from birth, which is denounced by Seneca, can be explained by means of the intrinsic flaw of the body. This is a prison of the soul and encumbers it; the soul, therefore, longs to be free from it. There is plenty of evidence in Seneca's work for such views, which can be interpreted either as a borrowing and adaptation of Platonic ideas or more consequentially with Stoicism itself.[46] Seneca, for example, uses the derogatory term *corpusculum* instead of *corpus*, just as Epictetus would soon use σωμάτιον (*Ep.* 24.16; 41.4; 58.29; *Helvia* 11.7). The body is a prison (*carcer*) for the soul (*Pol.* 9.3), an imprisonment (*vinculum*, literally 'chains'[47]); it is a burden for the soul (*pondus*, *Ep.* 24.17; 65.17) or a weight, *onus*, a characterisation comparable to the Platonic term ὄγκος[48] (*Ep.* 26.2; 92.33; 102.26; *Marc.* 24.5).

This is why philosophy is frequently described by Seneca as a process of disassociation from bodily life, in terms very similar to Platonism (*Ep.* 41.4-5; 102.27-28; 120.14-16).[49] Even Seneca's praises of death as a detachment from the body—also in connection with exhortations to suicide if necessary—may recall Platonic (and Patristic Platonic) expressions,[50] although the theoretical bases of Stoicism are different. Aldo Setaioli and others surmised that Seneca's view was influenced by so-called Middle Platonism.[51] Other scholars admit a Platonic influence, but stress more how the Platonic elements cohered well with Seneca's Stoicism.

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45 Edwards (2015); Image (2018) and my review *Reading Religion* 21st February 2018: http://readingreligion.org/books/human-condition-hilary-poitiers .

46 *Ep.* 24.17; 26.2; 65.16-22; 70.12, 17; 76.25; 78.10; 88.34; 92.33-35; 102.22-30; *Marc.* 11.1-5; 23.2; 24.5-25.1; *Polyb.* 9.3, 8; *Helv.* 11.6-7. Reydams-Schils (2010) 196-214: 'Seneca manages to put to good Stoic use such notions as the thoughts of God, the opposition between soul and body, or the return to a higher realm. If this assessment holds true, then the outcome of his appropriation of Platonic material is not fundamentally different from that of his use of passages taken from Epicurus. Yet, in hermeneutical terms, the manner in which he uses these two authors is different. With the quotations from Epicurus, he is borrowing from the enemy camp; in the case of Plato he is exploring genuine affinities, yet giving them a Stoic turn of thought. There can be no doubt that the Platonic colouring in Seneca is significant'.

47 *Ep.* 65.21; 70.12; 102.30; *Marc.* 24.5; *Polyb* 9.8; *Helv.* 11.7.

48 See Ramelli (2022)a 74-124.

49 See Inwood (2005)a 502-503.

50 *Marc.* 20.1-3; 22.3; 23.2; *Prov.* 6.7-9.

51 Setaioli (2007) 343-346.

Epictetus also had similar views about the body, which he often represented in denigratory terms, and—just as Seneca has God speak to humans—even had Zeus declare the necessity of evil and mention the body in negative terms: 'If it had been possible, Epictetus, I would have made your small body and whatever belongs to you free and safe from harm … But given that I could not do so [οὐκ ἠδυνάμην], I provided you with a part of myself, namely this faculty', referring to moral choice (*Diss.* 1.1.10-12; 2.5.27). While in Seneca's *Prov.* 6, as seen, the divinity declares to humans that it did protect them from real evil (moral evil) although not from apparent evil (material, external losses), here in Epictetus the divinity plainly admits that it cannot protect humans from evil in general. This is tantamount to an admission of its lack of omnipotence: for the Stoic Epictetus, this is perfectly in order, whereas, for instance, for the Christian Platonist Origen this would be inadmissible.[52] Seneca often repeats that God cannot protect us from evil, but always specifying that it is material evil or apparent evil and not real, moral evil: 'Since I could not [*non poteram*] protect you from these, I have armed your minds [*animos vestros armavi*] against them all' (*Prov.* 6.6). The human mind can regard death and other apparent evils as indifferent things (ἀδιάφορα), as Stoicism taught. The work of God's providence is to 'defend from death whatever God could not make immortal [*quae immortalia facere non poterat*], because matter impeded this [*quia materia prohibebat*], and defeat the body's vices through reason' (*Ep*. 58.27). Reason, intellect, and knowledge direct human ethical life; matter is the opposite, but not diametrically, since matter is represented more as a source of material evil than as a source of real, moral evil. Certainly, it can facilitate many passions, but rational assent can keep them in check and eliminate them according to the Stoic ideal of ἀπάθεια.

In *Ep*. 58, as just seen, Seneca speaks of the mortality of human beings due to their body. Does this mean that their soul is immortal? This could open up a perspective in the long run for the acquisition of ethical intellectualism on the part of those who are still defective in this regard (as, for instance, it would do in Origen's theory). But the immortality of the soul in Seneca is a vexed question. In *Ep*. 93.3-4,

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[52] See Unnik (1970) 27-36, who shows that God's omnipotence is not only Biblical (Gen 18:4; Mark 14:36) but also present in Graeco-Roman authors; Blumenthal (2018) 281-306, and, on Origen, who grounded it in divine *creatio ex nihilo* and *apokatastasis* and discussed it explicitly in *Contra Celsum*: Ramelli (2012-2013).

Seneca has recourse to the topic of being dead while physically alive (*diu … mortuus est*), a widespread theme in early imperial Stoicism, philosophy, and religious literature (including the New Testament)[53] and presents a notion of afterlife, both in the sense of post-mortem memory (*se in memoriam dedit*) and post-mortem existence. However, this is asserted as the first possibility within an alternative: either post-mortem existence or vanishing:

> (Sen. *Ep*. 93.10-11): That wise man adds: 'Yet, I do not depart any more bravely because of this hope [*hac spe*], namely that I think that a path lies open [*iter patere*] before me to my gods [*ad deos meos*]. For I have deserved [*merui*] to be admitted there, and indeed I have already been among them [*inter illos*]: I have sent there my intellect [*animus*] and they have sent [*miserant*] theirs to me. But suppose that I am removed from this world—i.e. that I die—and that nothing of a human being endures [*nihil ex homine restare*] after death [*post mortem*]; well, I am happy all the same [*magnus animus*], even if, when I leave, I shall move to… nowhere [*etiam si nusquam transiturus exeo*]'.

What is sure is that, thanks to the communion of intellect-rationality (*animus*, νοῦς, λόγος), the wise human being is among the gods on earth; perhaps he or she can hope to be among the gods also afterwards.[54]

Seneca returns again and again to the alternative between the soul's annihilation after death and its continued existence;[55] this alternative is well summarised in *Ep.* 65.24: *Mors quid est? Aut finis aut transitus* and in *Prov.* 6.6: 'Pay no attention to death: it either brings you to an end or to a different place'.[56] It may be prudent to conclude that 'No single position can be assumed as Seneca's consistent view', neither post-mortem existence nor annihilation.[57]

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[53] See Ramelli (2010)a, (2011)b 145-163.

[54] For the problem of afterlife in Stoicism, see Hoven (1971). for the issue of Seneca's belief in the immortality of the soul against the background of Stoic tradition: Long (2021): Seneca used an argument from symmetry, grounded in the parallel between pre-natal and post-mortem existence, and thought that, 'if our souls are everlasting, then we are immortal' (182).

[55] *Ep.* 102; *Prov.* 6.6; *Polyb.* 5.1-2; 9.1-3; *Ep.* 24.18; 65.24; 71.16; 90.29; 93.9-10; 99.30.

[56] The extinction of the soul is proposed in *Ep.* 36.10; 54.4-5; *Tro.* 397-408; a penchant towards survival in *Ep.* 63.16; 76.25; 88.34; the survival of the soul in *Marc.* 24.5-26.7; *Polyb.* 9.8-9; *Ep.* 65.18-22; 79.12; 86.1; 92.34-35; 93.4-5.

[57] Rist (1989), (2004).

A Look at Other Roman Stoics about Ethical Intellectualism: Musonius, Persius, Hierocles, and Epictetus

Seneca insists on ethical intellectualistic tenets in a number of his philosophical works and on many occasions, principally as a heritage from Stoicism and often within arguments grounded in Stoic tenets. In Roman Stoicism, Musonius, Seneca's contemporary, was dubbed 'the Roman Socrates' and indeed followed Socrates also with respect to ethical intellectualism. He strongly supported it, first of all in his emblematic declaration in *Diss*. 10, which seeks to demonstrate that the philosopher will never charge anyone with giving offence to him or her:

> (Mus. *Diss.* 10): Τὰ πολλὰ τῶν ἁμαρτανομένων ὑπ᾽ ἀγνοίας τε καὶ ἀμαθίας τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἁμαρτάνεται, ὧν ὁ μεταδιδαχθεὶς εὐθὺς παύεται.
>
> Most sins/errors are committed by people *out of ignorance and boorishness*; when they acquire knowledge and change their mind, they no longer commit them.[58]

Μεταδιδάσκω in the passive form means learning (being taught) something new and as a result converting and changing one's mind (μετα-); this, in Musonius' argument, immediately also imply changing one's choices and behaviour and ceasing to offend or commit sin. This is the pivot of ethical intellectualism. Musonius adds in the same diatribe that not only those who offend, but also those who take offence display their ignorance, since these are people who do not really know what is noble and what is shameful, namely they do not know that what is noble/good is only virtue and what is shameful (αἰσχρόν) is only vice. The philosopher, instead, who knows this very well, will never take offence at anything and will not cause offence to anyone. This is ethical intellectualism.

From ethical intellectualism follows Musonius' notion of forgiveness, as I pointed out elsewhere (1998; 2012a), and his preference for instruction and correction over retributive punishments, something that his admirer Origen—a supporter of ethical intellectualism himself, as well as of universal culpability, like Seneca—would develop and use as one of the buttresses for his theory of apokatastasis or the

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[58] Ramelli (2001), (2008) 689-943; Laurand (2014); Lutz–Reydams-Schils (2020).

universal restoration of (rational) creatures to God.[59] This is Musonius' argument, which is based on a specific historical example:

> (Mus. F39 Lutz): Τὸ δὲ Λυκούργου τοῦ Λακειδαιμονίου τίς ἡμῶν οὐ θαυμάζει; Πηρωθεὶς γὰρ ὑπό τινος τῶν πολιτῶν τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τὸν ἕτερον καὶ παραλαβὼν τὸν νεανίσκον παρὰ τοῦ δήμου ἵνα τιμωρήσαιτο ὅπως αὐτὸς βούλεται, τούτου μὲν ἀπέσχετο, παιδεύσας δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ ἀποφήνας ἄνδρα ἀγαθὸν παρήγαγεν εἰς τὸ θέατρον. Θαυμαζόντων δὲ τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων, 'Τοῦτον μέν τοι λαβών, ἔφη, παρ᾽ ὑμῶν ὑβριστὴν καὶ βίαιον, ἀποδίδωμι ὑμῖν ἐπιεικῆ καὶ δημοτικόν'.
>
> Who of us is not in awe of Lycurgus the Lacedaemonian's behaviour? For he had been blinded in one eye by one of his fellow citizens and had received the youth from the people to punish him as he deemed fit. However, he refrained from doing so, but rather educated him, turning him clearly into a good person, and led him to the public theatre. And when the Lacedaemonians regarded him with amazement, he said: 'I received from you this man as insolent and violent; I return him to you as decent and a good citizen'.

The key is education, which brings about knowledge; this makes a person ethically good. Musonius uses τιμωρέω, which in Aristotle refers to avenging punishment (*Rhet*. 1369b13) as opposed to κολάζω which indicates corrective punishment or instruction. Indeed, according to Aristotle, κόλασις 'is inflicted in the interest of the sufferer', whereas τιμωρία is inflicted 'in the interest of him who inflicts it, that he may obtain satisfaction'. Clement of Alexandria in *Strom.* 7.16.102.3 would make this distinction explicit: 'God never punishes [τιμωρεῖται], because punishment is the retribution of evil through other evil, but corrects [κολάζει], for the benefit of those who are corrected'. In his example, in a similar way, Musonius overtly refuses τιμωρία, rather preferring education (παιδεύω) over it.

This fragment of Musonius is preserved by the late-first and early-second-century Stoic Epictetus (F5[67], from his *Περὶ φιλίας*), who was a disciple of Musonius himself. He followed in Musonius' footsteps with respect to ethical intellectualism, but also had first-hand knowledge of Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, as well as Plato's Socrates. In Epictetus' view, volition or moral choice (προαίρεσις) depends on the correct

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[59] Ramelli (1998), (2012)a; (2013)a, (2021)c.

use of impressions (χρῆσις τῶν φαντασιῶν) by determining whether they are true or false through the faculty of 'assent', which depends on one's knowledge (*Diss.* 1.6.12–22; 2.26.3). Rational assent allows the moral agent to distinguish between the things that must fall under our *prohairesis* (προαιρετικά) and those that should not (ἀπροαίρετα).[60]

Precisely on the basis of ethical intellectualism, Epictetus in a dissertation entitled *We Should Not be Angry at Fellow Human Beings* (*Diss.* 1.28, within the *De ira* topic) begins his argument by claiming that rational assent, which is the foundation of our moral choices and actions, depends on the intellect:

> (Epict. *Diss*. 1.28.1-4): What is the reason why we assent to anything [συγκατατίθεσθαί τινι]? The fact that it seems to us to be so [τὸ φαίνεσθαι ὅτι ὑπάρχει]. Therefore, to assent to what seems not to be so [οὐχ ὑπάρχει] is impossible. Why? Because this is the very nature of our mind [ἡ φύσις αὕτη τῆς διανοίας]—to agree to what is true [τοῖς ἀληθέσι ἐπινεύειν], to be dissatisfied with what is false [ψευδέσι], and to withhold judgement regarding what is uncertain [τὰ ἄδηλα]. … If a man assents to a what is false [συγκατατίθεται τὰ ἄδηλα], know that he did not want to assent to something false [οὐκ ἤθελεν ψεύδει συγκαταθέσθαι], since every soul is deprived of the truth against its will [πᾶσα γὰρ ψυχὴ ἄκουσα στέρεται τῆς ἀληθείας], as Plato asserts.[61] Rather, it simply seemed to him that the false was true [ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ τὸ ψεῦδος ἀληθές].[62]

This is plainly Socrates' argument that no one does evil willingly. This is why Epictetus directly cites Plato's Socrates. Using the mythic example of Medea, he puts forward an objection by an imaginary interlocutor: '"Cannot a man, then, think that something is beneficial to him, and yet not choose [μὴ αἱρεῖσθαι] it?" "He cannot". Yet, Medea stated: "Now, now, I realise [μανθάνω] what evil deeds [κακά] I intend to perform: But passion/anger [θυμός] is stronger than my intentions [κρείσσων τὼν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων]"'. This would seem to contradict ethical intellectualism, but in Epictetus' interpretation it does not: Medea killed her children because she deemed this good ('she deemed [ἡγεῖται] following her anger and punishing her husband better than sparing her children'). She was deceived (ἐξηπάτηται); 'show

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[60] See, e.g., Long (2002).

[61] *Soph*. 228c.

[62] Coope (2016) 237-288, esp. 239-241.

her clearly that she is deceived, and she will not do so' (δεῖξον αὐτῇ ἐναργῶς ὅτι ἐξηπάτηται, καὶ οὐ ποιήσει, *Diss*. 1.28.8). This reasoning reasserts ethical intellectualism through and through.

Προαίρεσις is 'unconstrained by nature; it cannot be forced' (προαίρεσιν ἀκώλυτον φύσει καὶ ἀνανάγκαστον, 1.17.21). This is the same idea as Plato had expressed with his aforementioned theodicy maxim ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον. For both of them, human beings are eminently free and therefore responsible and accountable for that. Their theory will be developed by Patristic theologies of freedom such as those of Bardaisan, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa.[63]

Marcus Aurelius, the second-century Stoic philosopher-emperor who regarded himself as a disciple of Epictetus, employed, among other arguments, precisely the main tenet of ethical intellectualism. He did so within the same Stoic argument used by Musonius, as seen, to defend his tenet of not becoming angry against one's offenders. Since offenders act out of ignorance and against their will, Marcus argues, the offended person should not be angry at them, but rather show benevolence towards them:

> (Marc. Aur. *Ad seips.* 7.22): It is proper to a human being to be benevolent even to offenders [ἴδιον ἀνθρώπου φιλεῖν καὶ τοὺς πταίοντας]. This happens if it comes to your mind that they both are your kin [συγγενεῖς] and sin / act badly *out of ignorance and against their will* [δι᾽ ἄγνοιαν καὶ ἄκοντες ἁμαρτάνουσι]; that in a short time you will both be dead, and, first and foremost, that the offender has not damaged you [πρὸ πάντων ὅτι οὐκ ἔβλαψέ σε], since he has not rendered your hegemonic or ruling principle worse than it was earlier [οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἡγεμονικόν σου χεῖρον ἐποίησεν ἢ πρόσθεν ἦν].

The last argument, which was already developed by the ancient Stoics and Musonius, is taken over in *Ad seips.* 9.4, again with the use of the verb ἁμαρτάνω: 'The one who sins, sins against oneself; the one who commits injustice does so against oneself, since he makes himself bad'.[64] The most important point in the present investigation is Marcus Aurelius' use of ethical intellectualism as one of the main arguments he employs: offenders act out of ignorance and therefore, choosing evil, act against their own will. This is the gist of Socratic-Stoic ethical intellectualism.

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63 Ramelli (2022).

64 Ὁ ἁμαρτάνων ἑαυτῷ ἁμαρτάνει· ὁ ἀδικῶν ἑαυτὸν ἀδικεῖ, ἑαυτὸν κακὸν ποιῶν.

This does not mean that the Stoics, who supported ethical intellectualism and thought that choosing evil is an effect of ignorance, did not admit of any punishment, but they thought that this is no evil and often assumes the contours of purification—according to the distinction between retributive punishment and corrective, educative punishment I pointed out in Musonius F39 (this point would be embraced by Patristic philosophers who upheld ethical intellectualism and apokatastasis, such as Clement, adduced above, but also Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius, and others). First, from the Stoic viewpoint, sin is a punishment to whoever commits it. Already Cicero, reporting the Stoic point of view, observed that whoever disobeys natural law 'will suffer the most serious punishment' by the act of sinning itself, 'even though he should escape what are normally regarded as punishments' (*Rep.* 3.22.33). Vice is punishment to those who commit it, as Seneca repeats on several occasions (*Ep.* 110.2; *Ben.* 7.7.3-4; *Ir.* 2.30.2). Musonius claimed that people who commit injustice against others damage themselves, and not those who are offended, injured, victims of defamation, false testimony, violence, and so on. What is shameful is to commit such things; the philosopher cannot be harmed by people who are morally worse than she is (*Diss.* 10). The link between this theory and ethical intellectualism emerges clearly in the following statement: 'Indeed, thinking of how to bite in turn the person who has bitten us and how to return the injustice to the man who has committed it, is worthy of a beast and not of a human being, since such an individual cannot even acknowledge that *most sins are committed by people out of ignorance and coarseness*: *whoever abandons ignorance, immediately ceases to sin*'.[65] This is a very strong endorsement of ethical intellectualism. Marcus Aurelius, likewise, stated that vice is a punishment to itself: 'sin is harmful only to the man' who commits it and not to the victims or anyone else (*Ad seips.* 8.55). Epictetus similarly claimed: 'committing injustice is by itself a big damage to the man who commits it' (*Diss.* 4-5.10; cf. 3.11.1-2).

The Stoics, especially the Roman Stoics, followed Plato's above-mentioned theodicy principle (θεὸς ἀναίτιος, 'God is not responsible' for evil) in their claim that God cannot be the source of evil, while humans in their wrong choices are. I have already called attention to Epictetus' case. Seneca also claimed that 'the deities do not dispense or have

[65] See my commentary (2001).

anything evil [*malum*], but they do reprove and restrain some people, impose penalties on them, and sometime punish them under the appearance of doing good' (*castigant quondam et coercent et inrogant poenas et aliquando specie boni puniunt*, *Ep.* 95.50). Divine punishment is not evil as God has no evil and is not responsible for human evils.

While God is not responsible for evil, human beings are, and they are so out of ignorance. The deities never bring about evil, not even when they do send punishment, and even collective punishments.[66] In ancient Stoicism, Chrysippus maintained that collective punishment are decided by Zeus because they are beneficial to humans, that, 'seeing the chastisement of the wicked, the rest of humankind may be warned and deterred from attempting any similar misdeed' (Plutarch *Stoic. Rep.* 1040bc). Chrysippus theorised about the chastisement inflicted by the divinities to the wicked in the second book Περὶ θεῶν (Plutarch *Stoic. Rep.* 1050de).

Hierocles the Stoic explicitly recalls Plato's tenet that the deity is not responsible for evil and its chastisement of sinners, even collective, is not evil:

> *Of Hierocles, from the Treatise How Should One Behave toward the Gods?*
> Furthermore, it is necessary to affirm this too concerning the gods, that they are immutable and fixed in their judgments, so as never to depart from their initial decision. For changelessness and firmness too was one of the virtues, and it is reasonable that this provides among the gods too the stability and immovability of what they have once decided. From this it is clear that it is plausible that not even the chastisements that a divinity has determined to inflict on some people should be remitted. For in fact it is easy to draw the analogy, that if the gods changed their judgments and left unchastised one whom they decided to chastise, they could neither govern the world well and justly nor produce a reasonable justification for their change of mind. And yet epic poetry seems to say things of this sort off the cuff and without any (argument):
> people supplicate with sacrifices and pleasing prayers, libations and the scent of smoke, if someone should transgress and err,
> and this:
> Even the gods themselves are pliable,
> and in general all that is said that is similar to these (statements).
> In the same treatise.

[66] See Ramelli (2023); cf. (2021)a.

> But in fact one must not overlook this either: that even if the gods are 'not responsible for evils',[67] they nevertheless inflict some things of this kind on some people and wrap those who deserve them in both bodily and external defects, not because they practice malevolence or because they spitefully believe that a human being should suffer, but rather as a form of chastisement. For just as famines and droughts and also floods and earthquakes and every such thing mostly occur because of other, physical causes, but sometimes are also caused by the gods, when it is time for the faults of many people to be chastised publicly and collectively, in the same way the gods sometimes make use of bodily and external defects against a single person too, for his chastisement, to be sure, but also for his conversion and a better choice than his other [choices].[68]

Hierocles insists that the gods do not inflict any evil, and indeed, in line with Plato, he is adamant that they are not responsible for evil, meaning that they do not cause moral evil, which in the Stoic system is the only real evil. They do not want the suffering of people, but their reformation. Philo of Alexandria, who was a Jewish Platonist but in ethics was strongly influenced by Stoicism,[69] observed that God brings about punishments, including collective punishments, with the aim of 'promoting virtue'; in accordance with Plato's and Stoic theodicy, 'absolutely no evil is brought about by God' (*Prov.* 41; 53, *ap.* Eusebius *PE* 8.54). Alexander of Aphrodisias, an Aristotelian commentator who was a semi-contemporary of Origen and probably well known to him—as argued by Ramelli (2014a) 23-290—also testifies that according to the Stoics punishment is in fact an improvement or a setting right, a form of correction more than retribution (ἐπανόρθωσις, *Fat*. 35).

The point that God does not want the suffering of people but their reformation will be stressed by Patristic philosophers-theologians who adhered to ethical intellectualism such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa within their doctrine of apokatastasis.[70] A human creature's participation in divine beatitude or deification is the aim of God's purification of this creature. God's primary goal is the creature's participation in

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[67] This is an adaptation from Plato's above-mentioned tenet: 'God is not responsible' (θεὸς ἀναίτιος).

[68] Ramelli (2009a) 63-66.

[69] See Runia (2017) 159-178; Ramelli (2008a; 2014c); (2016) 92-96; (2021b) 317-352.

[70] Ramelli (2013)a 375-80 on Gregory and *passim*: this is a point shared by many Patristic thinkers who supported *apokatastasis*.

beatitude. Suffering is merely a side effect of the necessary purification from evil; the more evil one has attached to oneself through sinning, the more purification through suffering one will have to endure, but God's aim in this process is the elimination of evil and the creature's restoration and participation in blessedness, as Gregory of Nyssa puts it in the words of his elder sister and teacher Macrina:

> (*An.* 100C = GNO III/3.73.17-74.2): It is not the case that God's judgement has as its main purpose that of bringing about purifying punishment [κόλασιν] to those who have sinned. On the contrary, as the argument has demonstrated, the divinity on its part does exclusively what is good [ἀγαθόν], separating it from evil, and attracting (the soul) to itself, with a view to its participation in beatitude [τῆς μακαριότητος κοινωνίαν], but the violent separation of what was united and attached to the soul (i.e. evil) is painful for the soul that is attracted and pulled by the Divinity to itself. The Godhead does not want to inflict suffering, but attracts to itself what is its own.

This, I think, can be considered to be Gregory's appropriation of the doctrine of οἰκείωσις, which, as I argued (2014), in his thought reconfigures the Stoic theory of οἰκείωσις—used by Seneca himself, especially in *Ep.* 121[71]—and functions in respect to the intra-human relation and the human-God relation. Gregory here describes restoration or apokatastasis as the supreme action of οἰκείωσις or re-appropriation performed by the Godhead and directed to all of its creatures: the divinity appropriates again what is its own and was made alien by sin in a process of ἀλλοτρίωσις. All of God's creatures will return to the Good, their 'first οἰκεῖον' (what is most proper and familiar to someone), that is, God. Apokatastasis is God's glorious οἰκείωσις, the Divinity's making all of its creatures οἰκεῖα to itself again, after alienation from it (ἀλλοτρίωσις). At the same time, it is a re-orientation of creatural will towards its proper object (the πρῶτον οἰκεῖον). Thus, participation in God in the ultimate end is the Godhead's achieved οἰκείωσις, the re-appropriation of its creatures as well as rational creatures' participation in their 'first οἰκεῖον'. Gregory appropriated and Christianised the Stoic doctrine of οἰκείωσις, Socratic-Stoic-Platonic ethical intellectualism, and the related rejection of retributive punishment.

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[71] Klein (2016) , Ramelli (2024).

I have thus traced the chain of thought of this key philosophical theory in ancient philosophy, with a particular attention to Stoicism and Seneca, through to Patristic philosophy (especially here scholars oppose it to voluntarism, but not always on the basis of a careful assessment). Ethical intellectualism, I suggested, is a helpful category with which even contemporary philosophers can think. This is mainly why the present analysis contributes new understanding and knowledge, both regarding Seneca and Stoicism and regarding potential contemporary avenues in ethics.

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