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De otio 7

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In *De otio* 7 Seneca draws on the familiar philosophical idea of the three modes of life – centered, respectively, on pleasure, contemplation, and action[1] – in order to argue for the Stoic compatibility between the contemplative and active existences. If he can successfully reconcile the contemplative and active modes of life in ch. 7, Seneca will significantly advance his larger argument in *De otio* for the Stoic's justified retirement from the active life either at the end of a career of public service or even before that career begins (2.1-2); for if philosophical contemplation counts as a form of "active" service that benefits the community, the retired life of the mind remains actively and socially beneficial at any stage of one's existence. In sum, the Stoic commitment to the active life does not end with retirement; rather, what changes is the pathway by which that non-negotiable τέλος is reached.

Text and translation

7.1 *Praeterea tria genera sunt uitae, inter quae quod sit optimum quaeri solet: unum uoluptati uacat, alterum contemplationi, tertium actioni. Primum deposita contentione depositoque odio quod inplacabile diuersa sequen-*

[1] All citations of *De otio* and *De tranquillitate animi* follow the text of Reynolds (1977). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I am most grateful to two anonymous readers for very helpful suggestions and guidance on a number of points. See on the three modes (philosophical background and sources) Dionigi (1983) 261-262 with Viansino (1988-90) 2.179-182 and Williams (2003) 107.

tibus indiximus, uideamus ut haec omnia ad idem sub alio atque alio titulo perueniant: nec ille qui uoluptatem probat sine contemplatione est, nec ille qui contemplationi inseruit sine uoluptate est, nec ille cuius uita actionibus destinata est sine contemplatione est. **7.2** *"Plurimum" inquis "discriminis est utrum aliqua res propositum sit an propositi alterius accessio." Sit sane grande discrimen, tamen alterum sine altero non est: nec ille sine actione contemplatur, nec hic sine contemplatione agit, nec ille tertius, de quo male existimare consensimus, uoluptatem inertem probat sed eam quam ratione efficit firmam sibi; ita et haec ipsa uoluptaria secta in actu est.* **7.3** *Quidni in actu sit, cum ipse dicat Epicurus aliquando se recessurum a uoluptate, dolorem etiam adpetiturum, si aut uoluptati imminebit paenitentia aut dolor minor pro grauiore sumetur?* **7.4** *Quo pertinet haec dicere? ut appareat contemplationem placere omnibus; alii petunt illam, nobis haec statio, non portus est.*

7.1 Moreover, there are three modes of life, and it is commonly asked which of them is best. One is devoted to pleasure, the second to contemplation, the third to action. If we first put aside our philosophical rivalry and the relentless hatred which we proclaim against those who follow paths different from our own, let us observe how all three come to the same thing under different labels. The person who commends pleasure is not devoid of contemplation; the person devoted to contemplation is not devoid of pleasure; the person whose existence is dedicated to action is not devoid of contemplation. **7.2** "But it makes a very great difference," you say, "whether something is a primary aim or an accessory to some other primary aim." There may certainly be a great difference; nonetheless, one does not exist without the other. The contemplator does not contemplate without action, the active man does not dispense with contemplation, and the third person – the one of whom we have agreed to have a low opinion – does not sanction idle pleasure but pleasure that he makes stable for himself by his reason. Accordingly, even this pleasure-loving school is itself committed to action. **7.3** How could it not be, since Epicurus himself says that, at times, he will withdraw from pleasure and even seek out pain, if regret looms over the pleasure, or if he will take on a lesser pain in place of a greater one later? **7.4** My point in saying this? To make it clear that all sides commend contemplation. For some it is the goal; for us Stoics, it is a place to ride at anchor, but not a harbor.

Context

Three factors importantly condition the approach taken below to chapter 7, the first of them contingent on the identity of Seneca's putative addressee in the dialogue. He may well have named that addressee in the lost first sentence of the work: such is his practice in all the other *Dialogi* apart from *De tranquillitate animi*,[2] where Serenus opens the imaginary debate by addressing Seneca by name (1.1), with the latter then "replying" in the main body of the dialogue beginning in 2.1. In the case of *De otio*, the addressee's name is effaced in the table of contents of the *Codex Ambrosianus*,[3] the oldest and most important MS of the *Dialogi*, and the restoration of that name to Serenus is only conjectural. But Annaeus Serenus, prefect of the watch under Nero (Plin. *HN* 22.96), is commonly accepted as Seneca's addressee, not least because his "ardent and stubborn, yet open and honest"[4] personality as revealed in his imagined words at 1.4, etc., is in keeping with Serenus' character as represented in *De constantia sapientis* and the opening chapter of *De tranquillitate animi*.[5] For now, however, still more important is Serenus' shifting philosophical allegiance as portrayed in various of the *Dialogi*: an avowed Epicurean in *De constantia sapientis* (cf. 15.4), which plausibly dates to after 47 CE,[6] he follows the Stoics in *De tranquillitate animi* (cf. 1.10); that his Epicurean phase came first can be inferred from early in *De constantia sapientis*.[7] If, then, Serenus' change of philosophical stance is assumed to have been gradual, *De tranquillitate animi* would appear to be a relatively late work,[8] and perhaps not far removed from the phase in which Seneca wrote *De otio*.[9]

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[2] Discounting *Consolatio ad Polybium*, its opening also lost.

[3] The table: Reynolds (1977) ix.

[4] Griffin (1976) 354 n. 2.

[5] Further on Serenus, Griffin (1976) 77, 89 and n. 8, 253 with *PIR*² I p. 104 no. 618; Berno (2018) 15-16.

[6] Now Berno (2018) 10-15 (written between 49 and 54 CE?); Smith (2014a) 121 (possibly 54-9 CE?).

[7] Cf. 3.2: "If you say that [the sage] will not *receive* an injury, that is, that no one will try to *do* him an injury, I am abandoning all my occupations and becoming a Stoic!" (tr. Ker [2014] 151); Serenus evidently never yet a Stoic.

[8] Grimal (1978) 288 assigns it to between 51 and 54 CE (prob. 53), but most scholars cautiously opt for a 'high' date after *De constantia sapientis* and before Serenus' death in 62: see now Gazzarri (2024) x-xiii with Mutschler (2014) 153.

[9] *C.* 62? See Dionigi (1983) 48-66 (relating the date to Seneca's withdrawal from the Neronian court); Smith (2014b) 147-148.

Whether or not the two works are closely related in date, Serenus' presence in both would conspicuously strengthen certain strands of thematic compatibility between *De otio* and *De tranquillitate animi*. Early in the latter, Serenus claims to seek from Seneca a remedy for his deep-seated *displicentia sui* and his "weakness of good intention" (*bonae mentis infirmitas*, 1.15). But how to achieve the inner peace (*tranquillitas*, 2.3) that is that remedy? The best course, Seneca asserts (3.1), is that advocated by the 1st-century BCE Stoic Athenodorus of Tarsus:[10] enthusiastic engagement in public life, to the mutual benefit of oneself and others. But because political life is in reality so corrupt, Athenodorus reportedly urged in its place retirement to the private life (3.2), but not to idle *otium*: through the devoted study and teaching of philosophy, the individual can still benefit both oneself and humankind in general (3.3-8). In reply (4.1-8), Seneca objects that even if conditions are not conducive to public service, we should still retire from civic life only gradually, but not entirely withdrawal; for no state is so completely corrupt or beyond redemption that complete retirement is justified. Hence his proposed compromise: "So it is by far the best to mix leisure with your affairs (*miscere otium rebus*) whenever a life of action will be barred by chance hindrances or the condition of the state. For never are all options so utterly fenced off that no room is left for honorable action (*actioni … honestae*)" (4.8).[11]

The position reached here in *De tranquillitate animi* on the balance beneath *otium* and *actio* is the second factor that conditions my approach to *De otio* 7. Though I make no strong argument for the relative dating of the two works on the basis of thematic contact between them, Seneca's interlocutor who "speaks" in the main body of *De otio* is a committed Stoic. If we tentatively accept Serenus as the addressee of *De otio*, his Stoic allegiance in *De tranquillitate animi* (cf. again 1.10) is consistent with his characterization in *De otio* – in the sense that Seneca's interlocutory "you" within the dialogue can be taken to speak for Serenus.[12] In light of Seneca's portrayal of Athenodorus' position in *De*

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[10] On this student of Posidonius and "trusted acolyte" (Schofield [2015] 78) of the future emperor Augustus, see Graf (2009) with Inwood (2022) 155 and Gazzarri (2024) 95-96 n. 1.

[11] Tr. Fantham (2014) 191; cf. on the sequence of argument in *Tr*. 3-4 Schofield (2015) 78-79.

[12] For this distinction between Seneca's "explicit addressee" (Serenus) and his "fictive adversary" cf. Roller (2015) 59-65 (he terms the latter "the 'generalized interlocutor'"),

tranquillitate animi on the relation between Stoic *actio* and *otium*, that strand of argument can be seen to be complemented, tested, and differently explored in the kindred work that is *De otio*. In particular, *De otio* elaborates on the idea touched on in *Tr*. 4.6-7:

> The effort of a good citizen is never without use; heard and seen, by his expression and nod and silent persistence and even by his gait, he is of help (*prodest*). Just as some medications benefit by their mere smell, without taste or contact, so virtue, even hidden and at a distance, spreads advantage (*ita uirtus utilitatem etiam ex longinquo et latens fundit*). Whether it strides and exercises its right over itself, or finds sorties risky and is forced to furl its sails (*cogiturque uela contrahere*);[13] whether it is idle and silent (*otiosa mutaque*) and confined to a narrow place, or it is in the open field, in every kind of condition virtue is beneficial (*prodest*). Why do you think a man who keeps quiet is not useful as an example?[14]

If we accept that *De otio* is the later work, Seneca expands there on the thesis that was already sketched out in *Tr*. 4.6-7; and yet, if we still hold out the possibility that *De otio* is the earlier work, Seneca revisits in an abbreviated form in *Tr*. 4 the thesis that he has already examined in detail in *De otio*.

Third, if *De otio* is dated to *c*. 62 CE, Seneca's justification of withdrawal to a life of philosophical *otium* after a career of active service (2.2) has obvious implications for a biographical reading of the work: to what extent might Seneca offer a manifesto of sorts for his own *de facto* retirement from the Neronian court in and after 62?[15] For present purposes, however, our analysis of ch. 7 makes no assumptions about this possible biographical accent; our focus is trained solely on the philosophical substance and significance of the chapter.

Analysis

Our detailed coverage of ch. 7 is conveniently divisible into four subsections:

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esp. 60-61: "As readers, we are sometimes tempted to identify this [generalized] interlocutor with the dialogue's named addressee."

[13] See further on this last phrase p. 13 below.

[14] Tr. Fantham (2014) 190-191.

[15] See esp. Dionigi (1983) 100-110 (on "Autobiografismo e storia") with Viansino (1988-90) 2.171-3; but the matter "remains controversial" (Inwood [2022] 335).

1) The battle of wits in the dialogical drama

What precisely motivates Seneca to pitch his argument as he does at *this* particular moment in *De otio*? In chapter 6 his interlocutor – a committed Stoic, whether understood as Seneca's main addressee (Serenus?) or as an imaginary *alia uox*[16] – raises a sharp-witted objection to the flow of argument in ch. 5, especially Seneca's portrayal there of the cosmic consciousness that is achievable through *cogitatio* that "breaks through the ramparts of the sky, not content to know only that which appears to the eye" in the phenomenological world (5.6). The danger is that Seneca had made the reflective life appear *so* satisfying in chapter 5 that he may have overlooked the possibility that people may turn to contemplation for the wrong reason. What if they are motivated by pleasure, "seeking nothing from contemplation except unbroken reflection with no practical outcome; for that existence is attractive in its special charms" (6.1)?

Seneca parries this thrust with the crowning argument late in ch. 6 that, whatever the charms of *contemplatio*, philosophical *otium* is no mere self-indulgence. Witness the first three heads of the Stoa, Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus: as resident metics, Zeno and Cleanthes had never been eligible to hold office in Athens, which Aristotle had defined (*Pol*. 3 1275a22-3) as the main privilege of citizenship; and though Chrysippus may have become a naturalized Athenian, that development would have conferred full civic privileges only on his children.[17] But despite the fact that Zeno, etc., never held public office, they still achieved great things in the service of humankind through their philosophical contributions: "though they played no public role, they were nonetheless deemed to have done a lot" (6.5) – an argument closely related to that made on "latent action" or "action by example" in *Tr*. 4.6-7 as quoted above. For two reasons, therefore, Zeno, etc., fully comply with the Stoic commitment to active service despite their lack of conventional *actio*: (i) they are "exempt" from office on grounds that coincide with the third of the four distinctive aspects of the human self (*personae*) as defined by Panaetius, namely that one's options in life are limited by circumstances and chance;[18] hence their legal status

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16 See n. 12 above.

17 See Williams (2003) 106 on 6.5 *"non … solet."*

18 Cf. Cic. *Off*. 1.115 with Dyck (1996) 285-286, 287-288; Griffin (1976) 341-342.

exempted them from City Hall. But (ii) their "active" contribution – the philosophical example they set and the intellectual legacy they left – is nevertheless demonstrated by their formative influence on successive generations far beyond their local communities: they were very much *in actu* as the good Stoic should be (cf. 1.4).

Against this background, Seneca anticipates in chapter 7 the next possible objection that the interlocutor could bring against the developing argument. To argue that *otium*/*contemplatio* and *actio* are in some way compatible (as in chapter 6) is one thing; but how is that compatibility to be reconciled with the segregation and the hierarchy (cf. *quod sit optimum*, 7.1) traditionally associated with the tripartite division of life-choices? By enforcing that three-way division, that is, the interlocutor may – we imagine – try to short-circuit Seneca's effort to create a special fusion between the contemplative and the active lives. Hence Seneca proactively seeks to implicate in each other all three of the familiar βίοι – *uoluptas*, *contemplatio*, and *actio* (7.1). As if thinking on his feet in the unfolding drama of the dialogue, he in effect defends his larger argument by pressing above all the key point that "all sides [sc. Epicurean, Stoic, and Peripatetic] commend contemplation" (7.4).

2) Seneca's style of argument

For all its tactical shrewdness, however, Seneca's strategy in chapter 7 shows a practiced agility – even a hint of sophistic glibness – in the way his resourceful pen and stylistic finesse carry the weight of his argument. Already in 7.1 three datives are dependent on a single verb, *uacat*, to the effect that Seneca portrays the one *genus uitae* as "devoted" to pleasure, the second to contemplation, the third to action: the three life-modes are interrelated through this syntactical dependence on shared *uacat* even before he showily lays aside his and his interlocutor's Stoic partisanship (*deposita … indiximus*, 7.1) to repeat the synthesizing exercise in his next maneuver. For Miriam Griffin, in *uideamus … perueniant* (7.1) he registers an impatience – "his irritation … usually directed, in typical Roman fashion, to the hair-splitting of Greek philosophers, who concentrate on verbal differences rather than on substantial similarities."[19] But his tone here is surely more triumphant than impatient, and his maneuver more manipulative than critical of Greek

[19] Griffin (1976) 147.

hyper-sophistication. In his anaphoric sequence of *nec ille qui …*, *nec ille qui* and *nec ille cuius* late in 7.1, stylistic symmetry facilitates a beguilingly neat philosophical symmetry:[20] the first two units here create the illusion of a surface-equivalence between Epicurean and Peripatetic thought by effortlessly casting *uoluptas* and *contemplatio* as interrelated features in both systems; and even though the third unit varies the formulation by now associating *actio* with *contemplatio*, the implication carried over from the first two units is that *actio* too is compatible with *uoluptas*. After all, in light of the co-dependence established between *uoluptas* and *contemplatio* in the first two cases, Seneca's verbal design in the third unit is syllogistically alluring: in now pairing *actio* with *contemplatio*, he quietly imputes the pleasurable connotations of contemplation to action as well.

Alertness to Seneca's subtlety of maneuver is all-important in his battle to wits in 7.1 with an interlocutor who doggedly stands his Stoic ground, but with an impressive flexibility of his own. Put on the defensive in 7.1, that interlocutor deftly shifts the terms of debate in 7.2:

> "But it makes a very great difference," you say, "whether something is a primary aim (*propositum*) or an accessory to some other primary aim (*propositi alterius accessio*)."[21]

In taking this turn, the interlocutor focuses on *how* the three life-modes interact, not on *whether* they interact. Seneca has so far pushed for the interrelationship of the life-modes, but what of the possible hierarchy of value that may set them apart *despite* that ostensible interconnectedness? As we saw above, Seneca glimpses that hierarchy in *quod sit optimum* (7.1); the interlocutor has noted as much, and now he seizes on the point. Seneca imputes to him an easy fluency with technical Stoic language in the distinction drawn above between *propositum* and *propositi alterius accessio*. But Seneca effortlessly answers him with a concession in 7.2 that allows the former merely to reiterate his insistence on the coexistence of life-modes:

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[20] Cf. for the novelty of Seneca's maneuver here Dionigi (1983) 263 *ad loc.*: "nuovo e atipico per la dottrina stoica è questo βίος σύνθετος fondato sull'intercomunicabilità dei *tria genera uitae* e sul riconoscimento della *uoluptas* epicurea."

[21] See Dionigi (1983) 264-265 on the Stoic background to the relation of τέλος/*propositum* to ἐπιγέννημα/*accessio*.

> There may certainly be a great difference [between a primary aim and an accessory aim]; nonetheless, one does not exist without the other.

Seneca's further tactic is to appease his interlocutor by (i) appealing to common ground between them in *ille tertius, de quo male existimare consensimus* (shared Stoic disapproval of the Epicurean position), and (ii) pointedly demoting the Epicurean to third position here in 7.2 after listing him first in the *nec ille … nec ille … nec ille* sequence in 7.1. But despite these diplomatic touches, Seneca asserts the interrelationship of the different *genera uitae* through another symmetrical verbal flourish that is pleasing to the eye and ear but more aesthetically seductive than logically captivating. The combination of ABAB synchysis and ABBA chiasmus in *nec ille sine actione contemplatur, nec hic sine contemplatione agit* repeats the technique in 7.1 of making a philosophical point through stylistic elaboration: argument by artistic design.

3) Seneca's manipulation of language

Given Serenus' Epicurean past, Seneca nicely appeals in *ille tertius, de quo male existimare consensimus* to Serenus' now-Stoic antipathy for the Epicureans on pleasure.[22] But in stating that not even an Epicurean sanctions idle pleasure, *uoluptatem inertem*, and then that an Epicurean makes pleasure stable for himself by his reason, *quam* [sc. *uoluptatem*] *ratione efficit firmam sibi*, Seneca uses the language of effort and exertion that is carefully calibrated to appeal to the ears of his addressee/interlocutor: the words *ratione* and *firmam* and scornful *inertem* are meant to imply "action" within the hedonistic calculus. But despite this active connotation of *ratio* here, the Epicurean makes pleasure itself the criterion of rational discrimination: in going out of his way to stress the active *effort* allegedly involved in the calculus, Seneca downplays the fundamental *basis* determining the outcome of that calculus. Equally loaded is his reference in *efficit firmam* to the stable, ongoing state of Epicurean katastematic pleasure – the pleasurable condition of not being thirsty, say, as opposed to the kinetic pleasure of drinking to alleviate thirst: the Stoic overtones of his language[23] are designed to appeal to his interlocutor before Seneca moves to the predictable conclusion

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[22] So Dionigi (1983) 266-267.

[23] Cf., e.g., *C.S.* 13.1 (*animi firmitatem*), *Helu.* 5.5, *Ep.* 18.3, 5, 20.1, 30.8, 63.1, etc.

that the Epicurean school is "committed to action," *in actu* (7.2). The phrase *in actu* is itself carefully chosen to forge its own rapprochement between Epicureans and Stoics: after the latter were said in 1.4 to be *in actu* in their commitment to the active life, the former now conspicuously join them *in actu*.[24] This "active" component is then brought out in the complex sentence in which Seneca describes the calculus in action in 7.3 *Quidni … sumetur?*: his chiastic antithesis in *cum ipse dicat Epicurus aliquando se recessurum a uoluptate, dolorem etiam adpetiturum* neatly sets *uoluptate, dolorem* within the opposing future infinitives, and the accompanying *si*-clause repeats the chiasmus in *aut* **[A]** *uoluptati imminebit* **[B]** *paenitentia aut* **[B]** *dolor minor* **[A]** *pro grauiore sumetur*; the busy formulation is itself designed to convey the effort made in the calculation.

The pattern of linguistic slippage in *firmam*, etc., extends more widely over ch. 7, as in the case of 7.1 *nec ille qui uoluptatem probat sine contemplatione est, nec ille qui contemplationi inseruit sine uoluptate est*: as Dionigi points out, Seneca's use of *contemplatio* makes for an appealing superficial convergence between the Epicurean and Peripatetic positions, but it flattens out the very different connotations separating Epicurean ἡσυχία from Aristotelian θεωρία.[25] So too *uoluptas*: Epicurean ἡδονή as of the "end" (τέλος) is hardly interchangeable with Aristotelian ἡδονή as the fruit of metaphysical θεωρία.[26] Much has been made in recent scholarship of how Seneca's originality as a philosopher lies in the fact that, as Brad Inwood puts it, he thinks "creatively and philosophically in Latin."[27] On the positive side, this process of working out his ideas in Latin, in Latin terms, qualifies him as what Inwood terms "a rare example of first-order Latin philosophy."[28] But what we witness in 7.1-2 is a more manipulative example of this tendency: via the elasticity of such terms as *contemplatio* and *uoluptas*, verbal economy in Latin enables Seneca to blur and evade the fine distinctions in Greek that are less convenient to his argument.

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[24] The ablatival phrase *in actu* occurs in only four Senecan passages apart from *Ot.* 1.4 and 7.3, in at least three cases with clear reference to characteristically Stoic action (*V.B.* 4.2, *Ep.* 8.1, 85.37).

[25] Dionigi (1983) 264.

[26] Dionigi (1983) 263.

[27] Inwood (2005) 20.

[28] (2005) 20.

4) Action as end-goal

Seneca confidently concludes in 7.4 that "all sides [sc. Stoic, Epicurean, Peripatetic] commend contemplation"; for "us" Stoics, however, contemplation is "a place to ride at anchor, but not a harbor" (*statio, non portus est*). Elsewhere in Seneca the term *portus* is more familiar as a metaphor for "resting-place," whether of death, old age, or refuge;[29] but in the required sense here – "point of arrival" – *portus* amounts to a metaphorical equivalent of *propositum* as "end-goal," an equivalence confirmed by Senecan parallels for the coupling of the terms.[30]

For the Stoics, then, contemplation is a temporary state of reflection or anchorage (*statio*),[31] but not an ultimate destination (*portus*). For present purposes, this statement importantly does double duty by looking both backwards and forwards. First, the distinction between *statio* and *portus* refers back to the orthodox Stoic view attributed to the interlocutor in 1.4 (*"usque ad ultimum uitae finem in actu erimus…"*), and also to the two starting propositions in ch. 2: in the case either of retirement to the contemplative life after a long career in service or of dedicated immersion in it from an early age, Stoic *contemplatio* is directed towards *actio* for the social good (cf. *aliis prodest*, 3.5), whether in the form of teaching (2.2) or via the sage's writing and general public influence (so Zeno, etc., in ch. 6).

Secondly, the closing phase in 7.4 is also forward-looking, anticipating the nautical analogy in 8.4, at the very end of dialogue as we have it:

> If someone says (*si quis dicit*) that it is best to go by sea, and then forbids (*deinde negat*) sailing in a sea where shipwrecks commonly occur and there are often sudden storms that sweep the helmsman in the wrong direction, he tells me, unless I am mistaken (*puto*), not to set sail, however much he praises sailing (*uetat nauem soluere, quamquam laudet nauigationem*).

How to understand the nautical analogy in the sum of its two appearances in 7.4 and 8.4? Our approach to the question cannot avoid the controversy of whether or not the dialogue is complete at its trans-

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29 Dionigi (1983) 270.

30 Cf. *Ep*. 71.2-3, 85.32, cited by Dionigi (1983) 270.

31 For nautical *statio* used in this metaphorical sense cf. *Ir*. 3.6.1 (duly cited in *OLD statio* 3) with Woodman (1983) 175 on Vell. 2.72.5 *statio pro portu*.

mitted end. For some critics, the analogy in 8.4 brings suspiciously weak and abrupt closure to the work.[32] Perhaps more substantively, a main argument for incompleteness lies in the perceived need for Seneca to change direction in a lost portion of the treatise in order to account for the second proposition raised in 2.2: if he holds that all practical service in any localized *res publica* is ruled out because of the endemic corruption in any given state (8.2-3), and if *otium* is therefore a *necessary* choice for the *sapiens* and not just a possible one, how can that sage embark *in the first place* on a public career from which eventual retirement is justified? How, that is, can Seneca's proposition in 2.2 ever be a realistic option for the sage? If never, how can that topic *not* be redundant, at least in the treatise as we have it?[33] The alternative to this redundancy (the argument goes) is that Seneca found a way of making this second proposition relevant by embarking on a different sequence of thought in the putative lost segment of the work.

But the counterargument for completeness rests on the key point that the philosopher remains fully committed to action even in retirement. Both propositions in 2.1-2 are fully satisfied in the surviving work, in that each meets the mandated Stoic commitment to action throughout life (cf. 1.4). If a conducive state can be found, the sage will serve in it for as long as possible until age prevents him from doing so (cf. *profligatae aetatis*, 2.2); far from being disdainful of, or fussily selective about, public service *per se*, the sage looks "with a discriminating eye" (*fastidiose*, 8.1) for a suitable (i.e., not hopelessly corrupt) state in which to serve.[34] If no adequate state is to be found despite one's best efforts in the search, the philosopher is fully entitled to withdraw to the contemplative life at any age; but action nevertheless remains the

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[32] Most scholars incline to the incompleteness thesis: for a succinct survey of opinion, Dionigi (1983) 42 n. 25 with Smith (2014b) 148.

[33] Cf. on this line Griffin (1976) 332-333.

[34] For this positive connotation of *fastidiose* see Dionigi (1983) 273-274 with *TLL* 6.1 313.30-40 (incl. *Ep.* 44.2). The pejorative connotation of *fastidiosus* and its cognates is also prevalent in Seneca; hence Griffin (1976) 332-333 interprets the adverb here as signifying "arrogantly" or "fussily," to the effect that Seneca shows that "he disliked this particular Stoic *causa* [for exemption]," i.e., that the sage's "fussy" search will find no state in which to serve (so too Schofield [2015] 80). But the ambiguity of *fastidiose* opens up a further possibility: from the sage's perspective, the search for a suitable state is conducted "scrupulously" and "discerningly"; but from the normative Stoic perspective that goes by the book, mandating state-service, that sage may appear "fussy" or "arrogant"; and that clash of perspectives is captured by the bandwidth of meanings encased in Seneca's *fastidiose*.

goal – the ultimate *portus* – even *in otio*. Hence the stress on action in *all* circumstances – whether the Stoic is visibly engaged in public service or contributes to the common good in retirement – accounts for both propositions in ch. 2: however abrupt the closure in 8.4, the surviving work is intellectually coherent in the argument as rounded out in ch. 8.

But Seneca's closing flourish in 8.4 gives a more decisive and satisfying "finish" to the work, I propose, when its ironic charge is viewed in relation to the nautical analogy deployed in 7.4. In the latter, the Stoic commitment to *actio* is non-negotiable, permanent, and unwavering: action is the true *portus* for which the steadfast sage always aims. In 8.4, by contrast, that steadfastness is seen to waver: the implication, gently underscored by the hint of ironic condescension in *puto*,[35] is that the speaker envisaged in *si quis dicit* is too timid to venture upon all but the safest of seas. But the dictum in 7.4 allows no such prevarication: the sage cannot but set sail for the end-goal (*portus*/*propositum*) of *actio*, and any hesitation to do so is not just a failure of nerve but also an abrogation of Stoic duty; whatever the (figurative) storm-risk, the boat will sail, the voyage will be essayed, and the harbor/τέλος sought. Viewed from this perspective, Seneca's parting shot in 8.4 is empowered by its hard-hitting collusion with 7.4: far from giving weak closure to *De otio*, it contrasts faint-heartedness at sea with the unwavering commitment that is essential to the Stoic sailor who ceaselessly strives for the *portus* of action in 7.4.

Two corollaries remain to be addressed. First, if the nautical analogy in 8.4 in effect distinguishes the intrepid sage from the nervous sailor (i.e., the sage will voyage towards action whatever the risks *en route*), should the sage strive bravely to serve in a given state and seek to improve it even if it is judged to be irredeemably corrupt? Seneca's silence on this point may momentarily give pause (might he have developed it in a lost section of the work?). But in terms of his specific argument in *De otio* as defined in ch. 2, the fact remains that the sage's inability to enter active service in public life in Athens, say, or Carthage (cf. 8.2), because of the local conditions there in no way diminishes his basic commitment to action itself. Even at a remove from the official civic arena, that commitment will still be met through one's teaching and theoretical contributions; and so there is no question of the sage

[35] Cf. *OLD* 8; condescension in part because of the speaker's self-contradiction (*dicit … deinde negat*; *uetat nauem soluere, quamquam laudet nauigationem*).

shying away from the duty to *actio* itself. Second, however, the nautical analogy suggests another difficulty when viewed in relation to *Tr*. 4.6-7, the passage touched on earlier.[36] There, we recall, the sage's virtuous action is sometimes conditioned by circumstance:

> Whether it strides and exercises its right over itself, or finds sorties risky and is forced to furl its sails (*cogiturque uela contrahere*) …, in every kind of condition virtue is beneficial (*prodest*).

The sailing metaphor here has suggestive implications for 7.4: if conditions at sea are so dangerous as to make voyaging simply reckless, will even the intrepid sage be forced (by nautical analogy) to "furl his sails," thereby limiting his commitment to virtuous action? The analogy in 7.4, that is, is arguably open to qualification when viewed in specific and localized comparison with *Tr*. 4.7. But then the predictable default once more: within the framework of argument in *De otio* itself, the sage always aims at action. Even if local conditions inhibit any and all efforts to that end, the end itself remains sacrosanct, and the *sapiens* is always striving to reach it via *actio* (whether in the civic arena or the learned study). That point is fundamental, I argue, to what I take to be the true and satisfying ending of *De otio* in 8.4: the nervous sailor may hesitate there to take to the seas, but 7.4 has already told us that the committed sage will *never* in principle shy away from his duty to voyage to *actio*.

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[36] See p. 219 above.

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