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Seneca *De otio 2.* The Pursuit of *Otium* and the Vestals' Exemplary Life

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In the second chapter of *Ot.*, Seneca endeavors to reassure his reader that he is not abandoning the core precepts of the Stoic school. To do so, he proposes a structured analysis of his stance, which—he announces—is going to be divided in two parts. This paper analyzes the illustrations and rhetorical organization of these subdivisions. It delves into Seneca's literary and philosophical models to then offer a new reading of the closing image whereby Seneca associates the ideal of *otium cum dignitate* with the final duties of an old Vestal.

Text of *Ot.* 2

Nunc probabo tibi non desciscere me a praeceptis Stoicorum; nam ne ipsi quidem a suis desciverunt; et tamen excusatissimus essem, etiam si non praecepta illorum sequerer, sed exempla. Hoc quod dico in duas dividam partes: primum, ut possit aliquis vel a prima aetate contemplationi veritatis totum se tradere, rationem vivendi quaerere atque exercere secreto; deinde, ut possit hoc aliquis emeritis iam stipendiis, profligatae aetatis, iure optimo facere et ad alios actus animum referre virginum Vestalium more, quae annis inter officia divisis discunt facere sacra et cum didicerunt docent.

Right now I shall prove to you that I am not in revolt against the teachings of the Stoics; for they themselves have not revolted against their own teachings either. And yet I might plead a very good excuse

even if I did follow their examples and not their teachings. What I have to say I shall develop under two heads, showing, first, that it is possible for a man to surrender himself wholly to the contemplation of truth, to search out the art of living, and to practice it in retirement, even from his earliest years; secondly, that, when a man has now earned release from public service and his life is almost over, it is possible that he may with perfect justice do the same thing and turn his mind to quite different activities after the manner of the Vestal virgins, whose years are allotted to varied duties while they are learning to perform the sacred rites, and, when they have learned, they begin to teach.[1]

Ot. 2: first part

Seneca couches *Ot.*'s second chapter as a *probatio*,[2] that is, as a demonstration of how he has not relinquished Stoic teachings and, therefore, as a self-defense. Thus, he elaborates on the notion of demonstration to specify that he is going to offer evidence of his allegiance to the Stoic school. The *probatio* is then couched as an *excusatio*, with the doctrinal ground of the dispute being whether Seneca's appreciation of at least some of Epicurus's tenets is evidence of unacceptable philosophical eclecticism.

The remainder of this (extremely short) chapter is then utilized by Seneca to describe what the reader is to expect; that is, a structural subdivision into two parts that advocate for the viability of *otium*[3] during respectively one's youth (*a prima aetate*) and old age (*profligatae aetatis*). This argumentative line is supposed to furnish a synoptic description of the dialogue's whole structure. Of course, we cannot fully assess this feature due to the fraught transmission of the dialogue and the resulting incomplete condition of its ending.[4]

The distinction between youth and old age is not the only partition governing the chapter. Seneca distinguishes also between *praecepta* and *exempla* and learning vs. teaching. These various dichotomies lend themselves optimally to offering a systematic reading of the passage,

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1 All translations of the ancient texts are from the Loeb editions, unless otherwise indicated.

2 The chapter opens with the programmatic statement *nunc probabo*.

3 On Seneca's complex relation with the notion of *otium* see Grilli (1953), André (1962), and the recent monograph of Dross (2021).

4 On the textual transmission of *Ot.* see Malaspina (2024) in this volume.

and my analysis shall follow these stages of the argument. I will conclude by concentrating on the final illustration of the Vestals to which little scholarly analysis has been devoted so far.

The second chapter of *Ot*. is fully inscribed within the contentious topic of Seneca's relation with Epicureanism, for which I would like to borrow Schiesaro's recent and brilliant definition: "the allure of the other."[5] The presence of Epicurus in Seneca's philosophical opus is notoriously conspicuous, particularly so for the letters, and, within the letters comprised in Books I to III, all but six contain at least one quotation from Epicurus. These incursions into the philosophy of the Garden then progressively dwindle as one approaches the end of the *Epistulae Morales*, and this tendency has been variously interpreted: a matter that implicates also *Ot*. 2 and to which I shall return.

The opening *excusatio* at *Ot*. 2 can be fully grasped if probed against the foil of *Ep*. 33. Not only does the text in *Ot*. contain references to Epicurus, but—perhaps more crucially—it discusses the way the teachings of the old masters are to be utilized. At *Ot*. 2.1 Seneca declares that he has not deserted (*desciscere*) the teachings of the Stoics, at least not any more than the Stoics have themselves deserted them, and this is because, ultimately, the *exempla* ought to prevail over the *praecepta*. What does Seneca mean by this?

This statement accords well with the following declaration at *Ot*. 5.10 that *ne contemplatio quidem sine actione est* ("even the contemplative life is not devoid of action"), a notion repeatedly marshaled by Seneca, although hardly an original one, as it dates to at least Aristotle, but on which Posidonius had put great emphasis.[6] As hinted above, it is worth reading these statements against the text of *Ep*. 33. In the letter, Seneca

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[5] Schiesaro (2015). On the relation between Seneca and Epicureanism see also Mutschmann (1915), Schottlander (1954-1955), André (1968), Innocenti (1972), Setaioli (1988) 171-248, Inwood (1995).

[6] Cf. *Pol*. 4.7.3 and, more crucially, Posidonius fr. 186 EK: ὁ Ποσειδώνιος τὸ ζῆν θεωροῦντα τὴν τῶν ὅλων ἀλήθειαν καὶ τάξιν καὶ συγκατασκευάζοντα αὐτὴν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, κατὰ μηδὲν ἀγόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀλόγου μέρους τῆς ψυχῆς. ("Posidonius [maintained] that [the end] was to lead a life engaged in contemplating the truth and order of the whole universe and trying to consolidate this truth as he best can, in nothing influenced by the irrational part of his soul") (Trans. Gazzarri). The passage is more extended and in it Posidonius touches on various philosophical takes on the notion of τέλος, but significantly chooses to omit Chrysippus. Among the philosophers taken into consideration are Zeno, Cleanthes, Diogenes, Antipater, Archidamos, and, unsurprisingly, Panaetius. As stressed by Vimercati (2004) 651, Posidonius insists on the value of θεωρία as something more than sheer philosophical contemplation, in contrast entailing on the one hand the

stresses how *praecepta* and chopped-up fragments of wisdom can only be propaedeutic and should be best utilized for educating youth.[7] He then goes on to argue that the adult educated individual should not rely on memorized commentaries.[8] This age-based differentiation lies precisely in the distinction between *meminisse* ("remembering") and *scire* ("knowing"). Only an authentic pursuit of knowledge can transform the individual into an agent, allowing for the necessary transition from sheer *contemplatio* to *actio.* What Seneca then adds at *Ep*. 33.10 is worth quoting in its entirety:

> *Adice nunc quod isti, qui numquam tutelae suae fiunt, primum in ea re secuntur priores, in qua nemo non a priore descivit; deinde in ea re secuntur, quae adhuc quaeritur. Numquam autem invenietur si contenti fuerimus inventis. Praeterea qui alium sequitur, nihil invenit, immo nec quaerit.*
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> Consider this fact also, those who have never attained their mental independence begin, in the first place, by following the leader in cases where everyone has deserted the leader; then, in the second place, they follow him in matters where the truth is still being investigated. However, the truth will never be discovered if we rest contented with discoveries already made. Besides, he who follows another not only discovers nothing, but is not even investigating.

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acknowledgement of reality's divine nature, and on the other the concurrent need to restrain the passional component of one's soul.

7 See, in particular, *Ep*. 33.7: *Ideo pueris et sententias ediscendas damus et has quas Graeci chrias vocant, quia conplecti illas puerilis animus potest, qui plus adhuc non capit. Certi profectus viro captare flosculos turpe est et fulcire se notissimis ac paucissimis vocibus et memoria stare; sibi iam innitatur. Dicat ista, non teneat.* ("That is why we give to children a proverb, or that which the Greeks call *Chria*, to be learned by heart; that sort of thing can be comprehended by the young mind, which cannot as yet hold more. For a man, however, whose progress is definite, to chase after choice extracts and to prop his weakness by the best known and the briefest sayings and to depend upon his memory, is disgraceful; it is time for him to lean on himself. He should make such maxims and not memorize them"). Not only does the transition from *praecepta* to *decreta* entail a simultaneous gradual transition from sheer *contemplatio* to action, but also the philosopher's deployment of a different rhetorical strategy, namely, the passage from *disputatio* to a *sermo* that ought to be *inlaboratus et facilis*. On this matter, see also *Ep*. 94 and Bellincioni (1978) 90-94, Setaioli (2000) 111-120 and (2014), Williams (2015), and Gazzarri (2020) 96-101.

8 In fact, Seneca goes so far as to utilize the adjective *turpe* twice in the same par. (33.7). One's behavior should accord with one's age group. Furthermore, as part of the nexus of texts and ideas referenced in the epistle, this passage may point to the subtext of Cicero's conclusion of *Fin*. 1 where, concerning Epicurus' educational outcomes, he says that true philistines are those who, in old age, must study what should have been learned during childhood.

In this text Seneca uses the same verb *desciscere* as at *Ot*. 2. Its overtone is that of warfare language, a feature dear to the so-called diatribic tradition[9] and, perhaps more conspicuously for Seneca, to the *Sextii,* whose style notoriously advanced *quadrato agmine*.[10] True pursuit of knowledge, therefore, consists of research which is, by definition, an exploration of the unknown and a task for which the old masters can only provide tentative directions and never a pre-established solution. In the following par., *Ep*. 33.11, Seneca goes on to say that the forefathers of Stoic wisdom ought to be considered *duces* rather than *domini*:[11] that is "guides" rather than "masters." This claim aligns with Stoic orthodoxy. However, its subtext is filled with allusions to Epicurus who had notoriously spurred his fellow friends to advance beyond the old masters' teachings.[12] In particular, the transition from the warfare repertoire signified by *duces* to the field of property law introduced by *domini* unequivocally resonates with what is said of Epicurus at *Ep*. 21.9:

> *Has voces non est quod Epicuri esse iudices; publicae sunt. Quod fieri in senatu solet, faciendum ego in philosophia quoque existimo: cum censuit aliquis, quod ex parte mihi placeat, iubeo illum dividere sententiam et sequor, quod probo.*
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> There is no reason why you should hold that these words belong to Epicurus alone; they are public property. I think we ought to do in philosophy as they are wont to do in the Senate: when someone has made a motion, of which I approve to a certain extent, I ask him to make his motion in two parts, and I vote for the part which I approve.

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[9] On the so-called diatribe the work of Oltramare (1926) continues to prove useful. Among more recent contributions, see Griffin (1976) 13-16, Del Giovane (2015), and Williams (2015).

[10] This is the definition of Sextius'style famously given at *Ep*. 59.3. It is a phrase that belongs to the prose of eminent historians (Livy and Sallust *in primis*), and on whose application as a descriptor of the good style see Gazzarri (2020) 225-226. Wilson (1997) provides a detailed analysis of the phrase *quadrato agmine* as a stylistic signpost, while Henderson (2004) 233 insists on proximity of this expression with *lapide quadrato*, which at *Ep.* 86.4 qualifies the solidity of Scipio's villa at *Liternum*. On Sextius and the *Sextii*, see Lana (1953), (1992), Lévy (2008), and Di Paola (2014).

[11] *Ep.* 33.11: *Qui ante nos ista moverunt, non domini nostri, sed duces sunt.* ("Men who have made these discoveries before us are not our masters, but our guides").

[12] Seneca offers a similar reflection on the role of the old masters at *Tranq*. 1.10 where Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus are portrayed as generals whose orders the diligent soldier must obey: *Placet imperia praeceptorum sequi et in mediam ire rem publicam* ("I resolve to obey the commands of my teachers and plunge into the midst of public life").

Seneca's statement that the forefathers of Stoicism are not "masters" accords well with the notion that Epicurus' *sententiae* are public. That is, both philosophies are meant for universal use. However, much like the conclusion of *Ot*. 2 featuring the virgin Vestals, his curiosity and appreciation for Epicureanism are immediately counterbalanced by a highly institutional image: a session of the Senate.

Assuredly, this sanctum of Roman political life gestures towards the canonical critique of Epicureanism as a politically disengaged doctrine and one that calls for a lack of civic responsibility. It is within this set of ethical coordinates that we can fully appreciate Seneca's praise for the *exempla* over the *praecepta.* The propaedeutic phases of one's education can be made up of purposely excerpted *sententiae,* which prove effective to impart the very first rudiments, but eventually action ought to follow, and, in this regard, there is no better spur to action than action itself, that is *exempla*. As Pohlenz has repeatedly underscored, for the Stoics, all basic teachings could be couched as answers to the fundamental question, "How would the Stoic sage act in this situation?" and Zeno notoriously stated that he would rather observe one of those much-rumored Indian sages being burned alive, than reading the entirety of the writings on physical pain.[13]

In sum, not only do *exempla* prove didactically more effective, but virtuous action demonstrates the existence of a divine providential order and, even if the presence of a real sage proves exceedingly rare, indeed an apparition as rare as the phoenix,[14] his historical consistency holds together an entire ontological and ethical apparatus. Hence the necessary transition from *praecepta* to *exempla* is not only advantageous; it is vital. This is also the explanation that has often been proposed as to why the presence of Epicurus gradually diminishes the more the project of the *Epistulae Morales* advances: this tendency precisely reflects the necessary transition from propaedeutic θεωρία to action.

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[13] Cf. *SVF* 3.658, 668. The role of pain in Seneca's opus has been the object of recent and thorough investigation by Kroppen (2008), Courtil (2015) 349-487 and (2019), and Malaspina (2015).

[14] Cf. Seneca *Ep*. 46.1. The assimilation of the Stoic wise man to the mythical phoenix is already attested at *SVF* 3.658. On the phoenix as the allegoric representation of the *sapiens* see Gosserez (2013) and Torre (1995). The main work on the phoenix remains the monograph of Van der Broek (1972) and, more recently, Nigg (2016), in particular pp. 47-62.

Ot. 2: second part

Moving on to the second part of the second chapter of *De Otio*, Seneca advocates for the transition from the θεωρία characteristic of the youth who is yet learning and therefore not yet prone to action, to the contemplative retirement of old age for which action is no longer a possibility. The many chronological hints for the dialogue's late-date of composition that this statement offers have been the object of much scholarship.[15] Suffice it to say that the strenuous apology of old age, whereby one may lead a withdrawn life and yet benefit the whole community, accords well with the concluding phase of Seneca's life and demonstrates an agreement with Athenodorus' position, which had been rebuked in the *De tranquillitate animi*.[16] To quote Dionigi: "Dietro l'anonimo *senex* in congedo si cela S., il quale, spesa gran parte dell'esistenza in mezzo ai *negotia* ed ora inchiodato dal potere ad una condizione di impotenza, vuol proclamare il proprio diritto all'*otium*."[17] Seneca resorts yet once more to a warfare metaphor to signify a well-deserved retirement: the ablative absolute *emeritis iam stipendis* alerts the reader's memory to *ne ipsi quidem a suis desciverunt.* Seneca has not betrayed his Stoic *militia*; on the contrary, on account of his loyalty, he can now fully enjoy his *otium*. However, as we learn immediately after, this retirement ought to be active. This is the textual juncture where we encounter the illustration of the Vestals.

The tenure of the priestesses epitomizes a seamless transition from learning to teaching, with these two activities allocated to youth and old age, on either side of maturity, dedicated to practice. We know a Vestal's service lasted thirty years and was subdivided into three sequences of ten years each, corresponding to μανθάνειν ("learning"), δρᾶν ("practicing"), and διδάσκειν ("teaching"), as attested by both

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15 See Giancotti (1957) 225-243, Griffin (1976) 332-334, Williams (2003) 12-18.

16 Cf. Grilli (2002) 248-249. Seneca devotes the entirety of *Tranq*. 2-3 to the explanation and then confutation of Athenodorus' position. This philosopher is notably Athenodorus of Tarsos, the teacher of the young Octavian and not to be confused with another Athenodorus knows as Κορδυλίων, cf. Philippson (1931), Grimal (1945), (1946), Grilli (1953) 236-241, Pohlenz (1967) 502, Setaioli (1988) 357-358, Dross (2021) 94-216, Inwood (2022) 155. In particular, Grilli stresses how the differences between Seneca and Athenodorus are not particularly strong; rather the kernel of the matter lies in the preponderance that Athendorus had allotted to θεωρία while Seneca strives for a more balanced position between θεωρία and πρᾶξις.

17 Cf. Dionigi (1983) 189, see also pp. 100-110.

Dionysos of Halicarnassus and Plutarch.[18] Here Seneca eliminates the middle phase in order to preserve the dichotomy, which stands out as the structural feature of the chapter. In a similar fashion, as already observed by Dionigi, Seneca reduced the canonical tripartition of philosophical life (*rationalis*, *naturalis*, and *moralis*) to two moments, that is, contemplation followed by exercise.[19] Thus, one initial element concerning the mention of the Vestals concerns Seneca's willingness to enhance some specific aspects that prove congenial in order to make his point. The mention of the Vestals in Seneca's opus is exceedingly rare; in fact, it occurs only twice. At *Ben*. 1.3.7 Pasithea, one of the three Graces, is described as a virgin, like the Vestals, and the function of this illustration is purely exhortative. More interesting for us is the occurrence at *Prov*. 5.3-4:

> *Quid porro? Non est iniquum fortes viros arma sumere et in castris pernoctare et pro vallo obligatis stare vulneribus, interim in urbe securos esse percisos et professos impudicitiam? Quid porro? Non est iniquum nobilissimas virgines ad sacra facienda noctibus excitari, altissimo somno inquinatas frui? Labor optimos citat. Senatus per totum diem saepe consulitur, cum illo tempore vilissimus quisque aut in campo otium suum oblectet aut in popina lateat aut tempus in aliquo circulo terat.*
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> What then? Is it not unjust that brave men should take up arms, and stay all night in camp, and stand with bandaged wounds before the rampart, while perverts and professional profligates rest secure within the city? What then? Is it not unjust that the noblest maidens should be aroused from sleep to perform sacrifices at night, while others stained with sin enjoy soundest slumber? Toil summons the best men. The senate is often kept in session the whole day long, though all the while every worthless fellow is either amusing himself at the recreation-ground, or lurking in an eating-house, or wasting his time in some gathering.

As for *Ot*. 2, the mention of the Vestals is not merely an illustration but plays a more significant role. It belongs in a context both colored by warfare imagery and predicated on the fundamental opposition between *vita activa* and idleness. The common theme — connecting considerations of warfare and *vita activa* — is the time one selflessly

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[18] Cf. respectively Dionysus of Halicarnassus *Ant. Rom.* 2.67.2 and Plutarch *Num.* 10.2 and *an seni* 795d-e.

[19] Cf. Dionigi (1983) 191.

dedicates to duty. The vigil of the Vestals corresponds both to the soldier's nightly guard shifts (*in castris pernoctare*) and the senate's day-long deliberations. Furthermore, in the same way that the dutiful soldiers stand out as the opposite of the perverts (*percisos*, but Reynolds prints *praecisos* "eunuchs" which is the reading of **P**), and the senator is contrasted with the *vilissimus quisque*, so the Vestals stand out for their purity as opposed to the *inquinatae*. In sum, there are multiple parallel elements that allow the Vestals to fit optimally with positive ideals represented by the virile soldier and the hard-working senator. And yet, there is a gender discrepancy: the Vestals are females, which invites further investigations.

Much scholarship has been devoted to the religious, societal and historical role of the Vestals.[20] Staples and Parker have demonstrated how the Vestals embodied the values and the existence itself of Rome. Dumézil insisted on the pivotal role of the temple of the Vesta, and on the centrality eternal flame as a symbol of Rome's eternal role in history.[21] It would not be off the mark to posit that the Vestals' prestige constituted sufficient ground for Seneca to present them as *exempla* in spite of their gender. But I believe there is more to analyze, for the Vestals alone among all Roman women enjoyed *sui iuris* status.[22] Not only

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[20] Cf. Staples (1998) 129-130 and Parker (2004) 567. Among the most important contributions the topic see also Worsfold (1932), Pitsi (1942), Guizzi (1968), Hommel (1972), Beard (1980), (1995), Radke (1981), Martini (1997)a, (1997)b, (2004), Lovisi (1998), Parker (2004), Wildfang (2006), Scardigli (2007), Baschirotto (2012), Gallia (2014), Carandini (2015).

[21] Cf. Dumézil (1970) 1.315.

[22] To be more specific Vestal were freed from both *patria potestas* and other canonical forms of juridical tutelage but were nonetheless under the authority of the *pontifex maximus* who, at the moment of a girl's selection from the most distinguished among Roman families, would proceed to the ceremonial consecration by means of the ritual formula: *Te, Amata, capio*. Following the consecration, the *potestas* was de facto transferred from the *pater* to the *pontifex*, cf. Guizzi (1968) 200. As evidence of this newly acquired juridical status, the *pontifex* had the right to put a vestal to death, should she be found guilty of *crimen incesti*, cf. Cantarella (1981) 226-228 and Cornell (1981). The extraordinary juridical status of the Vestals allowed these priestesses to embody and represent the entire community, that is, a city made out of both men and women. As Carandini (2015) 94-95 aptly summarizes: "Questa è la forma originale che ha assunto la 'cosa pubblica' fin dagli esordi. Consisteva per queste sacerdotesse nell'essere neutre rispetto a parentela e luoghi, al fine di rappresentare l'interesse generale della collettività dal punto di vista sacrale, che aveva poi i suoi risvolti istituzionali e politici. Solo essendo di nessun uomo le vestali potevano essere di tutti, come di tutti era il complesso del Campidoglio-Arce-Foro. Esse non appartenevano nell'agro a nessun *pagus* e nell'abitato cittadino ad alcuna *curia*, *gens* e famiglia."

did this exceptional status make the Vestals the only women whose existence did not depend on a male, but their self-reliance— juridical and existential—accords well with the idea of self-possession: the constantly-emphasized *suum esse*, an ideal pervasive in Seneca's opus.[23] In this regard, their virginity, if interpreted as an embodiment of Rome's solidity and impenetrability, neatly connects the philosopher's aspirational ἀταραξία with the unshakeable glory of Rome.[24] In other words, through the sacred figure of the Vestals one's spiritual pursuit and independence is fully identifiable with Rome's eternal presence and providential role in the history of humanity. Thus, when Seneca suggests that, like a senior Vestal, one can withdraw in old age and still benefit others by teaching, he deploys imagery which is profoundly steeped in the notion of civic *officia*[25] and in a vision of (private) service that nonetheless advocates for Rome's universal role in the political arena. Nothing could be more removed from the Epicurean call for a lack of political engagement: far from the obscurity of the λάθε βιώσας,[26] the flame of Vesta gestures towards the necessary overlap between individual destiny and the glory of the state. The eternal continuity of the city which was powerfully conveyed by the everlasting fire of Vesta, sits well with the ancestral relation between flame and scepter.[27] Thus the flame

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[23] On Seneca's deployment of juridical language to craft a "linguaggio dell'interiorità," cf. Traina (1972) and Lotito (2001).

[24] As Parker (2004) 568 observes the powers of the Vestals were coterminous with the city walls and only the Vestal virgins could be buried within the *pomerium*. This prerogative underscored a consubstantiality between the physical bodies of the priestesses and the territorial integrity of Rome.

[25] It is worth observing how in the course of Rome's history the intercession of the Vestals was instrumental to regain civic *concordia*, as is the case with Appius Claudius in 143 BCE, Caesar in 82 BCE, Messalina in 48 CE, and Vitellius in 69 CE, cf. Carandini (2015) 92.

[26] On the permanence and variation of this precept in Latin literature and philosophy see Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1992) who demonstrates that as early as *Ep.* 1.17.10 Horace reasons on the conundrum of a secluded and retired lifestyle in tandem with the need to *colere reges*, or entertaining (unavoidable) relations with the centers of power. Thus, from very early on the Epicurean precept is reinterpreted through a distinctly Roman lens and adjusted to align with the demands imposed by political reality. On the fortune of the λάθε βιώσας in Augustan poetry cf. also Roskam (2007)b 155-187.

[27] At *El.* 417-430 Sophocles describes Chrysothemis telling the story of Clytemnestra's nightmare in which she dreamt of once again mating with Agamemnon who then took the scepter that once belonged to him and planted it beside the hearth, (i.e., where the fire is burns). This gesture has notoriously been interpreted by Gernet (1952) as a symbol of the male's lineage continuity. See also Carandini (2015) 22.

is tantamount to political continuity and stability. Yet fire for a Stoic is, quite literally, the matter of the soul[28] which is hot, fiery πνεῦμα, and which also informs the entire cosmos and ultimately coincides with God.[29] As Wildberger observes,[30] the identification of God with the πνεῦμα is first proposed by Chrysippus, and this interpretation supplants the fire-based theories that both Zeno and Cleanthes had produced. Such conceptual revolution likely occurred as a consequence of the development of ancient medicine. More precisely, Aristotle was the first to employ the term πνεῦμα to designate the vital principle that permeates the body. If we momentarily revisit the aforementioned reference to the sage as a phoenix (cf. p. 128), this mythical bird leads us back to fire-based imagery. The eternal cycle of the phoenix comes about as a process of self-incineration and subsequent rebirth: resurrection from ashes that signifies the regeneration of a physical body and the eternal cycle of time. In sum, the human soul is as eternal as Rome, God and the whole cosmos. Not only do they all share the temporal dimension of eternity, but they are also consubstantial. This is why the wise man, or he who, like the *proficiens*, strenuously pursues *sapientia* can never fully disengage from public life and from the eternal glory of Rome. All these aspirational goals coincide with and are betokened by Vesta's vivid flame.[31]

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[28] In this regard, it bears underlining Williams' (2003) 33 and 73 conjecture *ad alios acutissimo animo* in the place of the transmitted (and nonsensical) *ad alios actus animos*, which Reynolds (1977), preceded by Gertz and Hermes, prints in between *cruces*. While Williams does not offer any explanation for his bright conjecture, I would like to offer that the use of the adjective *acutus* (his superlative form followed by *animo* makes it even more plausible from a paleographic standpoint) resonates with the notion that the πνεῦμα is a fiery substance. More to the point, *acutus* is well attested for both describing mental acumen (*ThlL* I, 464, 15-46) and the physical, tapering movement of the flame, (*ThlL* I, 464, 41-44). Indeed, one's *animus* is *acutus* as the result of its fiery matter being subtle and stretching up.

[29] It is an all-encompassing spirit on which Seneca *Helv*. 8.3 comments thus: *divinus spiritus per omnia maxima ac minima aequali intentione diffusus* ("divine Spirit pervading all things from the smallest to the greatest with uniform energy").

[30] Cf. Wildberger (2006) 76.

[31] It is noteworthy that throughout *lat. viv*. Plutarch utilizes a light-based imagery to debunk Epicurus' theory. In the first part of this work, Plutarch's bases his claim on an interpretation of the Garden's theory that is at least partially distorted. More specifically, he interprets the proposed disengagement as a complete retreat from life, while Epicurus notoriously recommends that one only eschew those elements of political involvement that may produce anxiety and preoccupation, cf. Roskam (2007)a 97-99. What is particularly interesting, however, is the initial mention of light at 1129b, where the experience of living a life devoid of knowledge is compared

One final aspect that I would like discuss concerns Seneca's style. We have observed how the whole second chapter of *Ot*. hinges on subdivisions: *praecepta* vs. *exempla*, youth vs. old age, learning vs. teaching, and, crucially, though *sous rature*, Stoicism vs. Epicureanism.[32] Seneca himself chooses to "chop up" its text and argument, but as argued in *Ep*. 33.7 select sentences must be propaedeutic and train youth, while old age requires that one proceeds no longer *sub alio*, or following somebody else's authority, but in a more continuous, homogeneous, and organic way. It is not a coincidence that the lack of this desirable characteristic was imputed to Epicurus, whose uneven style supposedly mirrors his doctrine's lack of systematicity. While Seneca resorts to various images to signify the bad, uneven style in contrast to the more cohesive sought-after ideal, at *Ep*. 33.5 he notoriously resorts to the illustration of a feminine body:

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to extinguishing the light of a symposium. Plutarch (1129e-c) then moves to an extended section rich in eschatological undertones, in which, at 1130b, light comes to symbolize not merely knowledge but existence itself: οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον αὐτὸν οὑτωσὶ φῶτα καλεῖν τοὺς παλαιοὺς ὅτι τοῦ γινώσκεσθαι καὶ γινώσκειν ἑκάστῳ διὰ συγγένειαν ἔρως ἰσχυρὸς βέμπέφυκεν. αὐτήν τε τὴν ψυχὴν ἔνιοι τῶν φιλοσόφων φῶς εἶναι τῇ οὐσίᾳ νομίζουσιν, ἄλλοις τε χρώμενοι τεκμηρίοις καὶ ὅτι τῶν ὄντων μάλιστα τὴν μὲν ἄγνοιαν ἡ ψυχὴ δυσανασχετεῖ καὶ πᾶν τὸ ἀφεγγὲς ἐχθαίρει καὶ ταράττεται περὶ τὰ σκοτεινά, φόβου καὶ ὑποψίας ὄντα πλήρη πρὸς αὐτήν. ("Indeed I imagine that the ancients called man *phôs* because from our kinship with one another a strong love is implanted in each of us of being known and of knowing. And some philosophers believe that the soul itself is in its substance light, appealing among other proofs to the fact that the soul finds ignorance the most vexatious of all things and hates everything unilluminated and is disturbed by all that is dark, which to her is full of fear and mistrust"). The theory of the human soul had become particularly successful among Christians (cf. Roskam (2007)a 213), and the ἔνιοι τῶν φιλοσόφων mentioned by Plutarch have been identified with Heraclides Ponticus, cf. Dalfino (1998). However, given the use of the plural, a reference to the Stoic theory of the fiery πνεῦμα is not implausible, especially because Plutarch is here discussing the λάθε βιώσας principle which was so contentious for the Stoics. On light as a rhetorical operator in Seneca, cf. Berno (2003) 179-207.

[32] At. *Ot*. 3.2 the tension of this subdivision will be resolved through the illustration of the two different roads (i.e., the two philosophical orientations that, through different paths nonetheless lead to the same destination): *Duae maxime et in hac re dissident sectae, Epicureorum et Stoicorum, sed utraque ad otium diversa via mittit. Epicurus ait: "Non accedet ad rem publicam sapiens, nisi si quid intervenerit"; Zenon ait: "Accedet ad rem publicam, nisi si quid impedierit."* ("The two sects, the Epicureans and the Stoics, are at variance, as in most things, in this matter also; they both direct us to leisure, but by different roads. Epicurus says: "The wise man will not engage in public affairs except in an emergency." Zeno says: "He will engage in public affairs unless something prevents him.").

> *Quare depone istam spem, posse te summated degustare ingenia maximorum virorum; tota tibi inspicienda sunt, tota tractanda. Res geritur et per lineamenta sua ingenii opus nectitur, ex quo nihil subduci sine ruina potest. Nec recuso, quo minus singula membra, dummodo in ipso homine, consideres. Non est formosa, cuius crus laudatur aut brachium, sed illa, cuius universa facies admirationem partibus singulis abstulit.*
>
> For this reason, give over hoping that you can skim, by means of epitomes, the wisdom of distinguished men. Look into their wisdom as a whole; study it as a whole. They are working out a plan and weaving together, line upon line, a masterpiece, from which nothing can be taken away without injury to the whole. Examine the separate parts, if you like, provided you examine them as parts of the man himself. She is not a beautiful woman whose ankle or arm is praised, but she whose general appearance makes you forget to admire her single attributes.

Good style in a consistent and organic exposition of doctrine is wholesome and aesthetically pleasing, like the panoptic appreciation of a woman's body. In fact, wholeness is crucial also for the positive assessment of a female's physique and, specifically, for the body of the most public among Roman women: the Vestals. Their virginity and the impenetrability of their wholesome body, symbolize the impenetrability of Rome. Because virginity stands out as the connecting element throughout the career of a Vestal, even if an old priestess was past her apprenticeship, she was surely not any less a virgin. I am suggesting that Seneca's mention of the senior Vestal, who is now fully dedicated to teaching, is a symbolic image of profound significance on two levels. On the one hand, her life of selfless duty manifests the need for everlasting political engagement and faith in Rome: in fact, even when, in the last decade of her tenure, she instructs the younger priestesses, she remains a revered Vestal. Secondly, by means of her virginity, which is a reference to stability, continuity, and wholeness, she guides the reader back to unity after the argument has been subdivided so many times for didactic purposes. In sum, her wholeness signifies two specific ideals, one political and one stylistic, as if Seneca were subtly but unequivocally confirming his allegiance to Stoicism.

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