

The development of a practical  
moral identity in Seneca's  
*Epistulae Morales* 1-29

by

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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

## Abstract

In the *Epistulae Morales* Seneca presents his moral philosophy. Scholars such as Hadot, Mans and Smuts have studied Seneca's moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*. The question is, how does Seneca present and develop his moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*, i.e. what literary technique does he use? Scholars have pointed out that Seneca's use of the epistolary form is an integral part of this literary technique. The epistolary form was an ideal medium for conveying his moral philosophy: "[Seneca] presented himself as a spiritual guide, and for that purpose he made use of the literary form of letters... In this form Seneca was able to give a detailed presentation of the course of moral education" (Misch 1950:419). The more specific question is thus: how does Seneca use the epistolary form to present and develop his moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*?

In order to answer how Seneca employs the epistolary form, it is necessary to understand what Seneca's goal was with the *Epistulae Morales*. I suggest that the goal of Seneca's moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales* is the development of a practical moral identity. Seneca's choice of the letter as the form of his philosophical discussion enabled him to create certain fictional personae. The three main personae of the *Epistulae Morales* are the Ideal Persona (the embodiment of Seneca's moral philosophy), the persona Seneca and the persona Lucilius. These personae demonstrate the phases of moral progress. The Ideal Persona is the ideal, which the personae Seneca and Lucilius must strive towards becoming. The persona Seneca acts in the role of the mentor, advising the persona Lucilius on how to achieve this ideal, but he is himself still struggling towards it. The persona Lucilius is just beginning to walk the road of moral progress at the beginning of the *Epistulae Morales*. The phases of moral progress, which are enacted by the three personae, are also the phases of the development of a practical moral identity. The practical moral identity should thus be viewed both as a goal and as a process in the letters.

*Epistulae Morales* 1-29 form a separate whole, as scholars have pointed out. These letters also supply sufficient evidence of Seneca's literary technique of developing a practical moral identity in the *Epistulae Morales*. A close reading of *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 in Chapter 2 analyses this literary technique. Chapter 3 involves a systematic exposition of the practical moral identity in terms of certain themes. The themes represent the main

aspects of moral development, i.e. the main aspects of the development of a practical moral identity in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29.

## Opsomming

In die *Epistulae Morales* bied Seneca sy morele filosofie aan. Vakkundiges soos Hadot, Mans en Smuts het Seneca se morele filosofie in die *Epistulae Morales* bestudeer. Die vraag is egter, hoe ontwikkel Seneca sy morele filosofie in die *Epistulae Morales*, m.a.w. watter literêre tegniek gebruik hy? Vakkundiges het daarop gedui dat Seneca se gebruik van die briefvorm 'n integrale deel van hierdie literêre tegniek uitmaak. Die briefvorm was 'n ideale medium om sy morele filosofie weer te gee: “[Seneca] presented himself as a spiritual guide, and for that purpose he made use of the literary form of letters... In this form Seneca was able to give a detailed presentation of the course of moral education” (Misch 1950:419). Die meer spesifieke vraag is dus: hoe gebruik Seneca die briefvorm om sy morele filosofie in die *Epistulae Morales* te ontwikkel?

Om hierdie vraag te beantwoord, is dit nodig om te verstaan wat Seneca se doel met die *Epistulae Morales* was. Ek stel voor dat Seneca die ontwikkeling van 'n praktiese morele identiteit ten doel gehad het. Seneca se gebruik van die briefvorm het hom in staat gestel om sekere fiktiewe personae te skep. Die drie hoof personae van die *Epistulae Morales* is die Ideale Persona (die verpersoonliking van Seneca se morele filosofie), die persona Seneca en die persona Lucilius. Hierdie personae verteenwoordig die fases van morele ontwikkeling. Die Ideale Persona is die ideaal, wat Seneca en Lucilius moet nastreef. Seneca speel die rol van mentor. Hy gee Lucilius raad oor hoe om hierdie ideaal te verwesenlik, maar hyself streef ook daarna. Die *Epistulae Morales* open met Lucilius aan die begin van sy morele ontwikkeling. Die fases van morele ontwikkeling wat deur die drie personae opgevoer word is ook die fases van die ontwikkeling van 'n praktiese morele identiteit. Die praktiese morele identiteit moet gesien word as beide 'n doel en 'n proses in die briewe.

*Epistulae Morales* 1-29 vorm 'n afsonderlike geheel, soos deur vakkundiges uitgewys is. Hierdie briewe verskaf voldoende bewys vir die literêre tegniek waarmee die praktiese morele identiteit in die *Epistulae Morales* geskep word. 'n Gedetailleerde analise van

*Epistulae Morales* 1-29 in Hoofstuk 2 analiseer hierdie literêre tegniek. Hoofstuk 3 gee 'n sistematiese uiteensetting van die praktiese morele identiteit in terme van sekere temas. Die temas verteenwoordig die hoof aspekte van morele ontwikkeling, m.a.w. die hoof aspekte van die ontwikkeling van 'n praktiese morele identiteit in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29.

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# Chapter I: Introduction

The *Epistulae Morales*, written by Seneca during his years of retirement (A.D. 62-65), have attracted much criticism because of their controversial nature. Certain issues especially have led to heated debate, namely the genre of the work, Seneca's intended reader, the genuine versus the fictional nature of the letters, the arrangement of the letters, Seneca's literary style and the discrepancy between Seneca's character and his work.

## Genre

One of the big controversies centers on the genre of the *Epistulae Morales*. Wilson explains that part of the ongoing debate on the genre of the *Epistulae Morales* is the question of whether the letters are essays rather than letters. He says: "The result is that, until recently,<sup>1</sup> much modern criticism of the *Epistles* proceeded upon a basic misapprehension about genre" (1987:109). The imposition of titles upon the letters by translators creates essays out of the epistolary material (1987:109).<sup>2</sup> In Wilson's opinion, which I myself share, "Seneca's *Epistles* ask to be read as epistles, not essays; collectively, not selectively" (1987:110).

What do we know of the letter as a genre in Seneca's day? Where did this literary form come from? According to Quinn the real model for Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* is Horace's Epistles, except that in the place of verse Seneca opts for prose (1979:213). But Costa says: "In Latin there were two major collections of letters prior to Seneca, Cicero's correspondence and the verse epistles of Horace. Neither of these were models for him in any strict sense" (1988:1). Costa continues: "The Letters derive their form clearly from the Greek philosophical letter" (1988:2). "Besides the example of the Greek philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> The sources, which Wilson cites, point to the late sixties, but even in 1979 Quinn comments: "Seneca's *Letters* are moral essays, not real letters" (213).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Gummere (Loeb edition), Motto (1985), Hadas (1958) and Summers (1910).

letter the most important influences on Seneca's Letters are techniques derived from Hellenistic sermonizing and from rhetorical practice. There was a kind of moralizing discourse (sometimes called diatribe by modern authorities)" (Costa 1988:3). Coleman points out that it is difficult to assess precisely Seneca's debt to the diatribe (1974:289). What makes Seneca's letters different from those of his predecessors? Wilson comments: "These are not ordinary letters. They convey little news, little of the detail about current social and political activity that we find in the extant correspondence of Cicero or the younger Pliny. Seneca carefully distinguishes his epistles from the kind of letter Cicero wrote to his friend Atticus (*Epistula* 118)... Seneca's epistles reflect not the outside world so much as the condition and workings of his own mind. They are predominantly introspective, concerned much more with ideas than with events" (1987:103).

## Reader

Who is Seneca's audience, his reader? There is not complete clarity on the issue of Seneca's intended audience for the *Epistulae Morales*. Understanding this would help a great deal in understanding the controversial nature of the work. Stewart describes the audience of the *Epistulae Morales* as the Roman audience of Seneca's day (1997:4). He also says that Seneca's audience "doubtless consisted in large measure of uneducated people... After all, the Stoic philosophy was a public philosophy which strove after something which everyone desires - the good life" (1997:15). Wilson says of Seneca's audience: "The reliance on familiar history and mythology for analogies and examples, the infrequency of private allusions to persons and events known to Seneca and Lucilius but not to outsiders, the universalising treatment of ethical problems, the subordination of news about the author's life and habits to what is morally significant, the consistent quality and rhetorical sophistication of the language all anticipate a general readership" (1987:103-104). On the other hand, Ball explains: Stoic philosophy "took on, in the minds of its noblest followers, quite the character of a religion. The 'philosophical director' became, in certain circles, almost as definite a functionary as the 'spiritual director' in the Christian church. Without external rites and ceremonies, however, and without any vulgar personal hope, the Stoic religion could not expect to appeal to the masses and it did not. It was evidently a religion for an ethical aristocracy only" (1916:xviii-xix). According to Inwood, Seneca's "audience included readers who had considerable philosophical training, perhaps

even professional teachers of philosophy who cared to read contributions to their problems written in Latin” (1995:72). According to Rosivach, “Seneca’s intended audience was, narrowly, the wealthy equestrian Lucilius, and, more broadly, Rome’s educated elite, all of whom were, and would consider themselves, rich” (1995:94). Mans says that Seneca’s writings “are directed at a searching, aimless, restless and blasé human being” (1978:234). It should be noted that we, today, are also Seneca’s audience. Seneca states in *Ep.* 8.2 that in his retirement *posterorum negotium ago. illis aliqua quae possint prodesse conscribo*. The *Epistulae Morales*, written during his years of retirement, are part of this business he is conducting with the future (Wilson 1987:104).

### **Genuine versus fictional nature of the letters**

The genuine versus the fictional nature of the letters, which is connected to the genre of the *Epistulae Morales*, has been debated. Russell summarizes this debate: “The question of the relation of the Letters to real facts has been very much discussed. There are two lines of approach. One is from the expectations we can reasonably form from what we know of the theory and practice of epistolography. The other is from the evaluation of the internal evidence of the Letters. The most divergent views have been held. At one extreme, Hermann Peter [1901:225ff.] took the collection as a set of moral discourses to the youth of Rome, dedicated to Lucilius, in the same sense in which the *Naturales Quaestiones* were dedicated to him. At the other end of the scale, writers like Eugène Albertini [1923:136ff.] treated the whole correspondence as real, and explain the difficulties by saying that some Letters have been expurgated or suppressed. As usual, extremes are too simple” (1974:72-73).<sup>3</sup>

### **Arrangement of the letters**

Another controversy concerning the *Epistulae Morales* is their arrangement. Russell points out that the question of the reality of the correspondence is bound up with that of its

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<sup>3</sup> Griffin (1976), in her book *Seneca, a philosopher in politics*, confronts directly the problem of how to relate Seneca’s works to his life.

arrangement (1974:77). According to Russell there are three probabilities concerning the arrangement of the letters. The first probability is that “Seneca conceived a series of letters to Lucilius... Lucilius’ personality helped to determine what the book was like; but it was not an actual correspondence. Books I-III (*Epistulae* 1-29) at least belong to this initial impulse; the arrangement was deliberate, the epistolary form an essential.” Secondly, “Seneca found this a congenial medium. Not only reflections that could be based on incidents or occasions, but also consolations, discussions of technical points and *Beiträge* of the *moralis philosophia* could be handled in this way. Grouping was still important; but there was no overall plot, and no end was envisaged.” Thirdly, “Apart from Books I-III, we do not know in what groups the Letters were published, or indeed how much came out in Seneca’s lifetime. But, given the scale and time available, it seems likely that the order in which we have them not only gives the relative dramatic dates but more or less reproduces the order of composition. We must of course allow for the possibility that Seneca kept some letters in the drawer and used them later; this might help to explain the reversion to earlier types and themes in the last few books” (1974:78-79).

## Literary style

Seneca’s literary style is a very controversial topic.<sup>4</sup> Campbell remarks: “[Seneca’s] reluctance, as it appears, to say what one has to say and then have done with it instead of continuing the restless manufacture of yet bolder, more hard-hitting or more finished sentences or proverbs, sometimes arouses the impatience of more modern readers” (1969:23). Quinn explains: “Neither in death nor in life was there any opportunity left in the age of Nero for a man to play the role of Socrates. The continual need to stand apart from the depraved, the absurd and the horrible makes you in the end a character in the mad farce you despise and reject. The constant need to study your role and to interpret that role to others infects equally your thinking and the expression of your thoughts. It is this studied, theatrical simplicity which gives Seneca’s style a directness that attracts some and repels many... It is above all the voice of the individualist who finds it necessary to play a

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<sup>4</sup> For further accounts of Seneca’s style see, for example, Currie (1966), Motto and Clark (1975) and Coleman (1974).

carefully studied part because his ideas are unpopular, or because the only tool that can penetrate the intellectual and moral torpor of his contemporaries is simple, sharp talk barbed with paradox” (1979:218). This style of Seneca is called the pointed style.<sup>5</sup> Costa draws attention to the contradiction in what Seneca says of his style and what modern critics say of his style: “Seneca claims that his letters aim to be, like his conversation, *inlaboratus et facilis* (75.1). This looks paradoxical to us, but it must mean that he is not trying for special effects beyond the ordinary range of intelligent discourse, and that conversational elements like colloquialisms and anecdotes are often to be found. The declamatory features are not intended to lift the Letters above the grasp of the unsophisticated” (1988:3).

### **The discrepancy between Seneca’s character and his work**

Another controversy is the discrepancy between what Seneca preached and the life he himself led. Ball remarks: “The career of Seneca was one of apparent inconsistencies. In his writings, first and last, there is not a little by way of apology for the man who, in accommodating himself to the exigencies of this world, fails to make his practice square with his ideals. He took an almost humorous interest in the problem [Cf. 56.15]... The spectacle, to take only the most obvious, of a powerful courtier and one of the most colossally rich men in a day of world-wide fortunes, preaching the charms of a life of unworldliness and poverty, was calculated to excite detractors; and Seneca’s character has been a subject of endless dispute from his own day to ours” (1916:xv-xvi). Coleman points out: “But the discrepancy between the principles professed and the life that is lived, though relevant to our judgement of the man, has no necessary bearing on our assessment of his achievement as a writer. Here it is the effectiveness of what he writes that matters, not his ‘sincerity’” (1974:286 n.2). However, because it is a work about morality one finds it very

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<sup>5</sup> Summers discusses the pointed style in Greek and Roman literature (1910:xv-xli). He also discusses the language and style of Seneca’s prose (1910: xlii-xcv). Motto and Clark state that Seneca was not the first to develop the pointed style, but that he is the master of it (1975:1). Smiley (1919) discusses the Stoic theory of literary style and especially the question of how far the pointed style of Seneca may be regarded as the legitimate descendant of the style of his Stoic predecessors.

hard to ignore Seneca the man. The author casts doubt on the truth of his words, because he himself is unable to practise what he preaches.

A better understanding of Seneca's objective with the *Epistulae Morales* and what he does in the *Epistulae Morales*, may cast some new light on these controversial topics concerning this work.

## **Ethics**

“In the first century A.D., during the early years of the Empire, Rome's despots regularly rewarded intimates, intellectuals, and courtiers alike with exile and extermination... Social distinction, natural talents, and rational capacities were clearly disadvantageous” (Motto 1985:5). This was an era of universal depravity: “The mass of men, Seneca holds, are irresolute, ambitious, greedy, and impious” (Motto 1973:49).

The result of these dangerous and decadent times is that during the Principate philosophy was especially concerned with the question of the good and moral life. Motto points out: “All the schools [Academics, Cynics, Peripatetics, Cyrenaics, Epicureans, etc.] had increasingly come to emphasize, not a broad range of studies - in physics, metaphysics, psychology, esthetics - but a singular concern for ethics, for moral conduct” (1973:78). This general trend was especially evident in the work of our author: “Unlike earlier philosophers, who had equally stressed three branches of study - ethics, physics, and dialectic - the Stoics (and particularly Seneca) primarily emphasized ethics alone” (Motto 1985:9). For Seneca philosophy and ethics were synonymous. Campbell points out that Seneca “would have denounced the opinion to which most philosophers, tacitly or otherwise, have come round in the last half-century, that it is no part of the business of philosophy to turn people into better persons, as tantamount to desertion... His tremendous faith in philosophy as a mistress was grounded on a belief that her end was the practical one of curing souls, of bringing peace and order to the feverish minds of men pursuing the wrong aims in life” (1969:19).

Seneca is many things: “Seneca the philosopher was a polymath, a writer adept in innumerable fields - virtually a Renaissance Man. He is best known to us for his intense tragedies of blood, his consummate essays of philosophic advice, his pointed, level-headed

moral epistles, and his questioning scientific treatises” (Motto 1985:5). But first and foremost he is a moral educator. Hadot (1969) has studied Seneca’s moral philosophy. She looks at the psychagogical process in Seneca’s philosophy, i.e. his theory of the guidance of the soul and its educational objectives, and also the role of the guide or educator. Mans (1978) has also studied Seneca’s moral, educational thought, *inter alia* the objectives, theory and practice of Seneca’s moral education, as well as his “informal education”.<sup>6</sup> Smuts (1948) discusses Seneca’s system of ethics. These three authors’ works refer a great deal to the *Epistulae Morales*<sup>7</sup> as one of Seneca’s works in which we can learn much about his educational thought and strategies, and in which we clearly see him at work as a moral educator.

Scholars such as Hadot, Mans and Smuts have therefore discussed Seneca’s moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*. The question is, how does Seneca present and develop his moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*, i.e. what literary technique does he use?

### **Objective of study**

The objective of this study is to contribute towards the discussion of the literary technique which Seneca uses to present and develop his moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*. Scholars have pointed out that Seneca’s use of the epistolary form is an integral part of this

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<sup>6</sup> The relationship between Seneca and Lucilius is an example of Seneca’s informal education (Mans 1978:190). Mans states that Seneca follows the old Roman education in his education of Lucilius: “As far as the personal bond between educator and pupil is concerned, Seneca followed the old Roman education in his informal approach” (1978:238). The ancient Roman boy was informally educated at home. At the age of sixteen a respected and experienced public figure would take over his informal education (1978:191). This informal form of education co-existed with the formal public education in the Roman education of the first century AD (1978:191). Seneca approves of this calm and intimate form of education, which stands in contrast to the noisy public lectures of his time (1978:194). Mans discusses the informal educational relationship between Seneca and Lucilius (according to the *Epistulae Morales*) in detail in chapter 5. He also talks here of self-education, and specifically Lucilius’ education of himself.

<sup>7</sup> My study is only concerned with the *Epistulae Morales*.

literary technique. “Most modern commentators see Seneca’s use of epistolary form as the result of a deliberate choice of genre” (Wilson 1987:104). The epistolary form was an ideal medium for conveying his moral philosophy: “[Seneca] presented himself as a spiritual guide, and for that purpose he made use of the literary form of letters... In this form Seneca was able to give a detailed presentation of the course of moral education” (Misch 1950:419). The epistolary form also enables Seneca to make his moral philosophy more personal: “[T]he epistolary framework enables the writer to give his doctrine a more personalized tone and to establish through the medium of the notional correspondent a more intimate relationship with his wider public” (Coleman 1974:288). The question is, how does Seneca use the epistolary form to present and develop his moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*?

More specifically, the objective of this study is to cast new light on the issue of Seneca’s choice and use of the epistolary form, since this will explain the literary technique which he uses to present and develop his moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*. However, before we can try to answer why Seneca chose the epistolary form and how he employed it, we have to understand what Seneca chose it for; in other words, what Seneca’s goal was with the *Epistulae Morales*.

### **Seneca’s goal with the *Epistulae Morales***

“The cultural era of Rome under the early Empire was surprisingly modern, strikingly like our own. Local religions and provincial pieties had failed: an era of mass communications and of mass-man had ensued. If it was an age of cosmopolitan sophistication, yet it was also a period of personal crisis and individual loneliness” (Motto 1985:9). A reassessment of the individual and his place in the world at large was necessary. Self-scrutiny was thus at the order of the day: “The increasing interest in self-scrutiny can be seen as a response to a developing need for self-generated individual identity at a time when throughout the Roman Empire social structures were becoming more fluid, causing the disruption of traditional relationships” (Edwards 1997:27). In the dangerous, decadent and uncertain times of the Principate, man was searching for a new identity, a new way of defining his role in the world.

Seneca has the following to say about his objective with the *Epistulae Morales*: “I am working for later generations, writing down some ideas that may be of assistance to them. There are certain wholesome counsels, which may be compared to prescriptions of useful drugs; these I am putting into writing; for I have found them helpful in ministering to my own sores, which, if not wholly cured, have at any rate ceased to spread” (*Ep.* 8.2).<sup>8</sup> I propose that Seneca’s “wholesome counsels” form the basis of a moral identity developed in the *Epistulae Morales*. I thus propose that the goal of Seneca’s moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales* is the development of a moral identity. For the purpose of developing a moral identity, the epistolary form was appropriate. Edwards points out that “Seneca...makes extensive use of the potential of the letter-form to explore the notion of the self” (1997:25).<sup>9</sup>

The objectives of this study are now clearer. Firstly, I will look at how Seneca uses the epistolary form to develop a moral identity in the *Epistulae Morales*. In other words, I will examine the literary technique which Seneca uses to achieve his goal of developing a moral identity. Secondly, I will give a systematic exposition of this moral identity.

## **Moral Identity**

Stoicism suggests that we can form our own identities, since identity is not something with which we are born and which remains the same throughout our lives: “In Stoicism, as A.A. Long [1991:117] observes, ‘our natures are such that we fashion our own selves’- a process which requires self-interrogation and self-reflection” (Edwards 1997:26). The self is

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<sup>8</sup> Loeb edition 1967; Gummere’s translation. The English translations throughout this study are those of Gummere’s. My paraphrases of Seneca are also based on Gummere’s translations.

<sup>9</sup> Edwards remarks: “Although there was a strong philosophical tradition of concern with the well-being of the soul in the works of Plato, the Epicureans, and Stoics particularly, there is very little in the way of what might be termed self-scrutiny in any extant philosophical letters from before Seneca’s time... Seneca then is one of the foremost figures in a more general turn towards introspection. Indeed, writing in Latin, Seneca was to have a far greater influence on the western tradition of introspection than was Epictetus. Augustine, for instance, did not read Greek with much facility but he was familiar with Seneca’s work. Seneca’s Letters thus have a particular importance in what one might term the history of autobiography” (1997:25).

something which may be the product of hard work, not given but made (1997:30). Gill describes this hard work as “rooting out ingrained defects and inclinations by deliberate, sustained effort” (1983:470). Developing a moral identity for oneself is hard work, and every man is responsible for developing his own moral identity.

Man’s moral identity is connected to his ultimate goal, which - according to the Stoics - is virtue: “The reforming force that brings about tranquility (of mind) is man’s own spark of divine reason. Any man who cultivates his reason may obtain some degree of virtue. Consequently, Seneca and the Stoics avidly maintain that virtue can be developed within each individual human being. Since perfect reason and virtue are the same and since children do not possess reason, it follows that virtue is obtained by art, not by nature, by teaching and hard work, not by inheritance” (Motto 1985:10).

### **Universal Identity**

Seneca’s moral identity in the *Epistulae Morales* is also universal. In other words, it is an identity not only for Stoics, or for that matter Romans; it is the true identity. This does not mean that he ignored the aspect of individuality in moral identity. Edwards points out: “Earlier Stoic writing seems to have concentrated on the disposition of the Stoic sage, the ideal figure, whom aspiring Stoics should seek to emulate. Panaetius, however, a Stoic thinker of the second century BCE...seems to have shifted the focus onto the situation of the aspirant Stoic, a person still a long way from the perfection of the sage. Panaetius explicitly allowed scope for individual differences in his ethical teaching, stressing the responsibility of each individual for developing their own moral character... Yet, as has often been noted, this potential for a focus on self-examination is not seriously developed until the first century CE [and is demonstrated in the work of Seneca]” (1997:27). Seneca’s universal moral identity is true for anyone anywhere, but everyone everywhere is responsible for developing their own moral identity. Seneca’s goal is to give guidelines for the development of a moral identity.

### **Eclecticism**

The universality of the identity Seneca develops in the *Epistulae Morales* is the product of his eclectic tendencies. Motto explains: “Seneca collects and collates his philosophic

precepts from all sources, binding himself to the dogmas of no particular school... Although he allied himself to the Stoics more closely than to any other group of philosophers, yet his writings reveal him as an eclectic - one who was willing to assemble useful precepts from any school of thought... Seneca was no sectarian dogmatist, but rather a seeker after truth” (1985:9).<sup>10</sup> “In the pursuit of knowledge, Seneca advocated eclecticism, broad-mindedness, the utilization of precepts of all great thinkers regardless of their sect or school” (Motto 1984:229). However, Seneca’s eclecticism was not something new. Motto remarks: “It is true, to be sure, that by the time of the Middle Stoa in the first century B.C., Stoic leaders like Panaetius and Posidonius had themselves become ‘eclectic.’ Indeed, it was a general trend observable in all the schools. Academics, Cynics, Peripatetics, Cyrenaics, and the like had ceased what had been for several centuries a brawling over the finer distinctions of doctrine... And in the purely moral sphere to which philosophy was now confined, the natural tendency of the different schools, not even excluding the Epicurean, was to assimilation and eclecticism. From these circumstances there emerged the type which we now call the ‘eclectic,’ but which the Romans called simply the ‘philosopher’; that is, the man who drew practical wisdom from all sources alike, binding himself to the dogmas of no school” (1973:77-78).

## Practical Identity

Seneca’s recipe for the good life is - as I have already explained - a universal and moral identity. Stoic philosophy had its own recipe for the good life.<sup>11</sup> But according to Seneca a

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<sup>10</sup> According to Quinn, Seneca thinks of himself as a professional philosopher, primarily a Stoic, but with considerable sympathy for Epicureanism and able to speak with authority upon the doctrines of all schools (1979:214). Coleman talks of Seneca’s “particular blend of eclectic Stoicism”. He points out that orthodox Stoic positions and procedures are questioned in, for example, *Epistulae* 45, 85 and 117 (1974:286). Larson (1992) in his article “Seneca and the schools of philosophy in early imperial Rome” describes how Seneca was influenced by the Stoic, Sextian, and Cynic schools of philosophy with which he came into contact in Rome. He points out that these three schools had much in common.

<sup>11</sup> My goal is not a study of Stoic philosophy. I will not compare Seneca’s “version” of Stoic philosophy with any other such versions, or with Stoic philosophy (in Seneca’s time) in general. My goal is, more specifically,

very important ingredient was missing from this recipe. He says: “For there is a very disgraceful charge often brought against our school - that we deal with the words, and not with the deeds, of philosophy” (*Ep.* 24.15). Seneca wanted to give mankind a philosophy that could be practised, not only preached. Seneca believed that the chief aim of philosophy is the formation of character and he taught his pupils to accept Stoic principles as far as they were applicable to actual life; philosophy lay, for Seneca, not in words, but in realities (Holland 1920:164).<sup>12</sup> Making philosophy practical was one of Seneca’s main contributions to the Stoic philosophy.<sup>13</sup> Motto and Clark comment: “The Stoics had ever their goal to be...the realisation of the Platonic ideal of uniting *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*... [A]mong the Stoics the name of Seneca exemplifies most clearly the success of such a union” (1968:6).<sup>14</sup> However, Seneca was not the first Stoic to participate in making Stoic philosophy practical: “Early Stoic theories had already been significantly adapted by the Middle Stoa of the second and first centuries B.C., chiefly through the teaching of Panaetius and Posidonius, and by the time of the Late Stoa in the Roman period

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a study of Seneca’s moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*, and even more specifically, the literary technique with which it is presented and developed.

<sup>12</sup> “Seneca’s ambition was not to produce new developments in philosophy, but to propound and defend the Stoic view of life in a way that would appeal to the layman, indulging only in as much metaphysics as was necessary to provide a framework for the practical aspects of Stoicism” (Ross 1974:117).

<sup>13</sup> Seneca did other things for Stoic philosophy also. For example, Inwood speaks of Seneca as a rare example of first-order Latin philosophy: “Seneca took his understanding of philosophical issues out of Greek and into his own language... Seneca really did think things through, philosophically, in Latin” (1995:75).

<sup>14</sup> Holland remarks: “Stoicism in the centuries before Christ was like a motor started but off the clutch. There is a great deal of potential energy, but being merely potential it results in nothing but noise. Seneca supplied the clutch to Stoicism by applying it to the practical conduct of life” (1920:176). Campbell remarks: “John of Salisbury is supposed to have said of Seneca: ‘If Quintilian will excuse me saying so, there are very few if any writers on conduct among non-Christians whose words and ideas can be more readily applied to all kinds of practical things’” (1969:25).

interest centered much less on theoretical questions about logic and physics than on practical discussion of human conduct” (Costa 1988:2).<sup>15</sup>

I suggested above that Seneca uses the epistolary form to develop a moral identity in the *Epistulae Morales*. I have now defined the nature of this identity as more than simply moral; it is in fact a universal practical moral identity. The question now is, how does Seneca use the epistolary form to develop this practical moral identity?<sup>16</sup> Seneca’s choice of the letter as the form of his philosophical discussion enabled him to create certain fictional personae, which I will now discuss.

### **The personae of the *Epistulae Morales***

The *Epistulae Morales* are “a collection of practical admonitions” (Russell 1974:71). The embodiment of these practical admonitions constitutes an abstract persona, whom I have called the Ideal Persona. In other words, the Ideal Persona practises Seneca’s practical advice in the *Epistulae Morales*. The Ideal Persona is not the Wise Man, who is the ultimate goal of Stoic philosophy and thus the Stoic ideal, but a man striving to be wise. Campbell remarks: “Despite its wide acceptance in educated circles, early Stoicism had a forbidding aspect which went far to explain its failure to influence the masses. There was something unreal or fictional about the *sapiens*, the wise man or philosopher... Seneca’s contribution to ancient philosophy lay in the humanization of this creed” (1969:17). “In Seneca the relaxing of earlier doctrine shows itself in a greater awareness of human weakness and an acceptance that most of us must be content with a reasonable advance towards a perfection which is virtually unattainable” (Costa 1988:2). The Wise Man’s position at the end of the road of moral progress is virtually unattainable: “For one of the first class perhaps springs into existence, like the phoenix, only once in five hundred years” (*Ep.* 42.1). The Ideal Persona is a practical ideal, whereas the Wise Man is not, and since

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<sup>15</sup> Panaetius played his part in making Stoic philosophy more practical with his participation in the doctrine of the four Stoic personae. See De Lacy (1977) for a discussion of this topic.

<sup>16</sup> Henceforth I shall speak of the practical moral identity in Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales*, dropping the adjective “universal”, which makes the name of this identity too long.

Seneca places a lot of emphasis on practicality in his philosophy, the goal of his philosophy is rather the Ideal Persona. The Ideal Persona is Seneca's humanized *sapiens*.

The epistolary form allows Seneca to create the two fictional personae Seneca<sup>17</sup> and Lucilius.<sup>18</sup> Costa points out: "Seneca's stance in the letters with regard to Lucilius is that he, like Lucilius, is a novice, a *proficiens*, on the journey towards becoming the Stoic ideal *sapiens*, but he is a little further on the way and can give Lucilius the benefit of his experience and his mistakes" (1988:3). Seneca serves as physician, cheerleader, and friend to the younger man (Motto and Clark 1970:103).

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<sup>17</sup> The persona Seneca, the fictional author of the letters, must be differentiated from the historical/biographical Seneca, who is the real author of the *Epistulae Morales*. Costa says: "Choosing the letter-form not only allowed Seneca to set up a recipient of his news and views and teaching within an informal two-way relationship, but also encouraged him to talk about himself, as we do in letters. These autobiographical details are an obvious feature of the Letters and of great interest" (1988:4). Edwards agrees: "Seneca's Letters thus have a particular importance in what one might term the history of autobiography" (1997:25). But, Edwards remarks, "While many biographies have been written on the basis of Cicero's Letters, it would be virtually impossible to write a conventional biography based on those of Seneca... Nevertheless there is a sense in which Seneca's Letters can be seen as offering a detailed picture of the authorial self" (1997:23-24). Motto (1970:186-190) summarizes what we learn of this "authorial self" from the letters. Griffin discusses the real Seneca's life, but she concludes: "The literary portrait of himself as a moral teacher that Seneca has left in his essays and letters is rightly judged a more precious legacy than the historical *imago vitae suae*" (1974:34). Concerning Seneca's life, one should take into account what his contemporaries had to say about him. In this regard, see Dyson (1970) "The portrait of Seneca in Tacitus".

<sup>18</sup> The persona Lucilius (the fictional addressee of the letters) must be differentiated from the historical/biographical Lucilius (to whom the *Epistulae Morales* is dedicated). According to Russell, the letters supply a fair amount of biographical detail (1974:75). But rather than see the information supplied in the *Epistulae Morales* as biographical details of the real Lucilius, one should read them as Seneca's construction of the fictional persona Lucilius. Russell says that it is important not to exaggerate the plot: "It is, I hope, evident that the plot, such as it is, need not be real; in other words, it need not reflect actual progress or setbacks in [Lucilius'] character" (1974:75-76). Motto 1970:24-26 summarizes what we learn of the persona Lucilius from the *Epistulae Morales*.

## The complexity of the roles Seneca and Lucilius play in the *Epistulae Morales*

On the success of the characters Seneca and Lucilius in the *Epistulae Morales*, Edwards points out that Foucault's [1986:53] remark, namely "[Seneca's] correspondence with Lucilius deepens a preexisting relationship between the two men and tends little by little to transform this spiritual guidance into a shared experience from which each derives a benefit for himself", perhaps implies a certain continuity of characterization in the *Epistulae Morales* (1997:32). However, she continues, "other commentators have felt less at ease with the constructions of 'Seneca' and 'Lucilius' which emerge over the course of the 124 extant letters. Griffin [1976:5], for instance, comments: 'We must admit that Seneca's picture of his personality in the Letters lacks plausibility and consistency.' The Letters may at first appear to offer us the script of a philosophical relationship between two members of the Roman elite, yet when we look more closely at the roles each character plays we may find the situation altogether less straightforward" (1997:32-33).

Edwards comments on the multiplicity of authorial voices in the *Epistulae Morales*: "At times Seneca plays the role of Stoic sage, at times that of a lowly aspirant to philosophical improvement. Sometimes he mimics the voice of the traditional Roman moralist castigating the material luxuries of his fellows, sometimes that of the retired senator concerned with his estates, sometimes that of the elderly invalid. This strategy of many voices may, of course, be seen as a means for avoiding monotony, sustaining the reader's attention - a means to make philosophical instruction palatable. Yet it may also have a more serious philosophical purpose. Which is the real voice of Seneca? Is there a real voice?" (1997:34).

What role does Lucilius play in the *Epistulae Morales*? Why did Seneca choose Lucilius as the recipient of his letters? According to Costa "a shared interest in Stoic ethics would be sufficient grounds for what can be regarded as a mutual exploration steered by Seneca as the more experienced philosopher... Seneca and Lucilius had other interests in common: Lucilius was a cultivated man of literary pretensions, and Seneca mentions his poetic activities in several of the letters [*Epp.* 7.9, 24.19 and 79.5]" (1988:5). Wilson describes Lucilius' role: "he supplies a focus for the author's teaching and incitement" (1987:104). Russell points out that "career and literary interests alike make him seem a reflection of Seneca himself; and this, we may well think, is the key fact that brings the correspondence

to life... Seneca writes to an *alter ego*. In any case, the role that Lucilius has to play in the Letters is distinct from what he played as addressee of the *Naturales Quaestiones* and *De Providentia*. He clearly is in some sense a character in the plot. His 'progress' under Seneca's guidance, his efforts to obey the peremptory *vindica te tibi* with which the first letter begins, are a central theme throughout" (1974:75). "Lucilius never rises superior to fortune; if he ever did, the correspondence would cease" (1974:76).

The roles of Seneca and Lucilius in the *Epistulae Morales* is thus a complex issue. I hope to shed more light on the roles which they play in the *Epistulae Morales* by looking at the matter of moral progress in the *Epistulae Morales*.

### **Moral progress in terms of the personae**

Motto has the following to say about Seneca's view of moral progress: "Seneca is wholly committed to the belief in the possibility of moral progress in men" (1984:236).<sup>19</sup> She continues: "[Y]et he always recognized that progress was merely a potential, that man had, by an effort and will, to discipline himself to intellect and advancement... In fact, Seneca's entire philosophy is based on the idea of man's arduous journey toward wisdom. He envisions all of mankind as being *proficientes*, persons traveling along the path of moral progress" (1984:238-239).<sup>20</sup>

Motto points out that Seneca distinguishes three classes of *proficientes* and she draws a parallel between moral progress and these three classes of *proficientes*: "First, there are those who have eliminated some vices but not all - avarice, for example, but not anger.

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<sup>19</sup> On the idea of progress in Senecan thought, Motto has the following to say: "Seneca is appropriately an enormously potent exemplar of the classical world's advocacy of progress" (1984:228). Motto argues that it is wrong to exclude Seneca from the class of progressivists, as many critics do, because of his inclusion of cyclic theories, of universal demolition, and of the myth of the Golden Age in his philosophic writings (1984:231-236).

<sup>20</sup> Motto points out: "It is no accident that Seneca's prose is filled with the metaphor viewing man's life as a journey (*Epp.* 44.7; 77.4, 13; 99.7; 102.24; 107.2); he conceives of man's road as one requiring motion, alteration, accomplishment" (1973:52).

Second, there are those who have overcome the worst passions but are not yet secure against relapse. Third, there are those who have eradicated vices and passions but who, failing to test themselves, lack the confidence of the ideal Stoic sapiens [*Ep.* 75.8-14]. Men, therefore, proceed by degrees on the path of progress” (1985:10-11).<sup>21</sup>

Whereas Motto associates moral progress with three classes of *proficientes*, I rather associate moral progress with the three personae of the *Epistulae Morales*. The Ideal Persona, the persona Seneca and the persona Lucilius can be rated according to their moral progress. The Ideal Persona is the ideal, which the personae Seneca and Lucilius must strive towards becoming. The persona Seneca acts in the role of the mentor, advising the persona Lucilius on how to achieve this ideal, but he is himself still struggling towards it.<sup>22</sup> The persona Lucilius is just beginning to walk the road of moral progress at the beginning of the *Epistulae Morales*.

The moral progress or development of the personae Seneca and Lucilius during the course of the *Epistulae Morales* is not strictly connected to the chronological order of the letters. One can see them making progress, as one reads the letters in their chronological order, but their progress does not follow a strictly chronological pattern. Sometimes they fall back into previous vices. Their progress is a journey with all its ups and downs. The moral progress of Seneca and Lucilius can be determined by comparing their moral actions with those of the Ideal Persona and against their moral actions in previous letters. Their progress

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<sup>21</sup> Motto applies Seneca’s theory of the three classes of *proficientes* to the arrangement of the *Epistulae Morales*: “Specifically, the early letters are concerned with increasing one’s devotion to studies, and eliminating many a passion and vice (*Ep.* 1-50); the middle period displays one as master of his passions, but subject - as Seneca was - to relapse (*Ep.* 51-90); the last phase urges putting wisdom into practice, testing it, assaying it (*Ep.* 91-123), and the last letter (*Ep.* 124) is concerned with the very doorstep of wisdom, discussing as it does the good as it is to be fully attained by reason” (1973:54-55).

<sup>22</sup> “Seneca is indeed shown conducting the young Lucilius toward studies, and making his own progress throughout toward mastering successive stages of the *proficiens*” (Motto 1973:54). “Nor is Seneca merely the lofty wise man, directing others; it is crucial that we recognize that he, too, is making the very journey toward wisdom that he solicits in others: ‘In training another’s virtue, one must necessarily train his own’ (*Ep.* 109.12). Seneca, like the rest of mankind, is nothing like the final guide; he is only the traveler beside us” (1973:55).

demonstrates the implementation of Seneca's practical moral philosophy. In other words, the moral progress of Seneca and Lucilius demonstrates the practicability of Seneca's moral philosophy.

### **Moral progress in terms of the development of a practical moral identity**

In this procession by degrees on the path of moral progress, which is enacted by the three main<sup>23</sup> personae, we see the development of a practical moral identity, which is - as I have pointed out - Seneca's goal with the *Epistulae Morales*. In other words, the phases or levels of moral progress, which are enacted by the three personae, are also the phases of the development of a practical moral identity. The practical moral identity should thus be viewed both as a goal and as a process in the letters.

**To sum up:** The goal of Seneca's moral philosophy is the development of a practical moral identity. Seneca uses the epistolary form to achieve this goal. The epistolary form enables him to create certain personae. These personae demonstrate the phases of moral progress. It is in these phases of moral progress that we see the development of a practical moral identity.

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<sup>23</sup> There are other personae also. The question is, for this study specifically, do they also play a role in the development of the practical moral identity? There is the Wise Man, whom I have already mentioned. He helps to define the Ideal Persona and now and then he serves as a reminder of the practicality of Seneca's philosophy, since, on these few occasions when he is specifically mentioned in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 (namely *Epistulae* 9, 14, 17 and 28), the *sapiens* often represents the Stoic's "stricter" attitude. There are also "nameless" personae. Motto and Clark talk of "a generalized *adversarius*" (e.g. *Epistula* 24) and "the *adversarius*, unidentified, is nonetheless more clearly identifiable as the *vox populi*, as the crowd's commonplace, stubbornly orthodox, and conservative opinion" (e.g. *Epistula* 47) (1975:3). Campbell talks of "imaginary queries or objections (often scathing in tone) from the correspondent or another interjecter" (1969:21). These nameless personae are part of Seneca's didactic method. It is not always clear whom Seneca is addressing, but such specifics do not really matter. The point is that anyone (including himself) can learn from what Seneca has to say. The reader himself also becomes a persona by identifying with one of the other personae of the *Epistulae Morales*. The other personae of the *Epistulae Morales* thus play an indirect role in the development of the practical moral identity. But, for the purposes of identifying and discussing the development of the practical moral identity, the Ideal Persona, the persona Seneca and the persona Lucilius are of more importance.

## Epistulae 1-29

This study focuses on *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 as the first phase of Seneca's moral philosophy. Russell discusses the arrangement of the letters in the *Epistulae Morales*. He remarks: "The book-divisions are significant. They are at least as old as Aulus Gellius, and may well be Seneca's own. The first three books (Letters 1-29) certainly form a separate whole" (1974:78).<sup>24</sup> He points out that these first three books form a separate whole, since they all end in one or more maxims (1974:78).<sup>25</sup> He says "It is tempting to think that Seneca meant this [*Epistula* 29] as an end of a phase" (1974:78). Mans implies that *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 indeed form the first phase of Seneca's practical moral education. He argues that in *Epistula* 33 Seneca defends the inclusion of the maxims with pedagogic insight and explains that the *singula circumscripta* (maxims) gain easier acceptance. The maxims are therefore of much value for the *rudis* (the undisciplined), which Lucilius apparently no longer is, and which is possibly the reason for the abandonment of the maxims from *Epistula* 30 onwards (1977:20).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Costa remarks that "the division into books in any case goes back to Aulus Gellius in the second century A.D., who knew of at least twenty-two books: we must therefore presume that some more letters have not survived" (1988:7). Ball says that "the one hundred and twenty-four existing epistles were grouped in twenty books" (1916:186). Ball also remarks: "It is believed that the first three books (*Ep.* 1-29) were published by Seneca himself, perhaps with a view to their effect upon Nero, and that the other books appeared not long after their author's death" (1916:186-187). Apart from Books I-III, we do not know in what groups the letters were published (Russell 1974:79). It is clear that there are groups of related letters in the rest of the corpus, but any reconstruction of the process of composition is bound to be hypothetical (1974:78). Motto and Clark group *Epistulae* 40-48 and *Epistulae* 49-57: "[W]e should like to propose that Letters XLIX-LVII are coherent and meaningful, not geographically or chronologically, but thematically. Unlike the immediately preceding letters, XL-XLVIII, which are directed outward to Lucilius... the letters that follow are abruptly, personally, concerned with Seneca himself. In sharp contrast to those earlier epistles [XL-XLVIII] which gave general advice... we are suddenly confronted with the concrete instance of Seneca himself" (1971:217).

<sup>25</sup> See Mans (1977) on the connection between the maxims and the letters in which they appear. Mans specifically discusses this connection in *Epistulae* 3, 5, 15 and 23.

<sup>26</sup> According to Russell "the development from simple *praecepta* or 'useful thought' in the earlier letters to the lengthy and complex doctrinal discussions of the central and later part of the collection may plausibly be

Another reason for choosing *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 is that the later letters are mostly repetitions of, and developments on, particular themes or topics in the earlier letters of the *Epistulae Morales*. A third reason for focusing on *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 is that “Lucilius tends to fade from view in some of the later long letters, as though having given the letters their initial impetus his presence as a notional recipient becomes less necessary afterwards” (Costa 1988:2).<sup>27</sup> Letters 1-29 supply sufficient evidence of Seneca’s literary technique of personae and the development of a practical moral identity, which is the result of this literary technique.

## Methodology

I begin this study with a close reading of *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 (Chapter 2). This chapter analyses the literary technique which Seneca uses to develop a practical moral identity in the *Epistulae Morales*. Each letter is read for its contribution towards the picture of the moral development of the Ideal Persona, the persona Seneca and the persona Lucilius respectively. The discussion of each letter thus falls into the three categories “Ideal Persona”, “Seneca” and “Lucilius”. The category “Seneca” primarily consists of a discussion of the persona Seneca in each respective letter, but sometimes references are made to the real Seneca, the author of the *Epistulae Morales*. A fourth category in the reading of each letter is a short summary of the moral actions of the Ideal Persona, Seneca and Lucilius in that particular letter. The moral actions of Seneca and Lucilius are compared to the ideal moral actions of the Ideal Persona.

Chapter 3 involves a systematic exposition of the practical moral identity in terms of certain themes. The themes represent the main aspects of moral development, i.e. the main aspects of the development of a practical moral identity in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29.

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thought to reflect not only Seneca’s reading and a tendency to handle the genre with growing freedom, but also Lucilius’s progress in Stoic learning” (1974:76).

<sup>27</sup> Costa refers to Russell (1974:78-79) for a discussion along these lines (1988:7 n.4).

I identified eleven themes in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29:

Theme 1: One's attitude towards, and handling of, time

Theme 2: One's fight against Fortune

Theme 3: One's attitude towards, and handling of, one's body

Theme 4: One's fight against the fear of death

Theme 5: One's fight against the fear of poverty

Theme 6: One's position in society

Theme 7: One's understanding and practice of friendship

Theme 8: One's reformation of oneself and others

Theme 9: One's practice of philosophy

Theme 10: One's goal of achieving virtue

Theme 11: One's goal of achieving constancy

I also grouped these themes:

Theme 1 as "Group 1: Time"

Themes 2-5 as "Group 2: Weaknesses"

Themes 6-9 as "Group 3: Duties"

Themes 10 and 11 as "Group 4: Goals"

## Chapter 2: A close reading of *Epistulae Morales*

### 1-29

#### *Epistula 1*

##### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona handles his time correctly, because he has the correct attitude towards time. The Ideal Persona claims himself for himself: *vindica te tibi* (1).<sup>1</sup> According to Hijmans, “the legal ‘claim yourself for yourself’ is the first connotation of *vindicare* rather than an aspect of liberation” (1976:135). Hijmans does not agree with Gummere’s translation “set yourself free” (135). Further on Hijmans says: “This ‘legal’ interpretation of *vindicare* is strengthened by the fact that almost the entire letter is written in the vocabulary of property... The picture is that of the creditor claiming what is his own” (135-136).

The words *vindica te tibi* literally and practically mean that he gathers<sup>2</sup> and saves his time: *et tempus...collige et serva* (1). Hijmans remarks: “Indeed the advice ‘*tempus...collige et serva*’ is the content of *vindica te tibi*” (1976:135). The word *servare* means to watch or observe; also to keep, protect, preserve or save. On the one hand we thus have here a term of accounting. Hijmans remarks: “[T]his letter starts and finishes with words that denote

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the close reading of *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 (including the footnotes) the text references include the numbers of the paragraph(s). The letter number is unnecessary in these text references, since the letters are discussed individually.

I use the Latin text of the Oxford Classical Texts, edited by L.D. Reynolds (1965).

<sup>2</sup> The word *colligere* (*conligere*) means to gather or bring together, to collect; thus transfiguratively, to gain or acquire. The English expression “make time” would thus be an appropriate interpretation of this Latin word in this context.

saving, preserving and managing” (1976:136).<sup>3</sup> On the other hand a type of onslaught is implied. Hijmans says: “The relevant type of onslaught - if any - is suggested by the three words *auferebatur*, *subripiabatur*, *excidebat*. Seneca himself dismisses the first two in the sentence ‘*turpissima tamen est iactura quae per negligentiam fit*’ thereby introducing his more special theme. That should not close our eyes, however, to the fact that *auferr* and *subripi* are strengthened in the next lines by *eripiuntur* and *subducuntur*, words that respectively suggest more or less violent robbery and stealthy theft” (1976:135). Our time is stolen not only by people, but also by things, i.e. when we spend our time pursuing the wrong things.

The reason for gathering and saving one’s time is so that one does not lose time, implied by the three reasons Seneca gives for the loss of time: *tempus quod...aut auferebatur aut subripiabatur aut excidebat* (1). The idea is repeated: *quaedam tempora eripiuntur nobis, quaedam subducuntur, quaedam effluunt* (1). It is important to draw attention to these reasons for losing time, because in order to be fully aware of time, one has to know what is happening to it, i.e. how one is losing it. Seneca concludes with the worst reason for losing time: *turpissima tamen est iactura quae per negligentiam fit* (1). In order to have time to himself, the Ideal Persona must therefore not be careless with his time; rather, he must constantly be aware of time. The following sentence in paragraph 1 graphically demonstrates the embrace or capture of time, where the main sentence embraces the subordinate clause: *tempus [quod adhuc...excidebat] collige et serva*.

Seneca continues with the ways in which we misuse our time, building up (*magna...maxima...tota*, 1) towards the third way, which is the worst: *tota vita aliud agentibus* (1). From this one can infer that the Ideal Persona is someone who uses his time to do what is to the purpose.

In paragraph 2 Seneca gives, in a rhetorical question, the Ideal Persona’s attitude towards time, i.e. he places value on his time, he reckons the worth of each day and he understands that he is dying daily (*quem mihi dabis qui aliquod pretium tempori ponat, qui diem aestimet, qui intellegat se cotidie mori?*). This view of the Ideal Persona is connected to his

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<sup>3</sup> Also see Allen (1966) *The vocabulary of accounting in Seneca*.

understanding of the connection between time and death, i.e. that death actually lies behind us (*in hoc enim fallimur, quod mortem prospicimus: magna pars eius iam praeterit; quidquid aetatis retro est mors tenet*, 2). This mindset of the Ideal Persona forces him to live for now and not to count on the future; therefore he does not postpone (*omnes horas complectere; sic fiet ut minus ex crastino pendeas, si hodierno manum inieceris. dum differtur vita transcurrit*, 2).

The Ideal Persona realises the preciousness of time as his only possession. He lives according to nature by valuing and using correctly the gift of time<sup>4</sup>: *omnia, Lucili, aliena sunt, tempus tantum nostrum est; in huius rei unius fugacis ac lubricae possessionem natura nos misit* (3). The Ideal Persona is aware of how easily time can be stolen (*ex qua expellit quicumque vult*, 3); therefore, he carefully looks after his time. He realises that time is the only thing we can really claim, not the cheap and useless things we often value, since time can never be replaced, but possessions can (*et tanta stultitia mortalium est ut quae minima et vilissima sunt, certe reparabilia, inputari sibi cum inpetravere patiantur, nemo se iudicet quicquam debere qui tempus accepit, cum interim hoc unum est quod ne gratus quidem potest reddere*, 3). This is how the concept of time fits into his mindset. It is his most important asset or possession. It may also be why time is the subject of Seneca's first letter.

Seneca's conclusion (*quid ergo est?* 5) of *Epistula* 1 is that one is not poor if one has enough: *non puto pauperem cui quantulumcumque superest sat est* (5). Applied to the subject of time, one can infer that the Ideal Persona is someone who has enough time. For the Ideal Persona to achieve this, he saves what is really his, namely time, and he does not postpone doing so (*tu tamen malo serves tua, et bono tempore incipies*, 5).

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<sup>4</sup> Time is our single possession (*tempus tantum nostrum est*, 3), given to us by Nature (*in huius rei unius fugacis ac lubricae possessionem natura nos misit*, 3). Or perhaps time should rather be viewed as a loan from Nature, a thought suggested by the phrase *nemo se iudicet quicquam debere qui tempus accepit* (3). But since this phrase continues with the words *cum interim hoc unum est quod ne gratus quidem potest reddere* (3), which state that the loan of time can never be repayed, perhaps time should not be viewed as a loan from Nature. Perhaps it is rather a gift.

Seneca concludes, including a maxim: *nam ut visum est maioribus nostris, 'sera parsimonia in fundo est'*; *non enim tantum minimum in imo sed pessimum remanet* (5). He exhorts Lucilius and his reader to start saving their time now, for one day it may be too late. There is no time like the present, as the Ideal Persona realises and acts upon this realisation.

Seneca introduces an important principal of the Stoic philosophy when he says *interrogabis fortasse quid ego faciam qui tibi ista praecipio* (4). The Ideal Persona is someone who practises what he preaches.

## Lucilius

From the phrase *fac ergo, mi Lucili, quod facere te scribis, omnes horas complectere* (2), which picks up the sentence *ita fac, mi Lucili: vindica te tibi, et tempus...collige et serva* (1), it can be inferred that Lucilius has already begun the process of reformation, since he has already begun to use his time the right way. The correct attitude towards and handling of time is one of the main aspects of moral development or reformation (see Chapter 3, Theme 1). The word *adhuc* in paragraph 1 indirectly implies that Seneca believes in Lucilius' ability to make moral progress. It is therefore also a word of encouragement.

But up until now (*adhuc*, 1) Lucilius has been losing time in the following ways: *aut auferebatur aut subripiabatur aut excidebat* (1). This is because he is not aware of the situation: *persuade tibi hoc sic esse ut scribo: quaedam tempora eripiuntur nobis, quaedam subducuntur, quaedam effluunt* (1). In paragraph 1 Seneca emphasizes (*turpissima*) the worst reason for the loss of time, namely carelessness (*turpissima tamen est iactura quae per negligentiam fit*). This fact has already been stated twice: *excidebat* (1) and *quaedam effluunt* (1). For this reason it is so important that Lucilius must be very well aware of his situation concerning time.

The word *volueris* in paragraph 1 confirms Lucilius' independence. He can choose to listen to Seneca's advice and he can choose to follow it. Mans mentions the importance of the "will" in Seneca's philosophy. A very important requirement for making progress is the will to make progress, and to become morally good one needs will-power (1978:207-208). Long mentions the importance of "assent", which is connected to the issue of man's will: "The Stoic's intuition that assent is an essential faculty of the human soul draws attention to

their interest in the self, the first-person perspective, what each individual does with his experience. Any representation is a part of my experience, but I make it *mine* - my outlook, or belief, or commitment - or *not mine*, by giving or withholding assent” (1991:110).<sup>5</sup>

## Seneca

Seneca introduces the Stoic principle of practising what you preach in paragraph 4: *interrogabis fortasse quid ego faciam qui tibi ista praecipio*. He tells Lucilius how he himself is coping with that which he is teaching Lucilius in this letter. He confesses that he does not yet practise what he preaches: *non possum dicere nihil perdere, sed quid perdam et quare et quemadmodum dicam; causas paupertatis meae reddam* (4). Throughout the *Epistulae Morales* Seneca is also still striving to do what he advises Lucilius to do. In other words Seneca does a lot of preaching, which he is not practising! This principle of practising what you preach plays an important role in Seneca’s philosophy (see Chapter 3, Theme 11). The sentence above (*non possum... reddam*, 4) also points to the difference between Seneca and Lucilius: whereas the goal of the letter is to make Lucilius aware of his situation concerning time, Seneca at least knows his situation. His situation is not all that bad: *ratio mihi constat inpensae* (4).

The sentence *sed evenit mihi quod plerisque non suo vitio ad inopiam redactis: omnes ignoscunt, nemo succurrit* (4) carries the implication that Seneca is not completely to blame for his situation of not having complete control of his time. Hijmans has the following to say: “[Seneca admits] that he is still losing time (par. 4: *non possum dicere nihil perdere*) but he advances a number of reasons (or excuses?) that may be adduced to absolve him

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<sup>5</sup> See Frankfurt (1971) “Freedom of the will and the concept of a person”. This paper casts light on Seneca’s view of the freedom of the will. Frankfurt explains: “[S]uppose that someone...has in fact lost or been deprived of his freedom of action. Even though he is no longer free to do what he wants to do, his will may remain as free as it was before. Despite the fact that he is not free to translate his desires into actions or to act according to the determinations of his will, he may still form those desires and make those determinations as freely as if his freedom of action had not been impaired” (1971:15). We are reminded of Seneca’s words ‘*servus est.*’ *sed fortasse liber animo* (“‘He is a slave.’ His soul, however, may be that of a freeman”, *Ep.* 47.17).

from blame: 1. he can account for the losses (*causas paupertatis meae reddam*), 2. the losses are not his fault, 3. since what little is left is enough, the appellation poverty does not apply and, finally 4. (applicable to his old age, not Lucilius' younger years) it is too late to do anything about it in any case. Number two is particularly interesting, since it contains the words *non suo vitio* which, as it were an aside *sotto voce* and hidden in a clause of unusual length, pick up the notions that had been announced in *auferebatur/ subripiiebatur* and were repeated a line or so later only to be brusquely dismissed in favour of the theme of *neglegentia*. *Neglegentia* is *turpissima*, whereas on the other hand Seneca's own situation is one that everybody regards as forgivable (*omnes ignoscunt*)" (1976:136-137). In *Epistula* 19, paragraphs 3 and 6, Seneca also absolves Lucilius from full blame for losing or wasting his time.

The words *non enim tantum minimum in imo sed pessimum remanet* (5) are a reference to old age, and specifically Seneca's old age. Hijmans remarks: "If *vindica te tibi* in the sense suggested is said to Lucilius, a good case can be made for interpreting the proverbial '*sera parsimonia in fundo est*' as referring to Seneca himself" (1976:136). The words *non enim tantum minimum in imo sed pessimum remanet* make Seneca sound like a grumpy old man. It appears that Seneca does not practise what he preaches, since in *Ep.* 12.4-5 he says that one should love and cherish old age, because it is the best time of one's life, and especially right at the end. Even if Seneca is not here referring to his own old age, this is still a contradiction.

## Summary

The goal of the letter is to make Lucilius (and the general reader) aware of man's situation concerning time. One has to know one's faults before one can correct them. Seneca points this out in *Ep.* 6.1: *et hoc ipsum argumentum est in melius translati animi, quod vitia sua quae adhuc ignorabat videt*. Seneca himself says that he can clearly see the problem of his particular situation, which puts him a step ahead of Lucilius. Both must strive towards being the Ideal Persona, who is not only aware of his situation concerning time, but actively acts upon it. The Ideal Persona uses time the right way.

## ***Epistula 2***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona has a well-ordered and focused mind,<sup>6</sup> of which the primary and practical indication is that he is able to remain in one place and linger in his own company (*primum argumentum compositae mentis existimo posse consistere et secum morari*, 1).

Seneca goes a practical step further to apply this idea to something one does in one's own company, namely reading.

The Ideal Persona lingers among a limited number of master-thinkers, taking time to digest their work, with the result that ideas become a part of his mindset (*certis ingeniis inmorari et innutiri oportet, si velis aliquid trahere quod in animo fideliter sedeat*, 2). The Ideal Persona therefore does what is proper (what is to the purpose) properly, the emphasis of this letter being on "properly". Everywhere means nowhere: *nusquam est qui ubique est* (2). In paragraph 6 we learn what the contents of, and the limit to, the "proper" is. It is firstly having the necessary and secondly having enough (*quis sit divitiarum modus quaeris? primus habere quod necesse est, proximus quod sat est*, 6). The Ideal Persona does a thing properly and wholeheartedly, but he measures himself and what he does

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<sup>6</sup> Where in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 does Seneca speak of a well-ordered and focused mind? In *Ep.* 2.1 Seneca speaks of a *compositae mentis* (a well-ordered mind), of which the opposite is *aegri animi* (a disordered spirit), also indicated by the adjectives *vagum et instabile* (discursive and unsteady) in paragraph 2 of the same letter. Connected to the idea of a well-ordered and focused mind, are the phrases *quod in animo fideliter sedeat* (ideas must win firm hold in one's mind) in paragraph 2 and *quod illo die concoquas* (thoughts must be thoroughly digested) in paragraph 4 of the same letter. In *Ep.* 4.1 Seneca speaks of *emendato animo et composito* and *etiam dum emendas, etiam dum conponis* (an improved mind, one that is at peace with itself) and also *mentis ab omni labe purae et splendidae* (a mind so cleansed from every stain that it shines). There are also the phrases *bonam mentem* (a sound mind) in *Epp.* 17.1 and 23.1, *onus animi deponendum est* (burden of the mind which must be put aside) in *Ep.* 28.2 and *bonae quoque menti necdum adhuc perfectae et convalescenti sunt aliqua parum salubria* (there are some places which are unwholesome for a healthy mind which is not yet quite sound, though recovering from its ailment) in *Ep.* 28.6; all connected to the idea of a well-ordered and focused mind.

according to this limit. The maxim of *Epistula* 2 states that there is a proper limit to wealth, namely contentment (*'honesta' inquit 'res est laeta paupertas'*, 6). The maxim's connection with the rest of the letter is that just as there is a proper limit to wealth, there is also a proper limit to reading; in fact, there is a proper limit to everything. Seneca here says that the importance of maxims is that they fortify us against the hardships of life: *aliquid cotidie adversus paupertatem, aliquid adversus mortem auxilii compara, nec minus adversus ceteras pestes* (4).<sup>7</sup>

Seneca indirectly gives the goal of reading in comparisons illustrating discursiveness in reading, namely nourishment, healing and growing or progress (*non prodest... librorum multitudo*, 3). Seneca continues to give practical advice on how much to read: *itaque cum legere non possis quantum habueris, satis est habere quantum legas* (3); what to do when one craves a change in one's reading: *probatos itaque semper lege, et si quando ad alios deverti libuerit, ad priores redi* (4) and how to handle the knowledge one gains from reading: *aliquid cotidie adversus paupertatem, aliquid adversus mortem auxilii compara, nec minus adversus ceteras pestes; et cum multa percurrens, unum excerpe quod illo die concoquas* (4) All this practical advice on reading is practised by the Ideal Persona, indications of his *composita mens*.

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<sup>7</sup> Seneca also says that maxims are wholesome and potent to overcome obstacles (*praeceptis salutaribus et dura vincentibus*, 13.1). Seneca describes maxims in various ways: *...quod dictum alicuius animosum, quod praeceptum utile* (24.22), *aliquid...dependendum* (8.7), *sollemni...munusculo* (22.13), *peculio* (12.10), *...illi signum suum inpressero* (13.16), *una mercedula...ad haec beneficia* and *insigne praeceptum* (15.9), *conficienda sunt sacra et huic epistulae viaticum dandum est* (26.8) and *portorium solvero* (28.9). Seneca often speaks of his maxims as debts to be paid (18.14, 21.7, 23.9, 27.9 and 29.10). Seneca gives Lucilius maxims as a daily gift (*nunc ad cotidianam stipem manum porrigis*, 14.17). But maxims can also become a bad habit (as in Lucilius' case): *iam ab initio...circumspicies quid haec epistula munusculi adtulerit* (16.7), *nisi te male instituissem* (17.11; here Seneca admits that it is his fault), and *sed movebis mihi controversiam, si novi te, nec voles quod debeo nisi in aspero et probo accipere* (19.10). Seneca admits that he is dependent on Epicurus for maxims: *non est quod mireris animum meum: adhuc de alieno liberalis sum* (16.7) and *puta me non dicere unde sumpturus sim mutuum: scis cuius arca utar. expecta me pusillum, et de domo fiet numeratio* (26.8). In fact, Seneca quotes Epicurus 24 times in the first 29 letters: *Epistulae* 2, 4, 7-9 and 11-29. Epicurus' sayings - Seneca says - should be considered the common property of all men: *Epistulae* 8.8, 12.2, 14.17, 16.7, and 21.9 (Motto 1970:151).

## Lucilius

Seneca compliments Lucilius on his progress, which - he says - is apparent in Lucilius' correspondence with him and in what he hears others say about Lucilius (*ex iis...de te concipio*, 1). Lucilius has made the progress of being able to remain in one place, which means that his spirit is not disordered (*non discurrens nec locorum mutationibus inquietaris. aegri animi ista iactatio est*, 1). In this regard one should look at what Seneca says in *Ep.* 28.3 (*vadis huc illuc, ut excutias insidens pondus quod ipsa iactatione incommodius fit*) and *Ep.* 28.5 (*nunc non peregrinaris sed erras et ageris ac locum ex loco mutas, cum illud quod quaeris, bene vivere, omni loco positum sit*). *Ep.* 28.3, 5 thus contradicts *Ep.* 2.1. The fact that Lucilius is able to remain in one place does not, however, mean that his mind is well-ordered, of which the primary indication is not only a man's ability to remain in one place, but also to be able to linger in his own company (*primum argumentum...secum morari*, 1).

Seneca applies the idea of lingering in one's own company to reading and this is where Lucilius is going wrong: he reads too many different authors and books (*illud autem vide...vagum et instabile*, 2). Lucilius' motivation for doing so is a typical problem among people: '*sed modo*' inquit '*hunc librum evolvere volo, modo illum*' (4).

## Seneca

Of note is that Seneca again (as in *Epistula* 1) draws our attention to the Stoic principle of practising what you preach: *hoc ipse quoque facio* (5). Seneca practises his own advice (his advice of selecting one thought, out of the many thoughts he comes across in his studies every day, to be thoroughly digested: *aliquid cotidie... hoc ipse quoque facio; ex pluribus quae legi aliquid adprehendo*, 4-5) by supplying a maxim: '*honestas*' inquit '*res est laeta paupertas*' (5). The other maxims of *Epistulae* 1-29 also prove that Seneca practises this advice of his. In *Epistula* 1 Seneca does not practise what he preaches, but in *Epistula* 2 he does. Thus, Seneca appears to have made progress.

Seneca's eclecticism in philosophy is apparent in the words *hodiernum hoc est quod apud Epicurum nactus sum (soleo enim et in aliena castra transire, non tamquam transfuga, sed tamquam explorator)* (5).

## Summary

The Ideal Persona is not only able to remain in one place, but can also linger in his own company. Lucilius has progressed so far as to be able to do the former, but not the latter. His mind is therefore not disordered, but not yet ordered either.

The Ideal Persona lingers among a limited number of master-thinkers, taking time to digest their work, with the result that the ideas become a part of his mindset. Lucilius makes the mistake of reading too many different authors and books, with the result that he is discursive and unsteady.

Out of the many thoughts he comes across in his studies every day, the Ideal Persona selects one to be thoroughly digested that day. Seneca practically demonstrates this with the maxims of *Epistulae Morales* 1-29.

## **Epistula 3**

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona forms friendships by taking time first to judge a man, and when he has decided to make him his friend, he trusts him completely (*diu cogita an tibi in amicitiam aliquis recipiendus sit. cum placuerit fieri, toto illum pectore admitte*, 2). The Ideal Persona understands that trust is an integral part of friendship: *sed si aliquem amicum existimas cui non tantundem credis quantum tibi, vehementer erras et non satis nosti vim verae amicitiae. tu vero omnia cum amico delibera* (2). Seneca elaborates on the subject of trust: definitions of trust (*tam audaciter cum illo loquere quam tecum*, 2 and more specifically *sed quia interveniunt quaedam quae consuetudo fecit arcana, cum amico omnes curas, omnes cogitationes tuas misce*, 3); the importance of trust (*fidelem si putaveris, facies; nam quidam fallere docuerunt dum timent falli, et illi ius peccandi suspicando fecerunt*, 3); another definition of trust (*quid est quare ego ulla verba coram amico meo retraham? quid est quare me coram illo non putem solum?* 3); and the misuse of trust (*utrumque enim vitium est, et omnibus credere et nulli*, 4). The Ideal Persona clearly understands the meaning of trust. He therefore understands the meaning of friendship.

The Ideal Persona applies balance to his life. Two examples (on trust and work) illustrate this:

1. He trusts only his friends: *quid est quare ego ulla verba coram amico meo retraham? quid est quare me coram illo non putem solum?* (3). The two classes of men in paragraph 4, namely those who trust everyone and those who trust no-one, do not understand that one should trust only one's friends, and that one should trust them completely, as the definition of friendship commands.

2. He works and rests: *inter se ista miscenda sunt: et quiescenti agendum et agenti quiescendum est* (6).

In extremes lies unbalance, whether it is trusting too much or too little, or working too hard or too little. Extremes cause one's normal, balanced outlook on life to become clouded: *quidam adeo in latebras refugerunt ut putent in turbido esse quidquid in luce est* (6) (Mans 1977:15). A balanced life is a life in accordance with nature: *cum rerum natura delibera: illa dicet tibi et diem fecisse se et noctem* (6).

## Lucilius

Seneca questions Lucilius' understanding of the word "friendship" (*epistulas ad me ... verae amicitiae*, 1-2). The goal of this letter is to clear up his misunderstanding, i.e. to explain to him what true (and Stoic: see *proprio* in paragraph 1) friendship is.

## Summary

Friendship plays a very important role in Seneca's practical philosophy. For one, we need friends with whom to share our worries and reflections (*cum amico omnes curas, omnes cogitationes tuas misce*, 3). Since friendship plays such an important role, it is very important that Lucilius (and we) know what true friendship is. In this letter we learn that true friendship goes hand in hand with trust.

## Epistula 4

### Ideal Persona

The Ideal Persona strives towards the goal of *emendato animo et composito* (1). The ultimate pleasure comes from contemplation when one's mind is so cleansed from every stain that it shines (*alia tamen illa voluptas est quae percipitur ex contemplatione mentis ab omni labe purae et splendidae*, 1). Fear of trifles (a young man's kind of fear) and shadows (a child's kind of fear) stands in our way of achieving this goal: *illi levia, hi falsa formidant, nos utraque* (2). One of these trifling fears is the fear of death (the subject of death is introduced in paragraph 3).

This is how the Ideal Persona combats the fear of death:

- He meditates on death every day: *nulli potest segura vita contingere qui de producenda nimis cogitat, qui inter magna bona multos consules numerat. hoc cotidie meditare, ut possis aequo animo vitam relinquere* (4-5). Seneca repeats the exhortation to meditation on death in paragraph 9: *haec et eiusmodi versanda in animo sunt si volumus ultimam illam horam placidi expectare cuius metus omnes alias inquietas facit*. What are his thoughts concerning death? He thinks about the fact that death must not be feared, because it does not remain with us: *mors ad te venit: timenda erat si tecum esse posset: necesse est aut non perveniat aut transeat* (3).<sup>8</sup> He thinks about the fact that virtue is as efficacious as excessive fear when it comes to scorning life. In other words, one should scorn life out of virtue, rather than for trifling reasons, which are coated in excessive fear: *'difficile est' inquis 'animum perducere ad contemptationem animae' ... non putas virtutem hoc effecturam quod efficit nimia formido?* (4). He also thinks about the fact that we have been dying since the day we were born: *ita dico: ex quo natus es, duceris* (9). The Ideal Persona ponders these thoughts every day to help prepare himself for death, so that he does not have to fear it.

- He does not worry about dying: *fac itaque tibi iucundam vitam omnem pro illa sollicitudinem deponendo. nullum bonum adiuvat habentem nisi ad cuius amissionem*

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<sup>8</sup> Seneca deals with the fear of the after-life in *Epistula* 24 (paragraph 18).

*praeparatus est animus; nullius autem rei facilius amissio est quam quae desiderari amissa non potest* (6).

- He prepares himself against Fortune (*ergo adversus haec quae incidere possunt etiam potentissimis adhortare te et indura*, 6) and he does not place his trust in Fortune: *noli huic tranquillitati confidere: momento mare evertitur* (7).

Another trifling fear is the fear of poverty. The Ideal Persona combats the fear of poverty by not toiling after superfluous things, but living instead according to nature: *magnae divitiae sunt lege naturae composita paupertas* (10) and *ad supervacua sudatur... ad manum est quod sat est* (11).

## Lucilius

Lucilius has already begun to walk the road of moral progress (*persevera ut coepisti*, 1), but Seneca urges him to hurry, so that he may have longer enjoyment of his reformed self (*et quantum potes propera, quo diutius frui emendato animo et composito possis*, 1). With the word *quo* Seneca expresses his confidence in Lucilius' ability of attaining this goal.

Fear, especially of death, stands in Lucilius' way. But this fear seems to be the result of his wrong way of thinking about death. He thinks that to be able to not fear death one has to scorn life. He objects: "It is difficult to bring the mind to a point where it can scorn life" (*'difficile est' inquis 'animum perducere ad contemptionem animae'*, 4). Seneca's reply to Lucilius' objection is that men scorn life anyway, and not out of fear of death, but for trifling reasons (*non vides quam ex frivolis causis contemnatur*, 4). Is Seneca's reply to Lucilius relevant? Perhaps it is not so relevant, but he makes a good point! Seneca sarcastically remarks that men scorn life out of excessive fear, but - he asks Lucilius - will virtue not be as effective in doing the deed (*non putas virtutem hoc effecturam quod efficit nimia formido?*, 4)? At least then one dies in the name of something good!

There are those men who give up their lives too easily - out of excessive fear, a fear that stems from trifling reasons (*non vides...nimia formido*, 4). On the other hand, there are those men who cling to life - out of excessive fear of death (*nulli potest... spinas et aspera*, 4-5). Seneca sums up man's situation: "Most men ebb and flow in wretchedness between the fear of death and the hardships of life; they are unwilling to live, and yet they do not

know how to die” (*plerique...mori nesciunt*, 5). Lucilius must take care not to be like either of these two types of men. Seneca advises: “For this reason, make life as a whole agreeable to yourself by banishing all worry about it” (*fac itaque...deponendo*, 6). To sum up, men find life disagreeable, because they excessively fear life and death. They do not know how to live or how to die, so their lives are wasted. Seneca’s advice to Lucilius is to stop worrying about dying someday; just live and live for this moment.

Lucilius’ objects with the example of being captured by an enemy and ordered to death by the conqueror (*at si forte...duci iubebit*, 9). Lucilius’ objection here is irrelevant and weak, especially after everything Seneca has already said in this letter. Lucilius here represents man’s general feeling about death: it is something we do not want to face; we continually seek justification for our fear of it. Seneca’s refutation of Lucilius’ objection is short and simple: you are going to die anyway (*eo nempe quo duceris*, 9). Lucilius (like anyone; including Seneca) knows this, but needs reminding: *quid te ipse decipis et hoc nunc primum quod olim patiebaris intelligis?* (9). Hence Seneca’s repetitive advice to think on death everyday (*hoc cotidie meditare, ut possis aequo animo vitam relinquere*, 5 and *haec et eiusmodi...inquietas facit*, 9).

## Summary

The ultimate pleasure comes from contemplation when one’s mind is rid of all its faults. Seneca expresses his confidence in Lucilius’ ability of attaining this goal. Fear of “trifles and shadows” stands in man’s way of achieving this goal. One of these trifles is the fear of death. Lucilius’ fear of death is the result of his wrong way of thinking about death: he thinks that to be able to not fear death one has to scorn life.

The Ideal Persona has the answer: he neither scorns life, nor does he love life too much. In order to do this, he meditates on the subject of death everyday. Seneca also gives an idea of the type of thoughts about death on which one should meditate: understand death; do not desire a long life; look at the examples of the fates of the powerful; understand Fortune; understand that if you fear death you must not only fear the powerful; understand that you are going to die; understand that you have been dying since the day you were born.

## Epistula 5

### Ideal Persona

Seneca contrasts the so-called philosopher (*ne eorum more... perversa via sequitur evita*, 1-2) with the real philosopher (*intus omnia dissimilia sint... fugamus a nobis et avertimus*, 2-3). In this letter the word *philosophia* is used for the first time in the *Epistulae Morales*. It is implicitly stated that Lucilius (and all of us, the readers) must be or become philosophers.

These are the characteristics of the real philosopher, the Ideal Persona:

1. He is always improving himself: *te meliorem cotidie facias* (1). He improves himself without being conspicuous: *ne eorum more qui non proficere sed conspici cupiunt* (1).
2. He conforms to society outwardly but inwardly he is different: *intus omnia dissimilia sint, frons populo nostra conveniat* (2).
3. He practises moderation: *non splendeat toga, ne sordeat quidem; non habeamus argentum in quod solidi auri caelatura descenderit, sed non putemus frugalitatis indicium auro argentoque caruisse* (3).
4. His appearance and lifestyle do not repel, because it is his duty to improve others: *quos emendari volumus* (3).
5. He lives according to nature, i.e. plainly, but not penitently: *frugalitatem exigit philosophia, non poenam* (5).
6. He observes the mean between the ways of the sage and the ways of the world: *temperetur vita inter bonos mores et publicos; suspiciant omnes vitam nostram sed agnoscant* (5).
7. He lives for the present, not the future (which causes fear and hope) or the past: *nos et venturo torquemur et praeterito... nemo tantum praesentibus miser est* (9).

Seneca explains what fear and hope have in common (thus explaining the maxim ‘*desines*’ *inquit ‘timere, si sperare desieris*’, 7): each belongs to a mind in suspense, a mind looking forward towards the future (*quomodo ista tam... futuri expectatione solliciti*, 7-8). The connection between the maxim and the rest of the letter is that just as certain men misuse the name of philosophy, so we are prone to misuse man’s noblest blessing, namely foresight (*providentia, maximum bonum condicionis humanae*, 8), but both philosophy and foresight are noble things, which we can and must learn to use correctly. According to

Mans, the maxim is used by Seneca to bring forth the idea that two extremes, such as fear and hope - although significantly different - are bound by an uncertain expectation of the future. This then illustrates how other extremes, such as *intus* versus *frons* (2), *secundum naturam vivere* versus *contra naturam vivere* (4) and *sapiens (bonos mores)* versus the world (*mores publicos*) (5), are bound by the mean, which Seneca advises in this letter. The maxim also initiates the search for a remedy for the conflict between the fear of the known past and fear for the unknown future, which exists in the spiritual life of every person (1977:16). By adapting oneself to the present, one actually prepares oneself for the future and finds peace of mind about the past (Mans 1977:18). This is what the Ideal Persona does.

## Lucilius

Lucilius is persistent in his efforts to become a better man, and has made this his first priority (*quod pertinaciter...cotidie facias*, 1). Seneca now not only exhorts him to keep at it, but also begs him to (*nec tantum...sed etiam rogo*, 1). Seneca sees Lucilius' potential as a true friend, i.e. as a fellow student and even a teacher. This is a vote of confidence in Lucilius and his progress. Lucilius asks a good and relevant question (*dices, 'quomodo ista tam diversa pariter sunt?'*, 7), since Seneca spends quite some time answering him (*ita est, mi Lucili... miser est*, 7-9). One could infer that Lucilius is a good student.

However, Seneca warns Lucilius (at the same time questioning him, and forcing him to question himself) to make sure whether his efforts are genuine or not just for show: *illud autem te admoneo...vitae notabilia sint* (1). Forms of self-display must be avoided (*asperum cultum...evita*, 2). A real philosopher does not practise any forms of self-display.<sup>9</sup> There is the implication here that Lucilius has now advanced far enough to be

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<sup>9</sup> This is a principle that Seneca took very seriously and applied to his own life. Ball relates: "At one period in his youth [Seneca] adopted the vegetarian theory of diet [*Epistula* 108], and adhered to its practice for more than a year, giving it up finally at his father's request, not because he had ceased to believe in it or, as he judged, to thrive upon it, but lest it should be misunderstood as a superstitious observance of some half disreputable cult... The act was characteristic in its reconciliation of a philosophic breadth of mind with the

considered a philosopher (especially implied by the “us” in “*coeperimus*” in paragraph 2). The question is whether he is a real philosopher, like the Ideal Persona. In other words, Seneca questions Lucilius’ understanding of what a real philosopher is, in order to prevent Lucilius from going in the wrong direction, i.e. thinking he is a philosopher if his hair is long and he scorns silver, etc. That Lucilius misunderstands what a real philosopher is seems likely when considering his objection: ‘*quid ergo? eadem faciemus quae ceteri? nihil inter nos et illos intererit?*’ (6).

Seneca tells Lucilius that it is important that one be able to endure one’s riches: *infirmi animi est pati non posse divitias* (6).<sup>10</sup> Since both Seneca (e.g. where he talks of his country place and servants in *Epistula* 12) and Lucilius (“you are nearer the rich class”, *Ep.* 17.10) are rich, this remark of Seneca’s is very important to both of them. Seneca’s advice on being able to endure one’s riches does not contradict his advice on practising poverty in *Epistulae* 17, 18 and 20. From a biographical point of view, Seneca may appear to be contradictory in his opinions on poverty. But if one looks at what the Seneca in the *Epistulae Morales* says, he is shown to be quite consistent. See also, for example *Ep.* 18.13, where Seneca says that one may possess riches, but one must possess them dauntlessly (*intrepide*).

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regard for appearances and other practical considerations that are essential to getting on in the world” (1916:x-xi).

<sup>10</sup> Motto and Clark point out that the phrase *infirmi animi est pati non posse divitias* (6) is a paradox, and they explain that Seneca uses the paradox, in general, to shock his reader into paying greater attention. “For Seneca, sound thinking, *right thinking*, is hard work; he will not allow his audience passively to relax” (1975:2). See also Stewart (1997) “Challenging prescriptions for discourse: Seneca’s use of paradox and oxymoron”. He examines the way in which Seneca uses paradox and oxymoron in his *Epistulae Morales* to elucidate and present his Stoic doctrine to the Roman audience of his time. He argues that these were appropriate and effective literary devices for expressing Stoic philosophy, which held a new and unpopular philosophical position.

## Summary

Lucilius is practising philosophy, continuing to better himself; he has even made this his first priority. The question now is whether Lucilius is practising philosophy for the right motives: is he genuinely doing it to become a better man, or is it only for show?

Therefore, it is so important that Lucilius should understand what a real philosopher is, in order to prevent him from going in the wrong direction. For this reason, Seneca explains at length the difference between a real philosopher and a so-called philosopher. It boils down to a true understanding of what philosophers do: they improve themselves and others.

## Epistula 6

### Ideal Persona

The Ideal Persona practically improves himself by identifying faults of which he was previously ignorant and correcting them: *et hoc ipsum argumentum est in melius translatis animi, quod vitia sua quae adhuc ignorabat videt; quibusdam aegris gratulatio fit cum ipsi aegros se esse senserunt* (1).

The road of moral progress is not lonesome. There are many companions along this road who give a purpose to one's acquired knowledge and from whom one may also learn. Such companions are true friends. The Ideal Persona pursues only true friendship. Seneca describes the characteristics of true friendship in paragraphs 2-3: neither hope nor fear nor self-interest can sever true friendship (*illius verae quam non spes, non timor, non utilitatis suae cura divellit*), men will die for the sake of true friendship (*illius cum qua homines moriuntur, pro qua moriuntur*), true friendship occurs when souls are drawn together by identical inclinations into an alliance of honourable desires (*cum animos in societatem honesta cupiendi par voluntas trahit*), and those who possess true friendship know that they have all things in common, especially their troubles (*sciunt enim ipsos omnia habere communia, et quidem magis adversa*). Friends are thus fellow students.

The Ideal Persona learns with the purpose of teaching; in other words, his goal is to share his knowledge and specifically with his friends: *et in hoc aliquid gaudeo discere, ut*

*doceam... nullius boni sine socio iucunda possessio est* (4). The importance of having friends is sharing knowledge, and the importance of acquiring knowledge is sharing it with friends. One could infer the definition “friendship is sharing knowledge”.

The sharing of knowledge amongst friends has two parts: it is theoretical and practical. The Ideal Persona shares his knowledge with his friends, not only by giving precepts, but also by setting a living example; in other words, by practising what he preaches. Seneca demonstrates this. He shares his knowledge (with Lucilius) theoretically: *mittam itaque ipsos tibi libros, et ne multum operae impendas dum passim profutura sectaris, inponam notas, ut ad ipsa protinus quae probo et miror accedas* (5), and practically: *nec in hoc te accerso tantum, ut proficias, sed ut prosis; plurimum enim alter alteri conferemus* (6). The Ideal Persona learns, not only from precepts, but also from living examples, as Lucilius demonstrates: *plus tamen tibi et viva vox et convictus quam oratio proderit; in rem praesentem venias oportet, primum quia homines amplius oculis quam auribus credunt, deinde quia longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla* (5). The Ideal Persona teaches whilst learning, i.e. he is a student as well as a teacher: *nec in hoc te accerso tantum, ut proficias, sed ut prosis; plurimum enim alter alteri conferemus* (6).

The Ideal Persona is a friend to himself. Since friendship is about sharing knowledge, this means that he acquires knowledge for himself. Since the purpose of acquiring knowledge is to share it with friends and potential friends, the Ideal Persona is a friend to mankind: *‘quaeris’ inquit ‘quid profecerim? amicus esse mihi coepi.’ multum profecit: numquam erit solus. scito esse hunc amicum omnibus* (7). According to Thomsen this phrase stresses individualization as a prerequisite of socialization (1971-1980:170).

## Seneca

Seneca tells Lucilius that he feels that he is being not only reformed, but transformed (*intellego, Lucili, non emendari me tantum sed transfigurari*, 1). Does the process of moral progress involve reformation or transformation? The word *emendare* means to free from errors, emend, correct, improve - intellectually and morally. The word *transfigurare* means to transform or transfigure. Moral progress is about reforming ourselves, i.e. improving

ourselves, since the divine seed is already within us. Reformation thus means to free from errors and improve the good which is already within us.<sup>11</sup> Moral progress is not about transformation, since transformation implies change. Seneca perhaps uses the idea of transformation to make his own reformation sound more dramatic.

Seneca modestly admits that he does not assure himself, or indulge the hope, that there are no “elements”<sup>12</sup> left in him which do not need to be changed (*nec hoc promitto iam aut spero, nihil in me superesse quod mutandum sit*, 1). But the changes he still needs to make do not require a transformation; he simply needs to shape the elements he already has. There are elements that “should be made more compact, or made thinner, or be brought into greater prominence” (*quidni multa habeam quae debeant colligi, quae extenuari, quae attolli?* 1). This abstract description of the process of reformation is connected to the idea that the divine seed is within each of us, and needs to be nurtured and developed.

Seneca sums up his progress with the words *et hoc ipsum argumentum est in melius translati animi, quod vitia sua quae adhuc ignorabat videt; quibusdam aegris gratulatio fit cum ipsi aegros se esse senserunt* (1). This is a very important part of the process of reformation, namely to recognize one’s faults. Seneca again points out his progress: *concupere animo non potes quantum momenti adferre mihi singulos dies videam* (3). The words *singulos dies* are noteworthy. Progress happens on a daily basis. Thus, every day counts. Time is of the essence.

Seneca meets a very important requirement of the Ideal Persona: he learns in order to share his knowledge, to teach, to better mankind. He is willing to teach Lucilius, because Lucilius wants to be taught (*‘mitte’ inquis... ut doceam*, 4). By sharing knowledge with Lucilius, Seneca acknowledges him as his friend.

Philosophy for Seneca remains practical. Practical and living examples are better than books. Seneca advises Lucilius that the living voice and the intimacy of a common life will help him more than the written word (*plus tamen tibi et viva vox et convictus quam oratio*

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<sup>11</sup> I use the term reformation in the sense of moral growth or development, not radical change.

<sup>12</sup> Gummere’s translation of “*nec...nihil [in me superesse]*”.

*proderit*, 5). Seneca invites Lucilius to learn from him in person: *nec in hoc te accerso tantum, ut proficias, sed ut prosis; plurimum enim alter alteri conferemus* (6). Seneca will be Lucilius' living example, just as Zeno was Cleanthes' example, Socrates was Plato's and Aristotle's example, and Epicurus was Metrodorus's, Hermarchus's and Polyaeus's example (*Zenonem... contubernium fecit*, 6).

## Lucilius

By sharing his knowledge with Lucilius (in the *Epistulae Morales*) Seneca acknowledges Lucilius as his partner in study or his friend, since friendship is about sharing knowledge. Lucilius' progress is indirectly expressed in Seneca's acknowledgment of their friendship. Seneca says that by sharing his progress with Lucilius he is beginning to place a surer trust in their friendship, which he states is "the true friendship, which hope and fear and self-interest cannot sever, the friendship in which and for the sake of which men meet death" (*cuperem itaque tecum...pro qua moriuntur*, 2).<sup>13</sup> Seneca defines true friendship as "souls

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<sup>13</sup> In *Epistula* 6 Lucilius is eventually considered to be Seneca's friend. The following is Seneca's acknowledgement of their friendship through the course of *Epistulae Morales* 1-29. In *Epistula* 5.1 Seneca not only exhorts Lucilius to keep at his studies, but also begs him to (*nec tantum... sed etiam rogo*), because Seneca sees Lucilius' potential as a fellow student, i.e. as a true friend. In *Epistula* 6.4 Seneca says that he is willing to teach Lucilius, because Lucilius wants to be taught: *ego vero omnia in te cupio transfundere, et in hoc aliquid gaudeo discere, ut doceam*. By sharing knowledge with Lucilius, Seneca acknowledges him as his friend. Seneca says that by sharing his progress with Lucilius he is beginning to place a surer trust in their friendship, which he states is "the true friendship, which hope and fear and self-interest cannot sever, the friendship in which and for the sake of which men meet death" (*cuperem itaque tecum... pro qua moriuntur*, 6.2). Seneca defines true friendship as "souls (that) are drawn together by identical inclinations into an alliance of honourable desires" (*cum animos in societatem honesta cupiendi par voluntas trahit*, 6.3). Thus, by *Epistula* 6, Lucilius has progressed far enough to be considered Seneca's friend. In *Epistula* 19.1 Seneca requests that Lucilius press on with his studies, and he makes this request as Lucilius' friend: *quid enim habeo melius quod amicum rogem quam quod pro ipso rogaturus sum*. Words such as *mihi crede*, *Lucili* in *Ep.* 24.11, indicate that Seneca by now expects Lucilius to trust him as a friend. In *Epistula* 3.2 Seneca says that one should speak to a friend as if speaking to oneself. Thus Seneca indicates his friendship with Lucilius with the words *haec mecum loquor, sed tecum quoque me locutum puta* in *Ep.* 26.7. In *Epistula* 27.1 Seneca makes it very clear that Lucilius is his friend, in that he can talk to Lucilius as though he were talking to himself: *sic itaque me audi tamquam mecum loquar; in secretum te meum admitto et te adhibito mecum exigo*.

[that] are drawn together by identical inclinations into an alliance of honourable desires” (*cum animos in societatem honesta cupiendi par voluntas trahit*, 3). Lucilius has thus progressed far enough to be in an alliance of honourable desires with Seneca. Both Seneca and Lucilius want to make moral progress, and they want to do it together, as friends. Lucilius asks Seneca for help; he asks Seneca to share with him what he has found helpful (*‘mitte’ inquis...‘expertus es’*, 4). Seneca agrees, saying that this is the whole purpose of friendship (*ego vero omnia... possessio est*, 4). Seneca here implies that Lucilius is his friend with the words *nullius boni sine socio iucunda possessio est* (4).

Seneca demonstrates his teacher-student relationship with Lucilius by mentioning the practical assistance he has included with this letter to Lucilius. Such assistance includes the actual books for study: *mittam itaque ipsos tibi libros* (5). It is a clear reference to Lucilius’ progress that Seneca sends him the actual books themselves, instead of telling him what is in the books or his interpretation thereof. But, Seneca says, “in order that you may not waste time in searching here and there for profitable topics, I shall mark certain passages, so that you can turn at once to those which I approve and admire” (*et ne multum...miror accedas*, 5). Lucilius is not yet ready to tackle the books by himself. Seneca realises that the chances are slim that Lucilius will read the books in whole (see Lucilius’ habit of reading discursively in *Epistula 2*), so he decides to share his own experience of the books with Lucilius.<sup>14</sup>

Lucilius not only derives benefit from Seneca, but he himself is capable of conferring benefit upon Seneca, that is - Seneca says - they can assist one another greatly (*nec in hoc te accerso tantum, ut proficias, sed ut prosis; plurimum enim alter alteri conferemus*, 6).

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<sup>14</sup> For now Seneca aids Lucilius in his reading. But in *Epistula 33* Seneca tells Lucilius to “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” (5). It is time for Lucilius to start reading books completely; not simply skim through them. He must stop depending on maxims. He must make the knowledge of others his own. Seneca says, “I hold that there is nothing of eminence in all such men as these, who never create anything themselves, but always lurk in the shadow of others, playing the rôle of interpreters, never daring to put once into practice what they have been so long in learning” (8). “Let there be a difference between yourself and your book! How long shall you be a learner? From now on be a teacher as well” (9).

Thus even as a beginner on the road of progress or reformation one is important to others and can make a difference in their lives. This is very encouraging.

## Summary

The Ideal Persona shares his knowledge with his friends, because knowledge must be shared, and only with friends. Seneca demonstrates the sharing of knowledge with his “friend” Lucilius in his letters to the latter.

The sharing of knowledge amongst friends (fellow students), which includes teaching and learning, has two parts, a theoretical and a practical part. The Ideal Persona shares his knowledge with his friends, not only by giving precepts, but also by setting a living example; in other words, he practises what he preaches. He learns, not only from precepts, but also from living examples. Seneca invites Lucilius to learn from him in person; he will be Lucilius’ living example.

## Epistula 7

### Ideal Persona

The Ideal Persona avoids crowds. Not even the Wise Man (the Ideal Persona’s role-model) can withstand the shock of vices that comes with a crowd: *Socrati et Catoni et Laelio excutere morem suum dissimilis multitudo potuisset: adeo nemo nostrum, qui cum maxime concinnamus ingenium, ferre impetum vitiorum tam magno comitatu venientium potest* (6). The crowded Games are especially to be avoided: *nihil vero tam damnosum bonis moribus quam in aliquo spectaculo desiderare; tunc enim per voluptatem facilius vitia subrepunt* (2). But the problem lies, for Seneca, rather with the spectators than with the Games: *quia occidit, ille meruit ut hoc pateretur: tu quid meruisti miser ut hoc spectes?* (5). The Games were a strong Roman tradition. Seneca’s disapproval of the Games, however, was not the only area in which he strayed from traditional Roman attitudes. He had other liberal ideas for his time. Stewart explains that the contradiction between Seneca’s Stoic doctrine and the Roman values of his time takes the form of a total inversion. He remarks: “Seneca’s position criticizes exactly what the Roman tradition extols and vice versa... The

Roman tradition says that fame and strength are of utmost importance, whereas Seneca says that they are without value. Throughout the history of Rome, public service in any capacity was esteemed as virtuous, whereas Seneca claims that it is meaningless and that true virtue is internal, in the soul. Freedom is for the Romans an external condition in relation to Roman law, whereas for Seneca it is an internal condition related only to the human soul” (1997:10).<sup>15</sup>

The Ideal Persona avoids crowds, but that does not mean he loathes people: *neesse est aut imiteris aut oderis. utrumque autem devitandum est: neve similis malis fias, quia multi sunt, neve inimicus multis, quia dissimiles sunt* (8). Rather, the Ideal Persona withdraws into himself (*recede in te ipsum*, 8) to work at improving himself. He associates only with those who will make him a better man or whom he himself can better, because the process is mutual - men learn while they teach (*cum his versare qui te meliorem facturi sunt, illos admitte quos tu potes facere meliores. mutuo ista fiunt, et homines dum docent discunt*, 8).

However, there is a difference between teaching one’s fellow students and preaching before the general public. The Ideal Persona does not desire and avoids publicity: *non est quod te gloria publicandi ingenii producat in medium, ut recitare istis velis aut disputare* (9). Instead, the Ideal Persona learns for himself: *non est quod timeas ne operam perdideris, si tibi didicisti* (9). But there are some with whom the Ideal Persona can (and must) share his knowledge, namely his friends.

The Ideal Persona needs only one friend, but strives to be self-sufficient (*‘unus mihi pro populo est, et populus pro uno’*, 10; *‘satis sunt’ inquit ‘mihi pauci, satis est unus, satis est*

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<sup>15</sup> Motto and Clark also mention Seneca’s defiance of traditional Roman attitudes and ways: “It is well known, of course, that Seneca extolled humanitarianism in an era of slavery, that he championed clemency in a period of stark brutality, urged stoical self-restraint in a society of effete lasciviousness, and potent frankness in a world of adulation and obsequiousness” (1968:6). Elsewhere Motto remarks: “Again and again, Seneca insists upon man’s duty to aid his fellow man. Everywhere he recommends mercy, tolerance, kindness, and generosity to all... Such *humanitas* leads our philosopher to condemn anger, cruelty, warfare, and the ferocity of the gladiatorial combats. Moreover, his deep sentiment for mankind is further illustrated by his attitude toward slavery, toward the treatment of women, and toward the experience of friendship” (1985:11).

*nullus*', 11; and *'haec' inquit 'ego non multis, sed tibi; satis enim magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus'*, 11). *Epistula* 9 deals with the subject of self-sufficiency in detail. It is, however, preferable for the Ideal Persona to have friends, because in order to do his duty to mankind he has to share his knowledge.

## Seneca

Seneca admits that he himself is too weak to face a crowd: *ego certe confitebor inbecillitatem meam: numquam mores quos extuli refero; aliquid ex eo quod composui turbatur, aliquid ex iis quae fugavi redit* (1).

Seneca practically demonstrates the sharing of knowledge with friends: *sed ne soli mihi hodie didicerim, communicabo tecum quae occurrunt mihi egregie dicta circa eundem fere sensum tria...* (10). He practises what he preaches.

## Lucilius

Lucilius gives Seneca the topic of this letter when he supposedly asks Seneca what he regards as especially to be avoided (1). Seneca's answer is "crowds". He applies the advice to Lucilius: *nondum illi tuto committeris* (1). The Ideal Persona also avoids crowds. Not even the Wise Man is necessarily safe in a crowd: *Socrati et Catoni et Laelio excutere morem suum dissimilis multitudo potuisset* (6). But the word *nondum* (1) expresses Seneca's belief that Lucilius will someday be able to trust himself in a crowd. The word *nondum* thus also expresses Seneca's belief that Lucilius may one day have progressed far enough to be considered a Wise Man. But Lucilius is still a long way from attaining this goal. Seneca says that the young character, which cannot hold fast to righteousness, must be rescued from the mob, because it is too easy to side with the majority (*subducendus populo est tener animus et parum tenax recti: facile transitur ad plures*, 6). It is implied that Lucilius at this stage still has a *tener animus*. His Stoic mind (or more specifically "Senecan mind") is still young and fragile.

Seneca's advice to Lucilius (and himself) is: "Withdraw into yourself, as far as you can. Associate with those who will make a better man of you. Welcome those whom you yourself can improve. The process is mutual; for men learn while they teach" (*recede in te*

*ipse... docent discunt*, 8). This describes the relationship between Seneca and Lucilius. It also states that Lucilius is in a position to help reform others. But this must not go to his head. Seneca warns Lucilius to beware that pride in advertising his abilities does not lure him into publicity, so that he should desire to recite or harangue before the general public (*non est quod te gloria publicandi ingenii producat in medium, ut recitare istis velis aut disputare*, 9). The practical reason for this is that he would simply be wasting his time, because no man would understand him (*quod facere te vellem, si haberes isti populo idoneam mercem: nemo est qui intellegere te possit*, 9). No-one would understand him, either because Lucilius has progressed further than most men, or because a mob - simply by its very nature - is stupid.

Lucilius does seem to have a weakness for the spotlight. Seneca warns him to scorn the pleasure, which comes from the applause of the majority (*ista, mi Lucili... venientem*, 12). Their applause is nothing to be proud of. Seneca chides Lucilius, *multi te laudant: ecquid habes cur placeas tibi, si is es quem intellegant multi?* (12). Lucilius' question, *cui ergo ista didici?*(9), indicates that he does not yet understand the purpose of his studies. Seneca explains to Lucilius that instead of seeking publicity with his knowledge, Lucilius should learn for himself (*non est quod timeas ne operam perdideris, si tibi didicisti*, 9) and his friends. Seneca demonstrates this; he has learned for Lucilius also: *sed ne soli mihi hodie didicerim, communicabo tecum...* (9). By sharing his knowledge with Lucilius, Seneca acknowledges Lucilius as his partner in study, i.e. his friend.

## Summary

The Ideal Persona avoids crowds, but should he be faced with a crowd, he is able to withdraw into himself. Seneca admits that he himself is too weak to face a crowd, implying that he is not yet capable of withdrawing into himself. Lucilius is also not yet safe in crowds. The word *nondum* (1), however, implies that Lucilius will someday be able to trust himself in a crowd, i.e. he will be able to withdraw into himself.

The Ideal Persona associates with those who will make a better man of him and he welcomes those whom he himself can improve. Seneca and Lucilius illustrate this important part of progress with their relationship.

The process is mutual; for men learn while they teach. Lucilius is thus also in a position to teach. That Lucilius is in a position to teach is later shown explicitly in that Seneca quotes him in *Ep.* 8.10 and *Ep.* 24.21. But Lucilius must not misuse his ability and privilege of helping others, by seeking publicity. Rather than seek publicity with his knowledge, Lucilius should learn for himself and his friends. The Ideal Persona can (and must) share his knowledge with his friend(s). Lucilius should teach his friends with the purpose of bettering them and not for the purpose of winning their approval.

Lucilius does not yet understand the purpose of his studies. The goal of this letter is to give Lucilius the answer to this question. The purpose of acquiring knowledge is to be in a position to better oneself and one's friends, and ultimately mankind.

## ***Epistula 8***

### **Ideal Persona**

Seneca begins by clarifying the meaning of withdrawal. Withdrawal is not to shun men and be content with one's own conscience; neither is it a life of idleness (*'tu me' inquis... ego tibi videor inertiam suadere?* 1). Rather, the Ideal Persona withdraws from a public life and career in order to help improve his fellow men, thereby actually doing them a greater service. He can help more people by withdrawing from his worldly life: *in hoc me recondidi et fores clusi, ut prodesse pluribus possem* (1). The Ideal Persona spends his time studying philosophy in order to teach. He is hard working. Seneca demonstrates this: *nullus mihi per otium dies exit; partem noctium studiis vindico; non vaco somno sed succumbo, et oculos vigilia fatigatos cadentesque in opere detineo* (1).

The Ideal Persona pursues philosophy. Seneca says, "Believe me, those who seem to be busied with nothing are busied with the greater tasks; they are dealing at the same time with things mortal and things immortal" (*mihi crede, qui nihil agere videntur maiora agunt: humana divinaque simul tractant*, 6). The word *agere* (6) deserves attention according to Hijmans. He points out that apart from meaning "to act" or "to be active", the term *agere* is also used for "to act in character" and "to do whatever is right in a particular situation" (1966:242). Hijmans explains: "To be a wise man then is to be active and this activity is

sketched as a part played in a particular manner. It is to act rationally and in tune with the directives of nature, every single deed being based on a judgement. Hence Seneca's expressed scorn for those who use philosophy for ostentation (*Epp.* 16.3, 20.1, 24.15 and 109.38)" (1966:244). Hijmans adds: "Seneca's wise man plays at being a wise man" (1966:245). Seneca encourages us to play the part of the philosopher; in time we will become philosophers. The Ideal Persona not only pursues philosophy, but he is also a slave to philosophy and thus he is free (*philosophiae servias oportet, ut tibi contingat vera libertas*, 7).<sup>16</sup>

The Ideal Persona avoids the gifts of Chance (*vitae quaecumque vulgo placent, quae casus adtribuit*, 3). This he does by indulging his body only as much as is necessary for good health. When the body is treated more rigorously it will not easily be disobedient to the mind. Therefore, the Ideal Persona lives according to nature: he eats merely to relieve hunger, drinks merely to quench his thirst, dresses merely to keep out the cold and houses himself merely as a protection against personal discomfort (*ut corpori tantum indulgeatis quantum bonae valetudini satis est. durius tractandum est ne animo male pareat: cibus famem sedet, potio sitim extinguat, vestis arceat frigus, domus munimentum sit adversus infesta temporis*, 5). Since the Ideal Persona lives according to nature, he despises useless toil (*contemnite omnia quae supervacuum labor velut ornamentum ac decus ponit*, 5). Rather, he uses his time and energy to improve his soul (*cogitate nihil praeter animum esse mirabile*, 5). His soul will be great when it no longer considers external things to be of value (*cui magno nihil magnum est*, 5).

## Lucilius

Lucilius attacks Seneca: "Do you bid me to shun the throng and withdraw from men and be content with my own conscience? Where are the counsels of your school, which order a

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<sup>16</sup> Stewart explains: "Seneca's oxymoron obliges the reader to ask the question 'what does this mean', since the statement itself cannot be made sense of at face value" (1997:14). Stewart points out that to clarify the point, Seneca cites instances of many other forms of slavery in *Ep.* 47.17. What it comes down to is that "to be a slave to philosophy means to commit oneself to a life of overcoming the passions and mastering them in a retreat to the realm of pure thought" (1997:14).

man to die in the midst of active work?" (*'tu me' inquis... in actu mori?'* 1). This is supposedly Lucilius' reply to *Epistula* 7, and shows his misunderstanding (pointed out with the word *videor*) of what Seneca said there. Avoiding crowds does not mean being idle: *ego tibi videor inertiam suadere?* (1).

Seneca twice quotes Lucilius in paragraph 10. Lucilius can thus teach himself and Seneca. This demonstrates Lucilius' progress, as well as the mutual process of learning and teaching between Seneca and Lucilius.

## Seneca

Seneca defends himself against Lucilius' accusation. He is not idle, but has withdrawn for a higher purpose: *secessi non tantum ab hominibus sed a rebus, et in primis a meis rebus: posterorum negotium ago. illis aliqua quae possint prodesse conscribo; salutare admonitiones, velut medicamentorum utilium compositiones, litteris mando, esse illas efficaces in meis ulceribus expertus, quae etiam si persanata non sunt, serpere desierunt* (2). This sounds like a description of the *Epistulae Morales*.<sup>17</sup> By writing down his counsels, Seneca meets the Ideal Persona's requirement of helping mankind by sharing one's knowledge and personal experience. Seneca says that he has found the right path, albeit late in life and wearied with wandering (*rectum iter, quod sero cognovi et lassus errando, aliis monstro*, 3). How far has Seneca thus progressed? He is on the right path, but not necessarily far along with it.

Seneca says that what he does is more important than being a lawyer (*si haec mecum... et manum commodarem?* 6). He may seem to be doing nothing (as a retired old man), but he is in fact busy with greater things, even immortal things (*mihi crede, qui nihil agere videntur maiora agunt: humana divinaque simul tractant*, 6). The very service of philosophy is freedom (*hoc enim ipsum philosophiae seivire libertas est*, 7). Thus, since Seneca serves philosophy, he is free.

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<sup>17</sup> Wilson remarks: "Russell... [1974:71] is wholly convincing in his argument that Seneca is referring in 8.2 to the *Epistles* themselves, not to another work in progress. The remainder of *Epistle* 8 is full of the *salutare admonitiones* ('beneficial advice') that Seneca says here he is writing down for posterity" (1987:120, n.5).

In paragraphs 3-5 (*clamo: 'vitate... cui magno nihil magnum est'*) Seneca gives a short summary of his doctrine (one could almost say a short summary of the *Epistulae Morales*). In order to avoid Chance one must live according to nature. Then one will despise useless toil and rather use one's time and energy to improve one's soul and the souls of others. This one can only do through the practice of philosophy.

Seneca implies that Lucilius questions his use of other schools' teachings, but perhaps it is rather Seneca who feels the need to defend himself in his eclectic position: *potest fieri ut me... coturnatis dicenda sunt!* (8). But most probably Seneca just wants to draw attention to the issue of eclecticism, already a philosophic principle in his day. Seneca explains to Lucilius that it is not wrong of him to quote Epicurus instead of Stoics, since the truth is common property. The truth is not uttered only by the Stoic school. In fact, Seneca says, "how many poets give forth ideas that have been uttered, or may be uttered, by philosophers!" (*quam multi poetae dicunt quae philosophis aut dicta sunt aut dicenda*, 8).<sup>18</sup> By way of example Seneca quotes such a "philosophic" line of Publilius's in paragraph 9. In *Ep.* 9.21, Seneca again quotes a comic poet (unknown to us) to make the point that the truth is universal and not uttered only by Stoics, or - for that matter - philosophers.<sup>19</sup>

## Summary

It is very important that Lucilius should know what "withdrawal from worldliness" means, as he currently does not. The purpose of this letter is to clear his misunderstanding.

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<sup>18</sup> Stewart uses this phrase in the conclusion of his article "Challenging prescriptions for discourse: Seneca's use of paradox and oxymoron", in which he argues: "We must realise that we do a great disservice to philosophy if we deprive it of the oxymoron and other literary devices like it and if we consign such devices to orators and poets. Indeed, we would do well to reflect on Seneca's advice to Lucilius: '*quam multi poetae dicunt quae philosophis aut dicta sunt aut dicenda*' (8.8)" (1997:16). Stewart argues today what Seneca argued almost 2000 years ago!

<sup>19</sup> See Nussbaum (1993) "Poetry and the passions: two Stoic views". She remarks: "But such [ethical information found in poetry], once discovered by the philosopher, could from then on be transmitted in a prose form. So this argument, while it gives the philosopher a reason to read the poets himself, gives him no reason to make use of them in education" (1993:126).

Lucilius incorrectly thinks that withdrawal is the equivalent of idleness. Seneca explains that withdrawal does not mean that one has to shun men and be content with one's own conscience; neither is it a life of idleness. The Ideal Persona withdraws from a worldly career in order to spend his time studying and practising philosophy with the purpose of teaching his friends and, in the bigger picture, mankind. Seneca is doing just this with his letters to Lucilius. He is teaching his friend Lucilius. Through Lucilius as his medium Seneca says that he will also teach later generations.

## ***Epistula 9***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona strives to be self-sufficient. The Wise Man is self-sufficient: *sapientem se ipso esse contentum* (3). In this letter Seneca discusses the meaning of self-sufficiency, and more specifically, the connection between self-sufficiency and friendship.

Self-sufficiency is:

1. "A soul that cannot be harmed" or "a soul beyond the realm of suffering": *aut invulnerabilem animum dicere aut animum extra omnem patientiam positum* (2).
2. To feel one's troubles, but overcome them: *noster sapiens vincit quidem incommodum omne sed sentit* (3).
3. To be able to do without friends, not that one desires to do without them: *ita sapiens se contentus est, non ut velit esse sine amico sed ut possit* (5). Seneca's comparison of self-sufficiency with losing body-parts is effective, though shocking (*vide quam sit se contentus... ita sapiens se contentus est*, 4-5).
4. To be able to do without friends, because one endures the loss of a friend with equanimity; although one never needs to lack friends, as it lies in one's own control how soon one shall make good the loss: *et hoc quod dico 'possit' tale est: amissum aequo animo fert. sine amico quidem numquam erit: in sua potestate habet quam cito reparat* (5). Hadas' words can be applied in this instance: "This is Stoic *apathy*, which means not listlessness but imperviousness to perturbations" (1958:24). Friends are made by loving: *si vis amari, ama* (6). What Seneca means by "loving" is explained in number 5 below.

Seneca elaborates on the pleasure of forming new friendships (*habet autem... sed infantia dulcior*, 6-7).

5. To desire friends if only for the purpose of practising friendship in order that one's noble qualities may not lie dormant: *sapiens etiam si contentus est se, tamen habere amicum vult, si nihil aliud, ut exerceat amicitiam, ne tam magna virtus iaceat* (8). The Wise Man does not desire friendship so "that there may be someone to sit by him when he is ill, to help him when he is in prison or in want; but that he may have someone by whose sickbed he himself may sit, someone a prisoner in hostile hands whom he himself may set free" (*non ad hoc...custodia liberet*, 8). The Wise Man does not expect anything in return for his kindnesses to a friend. His kind of friendship is not a "fair-weather" friendship (*hae sunt amicitiae...utilis fuerit*, 9). In paragraph 10 Seneca says: "For what purpose, then, do I make a man my friend? In order to have someone for whom I may die, whom I may follow into exile, against whose death I may stake my own life, and pay the pledge, too" (*'in quid amicum paras?' ut habeam pro quo mori possim, ut habeam quem in exilium sequar, cuius me morti et opponam et inpendam*, 10). True friendship is selfless. Motto comments: "To Seneca, friendship is the expression of a natural instinct, a need for commitment" (1985:11). True friendship is based on pure love: *numquid ergo quisquam amat lucri causa? numquid ambitionis aut gloriae? Ipse per se amor, omnium aliarum rerum neglegens, animos in cupiditatem formae non sine spe mutuae caritatis accendit* (11). By "pure love" Seneca means love in its essence, unalloyed with the other emotions (Gummere 1917:48 n.a).

6. To seek friendship for its own sake: *nam si propter se ipsam expetenda est, potest ad illam accedere qui se ipso contentus est. 'quomodo ergo ad illam accedit?' quomodo ad rem pulcherrimam, non lucro captus nec varietate fortunae perterritus* (12).

7. To be sufficient unto oneself for a happy existence, but not a mere existence: *se contentus est sapiens ad beate vivendum, non ad vivendum; ad hoc enim multis illi rebus opus est, ad illud tantum animo sano et erecto et despiciente fortunam* (13).

8. To be in want of nothing, yet to need many things: *ait sapientem nulla re egere, et tamen multis illi rebus opus esse* (14). Gummere explains that "the distinction is based upon the meaning of *egere*, 'to be in want of' something indispensable, and *opus esse*, 'to have need of' something which one can do without" (1917:50 n.b). Although the Wise Man is self-sufficient, he has a need for friends, but not so that he will live happily, because he will live

happily even without friends (*ergo quamvis se ipso contentus sit...vivet enim etiam sine amicis beate*, 15).

9. To call for no practical aids from outside, i.e. to seek nothing outside oneself, or else one is subject to the play of Fortune: *summum bonum extrinsecus instrumenta non quaerit; domi colitur, ex se totum est; incipit fortunae esse subiectum si quam partem sui foris quaerit* (15).

10. Yet, to not be able to live, if one had to live without the society of man, because natural promptings draw men (even the Wise Man) into friendship: *se contentus est et tamen non viveret si foret sine homine victurus. ad amicitiam fert illum nulla utilitas sua, sed naturalis inritatio* (17). Friendship is thus in accordance with nature. As long as one is allowed to order one's affairs according to one's judgement, one is self-sufficient. One can marry and have children and still be self-sufficient: *quamdiu quidem illi licet suo arbitrio res suas ordinare, se contentus est et ducit uxorem; se contentus est et liberos tollit* (17).

11. When all good is limited to one's own being (*omne intra se bonum terminabit*, 18), in other words, when one deems nothing that might be taken from one to be a good (*nihil bonum putare quod eripi possit*, 19). Such are the bounds which one must set to one's happiness.

12. To be content with what one has and feel supremely happy: '*si cui*' inquit '*sua non videntur amplissima, licet totius mundi dominus sit, tamen miser est*' (20). This is only possible when one knows what bounds to set to one's happiness.

All of the above points (the characteristics of the self-sufficient man, the Wise Man) is what the Ideal Persona strives towards achieving.

## Lucilius

Lucilius gives Seneca the topic of this letter. Apparently he indirectly asked Seneca what the phrase "the Wise Man is self-sufficient" means (*an merito reprehendat...desideras scire*, 1). Lucilius' direct question to Seneca was, who is right in their understanding of self-sufficiency, Stilbo or Epicurus (*an merito reprehendat... animus inpatiens*, 1)? Seneca directly answers Lucilius' question in paragraphs 18-19 (*nihilominus... fine designat*).

Lucilius' question is important, because the phrase "the Wise Man is self-sufficient" is incorrectly explained by many ('*se contentus est sapiens.*' *hoc, mi Lucili, plerique perperam interpretantur*, 13).

Lucilius leads (or rather Seneca makes him lead) the discussion with his questions (*quaeris quomodo amicum cito facturus sit?* 6, and *quomodo ergo ad illam accedit?* 12), his interjection (*'non agitur' inquis 'nunc de hoc, an amicitia propter se ipsam adpetenda sit'* 12) and his objection (*'quid ergo?' inquis 'si beatum se dixerit ille turpiter dives et ille multorum dominus sed plurimum servus, beatus sua sententia fiet?'* 22).

Seneca says to Lucilius, *ista quam tu describis negotiatio est, non amicitia, quae ad commodum accedit, quae quid consecutura sit spectat* (10). These words indicate that Lucilius does not yet understand what true friendship is (which has thus far been explained in *Epistulae* 3 and 6).

Seneca warns Lucilius not to make the mistake of thinking that their (the Stoic) school alone is right. Rather Lucilius must look everywhere for the truth, even from the Stoic school's rival, the Epicureans, and Seneca illustrates this by quoting Epicurus in paragraph 20. To make his point even clearer (namely that the truth is universal and suggested by Nature: *hos sensus esse communes, natura scilicet dictante*, 21) Seneca quotes a comic poet in paragraph 21. Universal truths are not confined to the Stoics. Even comic poets utter such truths.

## Seneca

Seneca's explanation of the phrase "the Wise Man is self-sufficient" is quite academic in that he starts off by defining the terms involved in the problem, and the issue of translating Greek into Latin (*in ambiguitatem... patientiam positum*, 2). Inwood remarks: "[An] important aspect of Seneca's philosophical milieu, was what I take to be the relatively easy bilingualism of his immediate social environment... [N]ot only were Roman intellectuals comfortable in Greek, but... Greek intellectuals at Rome could be comfortable in and interested in Latin... I am suggesting, then, that Seneca stands out for his striking choice to do what I would call primary philosophy (rather than exegetical or missionary work) in Latin" (1995:68).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Inwood comments that in *Epistula* 9 "the looseness of fit between the Greek term and the obvious translation of it provokes explicit comment" (1995:74). Inwood remarks that there are few instances where

## Summary

The meaning of the phrase “the Wise Man is self-sufficient” is a very controversial issue. Is it true that because the Wise Man is self-sufficient he does not stand in need of friendship? The Ideal Persona strives to be self-sufficient, but he still makes the effort of acquiring friendship, since it is his duty to share his knowledge and also because friends, in turn, can help him make progress. Of course it is also important that Lucilius must understand what friendship is, which it seems he still does not.

## *Epistula 10*

### Ideal Persona

The Ideal Persona strives to be a better person. For this reason he faces his faults and desires; he does not try to hide them from himself and others. The Ideal Persona keeps to himself, because he is the best person for himself to associate with (*audeo te tibi credere*, 1 and *non invenio cum quo te malim esse quam tecum*, 2). Unlike thoughtless people (*nemo est ex imprudentibus... ipse se prodit*, 2), the Ideal Persona is safe in his own company, in seclusion. This is because he is in control of his mind. Solitude does not bring into play his baser desires. One is ready to live to oneself (like the Ideal Persona) when one has built a solid foundation and has regard for one’s real welfare (*‘non a summis labris ista venerunt, habent hae voces fundamentum; iste homo non est unus e populo, ad salutem spectat’*, 3).

The Ideal Persona prays for a sound mind and a healthy body and he prays frequently (*roga bonam mentem, bonam valetudinem animi, deinde tunc corporis. quidni tu ista vota saepe facias?* 4). The Ideal Persona strives to free himself of all desires; the proof of which is to be able to pray openly (before men) to God, because then his prayers are not base: *‘tunc scito esse te omnibus cupiditatibus solutum, cum eo perveneris ut nihil deum roges nisi quod rogare possis palam’* (5). The Ideal Persona is able to live among men as if God were

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Seneca deliberately introduces technical terms from Greek (*Epistulae* 58, 81, 87, 88 and 89). He also points out that sometimes Greek words are dropped in unself-consciously, as part of the style of the highly educated Roman (*Epistula* 99) (1995:74).

watching him and speak with God as if men were listening, because he is a good man, who has nothing to hide: *sic vive cum hominibus tamquam deus videat, sic loquere cum deo tamquam homines audiant* (5). This does not imply that the Ideal Persona is faultless, only that he does not try to hide his faults. Always having God and men as his witnesses in turn helps him free himself of his faults and desires.

## Seneca

Seneca says explicitly that he takes the credit for Lucilius' progress: *gratulatus sum protinus mihi* (3). Seneca sounds arrogant. He makes it sound as though he "made" Lucilius. Seneca certainly has a large hand in Lucilius' progress, but Lucilius is the one who has to actually make the progress. Perhaps one should rather hear Seneca's tone as that of the proud father or the proud teacher. Seneca is not shy about calling his own advice wholesome or advantageous: *vide ergo ne hoc praecipere salubriter possit* (5). One gets the impression that Seneca feels he is doing a good job as Lucilius' tutor.

## Lucilius

In this letter Seneca intensifies (see *Epistulae* 7 and 8) the topic of avoiding crowds, by telling Lucilius that he must not only avoid the many, but also the few, and even the individual (*sic est...fuge etiam unum*, 1). Seneca says that he knows of no-one with whom he should be willing to have Lucilius shared (*non habeo cum quo te communicatum velim*, 1). This can be read as a compliment for Lucilius: Seneca is the only one who is good enough for Lucilius. Or perhaps Seneca is complimenting himself: he does not trust anyone else with Lucilius' moral education.

Seneca further compliments Lucilius by saying that his opinion of Lucilius is so high that he dares to trust Lucilius with his own self (*et vide quod iudicium meum habeas: audeo te tibi credere*, 1). Seneca does not fear that when Lucilius is alone he will be like those people, who bring into play their base desires; whose minds display that which fear and shame usually repress (*nemo est ex imprudentibus... ipse se prodit*, 2). In this regard one should compare *Epistula* 25 where Seneca says that until Lucilius is a good, tranquil, and self-restrained man, he had better withdraw into a crowd in order to get away from himself,

because alone he is too close to a rascal (*si bonus vir es, si quietus, si temperans. alioquin in turbam tibi a te recedendum est: istic malo viro propius es, 7*).<sup>21</sup>

Not only does Seneca dare to trust Lucilius with his own self, but he goes further to say that he is hoping that, or rather promising himself that, Lucilius is the best man for himself to associate with (*vide itaque...esse quam tecum, 2*). Seneca thus expresses his trust in Lucilius' progress. Seneca praises Lucilius. He recalls how Lucilius hurled forth certain phrases, full of strength, in a great-souled way (*repeto memoria quam magno animo quaedam verba proieceris, quanti roboris plena, 3*).<sup>22</sup> Especially the words *magno animo* indicate Lucilius' progress. Lucilius is complimented still more: *dixi, 'non a summis labris ista venerunt, habent hae voces fundamentum; iste homo non est unus e populo, ad salutem spectat'* (3). Lucilius has thus now progressed so far as to have a solid foundation and regard for his real welfare. Seneca implies that Lucilius is also going in the right direction, i.e. that he is on the right path: *sic loquere, sic vive; vide ne te ulla res deprimat* (4).

However, Lucilius does not pray for the right things (*votorum tuorum veterum licet deis gratiam facias, alia de integro suscipe, 4*). Seneca advises him to pray for a sound mind and a healthy body (*roga bonam mentem, bonam valetudinem animi, deinde tunc corporis, 4*).

## Summary

The Ideal Persona is safe in seclusion, because he is in control of his mind. Lucilius is now safe to be left by himself (this does not, however, mean that he is capable of withdrawing

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<sup>21</sup> What is the purpose of such a contradiction? It could mean that Lucilius has fallen back into immoral ways. Or it might imply that Lucilius' progress does not strictly adhere to the chronological order of the letters. If the latter is the case, a contradiction such as this may have something to say about the arrangement of the *Epistulae Morales*.

<sup>22</sup> The details of this event are unknown, but that does not matter, since the point is made that Lucilius did it. Russell remarks about another of these "vague" passages (*Ep. 42.5*): "No names, no details; we have to guess what we can. Now it seems to me important to realise that the enigma is not puzzling: we can understand the drift of the passage perfectly well without knowing any more" (1974:77).

into himself in a crowd: see *Epistula* 7). The Ideal Persona keeps to himself, because he is the best person with whom to associate. Lucilius' goal should be to be the best man for himself to associate with. When he has achieved this goal he will be able to live among men as if God were watching him and speak with God as if men were listening. The Ideal Persona is able to pray openly (before men) to God because he does not try to hide his faults. He strives to free himself from all desires. Lucilius does not pray for the right things. The Ideal Persona prays for a sound mind and a healthy body and he prays frequently.

## ***Epistula* 11**

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona strives to be wise, because even though wisdom cannot overcome natural weaknesses of the body, e.g. blushing, it can overcome our unnatural weaknesses (*nulla enim sapientia naturalia corporis aut animi vitia ponuntur: quidquid infixum et ingenitum est lenitur arte, non vincitur*, 1). As a practical aid, he appoints a guardian over himself to be his witness and so help him get rid of his unnatural weaknesses (*magna pars peccatorum tollitur, si peccaturis testis adsistit*, 9).

### **Seneca**

Could Seneca be hinting that Lucilius should appoint him as his guardian in paragraphs 8-10? Does Seneca fit the criteria of being a guardian? From the examples which Seneca gives here, it could be inferred that to fit the criteria of being a guardian one has to be dead. However, in *Ep.* 6.5-6, Seneca said that it is better to follow living examples than simply precepts. Here Seneca offered to be Lucilius' living example. It thus seems that one should follow the example of a living person, and - should this living example be absent - one should act as though one's imaginary guardian were looking on.

## Summary

The Ideal Persona accepts his natural weaknesses but fights against his unnatural weaknesses. Wisdom helps him to overcome his unnatural weaknesses. Therefore, the Ideal Persona strives to acquire wisdom. As a practical aid he appoints a guardian over himself. In *Ep.* 6.5-6 Seneca offered to be Lucilius' living example. Now Seneca advises Lucilius to also appoint himself an imaginary guardian.

## ***Epistula 12***

### **Ideal Persona**

Seneca defines old age as the time when life is on the downward slope but has not yet reached abrupt decline (*aetas devexa iam, non tamen praeceps*, 5). The Ideal Persona cherishes and loves old age. For him it is full of pleasure because he knows how to use it (*conplectamur illam et amemus; plena est voluptatis, si illa scias uti*, 4). How does he use old age? He uses the days in his old age the same way in which he used his younger days, i.e. to better himself and to prepare for death. He looks death in the face, no matter how old he is (*primum ista tam seni ante oculos debet esse quam iuveni*, 6). The bonus of old age is that one is free of appetites: *aut hoc ipsum succedit in locum voluptatum, nullis egere* (5).

It is not only in old age that one must be aware of time and death. The Ideal Persona lives every day to the full, i.e. as if it rounded out and completed his existence (*itaque sic ordinandus est dies omnis tamquam cogat agmen et consummet atque expleat vitam*, 8). He can await the morrow without apprehension and say "I have lived" every morning (*ille beatissimus est et securus sui possessor qui crastinum sine sollicitudine expectat; quisquis dixit 'vixi' cotidie ad lucrum surgit*, 9). He lives under no constraints (*malum est in necessitate vivere, sed in necessitate vivere necessitas nulla est*, 10). Therefore, he is free.

### **Seneca**

Seneca acknowledges his old age: *quocumque me verti, argumenta senectutis meae video* (1). In paragraphs 1-3 Seneca describes a recent visit to his country place. He does this

comically, mocking himself: *quid mihi futurum est, si tam putria sunt aetatis meae saxa?* (1); *quod intra nos sit, ego illas posueram, ego illarum primum videram folium* (2); and ‘*perfecte*’ inquam ‘*iste delirat: pupulus, etiam delictum meum factus est? prorsus potest fieri: dentes illi cum maxime cadunt*’ (3). It is good to have a sense of humour about life and especially about getting old. Russell points out that this is “typical of Seneca: the moral, the irony at his own expense, the obsession with age, the unembarrassed banter with the slaveboy” (1974:82). Russell also points out that “description leading to reflection is a common formula in the Letters” (1974:82).

Seneca advises us to “cherish and love old age ; for it is full of pleasure if one knows how to use it” (*conplectamur illam et amemus; plena est voluptatis, si illa scias uti*, 4). Seneca compares the pleasure of old age with the pleasure of ripe fruit, the close of youth and the last drink which puts the finishing touch on drunkenness (*gratissima sunt poma... non tamen praeceps*, 4-5). These are not the kinds of pleasures Seneca urges us to enjoy. Where do such pleasures thus fit into Seneca’s proposed good life? If there is room for such pleasures in Seneca’s didactic, it is an indication of Seneca’s humaneness, his realism and his practicality. But, if such pleasures are not part of Seneca’s didactic, what is the implication of these comparisons for Seneca’s statement that old age is most pleasurable? Does it question this view of Seneca’s? However, one could also see these examples as being effective, albeit not appropriate.

Seneca states - as though it were a commonplace - that life is actually most delightful on the downward slope, but when it has not yet reached the abrupt decline (*iucundissima est aetas devexa iam, non tamen praeceps*, 5). To this Seneca adds still further that he personally believes that the period “on the edge of the roof” possesses pleasures of its own, or else the very fact of not wanting pleasures takes the place of the pleasures themselves (*et illam quoque...nullis egere*, 5). The way Seneca carries on about old age sounds as though he is trying to console himself about his age!

## Lucilius

Lucilius objects that it is a nuisance to always be looking death in the face, but Seneca renders his objection invalid: death must be looked in the face by everyone, of every age (*‘molestum est’ inquis... unum diem speret*, 6).

Lucilius by now insists on a maxim: ‘*sic*’ *inquis* ‘*sine ullo ad me peculio veniet?*’ (10). Lucilius supposedly objects to Seneca’s use of Epicurus (‘*Epicurus*’ *inquis* ‘*dixit: quid tibi cum alieno?*’ 11). To this Seneca angrily replies that he will continue to heap quotations from Epicurus on Lucilius, until he gets it into his head that the truth is common property (*quod verum est...sunt esse communia*, 11)!

Concerning the passage “*sed iam debeo... Epicurum tibi ingerere*” (10-11) Motto and Clark point out that “the contestant materializes into Lucilius himself. Some of the most forceful moments in the *Epistulae Morales* occur when this takes place. Throughout the letters, Seneca repeatedly, insistently addresses Lucilius *as if he were present upon the scene*. Indeed, when Seneca is not debating...with himself, or with society and public opinion, an imaginary Lucilius is virtually omnipresent upon the stage, as the stubborn *interlocutor*, as a questioner or outright challenger of Seneca’s arguments. Thus, he functions openly as *adversarius*, as recalcitrant opponent to Seneca himself... [T]here is another voice present in this passage - that of Epicurus... Seneca is doing much more than providing himself with one more paradoxical antagonist; he is giving himself the opportunity in the Letters to generate a host of new ‘voices’ that fill up the page. His terse, pointed prose is best served when cast in a dramatic arena, and his writing is remarkable, ultimately, for supplying so much of this tournament and collision... [W]ith the incessant play of ‘voices’ and the clash of contest, his epistles finally become a type of creative drama - the rich acting out of ideas in conflict” (1975:3-4).<sup>23</sup>

## Summary

Seneca demonstrates that it is good to have a sense of humour about life, and especially about getting old, with his mocking description of himself. The Ideal Persona cherishes and loves old age, for he knows how to use it. One should use one’s life, no matter how old one is, to better oneself and others through the practice of philosophy. Death should be looked in the face by everyone, no matter how old he or she is. Lucilius must still learn to look death in the face. Seneca personally believes that old age is the best time of one’s life.

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<sup>23</sup> For a study that stresses the drama of Senecan prose, see Hijmans (1966) “Drama in Seneca’s Stoicism”.

Nevertheless, every day counts, no matter how old one is. Seneca exhorts himself and Lucilius to be like the Ideal Persona, to live life to the full every day. The lesson of this letter is therefore that age counts for nothing (an issue for old men like Seneca and Lucilius), but time counts for everything. Life must be lived to the full, and in order to do this, death must be confronted.

## **Epistula 13**

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona strives towards a true spirit. The true spirit will never consent to come under the jurisdiction of things external to itself (*sic verus ille animus et in alienum non venturus arbitrium probatur*, 1). In other words, the Ideal Persona fights against Fortune. He becomes stronger through the tests of Fortune: *quae numquam certam dare fiduciam sui possunt nisi cum multae difficultates hinc et illinc apparuerunt, aliquando vero et propius accesserunt* (1).

How does the Ideal Persona fight Fortune? He is not unhappy before the crisis comes (*ne sis miser ante tempus*, 4). He is aware of and fights against the weakness of exaggerating, imagining or anticipating sorrow (*aut augemus dolorem aut praecipimus aut fingimus*, 5). Seneca discusses these three fears: exaggerated fear (*primum illud... an inbecillitate nostra*, 5), imaginary fear (*illud praesta mihi... hodie nihil negotii habet*, 6-7), anticipated fear ('*at enim futurum est*' ... *meliora proponere*, 8-11) and again exaggerated and anticipated fear (*nonnumquam, nullis apparentibus signis... statim in timorem venit scrupulus*, 12-13). He combats his fear of the future by reasoning: *non quid audias sed quid sentias cogites, et cum patientia tua deliberes ac te ipse interrogas, qui tua optime nosti* (6). Instead of fearing the future, he looks forward to better things and so gains time (*interim tibi meliora promitte. quid facies lucri? tempus*, 10).

The Ideal Persona lets prudence help him and he constrains his fear of the future with a resolute spirit, even when it is in plain sight (*hic prudentia prosit, hic robore animi evidentem quoque metum respue*, 12). Fear of the future is supposed to be a groundless fear and thus unnecessary. However, in comparison, the fear of the future in *hic prudentia*

*prosit, hic robore animi evidentem quoque metum respue* is real; it is not a groundless fear. If he is not yet strong enough to contemn his fear with a resolute spirit (and in this Seneca shows his practicality), he tempers his fear with hope (*si minus, vitio vitium repelle, spe metum tempera*, 12), but weighs his hopes and fears carefully (*ergo spem ac metum examina, et quotiens incerta erunt omnia, tibi fave: crede quod mavis. si plures habebit sententias metus, nihilominus in hanc partem potius inclina*, 13). He continually reflects on man's condition of fearing the future and this also helps to strengthen him: *ac subinde hoc in animo volve, maiorem partem mortalium, cum illi nec sit quicquam mali nec pro certo futurum sit, aestuare ac discurrere* (13). When he is strong enough, he can challenge Fortune: *alius dicat 'fortasse non veniet': tu dic 'quid porro, si veniet? videbimus uter vincat* (14).

The Ideal Persona lives for the present. He is not like the fool who is always getting ready to live (*'inter cetera mala hoc quoque habet stultitia: semper incipit vivere'*, 16). Rather, when he wakes up in the morning he is able to say "I have lived" (cf. *Epistula* 12).

## Lucilius

Seneca compliments Lucilius on having plenty of spirit (*multum tibi esse animi scio*, 1). What does *multum tibi esse animi* mean? In the context in which it is used here it probably means that he is courageous. It could also mean that he has a strong will or a well developed reason. Seneca goes on to say that Lucilius is spiritfult by nature, because even before he began to equip himself with maxims, which were wholesome and potent to overcome obstacles (*nam etiam antequam instrueres te praeceptis salutaribus et dura vincentibus*, 1), he had been taking pride in his contest with Fortune (*satis adversus fortunam placebas tibi*, 1). But now there is no doubting that Lucilius is full of spirit, because he has been tested by Fortune and survived (*et multo magis postquam cum illa manum conseruisti viresque expertus es tuas*, 1). Being tested by Fortune is the test of character and also further strengthens one's character (*quae numquam certam dare... descendit ad pugnam*, 1-2). Lucilius has often survived difficult tests of Fortune, in this way becoming stronger (*ergo, ut similitudinem istam prosequar, saepe iam fortuna supra te fuit, nec tamen tradidisti te, sed subsiluisti et acrior constitisti*, 3). Because of these

challenges his manliness has gained much strength (*multum enim adicit sibi virtus lacessita*, 3). The tests of Fortune test his courage, his will and his reason.

In this letter Seneca's approach to Lucilius is not a warning or exhortation or accusation as in many of the other letters, but simply a suggestion of some additional safeguards by which Lucilius can fortify himself against Fortune (*tamen, si tibi videtur, accipe a me auxilia quibus munire te possis*, 3). This shows Lucilius' progress. Lucilius has to realise that it is human nature to suffer more in imagination than in reality (*plura sunt, Lucili, quae nos terrent quam quae premunt, et saepius opinione quam re laboramus*, 4). Some dangers seem to be threatening Lucilius, so Seneca tells him not to worry about them, because they may never come and they certainly have not yet come (*cum illa quae velut imminentia expavisti fortasse nunquam ventura sint, certe non venerint*, 4). Lucilius must learn not to be miserable before the crisis comes (*illud tibi praecipio, ne sis miser ante tempus*, 4). Seneca advises Lucilius to think for himself, to consider not the rumours, but what he himself feels (*illud praesta mihi...qui tua optime nosti*, 6). Lucilius needs to ask himself what the motive of those people, who try to make him feel worried, is. He has to ask himself whether it is a rumour or a real evil; whether he has not himself turned what is not an evil into an evil ('*quid est quare... est malum facio?*' 6).

Lucilius interrupts with a relevant question: how is he supposed to know whether his worries are real or imaginary? ('*quomodo*' *inquis* '*intellegam, vana sint an vera quibus angor?*' 7). Seneca's answer is that the present can be analysed (and if one is free and healthy and one does not suffer from any external injury, one has nothing to worry about) and the future should be left to when the time comes (*accipe huius rei regulam... hodie nihil negotii habet*, 7). Lucilius again objects that something bad will happen in the future ('*at enim futurum est*', 8). Seneca advises Lucilius to use his reason; to consider whether his proofs of future trouble are sure and whether he is not being mocked by rumour (*primum dispice...singulos conficit*, 8). It is a common human problem that we agree too quickly with what people say; we do not make the effort to examine their words: *ita est, mi Lucili; cito accedimus opinioni; non coarguimus illa quae nos in metum adducunt nec excutimus* (8).

Seneca says that he is ashamed to either admonish Lucilius sternly or to try to beguile him with such mild remedies (*pudet me ibi sic tecum loqui et tam lenibus te remediis focilare,*

14). It is implied that Lucilius has progressed beyond the advice Seneca gives in this letter. Lucilius is ready for the more difficult step: “Let another say: ‘Perhaps the worst will not happen.’ You yourself must say: ‘Well, what if it does happen? Let us see who wins! Perhaps it happens for my best interests; it may be that such a death will shed credit upon my life’” (*alius dicat... vitam honestabit*, 14). Seneca says that he has been exhorting Lucilius for far too long. Lucilius needs reminding rather than exhortation, by which it is implied that Lucilius already knew what Seneca preaches in this letter (*nimum diu te cohortor, cum tibi admonitione magis quam exhortatione opus sit*, 15).

Seneca may be leading Lucilius on the path of reformation, but Lucilius’ nature also leads him on this path. Seneca says that Lucilius was born to such conduct as he describes in this letter (*non in diversum te a natura tua ducimus: natus es ad ista quae dicimus*, 15). In this Lucilius is not unique. The Stoics believe that we are all born with the divine seed of virtue within us and that it is in our nature to develop it and become wise. Motto comments: “For Seneca is committed to belief in the possibility of moral progress in men. He does not despair even of the man who has plunged into the worst habits... Believing each individual to have the divine seed of virtue in him, he is hopeful that advice, guidance, and cultivation will stir it into growth (*Ep.* 94.29; 108.8). He is therefore eager to present man with the tools and principles that will serve him as a rule of life” (1973:50). For this reason - Seneca says - Lucilius must increase and beautify the good that is in him (*eo magis bonum tuum auge et exorna*, 15).

Seneca compliments (which in turn encourages) Lucilius by addressing him *Lucili virorum optime* (16). The words *considera quid vox ista significet...et intellegas* (16) imply that Lucilius can now think for himself; Seneca no longer has to spoon-feed him. Lucilius also has to find his own examples: *circumspice tecum singulos* (17).

Seneca explains that he would not name the author of the maxim, if it were not for the fact that this is not one of Epicurus’ popular sayings (*non adicerem auctorem...adoptare permisi*, 17). This implies that Lucilius is well-read, but still only in popular works, and especially popular maxims.

## Seneca

Seneca makes it clear that he is speaking to Lucilius, not in the Stoic fashion, but in his milder style; in other words, he implies that he is being more practical than the strict Stoic doctrine: *non loquor tecum Stoica lingua, sed hac summissiore* (4).<sup>24</sup> The Stoic fashion is to consider fear and sorrow as unimportant and beneath notice, but - Seneca says - he will drop such puffed-up words and give more realistic and practical advice (*nos enim dicimus... di boni, vera*, 4). What does this say of Seneca's attitude towards Stoicism and of how he handles Stoicism? Seneca chooses what he wants or needs from Stoicism and mixes it into his recipe of the good life (an eclectic recipe!) with the emphasis or focus always being on practicality.

## Summary

Lucilius has often survived Fortune's difficult tests and so become stronger. What he still needs to learn about fighting Fortune, however, is not to worry about the future. The Ideal Persona does not fear the future (with its, often, groundless fears); he lives for the present. He combats his fear of the future by reasoning. He looks forward to better things and so gains time. He lets prudence help him and he contemns his fear with a resolute spirit, even when it is in plain sight. Lucilius is ready for the more difficult step of not only denying his fears of the future, but in fact confronting them. He is ready to challenge Fortune.

## ***Epistula 14***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona at times indulges his body, but he is not a slave to it (*non nego indulgendum illi, serviendum nego*, 1). Because he who makes his body his master, who is

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<sup>24</sup> Ball points out that "at times (Seneca) makes an explicit distinction between his own views and those of the sect" (1916:xix). He names *Epp.* 113.1 and 117.1 as examples.

over-fearful on its behalf, who judges everything according to the body, will have many masters (*multis enim...omnia refert*, 1).

He avoids discomfort and dangers to his body; he withdraws to safe ground by thinking continually how he may repel all objects of fear (*nihilominus quantum possumus evitemus incommoda quoque, non tantum pericula, et in tutum nos reducamus, excogitantes subinde quibus possint timenda depelli*, 3). According to Seneca there are three main classes of objects of fear: we fear want, we fear sickness and we fear the troubles which result from the violence of the stronger. The last of these fears is the worst, because it is accompanied by great outcry and uproar (*quorum tria... et tumultu venit*, 3-4).

The worst threats to the body come not from nature but from men in power. Therefore, the Ideal Persona avoids those in power by 1) not giving offence, 2) by not making enemies of them and 3) by turning his course to avoid trouble, but making a point of not seeming to avoid it (*demus itaque operam... quia quae quis fugit damnat*, 7-8). The alliteration in “*quia quae quis*” does not appear to highlight anything special, but one could say that it aids the words themselves, aurally making the point that it is indeed a complicated matter to avoid those in power. The Ideal Persona protects himself from the mob by 1) not having cravings like theirs which results in rivalry, 2) by having as little booty as possible on himself and 3) by avoiding hatred, jealousy and scorn by means of philosophy, which teaches one to observe the mean (*circumspiciendum ergo nobis est... non minus contemni quam suspici nocet*, 9-10).

The Ideal Persona takes his refuge in philosophy, because it is a sort of protecting emblem: *ad philosophiam ergo confugiendum est; hae litterae, non dico apud bonos sed apud mediocriter malos infularum loco sunt* (11).<sup>25</sup> Gummere gives the literal translation of *infularum loco sunt*, namely “is as good as a priest’s fillet” (1917:90 n.b). Philosophy serves as a refuge for the following reason: *haec quieta et sui negotii contemni non potest, cui ab omnibus artibus etiam apud pessimos honor est. numquam in tantum convalescet nequitia, numquam sic contra virtutes coniurabitur, ut non philosophiae nomen venerabile et sacrum maneat* (11). The study of philosophy incurs neither envy nor contempt,

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 5.2.

provided that the philosopher pursues it peacefully and without ostentation. Therefore, the Ideal Persona practises philosophy with calmness and moderation: *ceterum philosophia ipsa tranquille modesteque tractanda est* (11). To this Lucilius objects that one cannot call the philosophy of Marcus Cato moderate: ‘*quid ergo?*’ *inquis* ‘*videtur tibi M. Cato modeste philosophari... simul lacescit duos?*’ (12).<sup>26</sup>

The Ideal Persona (as a Stoic, see paragraph 14) shuts himself off from public life and withdraws into privacy to practise philosophy, for the purpose of improving men’s existence and framing laws for the human race (*interim ad hos te Stoicos voco qui a re publica exclusi secesserunt ad colendam vitam et humano generi iura condenda*, 14). The Ideal Persona is careful not to incur the displeasure of those in power by upsetting the customs of the people or inviting their attention by any novel ways of living (*non conturbabit sapiens publicos mores nec populum in se vitae novitate convertet*, 14). Seneca admits that there is the question of whether the Wise Man ought to give his attention to politics, but he says that he will discuss it later (*sed postea videbimus an sapienti opera rei publicae danda sit*, 14). Gummere refers to *Epistula* 22. In this letter Seneca says that one must retire from a worldly life.

Seneca makes it sound as if the motive for withdrawing from a public life and practising philosophy is to be safe: ‘*quid ergo? utique erit tutus qui hoc propositum sequetur?*’ (15). The Ideal Persona withdraws from public life to avoid discomfort and dangers. But this is not the only reason for his withdrawal. His main reason for withdrawing from public life is to work for the improvement of mankind.

The Ideal Persona regards the reasons for all his actions but not the results, i.e. he does not worry about that over which he has no control, namely Fortune (*denique consilium rerum omnium sapiens, non exitum spectat; initia in potestate nostra sunt, de eventu fortuna iudicat*, 16). The maxim addresses the fear of want: *is maxime divitiis fruitur qui minime divitiis indiget* (17). The Ideal Persona does not need riches (or anything else), but if he has it, he enjoys it. He sees it as a bonus and does not fear its loss. He is content.

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<sup>26</sup> See Griffin (1968) “Seneca on Cato’s politics: Epistle 14.12-13”.

## Seneca

Seneca opens this letter with the fact that we all have an inborn affection for our body and are entrusted with its guardianship (*fateor insitam esse nobis corporis nostri caritatem; fateor nos huius gerere tutelam*, 1). Seneca is realistic in that he does not expect one not to sometimes indulge one's body, but he maintains that one must not be a slave to it (*non nego indulgendum illi, serviendum nego*, 1).

Seneca asks Lucilius to consider those Stoics who withdraw from public life into privacy for the purpose of improving men's existence and framing laws for the human race without incurring the displeasure of those in power or upsetting the customs of the people (*interim ad hos... novitate convertet*, 14). This is what Seneca urges Lucilius to do and what he himself is doing. In *Ep.* 8.1-2 we learned of Seneca's withdrawal from public life in order to work for later generations.

Seneca is an eclectic; he is open-minded in his search for the truth: *ut scias quam benignissimus, propositum est aliena laudare: Epicuri est aut Metrodori aut alicuius ex illa officina. et quid interest quis dixerit? omnibus dixit* (17).

## Lucilius

Lucilius asks whether this is a proven plan (namely withdrawing from the world and practising philosophy) for safety from the jealousy and hatred of others: '*quid ergo? utique erit tutus qui hoc propositum sequetur?*' (15). Lucilius is only being realistic when he objects that it is difficult to not fear Fortune if one knows that she can inflict suffering and trouble: '*at aliquid vexationis adferet, aliquid adversi*' (16). Due to his renowned position (see *Ep.* 19.3) Lucilius fears the jealousy and hatred of powerful people.

## Summary

One motive for withdrawing from public life is to avoid discomfort and dangers. The Ideal Persona avoids those in power and he protects himself from the mob. The best thing in which to take refuge is philosophy.

There are those Stoics who withdraw from public life into privacy for the purpose of improving men's existence and framing laws for the human race without incurring the displeasure of those in power or upsetting the customs of the people. They practise philosophy with calmness and moderation. This is what the Ideal Persona does. Seneca urges Lucilius to do this and he himself is already busy doing it.

## ***Epistula 15***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona spends his time developing his mind, but he does take some time off to give his mind a break and to exercise his body.

Being well means studying philosophy, because without philosophy the mind is sickly and the body is like that of a lunatic (*sine hoc aeger est animus; corpus quoque, etiam si magnas habet vires, non aliter quam furiosi aut frenetici validum est*, 1). Therefore, the Ideal Persona primarily cultivates the health of his mind. The health of his body comes second (*ergo hanc praecipue valetudinem cura, deinde et illam secundam; quae non magno tibi constabit, si volueris bene valere*, 2). This is according to nature: *cum tibi feliciter sagina cesserit et tori creverint, nec vires umquam opimi bovis nec pondus aequabis* (2). No matter how hard one works out, one will never be a match for a bull, but it is according to the bull's nature to be strong.

He who devotes himself to his body wastes his life force and renders it less fit to bear a strain or severer studies. By overloading his body with food he strangles his soul and renders it less active. He also has to take orders from vile slaves (*multa sequuntur incommoda... bibere et sudare vita cardiaca est*, 3). The Ideal Persona, on the other hand, chooses exercises which will save time, because - Seneca reminds us - time is something of which we ought to keep strict account (*sunt exercitationes et faciles et breves, quae corpus et sine mora lassent et tempori parcant, cuius praecipua ratio habenda est*, 4). The Ideal Persona does short and simple exercises, which tire his body rapidly. Seneca prescribes running, weight-lifting and jumping (*cursus et cum...usum rude facile*, 4). Mans (1978: chapter 4) discusses Seneca's thoughts on physical education.

Apart from spending a small amount of time on exercising his body, the Ideal Persona also takes a break from his studies every now and then, because one's mind needs a change. But he does not choose activities that can unnerve him (*neque ego te iubeo semper inminere libro aut pugillaribus: dandum est aliquod intervallum animo, ita tamen ut non resolvatur, sed remittatur*, 6). Seneca recommends riding in a litter; reading, dictating, conversing or listening to another, and walking (*gestatio et corpus concutit...vetat fieri*, 6). Another option is "voice-culture", but the Ideal Persona will talk "according to nature": *usque eo naturale est paulatim incitari* (7).

The Ideal Persona is content, because he does not demand anything from, or is dependent upon, Fortune (*qui non cogitamus quam iucundum sit nihil poscere, quam magnificum sit plenum esse nec ex fortuna pendere*, 9). This is how he practically does it:

1. He continually reminds himself how many ambitions he has attained, and not how many he still wants to attain (*subinde itaque...quot sequantur*, 10).
2. He fixes himself a limit for the future, which he will not desire to pass, even if he can (*finem constitue quem transire ne possis quidem si velis*, 11).
3. He does not crave (*quare potius a fortuna inpetrem ut det, quam a me ne petam? quare autem petam?* 11).
4. He lives each day as though it were his last (*in quid laborem? ecce hic dies ultimus est; ut non sit, prope ab ultimo est*, 11).

## Seneca

This letter has an interesting opening. Seneca explains that it is an old Roman custom to add the words "If you are well, it is well; I also am well" to the opening words of a letter (*mos antiquis fuit, usque ad meam servatus aetatem, primis epistulae verbis adicere 'si vales bene est, ego valeo'* 1). Seneca adapts this to his outlook on life: "If you are studying philosophy it is well" (*recte nos dicimus 'si philosopharis, bene est.' valere enim hoc demum est*, 1). The words "*nos dicimus*" indicate that Lucilius shares this outlook. Seneca believes in and dictates a life devoted to philosophy.

Seneca has a lot to say on the art of rhetoric and how one should approach it, in paragraphs 7-8. Seneca makes it clear that he is against the art of rhetoric: *nec tu intentionem vocis contempseris, quam veto te per gradus et certos modos extollere, deinde deprimere. quid si*

*velis deinde quemadmodum ambules discere?* (7). The difference between philosophy and rhetoric is that rhetoric only teaches us to preach, whereas philosophy teaches us to practise. But Seneca himself makes use of rhetorical devices in the *Epistulae Morales*. There appears to be some disparity between the literary style which Seneca preaches and the style he practises, as I pointed out in the Introduction (see page 7). Motto and Clark remark: “Seneca prided himself upon his ability to deliver ideas in high oratorical tones, yet he also considered his letters to be informal conversations” (1975:2). What is the reason for this tension? Motto points out: “By combining philosophical training with rhetorical skill, the young Seneca pursued equally the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*” (1985:5).

Seneca says sarcastically, “*quid si velis deinde quemadmodum ambules discere?*” (7). There is nothing wrong with making oneself heard, but what one says is more important than how one says it. Lucilius sarcastically objects, “*quid ergo? a clamore protinus et a summa contentione vox tua incipiet?*” (7). Seneca agrees that speaking well is important, but stresses that it should be natural, and he goes on to describe how to talk “naturally”: *usque eo naturale est... rustico more desaeviat* (7-8). A Stoic doctrine that had great influence in the formulation of their theory of style was their belief that for anything to be ideal, whether speech or conduct, it must be in harmony with nature (Smiley 1919:51).

Seneca reminds us of the importance of valuing our time and living each day to the full with the words “*ecce hic dies ultimus est; ut non sit, prope ab ultimo est*” (11). These words also remind us of Seneca’s old age.

## Lucilius

It sounds as though the following may be Lucilius’ problem, because Seneca directly addresses him: *stulta est enim, mi Lucili, et minime conveniens litterato viro occupatio exercendi lacertos et dilatandi cervicem ac latera firmandi* (2). Or perhaps the words “*litterato viro*” rather imply and emphasize that Lucilius is different from such people, who dedicate their lives to their bodies, and that he is therefore living a better life.

Lucilius may be living a better life than the men who sweat away their lives, but that does not mean that he is living the good life. Lucilius has achieved many successes in the past

and outstripped many men; he has even outstripped himself (*subinde itaque, Lucili, ... te ipse antecessisti*, 10). The problem is that Lucilius' success is a worldly success. This is the life that Seneca is urging Lucilius to leave. Seneca is, however, realistic in that he realises that this may be difficult. He therefore advises Lucilius to fix himself a limit for the future (in terms of his worldly ambitions), which he will not desire to pass, even if he has the power to do so (*finem constitue quem transire ne possis quidem si velis*, 11).

## Summary

It is important for both Seneca and Lucilius to be continually practising philosophy, i.e. to be cultivating their minds. The body also needs attention, but the Ideal Persona will choose exercises that save time. The Ideal Persona also takes a break from his studies every now and then, but he does not choose activities that can unnerve him. One such activity is "voice-culture." Seneca stresses that what one says is more important than how one says it. The Ideal Persona has the answer: he talks according to nature.

The Ideal Persona is content, because he does not demand anything from, or is dependent upon, Fortune. This is possible because he continually reminds himself how many ambitions he has attained, and not how many he still wants to attain. Lucilius has achieved many successes in the past and outstripped many men, even himself. But this means that he has certain expectations of the future also. Therefore, he should fix himself a limit for the future, which he will not desire to pass, even if he could. However, he needs to rather concentrate on the present. He should not crave material things and he should live each day as though it were his last.

## ***Epistula 16***

### **Ideal Persona**

The process of moral progress is a constant process. The process itself has to be scrutinized on a regular basis. The Ideal Persona reflects daily (so that this idea is strengthened and implanted more deeply) that the good life is only possible through the study of wisdom, i.e. philosophy (*liquere hoc tibi, Lucili, scio, neminem posse beate vivere, ne tolerabiliter*

*quidem, sine sapientiae studio, et beatam vitam perfecta sapientia effici, ceterum tolerabilem etiam inchoata. sed hoc quod liquet firmandum et altius cotidiana meditatione figendum est, 1).* He keeps the resolutions he has already made, perseveres in them, developing new strength through continuous study, until a good inclination becomes a good settled purpose (*plus operis est in eo ut proposita custodias quam ut honesta proponas. perseverandum est et adsiduo studio robur addendum, donec bona mens sit quod bona voluntas est, 1).* He does not put confidence in himself too quickly; he examines himself to see if he is making progress in philosophy or merely in life itself (*illud ante omnia vide, utrum in philosophia an in ipsa vita profeceris, 2).*

He learns from philosophy how to live; philosophy guides his life: *animum format et fabricat, vitam disponit, actiones regit, agenda et omittenda demonstrat, sedet ad gubernaculum et per ancipitia fluctuantium derigit cursum (3).* An objector raises the question of how philosophy can help if Fate exists, or if God rules the universe, or if Chance governs everything (*dicet aliquis... nihil fortuna permittit, 4).* Seneca answers that no matter what, philosophy is our defence (*philosophia nos tueri debet, 5).* Philosophy teaches us to follow God and endure Chance (*haec docebit ut deum sequaris, feras casum, 5).*

The Ideal Persona lives according to nature, and therefore he is not poor (philosophy teaches him how to do this): *'si ad naturam vives, numquam eris pauper; si ad opiniones, numquam eris dives' (7).* How does one know if something is according to nature? Natural desires are limited; the false has no limits (*naturalia desideria finita sunt... nullus enim terminus falso est, 9).* With this in mind Seneca gives the following practical advice: if one wants to know whether that which one desires is based upon a natural or misleading desire, consider whether it can stop at any definite point; if not, it is contrary to nature (*et cum voles scire quod petes...scito id naturale non esse, 9).*

## **Lucilius**

Seneca evaluates the state of Lucilius's moral progress, explaining that it is a process which demands constant attention. Seneca states that Lucilius already knows the very important truth, namely that the good life is only possible through the study of wisdom, and that the good life is reached when our wisdom is brought to completion (*liquere hoc tibi, Lucili,*

*scio, neminem posse beate vivere, ne tolerabiliter quidem, sine sapientiae studio, et beatam vitam perfecta sapientia effici, ceterum tolerabilem etiam inchoata*, 1). But what Lucilius still has to know (and do) is that he must strengthen and implant this idea more deeply by daily reflection (*sed hoc quod liquet firmandum et altius cotidiana meditatione figendum est*, 1). He also has to learn to keep the resolutions he has already made, rather than go on and make new or even better ones (*plus operis est in eo ut proposita custodias quam ut honesta proponas*, 1). Seneca exhorts Lucilius to persevere, to develop new strength by continuous study, until that which is at this stage only a good inclination, becomes a good settled purpose (*perseverandum est et adsiduo studio robur addendum, donec bona mens sit quod bona voluntas est*, 1).

Lucilius apparently feels and writes to Seneca that the latter does not acknowledge his progress. Therefore, Seneca assures Lucilius that he is aware of his progress (*itaque non opus est tibi apud me pluribus verbis aut adfirmatione tam longa: intellego multum te profecisse*, 2). Seneca claims that he understands the feelings, which prompted Lucilius to write this (*quae scribis unde veniant scio; non sunt ficta nec colorata*, 2). Seneca was also once like Lucilius, i.e. at the same place on the road of moral progress. Seneca rates Lucilius' progress: at present he has hopes for Lucilius, but not yet perfect trust (*dicam tamen quid sentiam: iam de te spem habeo, nondum fiduciam*, 2). This is about trust in Lucilius' ability to reach the end goal of wisdom. But these words also indicate Seneca's distrust in Lucilius' true intentions: is Lucilius truly aiming for moral progress?

Seneca advises Lucilius to also adopt this attitude towards himself, since he may be putting confidence in himself too quickly and too easily (*tu quoque idem facias volo: non est quod tibi cito et facile credas*, 2). Seneca advises Lucilius to examine himself (*excute te et varie scrutare et observa*, 2). Most importantly, Lucilius must see whether it is in philosophy, or merely in life itself, that he has made progress (*illud ante omnia vide, utrum in philosophia an in ipsa vita profeceris*, 2). According to Gummere “*in ipsa vita profeceris*” should be directly translated as “have merely advanced in years” (1917:104 n.a). But does this sentence necessarily have to be about age, as Gummere thinks? Could it not also refer to worldly achievements? In other words, could the sentence “*illud ante omnia vide, utrum in philosophia an in ipsa vita profeceris*” mean that Lucilius must make sure whether he is making progress in philosophy, or whether he is simply bettering his worldly position?

Seneca indirectly questions Lucilius' moral progress. Lucilius has to realise his own faults, but sometimes one needs another to point them out.

On the one hand Seneca indirectly accuses Lucilius of misusing philosophy as a trick to catch the public, to show off, as a matter of words instead of facts, as a form of amusement or of relieving boredom (*non est philosophia... otio nausea*, 3). On the other hand he simply wants Lucilius to think about philosophy, of what it is and of what it is not (*non est philosophia... petendum est*, 3). In other words, either he indirectly accuses Lucilius or he wants to make Lucilius more aware. But this is the same thing really. The point is that he forces Lucilius to question himself.

Seneca warns and exhorts Lucilius: Lucilius must not allow the impulse of his spirit to weaken and grow cold. He must hold fast to it and establish it firmly, in order that what is now an impulse may become a habit of his mind (*ut te moneam... quod est impetus*, 6).

According to Seneca, maxims have become Lucilius' bad habit: *iam ab initio, si te bene novi, circumspicies quid haec epistula munusculi adtulerit* (7). Seneca claims to know Lucilius well with the words "*si te bene novi*".

## Seneca

An objector raises the question of whether philosophy is of avail if Fate or God or Chance exists (*dicet aliquis, 'quid... fortuna permittit'*, 4). Seneca tells Lucilius that whether the truth lies in one or in all of these views, we must be philosophers (*quidquid est ex his, Lucili, vel si omnia haec sunt, philosophandum est*, 5). These words show Seneca's open-mindedness. But, Seneca says, it is not now his purpose to discuss what is in our control, i.e. what role Fate, or God or Chance, etc. plays in our lives (*sed non est nunc in hanc disputationem transeundum, quid sit iuris nostri*, 6).<sup>27</sup> However, the question is appropriately brought up here. Seneca also uses this technique (of promising to discuss something in another letter) in *Ep.* 14.14, where he says that the role of politics in the Wise

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<sup>27</sup> See Motto (1970: 45-49) for the letters in the *Epistulae Morales* that deal with the roles which Chance, Fate, Fortune, etc. play in our lives.

Man's life will be discussed later. In *Ep.* 13.5, Seneca says "I know that some men laugh while being flogged, and that others wince at a box on the ear. We shall consider later whether these evils derive their power from their own strength, or from our own weakness." Such examples imply a systematic plan in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*.

Seneca modestly says that he is no genius, since he quotes the knowledge of others. However, he believes that there is nothing wrong with this, since the truth is common property: *non est quod mireris... ullo meum est* (7).

## Summary

The good life is to be wise. The good life is therefore only possible through the study of wisdom, i.e. through philosophy. Lucilius knows this, but what he does not realise is that he has to think this thought everyday, so that this idea is strengthened and implanted more deeply. He must enact this thought through the study and practice of philosophy. Lucilius must learn to keep the resolutions he has already made rather than make new ones. Seneca further exhorts Lucilius to persevere, to develop new strength through continuous study, until that which is at this stage only a good inclination, becomes a good settled purpose. Lucilius should not put confidence in himself too quickly and too easily. He should examine himself. Most importantly, Lucilius must see whether it is in philosophy, or merely in life itself, that he has made progress. The Ideal Persona makes philosophy the guide of his life.

## *Epistula 17*

### Ideal Persona

The Ideal Persona strives towards a sound mind at top speed and with his whole strength. If any bond holds him back he severs it (*et ad bonam mentem magno cursu ac totis viribus tendere; si quid est quo teneris, aut expedi aut incide*, 1). The Ideal Persona not only realises the all-important thing, i.e. the great benefit which philosophy confers (*et summam quidem rei pervides, quantum philosophia prosit*, 2). He also knows the strength and power of philosophy and he discerns accurately philosophy's various functions. He knows that we

receive great help from philosophy in everything and everywhere, and that philosophy succours us in the greatest matters and also in the smallest (*cum hoc dicis...in minima descendat*, 2).

Nothing can keep the Ideal Persona from practising philosophy, not even poverty. The Ideal Persona does not fear poverty; he even prefers it: *nempe hoc quaeris et hoc ista dilatione vis consequi, ne tibi paupertas timenda sit: quid si adpetenda est? multis ad philosophandum obstitere divitiae: paupertas expedita est, segura est* (3). He lives simply, i.e. in voluntary poverty. Simple living is necessary in order to study philosophy. Study cannot be helpful without simple living, because without such a lifestyle one will not have the time to become really involved in one's studies: *si vis vacare animo, aut pauper sis oportet aut pauperi similis. non potest studium salutare fieri sine frugalitatis cura; frugalitas autem paupertas voluntaria est* (5).

In paragraph 5 is another commonly used excuse for postponing the practice of philosophy: *'nondum habeo quantum sat est; si ad illam summam pervenero, tunc me totum philosophiae dabo.'* On the other hand, the Ideal Persona's priorities are right, because he secures philosophy before all other interests (*atqui nihil prius quam hoc parandum est quod tu differs et post cetera paras; ab hoc incipiendum est*, 5). This idea is repeated in paragraph 8 where we learn that the Ideal Persona does not postpone practising philosophy, because he seeks understanding first before anything else: *cum omnia habueris, tunc habere et sapientiam voles? haec erit ultimum vitae instrumentum et, ut ita dicam, additamentum? tu vero, sive aliquid habes, iam philosophare (unde enim scis an iam nimis habeas?), sive nihil, hoc prius quaere quam quicquam* (8). Another common excuse is *'parare' inquis 'unde vivam volo'* (5). The Ideal Persona, on the other hand, is always studying philosophy, no matter what else he has to do: *simul et parare te disce* (5).

Neither poverty, nor even actual want, should call us away from philosophy, because we must endure even hunger when hastening after wisdom (*non est quod nos paupertas a philosophia revocet, ne egestas quidem. toleranda est enim ad hoc properantibus vel fames*, 6). The Ideal Persona is prepared even to starve in his pursuit of wisdom (*ecquid vel esurienti ad ista veniendum est?* 6). Another common excuse for postponing the practice of philosophy is *'at necessaria deerunt'* (9). The Ideal Persona, on the other hand, suits his needs to nature, i.e. he lives according to nature. The Wise Man will kill himself if even a

pinch of need arrives, because he is self-sufficient (*primum deesse non poterunt, quia natura minimum petit, naturae autem se sapiens accommodat. sed si necessitates ultimae inciderint, iamdudum exhibit e vita et molestus sibi esse desinet*, 9).

The Ideal Persona realises that the development of his mind is the most important thing, and not the acquisition of riches, because without a sound mind he will never be content: '*multis parasse divitias non finis miseriarum fuit sed mutatio*'. *nec hoc miror; non est enim in rebus vitium sed in ipso animo* (11-12).

The Ideal Persona's goal is everlasting freedom and not fearing God or man, and this is what philosophy promises him (*quanto hoc maius est quod promittitur: perpetua libertas nullius nec hominis nec dei timor*, 6).

## Lucilius

Seneca gives Lucilius credit for the fact that he grasps the all-important thing, namely the great benefit which philosophy confers, but he criticizes Lucilius for not yet fully grasping philosophy's various functions and how philosophy helps us in everything, everywhere; in great and small matters (*et summam quidem... minima descendat*, 2).

Lucilius does not feel ready to put all his trust in philosophy. He feels that he should have some worldly backup. Seneca orders Lucilius to "cast away all such things, if he is wise, or rather, that he may be wise" (*proice omnia ista, si sapis, immo ut sapias*, 1). The fact that Seneca does not state the subject, makes it seem that whatever it is, it is a familiar topic between them; an issue so to speak. We learn from Lucilius' objection that Seneca is here referring to Lucilius' worldly position (more specifically, his estate): '*moratur*' *inquis* '*me res familiaris; sic illam disponere volo ut sufficere nihil agenti possit, ne aut paupertas mihi oneri sit aut ego alicui*' (1). Seneca replies that in saying this Lucilius does not seem to realise the strength and power of that good which he is considering (*cum hoc dicis, non videris vim ac potentiam eius de quo cogitas boni nosse*, 2). What is this good which

Lucilius is considering? The impression one gets from what Seneca lectures<sup>28</sup> Lucilius on in this letter, is that Lucilius is considering giving up his worldly activities in order to dedicate himself to philosophy. In this letter Seneca urges Lucilius to not allow anything worldly to stand in his way of practising philosophy. Nowhere does he explicitly say that Lucilius must retire from worldly things. However, the next step for Lucilius is - specifically - retirement, which Seneca will now begin pressing on him in the following letters. Exhortation to Lucilius to withdraw from the crowd and retire to private life is found in *Epp.* 19.8; 20.1, 6-8; 21.1-6 and 22.1-12 (Motto 1970:25).

It becomes clearer what Seneca is urging Lucilius to do in paragraph 2. Lucilius must leave his money matters: *mihi crede, advoca illam in consilium: suadebit tibi ne ad calculos sedeas* (2). Seneca reveals that Lucilius' reason for postponing his studies is to make enough money, so that he does not have to fear poverty (*nempe hoc quaeris et hoc ista dilatione vis consequi, ne tibi paupertas timenda sit*, 3). Thus Lucilius' fear of poverty is what keeps him from committing himself fully to philosophy. Lucilius rejects philosophy as a "comrade" (*quid est ergo quare hanc recuses contubernalem*, 4).<sup>29</sup>

Lucilius objects that when he has enough money, he will devote himself to philosophy: '*nondum habeo quantum sat est; si ad illam summam pervenero, tunc me totum philosophiae dabo*' (5). Lucilius' priorities are wrong, since he places philosophy, the ideal, second to his other interests (*atqui nihil prius quam hoc parandum est quod tu differs et post cetera paras; ab hoc incipiendum est*, 5). Lucilius retorts that he first wants to

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<sup>28</sup> The following is a summary of what Seneca lectures Lucilius on in this letter (*Epistula* 17): *proice omnia ista, si sapis, immo ut sapias, et ad bonam mentem magno cursu ac totis viribus tende; si quid est quo teneris, aut expedi aut incide* (1); *suadebit tibi ne ad calculos sedeas* (2); *quid est ergo quare hanc recuses contubernalem* (4); *si vis vacare animo, aut pauper sis oportet aut pauperi similis. non potest studium salutare fieri sine frugalitatis cura; frugalitatis autem paupertas voluntaria est* (5); etc.

<sup>29</sup> Literally, *contubernalis* means (in a military context) (1) a messmate, comrade, one who shares the same tent or (2) a young man who accompanied the general to learn the art of war. The image of man and philosophy together in the campaign of life is then produced by the use of this Latin word. Transfiguratively, *contubernalis* means (1) in general: a comrade, mate or (2) the husband or wife of a slave. In this case the image of philosophy as one's friend, one's husband or one's wife (where one is perhaps a slave), is produced.

acquire something to live on: *'parare' inquis 'unde vivam volo'* (5). But neither poverty, nor actual want, is an excuse for postponing philosophy (*non est quod nos paupertas a philosophia revocet, ne egestas quidem*, 6). Yet again Lucilius comes up with an excuse: *'at necessaria deerunt'* (9). But this excuse is irrelevant, because nature demands little and the Wise Man suits his needs to nature (*primum deesse non poterunt, quia natura minimum petit, naturae autem se sapiens accommodat*, 9).

Seneca gives Lucilius a different way of looking at his situation: poverty may actually be something to be desired, since riches stand in one's way of attaining wisdom, whereas poverty is unburdened and free from care (*quid si adpetenda est? multis ad philosophandum obstitere divitiae: paupertas expedita est, segura est*, 3). Riches stand in Lucilius' way of making moral progress. But, Seneca says sarcastically, even the rich man when in his senses copies philosophy's ways (*cuius mores sanus dives imitatur?* 4). Seneca's advice to Lucilius is that in order to have leisure for his mind and thus time for philosophy he has to live simply: be poor or resemble it (*si vis vacare animo, aut pauper sis oportet aut pauperi similis. non potest studium salutare fieri sine frugalitatis cura; frugalitas autem paupertas voluntaria est*, 5).

Lucilius is nearer the rich class, therefore - Seneca says - his remarks do not apply to him: *haec ad alios pertinent: tu locupletibus propior es* (10). Where else in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 does Seneca, after lecturing Lucilius throughout a letter, then say that his preaching is not really relevant to Lucilius? In *Epistula* 13 Seneca says that Lucilius has progressed beyond the advice he gives in that letter: *pudet me ibi sic tecum loqui et tam lenibus te remediis focilare. alius dicat 'fortasse non veniet': tu dic 'quid porro, si veniet? videbimus uter vincat; fortasse pro me venit, et mors ista vitam honestabit'* (14). What does this signify? Does it mean that Seneca is not really preaching to Lucilius? Seneca wants to cover a large spectrum of "moral progressers" (in the beginning phase of moral progress) in his audience. It should be remembered that he himself sets the example of the more advanced phase of moral progress and that which he preaches, namely the Ideal Persona, represents the very advanced phase of moral progress.

The maxims are now Lucilius' bad habit and Seneca admits that it is his fault: *nisi te male instituissem* (11).

## Summary

The Ideal Persona realises that the development of his mind is the most important thing, because without a sound mind he will never be content. Therefore, the Ideal Persona strives towards a sound mind at top speed and with his whole strength; if any bond holds him back he severs it. This letter urges Lucilius not to allow anything worldly to stand in his way of practising philosophy. Lucilius grasps the all-important thing, namely the great benefit which philosophy confers, but he does not yet fully grasp the extent of philosophy's power. Lucilius' fear of poverty is what keeps him from committing himself fully to philosophy. Seneca's advice to Lucilius is that, in order to have leisure for his mind and thus time for philosophy, he has to live simply - be poor or resemble it. The Ideal Persona lives in voluntary poverty. The Ideal Persona is always studying philosophy, no matter what else he has to do.

## *Epistula 18*

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona does not withdraw from the crowd, but does things differently; he does not make himself conspicuous, nor does he become one of the crowd (*illud temperantius, non excerpere se nec insignire nec misceri omnibus et eadem sed non eodem modo facere*, 4). How is he different from the crowd? The Ideal Persona neither seeks the things which lure one to luxury, nor is he led into them. This proves that he is constant (*certissimum enim argumentum firmitatis suae capit, si ad blanda et in luxuriam trahentia nec it nec abducitur*, 3). Russell notes that one of Seneca's favourite themes is that of *luxuria* (1974:92). To, practically, help him be constant he practises poverty in preparation for future stresses: *interponas aliquot dies quibus contentus minimo ac vilissimo cibo, dura atque horrida veste, dicas tibi 'hoc est quod timebatur?' in ipsa securitate animus ad difficilia se praeparet et contra iniurias fortunae inter beneficia firmetur* (5-6).

Seneca puts this experiment into perspective, saying that by practising poverty one is not doing anything great; one is merely doing what many really do, but one will be rich with more comfort once one learns that poverty is far from being a burden (*non est tamen quare*

*tu multum... non sit grave pauperes esse*, 8). The Ideal Persona scorns wealth, but if he possesses it, he does so dauntlessly (*quarum possessionem tibi non interdico, sed efficere volo ut illas intrepide possideas; quod uno consequeris modo, si te etiam sine illis beate victurum persuaseris tibi, si illas tamquam exituras semper aspexeris*, 13).

Seneca uses the great Epicurus as an example of someone who practised poverty to strengthen his argument (*certos habebat dies ille magister voluptatis Epicurus... qui nondum tantum profecerit, toto*, 9). Seneca relates what Epicurus wrote to Polynaenus in a well-known letter: Epicurus boasts that he himself lives on less than a penny, but that Metrodorus needs a whole penny (*hoc certe in iis epistulis... profecerit, toto*, 9). In connection with this paragraph, Avotins comments that the answer to the question of the purpose of such days of frugality lies in the boast of Epicurus that he could feed himself *non toto asse* whereas Metrodorus needed an entire *assis* (1977:215). Avotins continues: “This boast reveals that frugality on the *certi dies* kept increasing the ability of a man to subsist on less expense. Why did Metrodorus require more money? Because he had not yet made as much progress: ... *qui nondum tantum profecerit...* (*Ep.* 18.10)... Gradual progress in frugality must have resided not in eating less and less but rather in learning to find *voluptas* in progressively viler foods... [I]n *Ep.* 18.9 Epicurus was eating poorly at intervals in order to increase his self-sufficiency. The boast of Epicurus that he could live on less than Metrodorus shows, as one would expect, that there were different levels of self-sufficiency... In *Ep.* 18.9 the words ‘*certi dies*’ indicate that progress in frugality involved regular practice sessions” (1977:215).

The Ideal Persona avoids anger: *ingentis irae exitus furor est, et ideo ira vitanda est non moderationis causa sed sanitatis* (15). In conclusion, the Ideal Persona controls his fear of poverty by practising poverty, but anger he avoids, because it cannot be controlled.

## Seneca

In paragraph 1 Seneca makes it clear that he is disgusted by the Roman way of living in his time which consisted of festivities all year round (*december est... nunc annum*)! Therefore, he exhorts himself and Lucilius, who are both rich, to practise poverty: *exerceamur ad palum, et ne inparatos fortuna deprehendat, fiat nobis paupertas familiaris; securius divites erimus si scierimus quam non sit grave pauperes esse* (8).

Seneca says that it is acceptable to be rich, but then one has to be rich the right way, i.e. possess one's riches dauntlessly (*quarum possessionem...semper aspexeris*, 13). Seneca's views and actions are therefore not contradictory, as many scholars accuse him of being. The Ideal Persona is allowed to be rich. According to Coleman "there is irony, to be sure...in the spectacle of the millionaire philosopher extolling the virtues of poverty" (1974:286). On the other hand, Hijmans says: "[T]he remark (Ep. 20.13; cf. 18.5) that on occasion rich wise men play at being poor is interesting... [B]ut the aim of the imaginary poverty in Seneca fits in well with his entire program of moral exercises, which aims at accustoming a man to any condition nature may assign to him. In fact no-one can sustain a role that is not his natural one" (1966:246). One has to separate the biographical Seneca from the fictional Seneca, the fictional author of the letters. Only when his real life is brought into the picture, does Seneca appear contradictory.<sup>30</sup>

## Lucilius

Lucilius' progress is indirectly expressed in that Seneca says that he respects Lucilius' opinion and can learn from him: *si te hic haberem, libenter tecum conferrem quid existimares esse faciendum* (2). The problem on which Seneca consults Lucilius is the position of the philosopher in society; in other words, how the philosopher fits into society. Seneca knows his friend and predicts his answer: Lucilius would say that they should be neither like the people - who give themselves over to the festivities - in all ways, nor in all ways unlike them (*si te bene novi, arbitri partibus functus nec per omnia nos similes esse pilleatae turbae voluisses nec per omnia dissimiles*, 3). This is the right answer, although Seneca states it more clearly and specifically: *hoc multo fortius est, ebrio ac vomitante populo siccum ac sobrium esse, illud temperantius, non excerpere se nec insignire nec misceri omnibus et eadem sed non eodem modo facere; licet enim sine luxuria agere festum diem* (4). Neither seeking the things which are seductive and lure him to luxury nor being

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<sup>30</sup> It is worth looking at Motto's article "Seneca on trial: the case of the opulent Stoic", in which she defends Seneca against the charge of hypocrisy concerning his immense wealth. "In any defense of Seneca, we must, if we are to judge fairly, cross-examine the original plaintiff... We must return to P. Suillius himself" (1966:256).

led into them, is the surest proof a man can get of his own constancy (*certissimum enim argumentum firmitatis suae capit, si ad blanda et in luxuriam trahentia nec it nec abducitur*).

Seneca believes Lucilius is ready for the test of constancy. He therefore gives Lucilius a lesson, drawn from the teachings of great men, with which he can test his constancy and so strengthen it for future events which will demand it (*ceterum adeo mihi placet temptare animi tui firmitatem ut ex praecepto magnorum virorum tibi quoque praecipiam*, 5). The lesson is practising poverty; the goal is to be independent of Fortune and thus free (*interponas aliquot dies... beneficia firmetur*, 5-6). Seneca advises Lucilius to set apart certain days on which to withdraw from his business and make himself at home with the scantiest fare (which implies that Lucilius has not yet retired): *incipere ergo, mi Lucili, sequi horum consuetudinem et aliquos dies destina quibus secedas a tuis rebus minimoque te facias familiarem* (12). This “experiment” will help Lucilius to overcome his fear of poverty.<sup>31</sup>

Lucilius understands the danger of anger, because he has had slaves and enemies: ‘*inmodica ira gignit insaniam*’. *hoc quam verum sit necesse est scias, cum habueris et servum et inimicum* (14). It is implied - by grouping them together - that slaves are enemies. This is explained in *Epistula* 47.5 where Seneca says: “Finally, the saying, in allusion to this same high-handed treatment, becomes current: ‘As many enemies as you have slaves.’ They are not enemies when we acquire them; we make them enemies.” Lucilius’ kindness to his slaves in *Ep.* 47.1 should be compared.

Is Lucilius prone to anger, since Seneca addresses him directly (*ita est, mi Lucili: ingentis irae exitus furor est, et ideo ira vitanda est non moderationis causa sed sanitatis*, 15)? Not necessarily. Many people are prone to losing their tempers. By addressing Lucilius

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<sup>31</sup> *Epistula* 17 demonstrates Lucilius’ fear of poverty: ‘*moratur*’ inquis ‘*me res familiaris; sic illam disponere volo ut sufficere nihil agenti possit, ne aut paupertas mihi oneri sit aut ego alicui*’ (1); *nempe hoc quaeris et hoc ista dilatione vis consequi, ne tibi paupertas timenda sit* (3); ‘*nondum habeo quantum sat est, si ad illam summam pervenero, tunc me totum philosophiae dabo*’ (5); ‘*parare*’ inquis ‘*unde vivam volo*’ (5); *non est quod nos paupertas a philosophia revocet* (6); *dubitabit aliquis ferre paupertatem ut animum furoribus liberet?* (7); and ‘*at necessaria deerunt*’ (9).

directly, Seneca tries to comfort and assure him that his is a common problem and there are many others who also have to work at overcoming this fault.

## Summary

Seneca consults Lucilius on the problem of if and how the philosopher should fit into society. The Ideal Persona does not withdraw from the crowd, but does things differently; he does not make himself conspicuous, nor does he become one of the crowd.

The Ideal Persona neither seeks the things which lure one to luxury, nor is he led into them, which proves that he is constant. To practically help him be constant he practises poverty in preparation for future stresses. Seneca believes that Lucilius is ready for this test of constancy. Therefore Seneca advises Lucilius to set apart certain days on which to withdraw from his business and make himself at home with the scantiest fare. This will also help Lucilius to overcome his fear of poverty.

## Epistula 19

### Ideal Persona

The Ideal Persona retires from his worldly career and interests (*si potes, subduc te istis occupationibus; si minus, eripe*, 1). This implies that he has been involved in worldly activities for an uncertain amount of time. He retires obviously but not conspicuously: *neque ego suaserim tibi nomen ex otio petere, quod nec iactare debes nec abscondere; numquam enim usque eo te abigam generis humani furore damnato ut latebram tibi aliquam parari et oblivionem velim: id age ut otium tuum non emineat sed appareat* (2).

He is prepared to take the risk of retiring (*aliquid et pro otio audendum est*, 8). What is this risk? It may be difficult for those from his worldly life to let him go!

He considers carefully whom to take into his company ('*ante*' *inquit* '*circumspiciendum est cum quibus edas et bibas quam quid edas et bibas; nam sine amico visceratio leonis ac lupi vita est*', 10). He has this choice when he is retired (*hoc non continget tibi nisi secesseris*, 11). He is careful towards whom he shows kindness ('*quid ergo? beneficia non parant*

*amicitias?’ parant, si accepturos licuit eligere, si conlocata, non sparsa sunt... ut magis ad rem existimes pertinere quis quam quid acceperit, 12).*

## Lucilius

Seneca says that the letters he receives from Lucilius fill him with hope, since they are no longer mere assurances concerning Lucilius, but guarantees (*exulto quotiens epistulas tuas accipio; implem enim me bona spe, et iam non promittunt de te sed spondent, 1*). Lucilius is on the right course (*ita fac, oro atque obsecro, 1*). Seneca requests that Lucilius press on in this way, and he makes this request as Lucilius’ friend and for Lucilius’ own sake (*quid enim habeo melius quod amicum rogem quam quod pro ipso rogaturus sum, 1*).

The next step is for Lucilius to retire from his worldly career and interests (*si potes, subduc te istis occupationibus; si minus, eripe, 1*). Seneca advises Lucilius on how to retire: his retirement must not be conspicuous, though it should be obvious (*neque ego suaserim...sed appareat, 2*).

Lucilius came of a humble origin, but Fortune swiftly raised him to prosperity, specifically the position of procurator (*utinam quidem tibi senescere... ab istis promittitur, 5*). Seneca condemns this life of Lucilius as unwholesome (*tulit te longe a conspectu vitae salubris rapida felicitas 5*). Next, Seneca complains, Lucilius will acquire more important duties and after them still more, and it will never stop, because - by definition - the worldly activities with which Lucilius fills his life, will never satisfy him (*maiora deinde officia... numquam erit tempus, 5-6*). Worldly activities do not satisfy because where one desire is fulfilled, another begins: *talem esse cupiditatum: altera ex fine alterius nascitur (6)*.

Lucilius did not have much of a choice in being renowned: his ability, energy, charm and connections thrust him into the work of the world and it will not be easy to escape it; i.e. if he can escape it (*deinde videbunt... pristinae lucis, 3-4*)! Due to his position, Lucilius has many false “friends” (*quid enim relinques quod invitus relictum a te possis cogitare? clientes? quorum nemo te ipsum sequitur, sed aliquid ex te, 4*). Seneca explicitly says that Lucilius had no choice in being renowned with the words *tibi liberum non est (3)* and the verb *protulit (3)*. Again Seneca says that Lucilius’ present life was forced on him: *in eam demissus es vitam quae numquam tibi terminum miseriarum ac servitutis ipsa factura sit*

(6). It is a never-ending life of misery and slavery. However, no-one is to blame but Lucilius himself; Seneca is simply being realistic in that he understands how easily one can fall into such an existence: it happened to him also (see, for example, *Ep.* 8.3: “I point other men to the right path, which I have found late in life, when wearied with wandering”). What is important is that Lucilius now has the choice for peace in retirement (*quietem potes vindicare sine ullius odio, sine desiderio aut morsu animi tui*, 4). The words *utrum autem mavis ex inopia saturitatem an in copia famem?* (7) imply that Lucilius does have the choice to retire.

Seneca sketches for Lucilius his life of retirement: everything will be on a smaller scale, but he will be satisfied abundantly; he will be poor but sated, instead of being rich but hungry (*si te ad privata rettuleris, minora erunt omnia, sed adfatim implebunt: at nunc plurima et undique ingesta non satiant. utrum autem mavis ex inopia saturitatem an in copia famem*, 7). It all comes down to the fact that if Lucilius is not himself satisfied and happy, he cannot make anyone else happy (*quamdiu tibi satis nihil fuerit, ipse aliis non eris*, 7). It is Lucilius’ duty to help his fellow men find the good life. Everyone who is himself on the road of moral progress has a responsibility to help those he comes across.

Lucilius asks Seneca how practically to retire (*‘quomodo’ inquis ‘exibo?’* 8). Seneca’s answer is short and simple: *utcumque* (8). But he admits that it will not be easy. Just as Lucilius worked hard to better his worldly position (it was not just thrust upon him!), so he must dare something to gain leisure also (*cogita quam multa temere pro pecunia, quam multa laboriose pro honore temptaveris: aliquid et pro otio audendum est*, 8). The verb *audeo* implies that it might be dangerous.

But Lucilius does not really have a choice about whether he wants to retire or not. The other option Seneca sketches for him is to “grow old amid the worries of procuratorships abroad and subsequently of civil duties at home, living in turmoil and in ever fresh floods of responsibilities” (*aut in ista sollicitudine procurationum et deinde urbanorum officiorum senescendum, in tumultu ac semper novis fluctibus*, 8). Even if Lucilius may want a secluded life, his position in the world will forbid it, which is all the more reason why he should not allow his position to grow bigger (*quid enim ad rem pertinet an tu quiescere velis? fortuna tua non vult. quid si illi etiam nunc permiseris crescere? quantum ad successus accesserit accedet ad metus*, 8).

Once Lucilius has taken the next step of moral progress (of reformation), namely retiring from his worldly activities, he may then begin to consider whom to take into his company, since he will have this choice once he has retired (*'ante' inquit... nisi secesseris*, 10-11). In other words, Lucilius has to withdraw from the world to have real friends (*hoc non continget tibi nisi secesseris*, 11). The description in paragraph 11 (*errat autem... conciliandos amicos*) may be of Lucilius. Lucilius objects to this description: *'quid ergo? beneficia non parant amicitias?'* (12). If the above serves as a description of Lucilius, then it is clear that Lucilius still does not understand what true friendship is. One also wonders how he can still be so naïve.

In paragraph 12 we hear that Lucilius is beginning to call his mind his own (*incipis esse mentis tuae*). Lucilius is therefore beginning to think for himself. This shows much progress on his part.

Again mention is made of Lucilius' maxim habit: *sed movebis mihi controversiam, si novi te, nec voles quod debeo nisi in aspero et probo accipere* 10).

## Seneca

Both Seneca and Lucilius have had successful worldly careers: *satis multum temporis sparsimus: incipiamus vasa in senectute colligere. numquid invidiosum est? in freto viximus, moriamur in portu* (1-2). Seneca makes it sound as though he and Lucilius deserve to retire. Does this imply that as a young man one should be involved in worldly activities, only retiring to practise philosophy when one is older?<sup>32</sup>

Seneca makes a sarcastic side comment on Maecenas' debauched style for which Lucilius must watch out: *est ergo tanti ulla potentia ut sit tibi tam ebrius sermo?* (9). Gummere points out that with these words "Seneca whimsically pretends to assume that eccentric literary style and high political position go hand in hand" (1917:130 n.c). The problem with Maecenas' style can be explained by Seneca's view of correct literary style. Russell

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 3, Theme 6, "One's position in society", where the subject of retirement from worldly activities is discussed, as Seneca sees it.

remarks: “The Letters are also much concerned with literature. This was in accordance with the conventions of the genre... [T]he general philosophical theme of the correspondence determines the literary point of view also. Philosophy is a matter of *res, non verba* [*Epistulae* 40 and 115]; dignity and plainness are important; style is a reflection of character” (1974:84).<sup>33</sup>

## Summary

Lucilius is a renowned worldly man. The next step is for Lucilius to retire. The Ideal Persona retires from worldliness. Seneca advises Lucilius that he must not try to win fame by his retirement. The Ideal Persona retires obviously but not conspicuously. But Seneca admits that it will not be easy to retire. Just as Lucilius worked hard to better his worldly position, so he must risk something to gain leisure also. The Ideal Persona is prepared to take the risk of retiring. The Ideal Persona considers carefully whom to take into his company. Lucilius will also have this choice when he has retired from his worldly activities.

## *Epistula 20*

### Ideal Persona

Philosophy teaches us how to act, not how to speak (*facere docet philosophia, non dicere, 2*). Accordingly, the Ideal Persona practises what he preaches: *experimentum profectus tui capias non oratione nec scripto, sed animi firmitate, cupiditatum deminutione: verba rebus proba* (1). He strives to have his words and deeds in harmony with one another, to be equal to himself under all conditions and to always be the same. This is the highest duty and the highest proof of wisdom (*maximum hoc est et officium sapientiae et indicium, ut verbis opera concordent, ut ipse ubique par sibi idemque sit, 2*). In other words, wisdom means always desiring the same things and always refusing the same things (*quid est sapientia?*

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<sup>33</sup> For Seneca’s ideas on the connection between style and qualities of character, i.e. moral qualities, Wilson refers us to *Epistula* 40 (1987:120 n.8) and *Epistula* 46 (1987:107).

*semper idem velle atque idem nolle, 5*). Of course, one cannot always be satisfied with the same thing unless it is the right thing (*licet illam exceptiunculam...semper placere nisi rectum, 5*).

Such constancy demands that every man should live according to his own standards, his life should be in harmony with his words and his inner life should be in harmony with all his activities (*et hoc exigit, ut ad legem suam quisque vivat, ne orationi vita dissentiat vel ipsa inter se vita; ut unus sit omnium actio dissentio num color sit, 2*). This is indeed a difficult task (*'quis hoc praestabit?' pauci, aliqui tamen. est enim difficile hoc, 2*). Although the Ideal Persona may not always be able to maintain this standard, he will "travel the same path even if he cannot keep up the pace" (*sapientem uno semper iturum gradu, sed una via, 2*). In order to achieve this constancy the Ideal Persona finds a single norm and regulates his life according to this norm (*unam semel ad quam vivas regulam prende et ad hanc omnem vitam tuam exaequa, 3*). Also, he resolves upon what he wishes and persists in it (*nemo proponit sibi quid velit, nec si proposuit perseverat in eo, sed transilit; nec tantum mutat sed redit et in ea quae deseruit ac damnavit revolvitur, 4*). His judgement does not vary from day to day (*nesciunt ergo homines...agitur vita per lusum, 6*).

Another way in which the Ideal Persona develops his constancy is to let his thoughts, efforts and desires help to make him content with his own self and the goods which spring from himself. Therefore, he brings himself down to humble conditions from which he cannot be ejected (*huc ergo cogitationes tuae tendant, hoc cura, hoc opta, omnia alia vota deo remissurus, ut contentus sis temet ipso et ex te nascentibus bonis. quae potest esse felicitas prior? redige te ad parva ex quibus cadere non possis, 8*). The Ideal Persona practises poverty, not because it is better, but so that it is easy to endure (*ceterum magnae indolis est ad ista non properare tamquam meliora, sed praeparari tamquam ad facilia, 12*). But the Ideal Persona is able to live with poverty and with riches. In other words, if the Ideal Persona is rich he is able to endure poverty if he suddenly falls into it and if the Ideal Persona is poor he will despise riches if he suddenly falls into them, because whether he is rich or poor, the Ideal Persona's mind is content (*'nescio' inquis 'quomodo paupertatem... an hic divitiis non indulgeat, 11*).

## Lucilius

Lucilius apparently wrote to Seneca that he is in good health and that he thinks himself worthy of becoming his own master at last: *si vales et te dignum putas qui aliquando fias tuus, gaudeo* (1). Lucilius is thus claiming that he has now started thinking for himself, and will therefore be needing Seneca less. The word *si* implies that Lucilius may be thinking wrongly about himself. Seneca says to Lucilius: “If I can drag you from the floods in which you are being buffeted without hope of emerging” (*si te istinc ubi sine spe exeundi fluctuaris extraxero*, 1). It is implied that Lucilius still needs to be saved from the immoralities of the world and his own character. Here the word *si* implies that perhaps Lucilius will not even make it! He is therefore still much more dependent on Seneca than he realises.

Lucilius may thus be wrong about his progress. Seneca therefore advises him to test his progress, and not by mere speech and writings, which - it is implied - Lucilius is already practising, but by stoutness of heart and decrease of desire. He must put his beliefs, thoughts and words into action; he must practise what he preaches (*et experimentum profectus tui capias non oratione nec scripto, sed animi firmitate, cupiditatum deminutione: verba rebus proba*, 1). This is not to say that Lucilius is not already doing just that; it is simply that he must place more emphasis on it.

Seneca warns Lucilius to look carefully at himself and make sure whether his actions are not perhaps inconsistent, more specifically, whether his dress and his house are inconsistent, whether he treats himself lavishly and his family meanly, whether he eats frugal dinners and yet builds luxurious houses (*observa te itaque...aedifices luxuriose*, 3). This passage is not against riches, but against inconsistency. Seneca does not preach poverty, though he preaches practising poverty (*Epp.* 17.5, 18.5 and 20.13), so that one may remain constant should it happen to one. Lucilius must search for a single norm to live by and regulate his whole life according to this norm (*unam semel ad quam vivas regulam prende et ad hanc omnem vitam tuam exaequa*, 3). A single norm is what enables the Ideal Persona to travel one path, although not always at the same speed.

Seneca exhorts Lucilius to press on with what he has begun, and adds - not with absolute certainty though - that perhaps (*fortasse*, 6) he will be led to perfection (by Seneca: implied

by “*perduceris*”, 6), or to a point which he alone understands is still short of perfection (*preme ergo quod coepisti, et fortasse perduceris aut ad summum aut eo quod summum nondum esse solus intellegas*, 6). Only Lucilius himself knows what really goes on inside of him; only he himself knows if and how his soul is improving.

Lucilius makes a realistic and relevant objection, namely what will become of his household without an income (*‘quid fiet’ inquis ‘huic turbae familiarium sine re familiari?’* 7)? Seneca’s answer is not very practical: if Lucilius stops supporting them they will support themselves (*turba ista cum a te pasci desierit, ipsa se pascet*, 7). Here, it seems, is an implicit exhortation to retire from his worldly career and practise philosophy full-time. But this is no secret. Seneca has been working on Lucilius to leave his worldly life behind for a while now. Seneca advises a life of poverty, since one of poverty’s benefits is that it reveals one’s true friends (*illa veros certosque amicos retinebit*, 7). Lucilius seems to have - due to his renowned position - many false “friendships” (*illa veros certosque... nemo in honorem tuum mentiatur!* 7).

Does Seneca encourage Lucilius to become (literally) poor with the words *redige te ad parva ex quibus cadere non possis* (8)? But anyone else (who is not Lucilius, who is rich) will be poor when they retire from their worldly career. Retirement is not a realistic option, unless we accept that Seneca’s audience consists of financially well-off men, like himself and Lucilius. Or perhaps retirement is not meant literally. Perhaps it is rather about a certain mindset?<sup>34</sup>

Lucilius asks Seneca a very important question, namely whether one can be rich and wise: *‘quid ergo? non licet divitias in sinu positas contemnere?’* (10). This question is important for Seneca and Lucilius, who are both rich. We learn that Seneca is rich in *Ep.* 12.1-3 and that Lucilius is rich in *Ep.* 17.10. It is implied that they are both rich in *Epp.* 18.8 and 20.13. Luckily for them, Seneca’s answer is yes!

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<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 3, Theme 6, “One’s position in society”, where these questions are discussed.

## Seneca

Seneca is of course glad about Lucilius' progress (if it really is as he says). He openly says that he deserves the credit for Lucilius' progress: *mea enim gloria erit* (1). As in *Ep.* 10.3 we should understand Seneca's attitude to be that of pride in Lucilius, rather than arrogance.

Seneca says that the highest duty and the highest proof of wisdom is that deed and word should accord, and that a man should be equal to himself under all conditions and always be the same (*maximum hoc est et officium sapientiae et indicium, ut verbis opera concordent, ut ipse ubique par sibi idemque sit*, 2). "But", Lucilius objects (and a very relevant objection it is), "who can maintain this standard?" (*quis hoc praestabit?* 2). Seneca admits that it is very difficult; there are very few, but there are some men capable of achieving this goal (*pauci, aliqui tamen*, 2). They are the wise men. The Wise Man may not always be doing well, but he will always be going in the right direction (*nec hoc dico, sapientem uno semper iturum gradu, sed una via*, 2). This passage makes it clear that Seneca's Wise Man is more realistic and practical than the Wise Man of earlier Stoic dogma. Seneca's philosophy is open to all, and can be achieved by anyone willing to work hard at it.

Lucilius is still sceptical of other schools, but not Seneca, the eclectic: *inideas licet, etiam nunc libenter pro me dependet Epicurus* (9). Seneca is good enough to debate with Epicurus (*'nescio' inquis 'quomodo paupertatem iste laturus sit, si in illam inciderit.' nec ego, Epicure, an gulus si iste pauper contempturus sit divitias, si in illas inciderit*, 11).

What does this mean? Does it mean that Seneca is in the same phase of moral progress as Epicurus? Or does it have something to do with the fact that the truth is universal? Whatever the case may be, it does show Seneca's progress. Also, Seneca betters Epicurus by having the last say about the point in discussion: *itaque in utroque mens aestimanda est inspiciendumque an ille paupertati indulgeat, an hic divitiis non indulgeat* (11).

It is important for Seneca and Lucilius to practise poverty, so that it will be easy for them to endure (if and when) it comes. It is also especially important that they practise poverty, because they are rich and have had it easy, and are therefore prone to laziness (*quod eo magis faciendum est quod deliciis permaduimus et omnia dura ac difficilia iudicamus*, 13).

## Summary

Lucilius may be mistaken about his progress. Seneca therefore advises him to test his progress, and not by mere speech and writings, which - it is implied - Lucilius is already practising, but by practising what he preaches. The Ideal Persona practises what he preaches. The Ideal Persona strives to make his words and deeds accord, to be equal to himself under all conditions and to always be the same. This is indeed a difficult task but, although the Ideal Persona may not always be able to maintain this standard, he will always be travelling in the right direction on the path of moral progress. Seneca warns Lucilius to look carefully at himself and make sure if his words and his deeds are not perhaps inconsistent and also whether his deeds themselves are not perhaps inconsistent.

In order to achieve this constancy, the Ideal Persona finds a single norm and regulates his life according to this norm. Also, he resolves upon what he wishes and persists in it. Furthermore, he strives to make himself content with his own self and the goods which spring from himself; therefore, he lives humbly.

Lucilius asks Seneca a very important question, namely whether one can be rich and wise. This question is important for Seneca and Lucilius who are both rich. The Ideal Persona is able to live with poverty and with riches. The Ideal Persona even practises poverty. It is necessary for Seneca and Lucilius to practise poverty, so that it will be easy for them to endure if and when it happens to them. It is also especially necessary for them to practise poverty, because they are rich and have had it easy, and are therefore prone to laziness.

## ***Epistula 21***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona leaves worldly activities for the life of philosophy: *ex hac vita ad illam ascenditur. quod interest inter splendorem et lucem, cum haec certam originem habeat ac suam, ille niteat alieno, hoc inter hanc vitam et illam* (2). Man's problem is that he thinks that his condition in the world is one of importance, but it is mere brightness in comparison to the real light of philosophy (*magna esse... lumine inlustris est*, 1-2).

His studies in Philosophy make him eminent and distinguished (*studia te tua clarum et nobilem efficient*, 2), as well as those attached to his memory (*ingeniorum crescit dignatio nec ipsis tantum honor habetur, sed quidquid illorum memoriae adhaesit excipitur*, 6). He uses philosophy as his weapon in the battle against time: *profunda super nos altitudo temporis veniet, pauca ingenia caput exerent et in idem quandoque silentium abitura oblivioni resistent ac se diu vindicabunt* (5). However, his motive for practising philosophy is not to be remembered for generations to come, but to better himself and mankind. It is for this which he will be respected and remembered.

In his quest to better himself and mankind he searches for the universal truth, which cannot be misused (*has voces non est... ierint honeste esse vivendum*, 9). There are, for example, those who - through misinterpretation of his words - seek to use Epicurus as a screen for their vices. But Seneca proves to them that the truth cannot be misused (see paragraphs 7-9 of this letter).

He subtracts from his desires in order to better himself (*'si vis' inquit 'Pythoclea divitem facere, non pecuniae adiciendum sed cupiditati detrahendum est' ... ne istud tantum existimes de divitis dictum*, 7-8). He learns to control those desires which resist alleviation, which are according to our nature but not our needs, by giving them what he owes, not merely all he is able to give (*de his tecum desideris... non quod potes*, 11). In other words, he gives these desires just the necessary: he eats merely to relieve hunger, drinks merely to quench his thirst, dresses merely to keep out the cold and houses himself merely as a protection against personal discomfort (*Ep.* 8.5).

## Lucilius

Lucilius is having difficulty with people who tempt him to continue on fame's ladder (Summers 1910:186). Seneca tells him that these people are not the problem. He himself is his greatest difficulty: *cum istis tibi esse negotium iudicas de quibus scripseras? maximum negotium tecum habes, tu tibi molestus es* (1). Seneca identifies the core of Lucilius' problem, since Lucilius is unable to do so himself (*quid sit autem quod te inpediat, quia parum ipse dispicis, dicam*, 1). Seneca can identify Lucilius' problem, because he has been there himself. He is simply further along on the same road of moral progress; he has already passed the point where Lucilius now is. Sometimes one is

incapable of seeing one's own mistake and only another person, looking on from the outside and with a more objective view, can point it out. Lucilius' problem is that he does not know what he wants. He is better at approving the right course than at following it out, and he sees where true happiness lies, but he does not have the courage to attain it (*quid velis nescis, melius probas honesta quam sequeris, vides ubi sit posita felicitas sed ad illam pervenire non audes*, 1). More specifically, Lucilius' problem is that he resolves upon that ideal state of calm into which he hopes to pass, but then he is held back by his present worldly life, which he thinks is more important (*magna esse haec existimas quae relicturus es, et cum proposuisti tibi illam securitatem ad quam transiturus es, retinet te huius vitae a qua recessurus es fulgor tamquam in sordida et obscura casurum*, 1). The issue here is thus Lucilius' retirement from his worldly life. Seneca corrects Lucilius: a life of retirement, in which to practise philosophy, is much more important than his worldly life (*erras, Lucili: ex hac vita ad illam ascenditur*, 2). Lucilius' worldly life compared to a life of retirement and philosophy is like comparing mere brightness with real light (*quod interest inter splendorem et lucem... illa suo lumine inlustris est*, 2).

Seneca explains to Lucilius that it is not his worldly position, which will make him renowned, but rather his studies (*studia te tua clarum et nobilem efficient*, 2). What Seneca is trying to say to Lucilius in this letter, is indicated in the words *cum Idomeneo scriberet et illum a vita speciosa ad fidelem stabilemque gloriam revocaret* (3). Just as Epicurus did with Idomeneus, so Seneca is trying to recall Lucilius from a showy existence to sure and steadfast renown.

## Seneca

One's studies make one eminent and distinguished (*studia te tua clarum et nobilem efficient*, 2), as well as those attached to one's memory (*ingeniorum crescit dignatio nec ipsis tantum honor habetur, sed quidquid illorum memoriae adhaesit excipitur*, 6). Seneca is confident that he will be famous with future generations, and he compares himself with names such as Epicurus, Cicero and Vergil. Through Seneca's writings his student Lucilius will be famous, as in the case of Epicurus and his student Idomeneus, Cicero and his

student Atticus, and Vergil and his heroes Eurylus and Nisus (3-6).<sup>35</sup> Seneca's claims are proud.<sup>36</sup> However, not everyone has a talent for writing like Seneca (and Lucilius: see *Epp.* 8.10 and 24.21, where Seneca quotes him, and *Epistula* 46, where Seneca speaks of the pleasure he derived from reading one of Lucilius' books). It is one's duty to help one's fellow men by sharing one's knowledge, but everyone does this in their own way; one does not necessarily have to write a book!

Seneca defends himself against the accusation of plagiarism: *has voces non est quod Epicuri esse iudices: publicae sunt* (9). True words are public property. It is often repeated in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 that the truth is common property (*Epp.* 8.8, 12.2, 14.17, 16.7 and here, 21.9). Also, in *Ep.* 9.21 Seneca explicitly says that the truth is universal; in other words, not confined to the Stoics (Gummere 1917:54 n.c). Seneca further implies that ideas and words can be split up in order to get closer to the truth, and because of this, the truth cannot be misused through words (*quod fieri in senatu... honeste esse vivendum*, 9).

Seneca has his own idea to add to the description of the Epicurean life of simple pleasures in paragraph 11 (*de his tecum... non quod potes*). He is more realistic than the Epicureans, especially in his reasoning that man desires things which he does not need and which can even be bad for him (*ista voluptas naturalis est, non necessaria*, 11).

## Summary

Lucilius is blaming others for his problem, but he himself is to blame. Lucilius' problem is that he resolves upon that ideal state of calm into which he hopes to pass, namely a life of philosophy in retirement, but then he is held back by his present worldly life, which he

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<sup>35</sup> Seneca was right, for Lucilius is "unknown to us except through Seneca's writings" (Ball 1916:186).

<sup>36</sup> Is pride not a weakness? Motto points out that in *Ep.* 106.6 Seneca says that pride is one of the branches of evil (1970:174). She also refers to Seneca's words in *Ep.* 87.32: "Those things which are goods produce confidence, but riches produce shamelessness. The things which are goods give us greatness of soul, but riches give us arrogance. And arrogance is nothing else than a false show of greatness" (1970:174). In *Ep.* 21.5, Seneca thus reveals his confidence in that he will be famous with future generations. He is not being arrogant.

thinks is more important. The Ideal Persona leaves worldly activities for the life of philosophy. His studies make him eminent and distinguished, as well as those attached to his memory. Seneca explains to Lucilius that it is not his worldly position, which will make him renowned, but rather his studies. Seneca is thus trying to recall Lucilius from a showy existence to sure and steadfast renown, and only philosophy can bring one true renown. Seneca is confident that he will be famous with future generations, and therefore his student Lucilius will also be famous.

## ***Epistula 22***

### **Ideal Persona**

Seneca says that there are general rules as to what is usually done or ought to be done (*quid fieri soleat...etiam posteris datur*, 2), but no fixed rules of conduct for specific situations (... *quando fieri debeat aut quemadmodum, ex longinquo nemo suadebit*, 2). The Ideal Persona takes counsel in the actual situation; therefore, he is always watchful in mind, looking for an opportunity and acting on it with all his energy (*illud alterum... id age ut te istis officiis exuas*, 2-3), but also only acting “suitably and seasonably” (*idem tamen subicit nihil esse temptandum nisi cum apte poterit tempestiveque temptari*, 6). But are there still rules of conduct then? Mitsis remarks: “Seneca argues that one may have a grasp of general moral principles (*decreta*) and yet still be unable to discover what a particular moral situation demands. It is the practice of receiving advice, *admonitio*, in the form of more determinate moral precepts (*praecepta*), that teaches agents to recognize what individual cases require and therefore enables them to act [see *Ep.* 94.32]... For the Stoics, therefore, moral judgement and development are structured at every level by rules; and these rules are grasped by reason alone” (1993:291).

The Ideal Persona perseveres only in that which is worthy of a good man, i.e. he does not waste his energy on worthless pursuits. When he sees dangers ahead he retreats to a safe position, but not making his retreat obvious (*si operae pretium habebit perseverantia, si nihil indignum bono viro faciendum patiendumve erit... sed cum viderit gravia in quibus volutatur, incerta, ancipitia, referet pedem, non vertet terga, sed sensim recedet in tutum*, 8). The Ideal Persona despises the rewards of business and leaves them behind to enter a

higher life (*facile est autem, mi Lucili, occupationes evadere, si occupationum pretia contempseris*, 9). One can thus leave one's wordly career behind by despising its rewards. If the money, power, etc. no longer lure one, neither will the business that produces these things.

He prays for the right thing, namely wisdom: *emerge ad meliorem vitam propitiis diis, sed non sic quomodo istis propitii sunt quibus bono ac benigno vultu mala magnifica tribuerunt, ob hoc unum excusati, quod ista quae urunt, quae excruciant, optantibus data sunt* (12). Do the gods grant wisdom or is wisdom something one must acquire without the help of the gods? Seneca says: "Rise to a higher life with the favour of the gods" (*emerge...diis*, 12), but the sincerity of these words is cast into doubt by the description of the gods which follows (*sed non sic...data sunt*, 12). Does Seneca take the gods and praying to them seriously? Campbell points out: "The word 'God' or 'the gods' was used by the philosophers more as a time-honoured and convenient expression than as standing for any indispensable or even surely identifiable component of the Stoic system. And the tendency of Stoicism was always to exalt man's importance in the universe rather than to abase him before a higher authority. The hope of immortality was occasionally held out but Seneca does not play on it. To him as to most Stoics virtue was to be looked on as its own reward and vice as its own punishment. The religious hunger of the masses of his day was to be met not by philosophy but by the cults of Isis and Mithras and Christianity" (1969:18).

The Ideal Persona strives to be free of care: *percepit sapientiam, si quis tam securus moritur quam nascitur* (16). Only philosophy can make this possible. Rosivach comments: "For Seneca in the *Epistulae Morales* Stoic philosophy is a form of mental discipline the practice of which will provide its practitioner with *securitas*, (freedom from care)" (1995:91). Therefore, the Ideal Persona chooses and lives a noble life by pursuing wisdom through philosophy: *nemo quam bene vivat sed quam diu curat, cum omnibus possit contingere ut bene vivant, ut diu nulli* (17). Man's problem is that he busies himself with things which he cannot control, namely Fortune, while putting off that which he can control, namely pursuing wisdom through the hard and dedicated study of philosophy.

## Lucilius

Lucilius by this time understands that he must withdraw from his worldly life, but he asks Seneca how he should, practically, go about this (*iam intellegis educendum esse te ex istis occupationibus speciosis et malis, sed quomodo id consequi possis quaeris*, 1). Seneca replies that he cannot be specific (*quaedam non nisi a praesente monstrantur*, 1), but only give Lucilius general rules (*quid fieri soleat, quid oporteat, in universum et mandari potest et scribi; tale consilium non tantum absentibus, etiam posteris datur*, 2). This also sounds like a description of the *Epistulae Morales*. Seneca advises Lucilius to take counsel in the presence of the actual situation; and thus he must always be attentive, looking for an opportunity, and when seeing it, grasp it and devote all his energy to it - so ridding himself of his business duties (*cum rebus ipsis... officiis exuas*, 2). Lucilius has to find an opportunity himself and do it himself in his own way. Seneca gives Lucilius two options: retire or commit suicide! (*et quidem... vel abrumpas*, 3).

Lucilius is responsible for getting himself into his present situation (*ut quod male implicuisti*, 3 and *negotiis in quae descendisti*, 4), but prefers people to think that he “tumbled” (Gummere’s translation of *incidisti*) into his situation (*quod videri mavis, incidisti*, 4). The word *incidisti* also means to fall in, to occur or to happen. But this word does not necessarily absolve Lucilius from responsibility. Whether one “tumbles” or “falls”, it is an action which one begins - not necessarily on purpose - but then loses control of. Does Lucilius want people to think he lost control? Perhaps. He may want people to think that he did not premeditate and plan his current worldly position. It just sort of happened; he never really had much control of where he was going. Seneca advises Lucilius to be content and not struggle on to further business, because then he will lose all grounds of excuse, and people will see that it was not a “tumble” (*non est quod ad ulteriora nitaris, aut perdes excusationem et apparebit te non incidisse*, 4). The typical excuse for taking on a big endeavour (and probably also Lucilius’ excuse) is *non potui aliter. quid si nollem? necesse erat* (4). “But,” Seneca says, “no-one is compelled to pursue prosperity at top speed” (*nulli necesse est felicitatem cursu sequi*, 4).

Seneca implies that Lucilius is kept back from retiring from his worldly ambitions and activities by the rewards of his worldly business: *facile est autem, mi Lucili, occupationes evadere, si occupationum pretia contempseris* (9). It may just as well be Lucilius saying

*'quid ergo? tam magnas spes relinquam? ab ipsa messe discedam? nudum erit latus, incomitata lectica, atrium vacuum?'* (9). Seneca is here describing a typical reaction, but Lucilius can see himself in this description. Seneca implicitly accuses Lucilius of clinging to that which he condemns, of not practising what he preaches (*excute istos... plures servitutum tenent*, 10-11). He forces Lucilius to look at the mistakes of others, so that he will realise his own mistakes. Seneca questions the genuineness of Lucilius' intention (indicated by the word *si*): *sed si deponere illam in animo est et libertas bona fide placuit, in hoc autem unum advocationem petis, ut sine perpetua sollicitudine id tibi facere contingat* (11). But if it is not Lucilius' intention to retire from worldliness, then the following is his intention: *sed si propter hoc tergiversaris... numquam exitum invenies* (12). If this is his intention - Seneca warns Lucilius - he will never be happy.

Lucilius is still sceptical of others schools: *numquid offenderis... si quid delibero?* (5). Therefore he asks Seneca for something Stoic also (*nunc et Stoicam sententiam quaeris*, 7). It seems that within Lucilius' circle the Epicurean school has a bad name as being rash, but Seneca tells him that this is not the case (*non est quod quisquam illos apud te temeritatis infamet: cautiores quam fortiores sunt*, 7). In Lucilius' line of thinking, Seneca anticipates and points out to him, he probably expects the Epicurean sect to say that one should take on difficult tasks (*expectas forsitan... rerum difficultate*, 7). This is true, Seneca admits, but people interpret them wrongly. They mean that one should take on difficult tasks that are worth one's while and not suffer anything unworthy of a good man (*dicentur tibi ista... erit negotii causa*, 8). Seneca thus corrects Lucilius, and those who think like him. For a moment there, Lucilius had thought he had an excuse for his busy worldly life: *ne illud quidem quod existimas facturum eum faciet, ut ambitiosis rebus implicitus semper aestus earum ferat* (8)!

Seneca defended the Epicurean school, because it was not - as men like Lucilius thought - a rival school. Motto comments: "The two most popular schools of philosophy in Imperial Rome were the Stoic and Epicurean - philosophies devoted to ethical conduct. Men like Seneca, in quest of intellectual freedom and tranquility of mind, found the fundamental ethical teachings of these two schools very similar. The Stoics taught that virtue was the highest good; the Epicureans believed that pleasure was the *summum bonum*. But the Epicurean view of pleasure, as expounded by its founder, was by no means the later

distorted idea of wine, women, and song. Since Epicurus taught that one cannot lead a life of pleasure without leading a life of honor, prudence, and justice, nor lead a life of honor, prudence, and justice which is not also a life of pleasure, the basic moral goals of Stoicism and Epicureanism seemed one and the same” (1985:9).

## Seneca

According to Seneca there is no half-way measure; one either withdraws from one’s wordly existence or else from existence altogether! (*censeo aut ex ista vita tibi aut e vita exeundum*, 3). Seneca repeats this idea in paragraph 12: *nemo cum sarcinis enatat*.

However, in spite of the fact that Seneca feels so strongly about the issue of retirement from worldliness, he remains realistic and practical, as is clear from his advice: “Meanwhile, - and this is of first importance, - do not hamper yourself; be content with the business into which you have lowered yourself” (*interim, quod primum est impedire te noli; contentus esto negotiis in quae descendisti*, 4).

It sounds as though Seneca humorously mocks himself when he says *nihil me magis in ista voce delectat quam quod exprobratur senibus infantia* (14).

## Summary

The Ideal Persona leaves worldly things completely (according to Seneca there is no half-way measure; one either withdraws from one’s wordly existence or else from existence altogether!), in order to follow a life of pursuing wisdom through the study of philosophy. This is the noble life.

Lucilius by this time understands that he must withdraw from his wordly life, but he asks Seneca how he should, practically, go about this. Seneca replies that he cannot be specific, but only give Lucilius general rules. Lucilius has to find an opportunity himself and do it himself in his own way. The Ideal Persona takes counsel in the actual situation. Therefore, he is always watchful in mind, looking for an opportunity and acting on it with all his energy, but also only acting suitably and seasonably.

Lucilius is kept back from retiring by the rewards of his business. The Ideal Persona despises the rewards of business and therefore he can leave them behind to enter the higher life of pursuing wisdom.

## ***Epistula 23***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona strives towards soundness of mind (*exhortor ad bonam mentem*, 1). Soundness of mind is to know what it is one finds joy in (and not to find joy in useless things) and not to place one's happiness in the control of externals (*ad summa pervenit qui scit quo gaudeat, qui felicitatem suam in aliena potestate non posuit*, 2). Such soundness of mind is the true joy. The effects of true joy are that one can despise death with a care-free countenance, open one's door to poverty, hold the curb on one's desires and endure pain (*an tu existimas quemquam soluto vultu et... in magno gaudio est*, 4).

How does the Ideal Persona attain true joy? He casts aside all that glitters outwardly and comes from others and rejoices in his own self, his best part, i.e. his soul (*fac, oro te, Lucili carissime, quod unum potest praestare felicem: dissice et conculca ista quae extrinsecus splendent, quae tibi promittuntur ab alio vel ex alio; ad verum bonum specta et de tuo gaude. quid est autem hoc 'detuo'? te ipso et tui optima parte*, 6). Also, he keeps the pleasures of the body within bounds, rather concentrating on the real good, which does not need as much caution (*modum autem tenere in eo difficile est quod bonum esse credideris: veri boni aviditas tuta est*, 6). The real good comes from a good conscience, honourable pursuits, right actions, contempt for the gifts of chance, and an even and calm way of life, which treads but one path, i.e. constancy (*quod sit istud interrogas... unam prementis viam*, 7). In order, practically, to attain the real good, the Ideal Persona searches for and finds a guiding purpose with which to control himself and his affairs (*pauci sunt qui consilio se suaque disponant*, 8). In order to do this, he decides what he wishes and abides by his decision, not leaping from one purpose to another (*ideo constituendum est quid velimus et in eo perseverandum*, 8). Thus, the Ideal Persona perseveres to attain the real good, which will bring him true joy.

The Ideal Persona is not like the fool who is always beginning life, but makes it his aim to live nobly by pursuing wisdom. Living nobly has nothing to do with age, since - if one lives nobly - one has lived long enough: *id agendum est ut satis vixerimus: nemo hoc praestat qui orditur cum maxime vitam* (10). The noble life brings true joy.

## Seneca

Seneca is not interested in making small talk with Lucilius (a natural component of a letter), but rather with that which will help both himself and Lucilius, i.e. an exhortation to soundness of mind (*putas me tibi... bonam mentem?* 1). Seneca and Lucilius are thus moving forward and learning together, although Seneca portrays himself as Lucilius' teacher: *ad quod te conor perducere* (5). Lucilius asks the appropriate question, namely what the foundation of a sound mind is (*huius fundamentum quod sit quaeris*, 1). By changing the word "foundation" (which Seneca puts in the mouth of Lucilius) to "pinnacle", Seneca emphasizes the latter word: *fundamentum hoc esse dixi: culmen est* (1). Seneca's answer to Lucilius' question is not to find joy in useless things (*ne gaudeas vanis*, 1). Both Seneca and Lucilius must still learn the joy of being independent of externals.

## Lucilius

Lucilius feels that under Seneca's orders he will be losing out on life: *existimas nunc me detrahere tibi multas voluptates qui fortuita summoveo, qui spes, dulcissima oblectamenta, devitandas existimo?* (3). But, Seneca assures him, it is exactly the opposite (*immo contra... supra omnia erectus*, 3). Seneca urges Lucilius to think about the question of whether one can despise death with a care-free countenance, whether one can open one's door to poverty, whether one can curb one's pleasures, whether one can contemplate the endurance of pain (*an tu existimas quemquam soluto vultu et, ut isti delicati loquuntur, hilariculo mortem contemnere, paupertati domum aperire, voluptates tenere sub freno, meditari dolorum patientiam?* 4). Because he who ponders these things (namely death, poverty, temptation and suffering) in his heart is indeed full of joy (*haec qui apud se versat in magno gaudio est*, 4). This is the joy that Seneca wants for Lucilius (*in huius gaudii possessione esse te volvo*, 4).

Seneca begs Lucilius to “cast aside and trample under foot all those things that glitter outwardly and are held out to [him] by another or as obtainable from another” (*dissice et conculca...vel ex alio*, 6). Here Seneca refers to “the various sects which professed to teach how happiness is to be obtained” (Gummere 1917:162 n.a). Seneca advises Lucilius to rather seek out the real good (*veri boni aviditas tuta est*, 6). Lucilius, the good student, asks the appropriate question, namely what the real good is and where it comes from: *quod sit istud interrogas aut unde subeat?* (7). In paragraph 10 Lucilius, again demonstrating the position of the good student, asks the appropriate question; Seneca himself admits that an explanation is necessary (*‘quare?’ inquis; desiderat enim explanationem ista vox*).

Seneca gives Lucilius two options: *pauci sunt qui consilio se suaque disponent: ceteri, eorum more quae fluminibus innatant, non eunt sed feruntur* (8). That is, Lucilius can either be someone in control of his life, or else someone merely swept along by life.

Seneca takes it for granted that Lucilius has chosen the first option (they have come too far for the other choice!) and proceeds to tell him how to achieve it: he should decide what he wishes and abide by his decision (*ideo constituendum est quid velimus et in eo perseverandum*, 8).

What is implied by the words *Epicuri tui* (9)? Has Lucilius accepted Epicurus as a teacher? Is he becoming eclectic like Seneca? In paragraph 6 Seneca addresses Lucilius *Lucili carissime* (6), which indicates that their friendship and love has grown stronger. Perhaps, with the progress of their friendship, Lucilius is starting to think more like Seneca.

## Summary

The Ideal Persona strives towards attaining true joy. True joy is to be independent of externals. The Ideal Persona thus attains true joy by casting aside all things outside of him, i.e. all things beyond his control, and rejoicing in his soul. In other words, he keeps the pleasures of the body within bounds, concentrating instead on the real good. The real good comes from a good conscience, honourable pursuits, right actions, contempt for the gifts of chance, an even and calm way of life, and constancy. In order, practically, to attain the real good, the Ideal Persona searches for and finds a guiding purpose with which to control himself and his affairs. In order to do this, he decides what he wishes and abides by his decision. He perseveres to attain the real good.

Both Seneca and Lucilius must still learn the joy of being independent of external and material things. But Lucilius is not sure if he wants to. He feels that under Seneca's orders he will be losing out on life. But Lucilius does not understand the meaning of true joy. He who ponders things such as death, poverty, temptation and suffering in his heart is indeed full of joy. This is the joy that Seneca wants for Lucilius; this is true joy. To achieve it, he must make a choice: he can either be in control of his life, or else merely swept along by life. Only the real good can put him in control of his life.

## ***Epistula 24***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona does not worry about the future. Therefore, he does not ruin the present (*quid enim...metu perdere*, 1). This is how he practically deals with worrying about the future:

1. He assumes that what he fears will happen, will happen anyway and he measures his fear.
2. He understands that his fear is either insignificant or short-lived.
3. He gathers examples for encouragement (*sed ego alia te ad securitatem via ducam... exempla quibus confirmeris colligenda sunt*, 2-3).

Seneca elaborates on examples in paragraphs 4-5 (*damnationem suam Rutilius... Mucius quod non occiderat*), paragraphs 6-8 (*quidni ego narrem ultima ille nocte... spiritum non emisit sed eiecit*) and paragraphs 9-10 (*sicut illum Cn. Pompei socerum Scipionem... et quidem Catonis, mori?*). Are these examples of wise men or brave men? The answer is that wisdom makes one brave. The goal of examples is to encourage one to face that which one thinks is most terrible (*non in hoc exempla nunc congero ut ingenium exerceam, sed ut te adversus id quod maxime terribile videtur exhorter*, 9).

The Ideal Persona despises death (*ad contemnendam mortem*, 6). He strips things of all that disturbs and confuses (*demere rebus tumultum ac videre quid in quaque re sit: scies nihil esse in istis terribile nisi ipsum timorem*, 12). Holland explains: "The philosopher sees things as they are presented to him by nature, not as they are represented to him by his imagination worked on by the suggestion of others" (1920:174). The apostrophe to death is

effective (*quid mihi gladios et ignes ostendis... brevis es si ferre non possum*, 14). The phrase *levis es si ferre possum; brevis es si ferre non possum* (14) echoes a celebrated Epicurean line of consolation (Russell 1974:85). The Ideal Persona sees death for what it really is by stripping it of its mask.

The Ideal Persona does not fear death. This is how he, practically, does it:

1. He thinks of everything bad that can happen as something which will happen, so that he will not be caught off guard (*quidquid fieri potest quasi futurum cogitemus*, 15).
2. He removes his mind from his specific case to the case of men in general (*abduc illum a privata causa ad publicam*, 16). This is how the Ideal Persona thinks: pain can reach one's petty body from other sources than from wrong or the might of the stronger. For example, one's pleasures themselves become torments (e.g. banquets bring indigestion). One should remind oneself that if one becomes poor one will be one of many; if one is exiled one will regard oneself as if born there; if one is imprisoned it makes no difference - one is not free from the bonds of the body now; if one dies one will cease to run the risk of all of the above (*dic mortale tibi et fragile... desinam mori posse*, 16-17).<sup>37</sup> This certainly puts death in another perspective: it is important for the Ideal Persona to have a sense of humour!
3. He does not fear the after-life (*nemo tam puer est... mors nos aut consumit aut exiit, emissis meliora restant onere detracto, consumptis nihil restat, bona pariter malaque summota sunt*, 18).
4. He knows that the death which he fears is the last but not the only death, for we are dying every day (*mors non una venit, sed quae rapit ultima mors est*, 21).

The Ideal Persona searches for the mean between loving and hating life (*in utrumque enim monendi ac firmandi sumus, et ne nimis amemus vitam et ne nimis oderimus*, 24). He

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<sup>37</sup> According to Motto and Clark the passage *pauper fiam... desinam mori posse* (17) "is typical of a great deal of Senecan practice in the *Epistulae Morales*. The passage is chatty, at the same time that it is rhetorical... [We have here] a contest or debate. On either side of the colons appear two adversaries - almost, if you will, two parts of Seneca. The first of course is a neophyte, a non-Stoic, uttering the clichés of popular reasoning... Responding to this generalized, protesting voice, Seneca answers with bold and confident philosophic strokes. In any event, the presence of such a generalized *adversarius* provides the passage with a remarkable back-and-forth tension of conflict, and the prose comes across to us with the race and force of a tennis match" (1975:2-3).

ponders thoughts such as these below to strengthen his mind for the endurance alike of death and life:

1. Certain men are tired of life and therefore seek death: *ridiculum est currere ad mortem taedio vitae, cum genere vitae ut currendum ad mortem esset effeceris* (22).

2. Certain men are afraid of death and are therefore unwilling to live: *quid tam ridiculum quam adpetere mortem, cum vitam inquietam tibi feceris metu mortis?* (23).

3. Certain men are afraid of death and therefore kill themselves: *tantam hominum inprudenciam esse, immo dementiam, ut quidam timore mortis cogantur ad mortem* (23).

The Ideal Persona is not like any of these men. Even when reason demands suicide, he still takes time to reflect (*etiam cum... vita sed exire*, 24-25). He avoids the lust for death (*et ante omnia...libido moriendi*, 25). He will not end his life out of boredom, because he is not bored by life (*multi sunt qui non acerbum iudicent vivere sed supervacuum*, 26).

The Ideal Persona practises what he preaches: *sed an vere audieris, an vere dixeris, effectu proba* (15). He thus proves that, contrary to popular opinion, Stoic philosophy is practical: *hoc enim turpissimum est quod nobis obici solet, verba nos philosophiae, non opera tractare* (15).

## Lucilius

Lucilius is worried about a future lawsuit with which someone is threatening him (*sollicitum esse te scribis de iudici eventu quod tibi furor inimici denuntiat*, 1). Seneca chides Lucilius for being so foolish as to be unhappy now, because he may be unhappy at some future time (*est sine dubio stultum, quia quandoque sis futurus miser esse iam miserum*, 1). Lucilius expects Seneca to advise him to picture to himself something better and to rest in the allurements of hope (*existimas me suasurum ut meliora tibi ipse propnas et adquiescas spei blandae*, 1). Instead, Seneca's advice to Lucilius is to assume that what he fears may happen will certainly happen, to measure this fear and, eventually, to understand that what he fears is either insignificant or shortlived (*si vis omnem...quod metuis*, 2). Russell remarks: "Instead of the expected advice to hope for the best and not face trouble till it comes (advice he had given in 13.4-5), Seneca judges that Lucilius is now ready for a more radical cure: think of the worst, and be prepared even for that" (Russell

1974:85).<sup>38</sup> He adds: “The essential step in facing a situation like this (the lawsuit) is to recognize the true values of things. We are all deceived by false appearances, as children are by masks. The masks must be stripped off” (1974:86).

Seneca says it is a fact that the mind has an unreflecting tendency towards death (*est enim, mi Lucili, ut ad alia, sic etiam ad moriendum inconsulta animi inclinatio*, 25). He hereby reassures Lucilius that he is not alone in the struggle of despising death.

Seneca advises Lucilius to find examples of men of high achievement or of high endeavour to help strengthen him against his fear: *nec diu exempla quibus confirmeris colligenda sunt: omnis illa aetas tulit. in quamcumque partem rerum vel civilium vel externarum memoriam miseris, occurrent tibi ingenia aut profectus aut impetus magni* (3). Costa’s translation of the words *ingenia aut profectus aut impetus magni* is more literal: “minds which showed either philosophical maturity or great natural energy” (1988:21). Costa comments: “Seneca frequently uses *profectus*...in the almost technical sense...of the philosophical or moral progress made by the *proficiens*: see 11.1, 20.1” (1988:162 n.3). Seneca’s choice of examples imply that Lucilius may be fearing death, exile, imprisonment or torture (*numquid accidere tibi... Mucius quod non occiderat*, 3-5). In this regard Gummere’s words are noteworthy: “Seneca’s theme (for *Epistula* 24) is suggested by the fear which possesses Lucilius as to the issue of a lawsuit. This fear is taken as typical of all fears, and Seneca devotes most of his letter to the greatest fear of all - the fear of death” (1917:164 n.b). However, Seneca applies his practical advice to Lucilius’ specific situation, namely the possible lawsuit in paragraph 12 (*securus itaque...iniquissimum compara*).

Seneca assures Lucilius that there are examples of men who despised death, who were not as resolute (*facilius autem exhortabor...animum fortissimorum*, 9). Seneca implies that if Scipio could do it, so can Lucilius! Seneca leaves Lucilius to think for himself of modern examples of men who have scorned death, i.e. who have cut short their misfortunes by

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<sup>38</sup> Manning points out: “The theory that the power of misfortune could be much forestalled by anticipation, and that the unexpected struck home much harder was particularly associated with the Cyrenaics” (1976:301). He also points out: “While Lucilius may not be advanced enough to adopt the Cyrenaic approach in Letter 13, by the time the 24th letter was written he had made sufficient progress to justify it” (1976:302).

death (*respice ad haec nostra tempora...morte praeciderint*, 11). This shows Seneca's confidence in Lucilius.

Lucilius sarcastically interrupts Seneca in paragraph 6: '*decantatae*' inquis '*in omnibus scholis fabulae istae sunt; iam mihi, cum ad contemnendam mortem ventum fuerit, Catonem narrabis*'. Russell comments: "Seneca's use of the most overworked material he can find is thus deliberate; it is part of his presentation of the good life as traditional wisdom: there is nothing new to know; the crux lies in making the effort to act" (1974:86). In paragraph 15 Seneca admits that all this talk about death is familiar (*saepe audisti, saepe dixisti*). The point is: have you taken it in, Lucilius? After Seneca's mocking words *nemo tam puer est* (18), Lucilius certainly will not believe in the Underworld anymore (not to say that he ever did)!

Seneca suggests that Lucilius' work should be seen by others also: *permitte mihi hoc loco referre versum tuum, si prius admonuero ut te iudices non aliis scripsisse ista sed etiam tibi* (19). This says much of Lucilius' progress: he is now in a position to teach. Seneca indirectly confronts Lucilius: did you really mean this for others, because it is ignoble to say one thing and mean another, and even more ignoble to write one thing and mean another (*si prius admonuero... scribere, aliud sentire*, 19)? Ball points out that Seneca is here "clearly thinking not so much of the question of sincerity as of a sufficient command of one's diction to be able to say effectively just what one means" (1916:xxix).

Seneca comments on Lucilius' style: *haec cum descripsisses quo soles ore, semper quidem magnus, numquam tamen acrior quam ubi veritati commodas verba* (21). Lucilius has a knack for expressing the truth very appropriately. The Stoic dictum "to speak well is to speak the truth" was the corner stone of the Stoic theory of literary style (Smiley 1919:51). The word *semper* (21) carries the implication that Lucilius has often before expressed such truths. Seneca quotes Lucilius in paragraph 21. Lucilius thus actually answers himself; Seneca merely pointed this out to him (*malo te legas quam epistulam meam; apparebit enim tibi hanc quam timemus mortem extremam esse, non solam*, 21). Russell remarks that the lesson is not only hackneyed (and one recalls Lucilius' words *decantatae... in omnibus scholis fabulae istae sunt; iam mihi, cum ad contemnendam mortem ventum fuerit, Catonem narrabis*, in paragraph 6 of this letter); it is one Lucilius himself knows (1974:87).

Words such as *mihi crede, Lucili* (11) indicate that Seneca (by now) expects Lucilius to trust him as a friend. Seneca acknowledges Lucilius' progress (because of following Seneca's advice) with the words *quod facere te moneo scio certe fecisse* (16).

## Seneca

Seneca sarcastically says that his goal with all the examples is not to exercise his wit, but to encourage Lucilius (*non in hoc exempla nunc congero ut ingenium exerceam, sed ut te adversus id quod maxime terribile videtur exhorter*, 9). However, Lucilius must think for himself of modern examples of men who have scorned death (*respice ad haec nostra tempora...morte praeciderint*, 11). This says something of Seneca's teaching method: he gives his student room in which to search and explore for himself.

Seneca says that he will not be so foolish as to go through Epicurus' refutation of the Underworld, but then he does, using the conventional rhetorical device of a *praeteritio* (*non sum tam ineptus ut Epicuream cantilenam hoc loco persequar et dicam vanos esse inferorum metus...ossibus cohaerentium*, 18)!

## Summary

The motivation for this letter is Lucilius' worry over a future lawsuit with which someone is threatening him. Seneca chides Lucilius for being unhappy now, because he may be unhappy at some future time.

The Ideal Persona does not worry about the future. He practically deals with worry:

1. He assumes that what he fears will happen, will happen anyway, and then he measures his fear.
2. He understands that his fear is either insignificant or short-lived.
3. He gathers examples for encouragement.

The Ideal Persona does not fear death. He practically deals with the fear of death:

1. He thinks of everything bad that can happen as something which will happen (so that he will not be caught off guard).
2. He removes his mind from his specific case to the case of men in general.
3. He does not fear the after-life.

4. He knows that the death which he fears is the last but not the only death, for we are dying every day.

The Ideal Persona searches for the mean between loving and hating life.

## ***Epistula 25***

### **Ideal Persona**

It is the Ideal Persona's job to reform others, or rather to help others to reform themselves. His attitude towards those he tries to reform is that he would rather lack success than faith in their progress (*an profecturus sim nescio: malo successum mihi quam fidem deesse*, 2), but he does not spend forever on the job; he passes on to others who also need his help (*inpendam huic rei dies et utrum possit aliquid agi an non possit experiar*, 3). It is never too late to reform, since one is never too old (*nec desperaveris etiam diutinos aegros posse sanari, si contra intemperantiam steteris, si multa invitos et facere coegeris et pati*, 2).

Here are some practical steps of reformation he himself follows and which he also teaches to those whom he is trying to reform:

1. Live according to nature (*ad legem naturae revertamur*, 4).
2. Appoint a guardian over oneself and, in the meantime, engage in making oneself one's own guardian, i.e. someone in whose company one would not dare to sin ('*sic fac' inquit... peccare non audeas*, 5-6).
3. Withdraw into oneself when one is forced to be in a crowd (of course one should avoid crowds), provided one is a tranquil, good and self-restrained man. Until one is, one should in the meantime seek out certain individuals, because then any company is better than being by oneself (*cum hoc effeceris... istic malo viro propius es*, 6-7).

### **Seneca**

The following represents Seneca's view of reformation:

Seneca and Lucilius have two mutual friends (*duos amicos nostros*, 1). Seneca has undertaken the reformation of these two friends. He says that he will have to approach them differently (*diversa via eundum est; alterius enim vitia emendanda, alterius frangenda*

*sunt*, 1). Seneca says that he is prepared to work hard at reforming the second man, who is older (*utar libertate tota*, 1). Seneca will take on the older man's reformation out of love, but he may also be forced to hurt the man's feelings (*non amo illum nisi offendo*, 1).

Seneca admits that he is not sure whether he will make progress with the old man, but says that he would prefer to lack success rather than to lack faith (*an profecturus sim nescio: malo successum mihi quam fidem deesse*, 2). Seneca points out to Lucilius that he is wrong in thinking that the success of reforming someone has got anything to do with their age (*nec desperaveris etiam diutinos aegros posse sanari... ne de altero quidem satis fiduciae habeo*, 2).

Seneca's "he cannot fool me" (*aliis haec intermissio eius inposuit, mihi verba non dat*, 3) adds a humorous tone to the episode of Seneca assisting in the reformation of the older man. Seneca closes the subject of the reformation of the old man by saying that he will devote some time to the matter and try to see whether or not something can be done (*inpendam huic rei dies et utrum possit aliquid agi an non possit experiar*, 3). Seneca does not sound very confident. Or perhaps he is just being realistic, due to former experience.

## Lucilius

Lucilius' view of reformation makes him sceptical that the old man (and old people in general) can be helped: '*quid ergo?*' inquis '*quadragenarium pupillum cogitas sub tutela tua continere? respice aetatem eius iam duram et intractabilem: non potest reformari; tenera finguntur*' (1).

Seneca returns to Lucilius' reformation in paragraph 4. Lucilius is continuing on the right path (*tu nobis te, ut facis*, 4). However, Seneca challenges Lucilius to show him that he is brave and to get rid of his "baggage", since no possessions are necessary on the road of moral progress (*fortem praesta et sarcinas contrahe; nihil ex his quae habemus necessarium est*, 4). Both Seneca and Lucilius must learn to live according to nature (*ad legem naturae revertamur*, 4).

Seneca states that it is good to appoint a guardian over oneself, a witness to one's thoughts (*prodest sine dubio...tuis iudices*, 5). It is good to live as one would live under the eyes of some good man, always by one's side (*hoc quidem longe...praesentis oculis*, 5). But in

Lucilius' case, Seneca says that it is enough for Lucilius to act, in whatever he does, as he would act if anyone at all were looking on (*sed ego etiam hoc contentus sum, ut sic facias quaecumque facies tamquam spectet aliquis*, 5). It is by far nobler to live as one would live under the eyes of some good man, but anyone is better than no-one, because solitude prompts us to all kinds of evil (*omnia nobis mala solitudo persuadet*, 5). When the time comes that Lucilius has progressed so far that he has respect for himself, he may send away his attendant, but until then he needs to set a guardian over himself (*cum iam profeceris tantum ut sit tibi etiam tui reverentia, licebit dimittas paedagogum: interim aliquorum te auctoritate custodi*, 6).

When Lucilius has progressed far enough to be his own guardian, then he can proceed to the next step, namely to withdraw into himself when he is in a crowd (*cum hoc effeceris... 'tunc praecipue in te ipse secede cum esse cogaris in turba'*, 6). But for now, Lucilius must seek out certain individuals (*circumspice singulos*, 7) and - Seneca adds sarcastically - until Lucilius is a good, tranquil, and self-restrained man, he had better withdraw into a crowd in order to get away from himself, because alone he is too close to a rascal (*si bonus vir... viro propius es*, 7)!<sup>39</sup>

## Summary

The Ideal Persona reforms himself and it is his duty to reform his fellow men. Lucilius is sceptical that old people can be reformed. Seneca points out to Lucilius that he is wrong in thinking that the success of reforming someone has anything to do with their age. Seneca says that he would prefer to lack success rather than to lack faith in helping someone to make progress. This is the Ideal Persona's attitude towards those he tries to reform. But he does not spend forever on the job; he passes on to others who also need his help.

The Ideal Persona follows these practical steps of reformation and also teaches them to those whom he is trying to reform:

- 1) One must live according to nature.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 10.1.

2) One must appoint a guardian over oneself and, in the meantime, engage in making oneself one's own guardian.

3) One must withdraw into oneself when one is forced to be in a crowd, provided one is a tranquil, good and self-restrained man. Until one is, one should in the meantime seek out certain individuals, because then any company is better than being by oneself.

These three steps of reformation are applied to Lucilius: Seneca challenges Lucilius to be brave and to get rid of his worldly baggage, which is unnecessary. Both Lucilius and Seneca must learn to live according to nature, as the Ideal Persona does. Seneca advises Lucilius to act, in whatever he does, as he would act if anyone at all were looking on.

When the time comes that Lucilius has progressed so far that he has respect for himself, he may send away his attendant, but until then he needs to set a guardian over himself. When Lucilius has progressed far enough to be his own guardian, he can then proceed to this next step, namely to withdraw into himself when he is in a crowd. But for now Lucilius must rather seek out certain individuals.

## ***Epistula 26***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona does not look down on old age, but appreciates and enjoys it: *viget animus et gaudet non multum sibi esse cum corpore; magnam partem oneris sui posuit. exultat et mihi facit controversiam de senectute: hunc ait esse florem suum. credamus illi: bono suo utatur* (2). He uses his old age to prepare for death, which delivers the final judgement over us: *'nihil est' inquam 'adhuc quod aut rebus aut verbis exhibuimus...quid profecerim morti crediturus sum* (5). But no matter how old he is, the Ideal Persona is ready for death everywhere (*incertum est quo loco te mors expectet; itaque tu illam omni loco expecta*, 7). He learns thoroughly how to die by thinking on death (*'meditare mortem' ... 'egregia res est mortem condiscere'*, 8). He learns how to die so that he may be free, i.e. above any external power (*'meditare mortem': qui hoc dicit meditari libertatem iubet. qui mori didicit servire dedit; supra omnem potentiam est, certe extra omnem*, 10). He gradually lessens his love of life so that he may be ready to take it should necessity demand so (*una est catena...statim facere*, 10).

## Seneca

In paragraphs 1-3 Seneca reveals his personal experience of old age. He self-mockingly says that just a while ago he was telling Lucilius that he was within sight of old age (still before him), but now he has already left it behind (*modo dicebam tibi in conspectu esse me senectutis: iam vereor ne senectutem post me reliquerim*, 1). He is now in the worn-out class, those who are nearing the end (*inter decrepitos me numera et extrema tangentis*, 1)! Nevertheless, his mind is strong, though his body frail, and for this he gives thanks to himself, with Lucilius as his witness (*gratias tamen mihi apud te ago: non sentio in animo aetatis iniuriam, cum sentiam in corpore*, 2). How is Seneca responsible for the fact that his mind is still strong? Seneca has put a lot of work and effort into developing and strengthening his mind. Seneca is not trying to say here that he can control the ageing process.

Seneca relates what he thinks, or rather what his mind tells him (the personification is used for dramatic effect): it tells him that old age is its time of bloom, that he must consider how much of his peace of spirit and moderation of character he owes to wisdom and how much to his time of life and that he must distinguish carefully what he cannot do and what he does not want to do (*exultat et mihi... quae nolim*, 2-3). Old age has good and bad effects on one's life. Seneca must establish which are which and do the right things. The good things must be due to himself and not his age, and the bad things (which are due to himself or his age), he must correct.

Lucilius plays the role of objector and questions the negative side of old age: '*incommodum summum est*' inquis '*minui et deperire et, ut proprie dicam, liquescere. non enim subito impulsus ac prostratus sumus: carpimur, singuli dies aliquid subtrahunt viribus*' (4). Seneca disagrees, saying that a gradual withdrawal is easy (*sed quia lenis haec est via, subduci*, 4). He even makes dying sound like quite a wonderful experience: *ecquis exitus est melior quam in finem suum natura solvente dilabi?* (4).

In paragraphs 5-6 (*ego certe... reformido iudicium*), Seneca shows how he personally deals with old age and death as an example to Lucilius; he indicates how one should think on

death.<sup>40</sup> Hijmans points out: “At the very first reading it is clear that letter 26 finds its centre in the passage Seneca addresses to himself [paragraphs 5 and 6], that these paragraphs are introduced by some remarks belonging in the *topos de senectute* and that the addition has been chosen carefully in connection with the subject matter of the letter as a whole. When we start determining the latter it soon appears that ‘death’ as a single unified notion will not do as an indication of the central subject. The large central section leaves no doubt that it is rather the day of our death as the moment of truth vis à vis the life we have lived that Seneca spotlights in this letter” (1976:137-138).

One’s progress only shows at the point of death (*quid profecerim morti crediturus sum*, 5). But if one’s progress only shows at the point of death, how is it possible to evaluate a person’s progress during their life, as Seneca does with himself and Lucilius, and as I do with Seneca and Lucilius? There are certain markers on the road of progress, by which one can measure one’s progress (e.g. one’s ability to make true friends and be one oneself). The themes which I have identified in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 (see Chapter 3) are all markers of progress. But death is the biggest and final test of one’s progress.

Seneca is still depending on Epicurus for maxims, but he promises Lucilius that soon he will be depending on himself (*puta me non dicere unde sumpturus sim mutuum: scis cuius arca utar. expecta me pusillum, et de domo fiet numeratio*, 8). This indicates Seneca’s progress; he is becoming wiser.

## Lucilius

Lucilius is younger than Seneca (*iuvenior es*, 7), but age has nothing to do with dying (*non dinumerantur... loco expecta*, 7). Lucilius must therefore prepare himself for death.

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<sup>40</sup> Edwards quotes Misch [1950:421]: “When Seneca retreats into his solitary conscience, he reveals to others... a spiritual act, which he would have them imitate; and he directs the energy which he gains from introspection alike towards himself and his friend and toward the depraved world in general. This double aspect appears in his epistles for the first time as a characteristic of literary confessions; it will reappear in Augustine’s *Confessions* and in modern times, especially in Rousseau” (1997:28).

One should speak to a friend as if speaking with oneself. Thus Seneca indicates his friendship with Lucilius with the words “*haec mecum loquor, sed tecum quoque me locutum puta*” (7).

## Summary

The Ideal Persona learns thoroughly how to die by thinking on death. In paragraphs 4-6, Seneca shows how he personally deals with old age and death as an example to Lucilius. The Ideal Persona learns how to die so that he may be free, i.e. above any external power. The Ideal Persona appreciates and enjoys old age and uses it to prepare for death. Lucilius is younger than Seneca, but age has nothing to do with dying. No matter how old he is, the Ideal Persona is ready for death everywhere.

## *Epistula 27*

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona shares his remedies with his friends. Thus, while reforming himself, he helps reform others (*non sum tam... mecum exigo*, 1).

He seeks virtue, which is the only abiding good and which alone affords everlasting and peace-giving joy. He seeks virtue in his soul, for one's soul has to discover virtue for itself within itself (*aliquod potius bonum mansurum circumspice; nullum autem est nisi quod animus ex se sibi invenit. sola virtus praestat gaudium perpetuum, securum*, 3). He is alone in this matter, because finding virtue cannot be delegated to someone else (*delegationem res ista non recipit*, 4); one cannot borrow or buy a sound mind (*bona mens nec commodatur nec emitur*, 8). Ordinary literature, as contrasted with philosophy, admits of outside assistance (*aliud litterarum genus adiutorium admittit*, 5), and Seneca illustrates this with the juicy story of Calvisius Sabinus (*Calvisius Sabinus... multos servos valentissimos habeas*, 5-8).

He lives according to nature by living in voluntary poverty (‘*divitiae sunt ad legem naturae composita paupertas*’, 9).

## Seneca

Lucilius is rebelling against Seneca, his teacher. He accuses Seneca of trying to reform him, when he himself is not yet reformed (*'tu me' inquis 'mones? iam enim te ipse monuisti, iam correxisti? ideo aliorum emendationi vacas?'* 1).<sup>41</sup> Seneca corrects Lucilius: though he may not yet be completely reformed, this should not stop him from sharing what he has found helpful during the process of reformation so far (*non sum tam improbus ut curationes aeger obeam, sed, tamquam in eodem valetudinario iaceam, de communi tecum malo conloquor et remedia communico*, 1).

Seneca is ashamed that in his old age he still desires and pursues the same things as he did in his boyhood days (*clamo mihi ipse, 'numera annos tuos, et pudebit eadem velle quae volueras puer, eadem parare*, 2). Seneca admits and anticipates that there will be more disordered pleasures to harm him in the future, but also that those wrongful pleasures of the past will keep on harming him (*dimitte istas voluptates turbidas, magno luendas: non venturae tantum sed praeteritae nocent*, 2). With guilty pleasures regret remains even after the pleasures are over (*ita improbarum voluptatum etiam post ipsas paenitentia est*, 2). Seneca thus has personal experience of this, and he shares his mistake with Lucilius. He hopes that his confession will stop Lucilius from making the same mistake. Though Seneca is still occupied with his own reformation, he tries to help Lucilius by making this confession.

## Lucilius

Seneca makes it very clear that Lucilius is his friend, in that he can talk to Lucilius as though he were talking to himself: *sic itaque me audi tamquam mecum loquar; in secretum*

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<sup>41</sup> Edwards points out that Seneca here “presents himself as the addressee of his own advice... This strategy serves, in part, to present an appealing picture of Seneca as a man aware of his own faults, rather than a faultless superior offering advice to humbler persons. It also serves to complicate the notion of adviser and advised, of the letters as communication between one individual and another. The dialogue between the more advanced philosopher and the learner is interiorized - yet in such a way that an audience may listen in on the dialogue and indeed may hope to rehearse such dialogues for themselves” (1997:32).

*te meum admitto et te adhibito mecum exigo* (1). In *Epistula* 3 this is said to be one of the principles of friendship. These words also make it sound as though Seneca is progressing closer to being the Wise Man, who desires friends if only for the purpose of practising friendship in order that his noble qualities may not lie dormant (see *Ep.* 9.8).

Seneca counsels Lucilius to forsake fleeting pleasures and discover, within himself, virtue, which alone gives everlasting joy (*non sunt solidae... perpetuum, securum*, 2-3). Seneca's wish for Lucilius is to attain the ultimate joy of virtue (*quando ad hoc gaudium pervenire continget?* 4). The word *quando* (4) expresses Seneca's belief in Lucilius' ability to attain this joy. Seneca affirms Lucilius' progress: so far Lucilius has not been sluggish, but he must quicken his pace, for much work remains. To accomplish virtue, Lucilius must himself give all his waking hours and all his efforts (*non quidem cessatur adhuc, sed festinetur. multum restat operis, in quod ipse necesse est vigiliam, ipse laborem tuum inpendas, si effici cupis*, 4). Only Lucilius himself can do it; no-one can do it for him (*delegationem res ista non recipit*, 4).

With the words *quisbusdam remedia monstranda, quibusdam inculcanda sunt* (9) Seneca derides the wealthy Lucilius.

## Summary

Lucilius is of the opinion that Seneca is wrong in trying to reform him, when he himself is not yet reformed. Seneca corrects Lucilius: though he may not yet be reformed, this should not stop him from sharing what he has found helpful during the process of reformation. While reforming himself, the Ideal Persona helps reform others.

Seneca is ashamed that in his old age he still desires and pursues the same things as he did in his boyhood days. With the guilty pleasures of his past there remains much regret. Seneca counsels Lucilius to forsake such fleeting pleasures and discover virtue within himself. Virtue alone gives everlasting joy. The Ideal Persona seeks virtue in his soul, for one's soul has to discover virtue for itself within itself. To accomplish virtue, Lucilius must himself give all his waking hours and all his efforts. Only Lucilius himself can do it.

## ***Epistula 28***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona knows that travelling is not a cure for discontent, because one's faults will follow one wherever one travels (*terraeque urbesque recedant, sequentur te quocumque perveneris vitia*, 1). Rather, he lays aside the burdens of his mind (*onus animi deponendum est: non ante tibi ullus placebit locus*, 2). Literally, *Epistula 28* is about the Ideal Persona seeking a change of soul rather than a change of place. What lies behind his attitude? The Ideal Persona does not try to escape the fact that the only way towards the happy life is through the soul itself. Material things cannot bring true happiness.

It is his belief that the whole world is his country ('*non sum uni angulo natus, patria mea totus hic mundus est*', 4). According to the Stoic philosophy the world is a single great community in which all men are brothers (Campbell 1969:15). Therefore, he is happy anywhere and everywhere, because that which he seeks, namely to live well, is found everywhere (*illud quod quaeris, bene vivere, omni loco positum sit*, 5). But there are some places to avoid. The Wise Man (and thus the Ideal Persona) will endure a stormy existence if he has to, but he will choose not to (*sapiens feret ista, non eliget, et malet in pace esse quam in pugna*, 7).

The Ideal Persona strives to be free, to scorn the slavery of external things; in other words, he fights Fortune for his freedom (*quid interest quot domini sint? servitus una est; hanc qui contempsit in quantalibet turba dominantium liber est*, 8). We are reminded of *Ep. 8.7* where Seneca says that in order to be independent of Fortune and thus free, one must be a slave to philosophy (*philosophiae servias oportet, ut tibi contingat vera libertas*). Stewart explains: "The oxymoron here consists in the fact that one can, legally speaking, be a slave, surrounded by a crowd of masters, and yet nevertheless still be free... [F]reedom for Seneca consists in a certain mental disposition which is indicated here by the verb *contempsit*. One could say that freedom resides in the soul; hence, if one has the correct mental disposition indicative of a free soul, then one's legal status or social condition is irrelevant" (1997:13-14).

How does he achieve this freedom? The knowledge of sin is the beginning of salvation (*'initium est salutis notitia peccati'*, 9). Therefore, to achieve salvation (i.e. to reform himself), the Ideal Persona searches for his sins: he hunts up charges against himself; playing the part first of accuser, then of judge, and last of intercessor, being at times harsh with himself (*ideo quantum potes te ipse... aliquando te offende*, 10).

## Lucilius

Lucilius has been trying to shake off the gloom and heaviness of his mind by travelling (*vadis huc illuc, ut excutias insidens pondus quod ipsa iactatione incommodius fit*, 3 and *nunc non peregrinaris sed erras et ageris ac locum ex loco mutas*, 5).<sup>42</sup> Seneca compares Lucilius to Vergil's mad prophetess: *talem nunc esse habitum tuum cogita qualem Vergilius noster vatis inducit iam concitatae et instigatae multumque habentis in se spiritus non sui bacchatur vates, magnum si pectore possit excussisse deum* (3). Seneca points out to him that it is a typical human mistake to think that travelling will cure one's discontent<sup>43</sup>: *hoc tibi soli putas accidisse et admiraris quasi rem novam quod peregrinatione tam longa et tot locorum varietatibus non discussisti tristitiam gravitatemque mentis?* (1). Lucilius' unhappiness is due to the fact that he has faults, from which he cannot get away (*sequentur te quocumque perveneris vitia*, 2).

Seneca warns Lucilius that there are some places, which could be bad for him (e.g. the Forum). Such places are unwholesome for a mind like Lucilius', which is healthy but not yet quite sound, though recovering from its ailment (*ita bonae quoque menti necdum adhuc perfectae et convalescenti sunt aliqua parum salubria*, 6).

## Summary

Lucilius has been trying to shake off the gloom and heaviness of his mind by travelling. His unhappiness is due to the fact that he has faults, from which he cannot get away. The

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Epistula*. 2.1.

<sup>43</sup> Compare the modern expression of this attitude: "I want to go away (overseas) to 'find myself'!"

Ideal Persona knows that travelling is not a cure for discontent, because one's faults will follow one wherever one travels.

Therefore, instead of trying to flee his faults, the Ideal Persona confronts them. He lays aside the burdens of his mind. But first he has to find his faults. The knowledge of sin is the beginning of salvation. Therefore, to achieve salvation, the Ideal Persona searches for his sins: he hunts up charges against himself; playing the part first of accuser, then of judge, and last of intercessor, being at times harsh with himself. This is how Lucilius must rid himself of his faults.

The Ideal Persona is happy anywhere and everywhere, because that which he seeks, namely to live well, is found everywhere. Seneca warns Lucilius that there are some places, which could be bad for him, and which he must therefore avoid. The Ideal Persona will endure a stormy existence if he has to, but he will choose not to.

## ***Epistula 29***

### **Ideal Persona**

The Ideal Persona reforms only those who want to be reformed (*nulli enim nisi audituro dicendum est*, 1). In contrast, Seneca points out the wrong way of the Cynics: they employ an indiscriminating freedom of speech and offer advice to any who come in their way (*ideo de Diogene... natura morbove mutos*, 1). Lucilius tries to make this conduct of the Cynics sound very noble, but Seneca sets him right: "the archer ought not to hit the mark only sometimes; he ought to miss it only sometimes" (*'quare' inquis 'verbis parcam?... ad effectum casu venit*, 2-3). The Ideal Persona chooses to reform only those who will make progress, withdrawing from the hopeless, yet not giving up too soon and even using drastic remedies when all seems hopeless (*sapientia ars est...extrema remedia temptet*, 3). If he cannot root out all his patient's faults, the Ideal Persona tries to put a check on them, because relief is a substitute for health (*vitia eius etiam... bona remissio*, 8).

The Ideal Persona does not cater for the crowd (*'numquam volui populo placere; nam quae ego scio non probat populus, quae probat populus ego nescio'*, 10). He prefers to please himself rather than the populace. He weighs, not merely counts, men's judgements.

He lives without fear of gods or men. He either overcomes or ends evils (*scilicet ut malis...mala aut finias*, 12). These are the benefits of philosophy. Philosophy is to be preferred to every art and every profession (*quid ergo illa laudata et omnibus praeferenda artibus rebusque philosophia praestabit*, 12).

## Lucilius

Lucilius gives Seneca the topic of this letter, as he supposedly wrote to Seneca inquiring about Seneca's reformation of their mutual friend Marcellinus (*de Marcellino nostro quaeris et vis scire quid agat*, 1). What role does a character like Marcellinus play in the *Epistulae Morales*? Misch points out that "in the 'Moral Epistles', [Seneca] attaches the precepts and teachings of ethics encouragingly, critically, instructively to various typical experiences of the Stoic course of education through which Lucilius has to pass, gradually pushing ahead; he introduces further variety with references to other persons, shown as at other moral stages and with other elements of character" (1950:419).

Lucilius has his own view on reformation: Lucilius thinks that in trying to reform many he is bound to reform at least some ('*quare' inquis... multa temptanti*', 2). This is exactly what the good man ought not to do (*hoc, mi Lucili, non existimo magno viro faciendum*, 3).

Lucilius is up to date with his own progress: he understands from where and to where he has made progress, and for that reason has an idea of the distance left to go (*qui intellegis unde quo evaseris et ex eo suspicaris quousque sis evasurus*, 9). Seneca believes in Lucilius' ability to regulate his character, rouse his courage and stand firm in the face of things which have terrified him (*tu interim, qui potes... compone mores tuos, attolle animum, adversus formidata consiste*, 9).

Lucilius needs this ability, since he has good reason to be frightened: *aeque ad tuam mortem multis aditus non est, licet illam multi minentur* (9). Seneca's reasoning is not very convincing when he says that Lucilius should not count the number of those who inspire fear in him (*numerare eos noli qui tibi metum faciunt*, 9), since Nature ordered it that, as only one has given him life, so only one will take it away (*sic istuc natura disposuit: spiritum tibi tam unus eripiet quam unus dedit*, 9).

Indignantly, Seneca implies that Lucilius has no shame, since he refuses to let Seneca off from paying the last instalment (*si pudorem haberes, ultimam mihi pensionem remisisses*, 10). The word *ultimam* makes it clear that Lucilius should no longer be expecting maxims with his letters from Seneca. By this time, Seneca implies, it should be obvious from where he gets his maxims: '*quis hoc?*' *inquis, tamquam nescias cui imperem* (11).

Seneca makes it sound as though Lucilius really likes popularity: *ceterum, si te...favorem ferat?* (12). This could be his downfall.

## Seneca

Seneca has the correct view of who should be reformed: *eligat profecturos, ab iis quos desperavit recedat, non tamen cito relinquat et in ipsa desperatione extrema remedia temptet* (3). What does this say about Lucilius, whom Seneca has chosen to reform? Seneca believes in him and in his progress.

Seneca describes the case of reforming Marcellinus. He analyses Marcellinus' sense of humour and his wit (*advocabit illas facetias...omnia quae dicturus sum occupabit*, 5). He anticipates Marcellinus' argument, namely that he will point out bad immoral philosophers, philosophers who do not practise what they preach, and he gives some examples of such so-called philosophers (*et obiciet philosophis... in faciem ingeret*, 5-7). He proposes how he will deal with Marcellinus: he will put up with his taunts, he will show him that his worth was greater when he was unpopular, and he will put a check upon those faults of Marcellinus which he cannot root out (*constitui tamen contumelias perpeti... sanitatis loco est bona remissio*, 7-8). In paragraph 4 Seneca mockingly makes himself sound very brave: *nihilominus adibo hoc periculum et audebo illi mala sua ostendere*. Helping a man such as Marcellinus is dangerous! One's moral character has to be strong enough. The attention Seneca gives to detail in this description implies that, and practically demonstrates how, every person's reformation or moral progress is different.

## Summary

Seneca and Lucilius' views on who should be reformed differ. Lucilius feels that if one aims to reform many one will reform at least some. Seneca corrects Lucilius. The Ideal

Persona reforms only those who want to be reformed. He also reforms only those who will make progress. If he cannot root out all his patient's faults, he will try to put a check on them.

## **Chapter 3: Themes representing the main aspects of the development of a practical moral identity in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29**

In this chapter I give a systematic exposition of the main aspects of moral development revealed through *Epistulae Morales* 1-29. To be more precise, it is a systematic exposition of the main aspects making up a practical moral identity. These main aspects of the development of a practical moral identity in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29 are represented by themes. The eleven themes which I identified in Letters 1-29 lent themselves to being grouped together and also divided into sub-ideas of that theme.

### **Group 1: Time**

#### **Theme 1: One's attitude towards, and handling of, time**

##### **The correct understanding and use of time**

Firstly, a person with a practical moral identity thoroughly understands his situation concerning time. Secondly, he actively acts upon this understanding. How does he understand his situation concerning time? He understands that he is dying daily; therefore he places value on his time (1.2).<sup>1</sup> This outlook of his is connected to his understanding of the connection between time and death, namely that death actually lies behind us (1.2). He realises the preciousness of time as his only possession. Time is a gift from nature (1.3). He is aware of how easily time can be stolen; therefore he looks after his time very carefully (1.3). His correct understanding of his situation concerning time results in his correct way of using time.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the discussion of the themes (including the footnotes), the text references include the numbers of the letter(s) and paragraph(s).

The result of the correct understanding of his situation concerning time is that his mind is set on the present (15.4). This is seen in that he lives each day as though it were his last (15.11); in other words, he makes it his goal to live every day to the full (12.8). Therefore, he does not postpone what has to be done (13.16). He is always aware of time, so that he will use it optimally (22.2-3). He strives to have perfect timing in executing his activities (22.6). He realises that time is what matters; not age (12.6). In order to get the most out of life, he looks death in the face. The fear of death must be confronted before one can truly live life to the full (12.6). He combats his fear of the future, with all its groundless fears, by reasoning (13.6). Only when he has confronted his fear of the future and of death can he truly live for the present (13.16).

He uses his time to practise philosophy (5.1 and 8.5-7). A life of pursuing philosophy is the life of leisure. What does Seneca mean by the word “*otium*” (the word “*otium*” appears in *Epp.* 8.1, 16.3 and 19.2, 8)? In *Ep.* 3.5 Seneca says, “[Y]ou should rebuke these two kinds of men, - both those who always lack repose, and those who are always in repose. For love of bustle is not industry, - it is only the restlessness of a hunted mind. And true repose does not consist in condemning all motion as merely vexation; that kind of repose is slackness and inertia.” In *Ep.* 22.8 Seneca says, “[A] good man will not waste himself upon mean and discreditable work or be busy merely for the sake of being busy.” Motto and Clark comment: “[Seneca] vividly contrasts the life of leisure (*vita otiosa*) with the idle life (*occupatio desidiosa*), stressing the immense difference between the two... Moreover, he likewise emphasizes the futility and absurdity of a life devoted to busy idleness” (1978-1979:210).

The life of leisure does not consist in labour or employment, but in active contemplation. Motto and Clark explain: “[T]he contemplative life itself, he insists, *is* a life of ‘action’. For, in truth, Seneca believes that there is an admixture of *otium* and *negotium* in all intellectual enterprise, and he clearly feels that one’s life should, at the least, incorporate healthy portions of each” (1978-1979:209). “Assuredly, the *vita contemplativa* is by no means devoid of action, for it continuously entails a strenuous, quickened commitment to studies, to meditation, and to thought. Through such leisure, man can benefit his fellow-men - more than in any other way” (1978-1979:214). Motto and Clark comment: “Romans were essentially without interest in philosophic leisure, and Seneca’s championing of the

idea is significant. As one critic [De Grazia 1962:21] noted: in Rome, ‘Seneca first gave the ideal (of [*otium*]) real consideration, and he almost alone among Romans carried the standard forward [from Greece].’” (1978-1979:209).<sup>2</sup>

A person with a practical moral identity realises that philosophy is the only worthwhile pursuit: it could bring him renown; it could carry his name into the future (21.3-6). Because he understands what it means to be a real philosopher, he does not waste any of the precious moments of the present (5.1). He practises philosophy now and he is always busy at it. Philosophy is his first priority; everything else comes second (17.5). He realises that progress happens on a daily basis and he acts upon this realisation. He uses every day, every moment, to better himself (6.3). His progress is hurried along by his friends, his fellow-students. They help him to make progress, and he in turn - even whilst still in the process of reformation himself - helps reform them (6.5-6). He understands that the only way towards a happy life is to make philosophy the guide of one’s life (16.1). He contemplates this daily, so that he may stay focused on the purpose of his studies (16.1).

### **Doing the proper properly, but also living a balanced life**

He uses his time correctly by doing a thing properly. Rather than doing many things inadequately, he rather does only a few things efficiently. Therefore, he uses his time correctly by doing what is proper (that which is to the purpose) properly (2.2). What is proper in terms of time? In *Epistula* 2 the proper is specifically: “You must linger among a limited number of master-thinkers and digest their work, if you would derive ideas which shall win firm hold in your mind. Everywhere means nowhere” (2.2). The proper thing for

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the modern mega-industry on time management! Russell [1935:9-29] argues that “modern technological society...requires less and less work; education and civilization can train the worker to cope with more and more leisure. Nevertheless, in the modern era, with its addiction to mass-production, time itself has come to be treated as a *commodity*. Thus, although leisure is for the first time in history available to the mass of mankind, it is considered an ill-advised and guilty pleasure: ‘In contrast to the ancient and medieval outlook, time in the modern world has become more and more an instrument serving no other function than to produce goods for consumption and profit - hence the changed conception of *ransoming* time through ceaseless activity, production, and profit, in contrast to the Greek idea of ransoming time through contemplation of external verities and values’ [Meyerhoff 1960:107]” (Motto and Clark 1978-1979:207-208 n.5).

the Stoic to do (to fill up his time) is to study<sup>3</sup> and practise philosophy and this is the way he will do it, namely thoroughly, properly. He perseveres in his resolutions (16.1).

He does the proper properly and wholeheartedly, but always keeps balance in mind. This is seen, for example, in that he understands that one should not trust no-one, but neither should one trust everyone. He trusts only his friends and he trusts them completely. Of course he also understands what true friendship and trust is (3.3). His balanced outlook is also displayed in that he works very hard, but also rests when necessary (3.6). He strives to lead a balanced life in all areas of his life. He is not a man of extremes, because in extremes lies unbalance. Concisely, he uses his time correctly by leading a balanced life.

### **A well-ordered and focused mind**

To do things properly and to maintain balance, he needs a well-ordered and focused mind. A focused mind thus enables him to use his time correctly. He therefore strives to make his mind well-ordered and focused. To achieve this he forces himself to remain in one place, so that he does not waste time moving around (2.1). But more important than being able to remain in one place, is to be able to linger in his own company. This is the evidence of a well-ordered and focused mind (2.1). He is focused in his reading. Rather than read many books, he reads only a few, but he reads them well, making the ideas a part of his mindset (2.2). He focuses in on his studies by selecting, out of the many thoughts he comes across in a day, one to be thoroughly digested (2.4-5).

An “*emendato animo et composito*” is the result of being reformed. He strives towards such a calm and ordered mind; a mind free of errors.<sup>4</sup> He does not waste any time in pursuing this goal. He is always busy working at his progress (4.1). By means of

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<sup>3</sup> In *Ep.* 84.2 we learn what Seneca means by studying: “We ought not to confine ourselves either to writing or to reading; the one, continuous writing, will cast a gloom over our strength, and exhaust it; the other will make our strength flabby and watery. It is better to have recourse to them alternately, and to blend one with the other, so that the fruits of one’s reading may be reduced to concrete form by the pen.”

<sup>4</sup> The word *emendo -are* means to free a person or his character from faults or errors. But it can also mean to correct the mistakes or inaccuracies in a document, etc. There is thus a metaphorical link between textual and moral improvement.

philosophy he strives towards a sound mind. He does so at top speed and with his whole strength. Nothing holds him back (17.1). Not even the fear of poverty holds him back, because it is this fear that keeps people busy with useless toil (17.3). He even goes as far as to live in voluntary poverty, i.e. to live simply (17.5). His ultimate goal is soundness of mind, and this means being independent of externals, which are useless things (23.1). Rather than try to run away from his faults, he strives to rid his mind of its faults (28.2). Neither does he voluntarily go to places that could be unwholesome for his mind. He will endure a stormy existence if he has to, but he will choose not to (28.6).

### **The correct attitude towards, and handling of, age**

He uses his time correctly by having the right attitude towards age and handling it correctly. He cherishes and loves old age. For him it is full of pleasure, because he knows how to use it (12.4 and 26.2). He uses his life, no matter how old he is, to better himself and others through the practice of philosophy. He prepares for death (26.5). He looks death in the face, no matter how old he is, because only then can he live his life to the full. In other words, in order to be free, he has to learn how to die (12.6 and 26.7). He is always prepared for death (or rather, he constantly works at being prepared for death, because the fear of death must be faced regularly) no matter how old he is (26.7). He works at having a sense of humour about death (12.1-3). One can cultivate such a sense of humour: the more one learns about a subject, the more one develops one's ability to actually see something comical in it. Motto and Clark are of the opinion that "Seneca is a moralist and serious man, but one capable at any moment of seizing a laughing pleasure" (1968:10).

## Group 2: Weaknesses<sup>5</sup>

### Theme 2: One's fight against Fortune

#### Living according to nature

A person with a practical moral identity avoids the gifts of Chance (8.3).<sup>6</sup> In order to avoid Chance, he lives according to nature. Stewart explains the phrase “living according to

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<sup>5</sup> Initially, I wanted to group Themes 2-5 (one's fight against Fortune, one's attitude towards and handling of one's body, one's fight against the fear of death, one's fight against the fear of poverty) under the heading “One's attitude towards and handling of *indifferentia*”. I decided against this, since “*indifferentia*” is a rather controversial topic. However, according to Motto, Themes 2-5 can be classified as *indifferentia* (1970:110). Thus, my grouping of themes 2-5 is related to the topic of *indifferentia*, though I have decided to group them under the heading “Weaknesses” (fear of Fortune and the future, fear for our bodies, fear of death, and fear of poverty, are man's most common weaknesses). Motto explains the term “*indifferentia*” as follows: “Only that which is absolutely good (*virtus*) can be considered a good, and only that which is absolutely bad (*turpitude*) can be considered an evil. Such was the traditional Stoic teaching, which further distinguished all things which lie outside the categories of good and evil as being *indifferentia*. Among such ‘indifferent things,’ it is true, some (health and riches) are advantageous, while others (poverty and disease) are disadvantageous. However desirable or influential the former may be, Seneca and the Stoic school sharply distinguish between their purely relative value and the absolute value of virtue” (1985:10).

<sup>6</sup> Is Chance the same as Fortune? Gummere's translation of *Epistula* 8 shows Chance and Fortune to be the same thing. He translates *casus* as Chance (8.3), *fortuitum* as Chance (8.3), *fortunae* as Fortune (8.3) and *fortuna* as Fortune (8.4). But does Seneca mean them to be one and the same thing? In this regard one can look at *Ep.* 16.5, where Seneca says, “Whether the truth, Lucilius, lies in one or in all of these views, we must be philosophers; whether Fate binds us down by an inexorable law, or whether God as arbiter of the universe has arranged everything, or whether Chance drives and tosses human affairs without method, philosophy ought to be our defence.” This passage suggests that Seneca does not strictly differentiate between Chance and Fortune. Motto comments that although Seneca speaks of God, Fate, Fortune, Chance and Providence as identical, at times he seems to make some distinction among them. He describes Chance as a blind power that drives and tosses human affairs without order, Fate (the *Parcae*) as cruel and inexorable, Fortune (the Goddess) as destructive, fickle, harsh, cruel, unjust and invincible. “No such derogatory adjectives, however, are employed when speaking of God (or Providence, which is used as a synonym for God), who is always portrayed as a just, beneficent, and kind being, one who can neither receive nor inflict injury” (1970:45).

nature” as follows: “The Stoics believed that the universe was governed by a rational plan determined by God. When the Stoics speak of ‘nature’, they mean this rational plan which provides for the well-being of mankind and the world. Hence, the Stoics are continually confronted by the incongruity of this divine rational plan with needless suffering and injustice. This situation in many ways sets the agenda of the philosopher whose goal is then to attain the good life, which for the Stoics means ‘to live in conformity with nature’. The Stoic sage is one who is able to bring his own rationality into accordance with the rational plan of the universe... The point of the Stoic command, ‘live according to nature,’ is precisely to free oneself from the caprice of fortune by adopting a disposition with which one can bear with equanimity whatever nature or fortune metes out” (1997:5). Seneca speaks of “living according to nature” in *Epp.* 4.10, 16.7, 17.9, 25.4 and 27.9. All the themes in Chapter 3 are aspects of “living according to nature”. Since the themes also represent aspects of the development of a practical moral identity, it can be concluded that moral development (the development of a practical moral identity) is about learning to live in conformity with nature.

He lives according to nature, by indulging his body only so far as is needful for good health. Also, he despises useless toil, rather using his time and energy to improve his soul and the souls of others, by means of philosophy (8.5). Motto points out that the soul and the mind are the same: *animus, mens, anima* (1970:200). The soul is man’s primary part. The soul itself has two parts, the rational and the irrational. It is of divine origin, a part of and emanation from God. The perfect soul is described as virtue itself, and the highest good. Only one thing brings the soul to perfection - the unalterable knowledge of good and evil. The soul is easily moved to evil. It is by nature obstinate, greedy, quarrelsome and discordant. But nothing is so difficult that the human mind may not overcome it. The soul is more powerful than Fortune, since it possesses the power to make us noble, happy and rich (Motto 1970:200-202).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Long explains: “The Stoics distinguish the mind and the soul (of which the mind is a part) from the body, but they regard the soul as no less corporeal than the body... They wanted an account of the soul which would distinguish it from flesh, blood, bones and sinews, and at the same time explain the soul-body relation as a physical interaction. Hence they identified the soul with ‘breath’ (*pneuma*) that completely interpenetrates every part of the flesh, blood, bones and sinews” (1991:102).

His fight against Fortune is a fight against the weakness of succumbing to things external to himself (13.1). In *Epistula* 8 he avoids Fortune (*vitae...quae casus adtribuit*), but in *Epistula* 13 he fights Fortune, the idea of fighting being implied by the words “*adversus fortunam*” (13.1), by the words “*postquam cum illa manum conseruisti viresque expertus es tuas*” (13.1) and by the comparison of man’s fight against Fortune with the fight between prizefighters (*non potest...pugnam*, 13.2). The question is, which is Stoic: avoid or fight Fortune? He does not go looking for trouble; he does not pick a fight. Rather, he avoids trouble. But when trouble comes to him, he has no choice but to fight it. However, he must learn to confront his fears (13.14). Fortune tests his character and, in turn, also further strengthens his character (13.1). When he grows stronger, he can challenge Fortune (13.14).

### **Acting according to reason**

He has control in deciding how to act and he acts according to reason (14.16). Motto has the following to say about the reason: “Man, Seneca maintains, possesses a double nature - a physical nature which animals also enjoy and a rational nature which is man’s distinguishing characteristic. The more the individual perfects his reason, the closer he comes to ‘nature,’ which is synonymous with God, who is ‘perfect reason.’ In fact, Seneca and the Stoics argue that to live ‘according to nature’ is to live according to reason, the highest achievement of man... The more perfect his reason, the more fully does he possess that Stoic virtue which alone can give man everlasting joy... Such virtue is man’s sole and supreme good. It offers him a life that is consistent and a happiness that can be neither increased nor diminished by indifferent things and external conditions” (1985:10).<sup>8</sup> A person with a practical moral identity strives, though it is very difficult, not to worry about the outcome of his actions, because in this Fortune has the control (14.16).

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<sup>8</sup> Campbell comments that for the Stoics “living ‘in accordance with nature’ means not only questioning convention and training ourselves to do without all except the necessities (plain food, water, basic clothing and shelter) but developing the inborn gift of reason which marks us off as different from the animal world. We are meant to set free or perfect this rational element, this particle of the universal reason, the ‘divine spark’ in our human make-up, so that it may campaign against and conquer pain, grief, superstition and the fear of death... In this way we shall arrive at the true end of man, happiness, through having attained the one and only good thing in life, the ideal or goal called...in Latin *virtus*” (1969:15).

Fear of Fortune is also about fearing the future. One's future is one's fate and vice versa, and Seneca easily mixes the concepts "future" and "fortune" in, for example, *Epistula* 13. A person with a practical moral identity combats his fear of the future by reasoning (13.6). How does he go about reasoning? He questions his fear (*quid est quare... est malum facio?* 13:6). He questions his questions (*quomodo angor?* 13.7). He consults rules (*accipe... utrisque*, 13.7). He considers whether his proofs are sure (*primum mali*, 13.8). He examines those things, which cause his fear, and puts them to the test (*non coarguimus... excutimus*, 13.8). Yet again, he examines the matter carefully (13.10).

### **The role of hope**

Worrying about the future's groundless fears only loses one valuable time and energy. Rather than worry (in other words, look forward to bad things), he looks forward to better things and so gains time (13.10). Looking forward to better things has something akin to hope. But is he not supposed to leave the future alone and live for now? Where then is place for hope? He lets prudence help him and he contemns his fear of the future with a resolute spirit even when it is in plain sight. If he is not yet strong enough to do this, he counters one weakness with another, and tempers his fear with hope (13.12). Hope is thus a better weakness than fear: "Accordingly, weigh carefully your hopes as well as your fears... And if fear wins a majority of the votes, incline in the other direction anyhow" (13.13). Still, he must weigh his hopes and fears carefully (13.13). Seneca points out that hope causes fear (5.7) and anxiety (23.2). What role then does hope play in Seneca's philosophy? Hope for the future is better than fearing the future, but hope has problems of its own. One must guard against vain and extensive hopes (23.3). It is best to focus on the present.

### **Practising philosophy**

He fights Fortune for his freedom (28.8). Therefore, he devotes his life to philosophy, since philosophy alone can teach him how to be independent of Fortune (15.1). His priorities are right, because the achievement of a sound mind, by means of philosophy, comes first in his life (17.1 and 8). He realises that the development of his mind is the most important thing, because without a sound mind he will never be content (17.11-12). Philosophy comes first in his life and not worldly things, because the latter are subject to Fortune. In order to be free of all cares and thus free of Fortune, he lets go of his worldly

career and interests and practises philosophy (22.3). Does he have to let go of his worldly career and interests in order to practise philosophy? Or can he have a worldly career and still practise philosophy?<sup>9</sup>

Philosophy teaches him how to deal with his fear in a practical way. He practically deals with fear of the future in the following way: he assumes that what he fears will happen, will happen anyway and he measures his fear; he understands that his fear is either insignificant or short-lived; and he gathers examples of men, who defied Fortune, who even scorned death, for encouragement (24.1-3). He also continually reflects on man's condition of fearing the future, and this helps strengthen him further (13.13). He fights to be independent of Fortune by continually reminding himself how many ambitions he has attained, and not how many he still wants to attain; fixing himself a limit for the future, which he will not desire to pass even if he can; not craving; and living each day as though it were his last (15.10-11).

### **Theme 3: One's attitude towards, and handling of, one's body**

#### **Freeing oneself from bodily desires: the roles of God and prayer**

A person with a practical moral identity strives to free himself of all bodily desires (10.5). When he has accomplished this, he will be the best man for himself to associate with (10.2). He strives to be a good man, who has nothing to hide. In other words, he strives to be able to live among men as if God were watching him and speak with God as if men were listening. Always having God and men as his witnesses in turn helps him free himself of his desires (10.5). Motto has the following to say about Seneca's conception of God: "Seneca, like the Stoics, believed that in the universe there is one supreme power, God, who appears under different names as Nature, Fate, or Reason. This deity, however described by human speech, is not an anthropomorphic, angry figure, but rather a divine, coherent principle that controls all things. Together with the Stoics, Seneca is a pantheist. Like them, he regards God as the 'rational principle' that penetrates everything and is present everywhere. Such pantheism embraces also the concept that every soul is of divine

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<sup>9</sup> In this regard, see Theme 6, "One's position in society", on the issue of retirement.

origin, a part of and a representative of God. Just as God is the secret power in nature that creates unity, so he is the hidden force in man that produces virtue... God is our guide and our protector, whose spirit resides in our hearts... By progressing on the path of perfection, man becomes more virtuous, more like God. In fact, the ideal Stoic *sapiens* is similar to God in everything except his mortality. What is more, he even excels God, since ‘God is fearless through nature’s beneficence, the wise man through his own efforts’ (*Ep.* 53.11)” (1985:12).

He prays for the right things, namely he prays for a sound mind and a healthy body and he prays frequently (10.4). What does Seneca mean by prayer? The Stoics believe that “Since God dwells in our hearts rather than in temples, man needs no prayer or organized worship... [God] is ever eager to serve and to aid men. Our sole duty to God is to believe in him as the creator and ruler of the universe and to imitate his benevolence” (Motto 1985:12).

### **The roles of philosophy and exercise**

A person with a practical moral identity knows his natural and unnatural weaknesses. He accepts his natural weaknesses, but he strives to overcome the unnatural weaknesses of his body by means of philosophy (11.1). Eliminating weaknesses is a gradual process. He subtracts from his desires in order to better himself (21.7-8). If weaknesses cannot be overcome, they should be controlled. He learns to control those desires, which refuse alleviation (21.11). Such desires are according to our nature but not our needs and he learns to control them by giving them only the necessary (21.11).

He sometimes indulges his body, but he is not a slave to it (14.1). He avoids that which can harm his body (14.3). Therefore, he takes refuge in philosophy (14.11). He may also choose to be like those Stoics who withdraw from public life into privacy for the purpose of improving men’s existence and framing laws for the human race without incurring the displeasure of those in power or upsetting the customs of the people (14.14). Does he have a choice about whether he wants to withdraw from public life?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See theme 6, “One’s position in society”, on the issue of withdrawal from worldly life.

He is always busy cultivating his mind through philosophy (15.1). He also gives attention to his body, but he chooses exercises which tire the body rapidly and so save time, e.g. running, weight-lifting and jumping (15.4). He gives his mind a break, but he chooses exercises which save time and are not unnerving (15.6). Examples of such exercises are riding around in a litter, reading, dictating, conversing or listening to another, walking and even “voice-culture” (15.6-7).

### **The role of a guardian**

As a practical aid for getting rid of his bodily weaknesses, he appoints a guardian over himself to be his witness and so help him get rid of his unnatural weaknesses (11.9). Seneca has the following to say on the choice of a guardian: “Cherish some man of high character, and keep him ever before your eyes, living as if he were watching you, and ordering all your actions as if he beheld them... We can get rid of most sins, if we have a witness who stands near us when we are likely to go wrong. The soul should have someone whom it can respect... Choose therefore a Cato; or, if Cato seems too severe a model, choose some Laelius, a gentler spirit. Choose a master whose life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector or your pattern. For we must indeed have someone according to whom we may regulate our characters” (11.8-10; cf. 25.5-6). The words “*ipse animum ante se ferens vultus*” (11.10) draw one’s attention: a man’s soul is what counts and his soul can be seen in his actions. The examples Seneca gives here (Cato and Laelius) can be compared to Seneca’s advice to choose living examples (e.g. Seneca himself) in *Ep.* 6.5-6. It thus appears that one needs a real-life guardian and also an imaginary guardian, because the former cannot always be around.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Edwards also points this out: “Companions of the right kind are not, however, always available. The would-be philosopher must then create them for himself. In Letter 25.5-6, Seneca advises, imagine all your actions are being scrutinized by some great man such as Scipio, Cato, or Laelius... Thus even where circumstances prevent association with good men, the would-be philosopher can still obtain some of the benefits of this social practice by staging interaction between himself and the wise man within his own imagination” (1997:30).

## Theme 4: One's fight against the fear of death<sup>12</sup>

### Death, life and after-life

Seneca talks about man's fear of death in *Epp.* 4.5, 9; 22.14, 16; and 24.23 (Motto 1970:60). Man's fear of death is also mentioned in *Ep.* 24.11. Seneca talks about the scorn of death in *Epp.* 4.3 and 24:11-14 (Motto 1970:61). He also talks about despising death in *Epp.* 23.4 and 24.6, 9, 11 and 14. To not fear death, to scorn death and to despise death is the same attitude towards death.

A person with a practical moral identity aims to neither scorn life, nor love life too much (4.4-5). In other words, he searches for the mean between loving and hating life (24.24). He gradually lessens his love of life, so that he may be ready to take it if necessity demands (26.10). But he does not waste his life by worrying about dying (4.6). Instead he confronts death, so that he may be able to live his life to the full (12.6). He also confronts death, so that he may be free, i.e. above any external power (26.10). He confronts his fear of death, no matter how old he is (12.6). Whatever his age, he is ready for death everywhere (26.7). He meditates on the subject of death everyday, so that he may learn thoroughly how to die (4.4-5 and 26.8).

He practically deals with his fear of death in the following way: he thinks of everything bad that can happen as something which will happen (24.15); he removes his mind from his specific case to the case of men in general (24.16); he knows that the death which he fears is the last but not the only death, for we are dying every day (24.21); and he does not fear the after-life (24.18). Seneca does not believe in the conventional view of the after-life, namely Hades (24.18). His view of life after death is more scientific, influenced perhaps by the Epicurean school. Either one's body and soul dies, or only one's soul lives, one's better part anyway (24.18). However, Seneca does not say anything in *Epistula* 24 about what happens to one's soul when it is released from one's body (see Motto 1970:61-62 for the letters in the *Epistulae Morales* which deal with this topic). Motto's words are important:

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<sup>12</sup> Rosivach notes: "Particularly in the letters in the first part of the collection it is clear that the cares from which philosophy is to free us are the two great fears, fear of death and fear of poverty" (1995:91).

“Therefore, not death and the afterlife are to (Seneca) of primary importance, but conduct in life, and the preparation for death. And we discover that with him *meditatio mortis* is a predominant theme” (1973:74).<sup>13</sup>

## **Theme 5: One’s fight against the fear of poverty**

### **Definition of poverty**

Man fears poverty (14.3-4 and 17.3). What does Seneca mean? What exactly is it that man fears? Rosivach explains the fear of poverty as Seneca presents it in the *Epistulae Morales*: “The precise fear Seneca seeks to allay is thus the fear of *becoming* poor and...only the wealthy can *become* poor” (1995:91). He continues: “Perhaps the closest we can come to defining Seneca’s view of wealth and poverty is that wealth allows and poverty prevents its possessors from supporting a particular life-style (or, more simply, owning the things) which they, and society at large, would consider typical of the wealthy” (1995:92). He remarks: “[F]or Seneca, and presumably for his readers as well, (poverty) was not a socio-economic reality but the nightmare of the wealthy; the fear that some day they might no longer be rich” (1995:93). “At one point Seneca says that poverty prevents a wise man from teaching others how to handle public affairs [*Ep.* 85.38]... [I]t is because he has lost the respect which wealth brings” (1995:93-94).

### **Poverty in accordance with nature**

A person with a practical moral identity does not allow a superfluous thing, such as fear of poverty, to keep him from living a life according to nature (4.10). Because no-one, who possesses what is sufficient for nature, is poor (1.5, 2.6, 4.10, 16.7, 25.4 and 27.9). Living according to nature means that he eats merely to relieve hunger, drinks merely to quench

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<sup>13</sup> Motto and Clark explain that the Epicurean “*meditare mortem*” (*Ep.* 26.8,10) is a familiar topic in Seneca’s writing. They recommend consulting especially *Ep.* 54 and, more generally, *Epp.* 30.18, 69.6, 70.17, 91.7, 101.7-8, 114.26-7. They also say that “much of this sharp awareness, in addition to being relevant to traditional Stoic *topoi*, is also owing to Seneca’s own sad and painful personal experiences” (1971:218 n.3).

his thirst, dresses merely to keep out the cold and houses himself merely as a protection against personal discomfort (8.5).<sup>14</sup>

He strives to be content with his own self and the goods which spring from himself (20.8) He strives to be a man who is able to live without riches, but also with riches (14.17-18 and 20.10). Rosivach comments: “[P]ossession of wealth may also bring with it a special sense of guilt for Stoics in that the practice of a philosophy which condemns avarice and luxury and urges its followers to live according to nature would seem to require them to live the truly simple life just as the Cynics did. While not actually admitting to this sense of guilt Seneca nonetheless appears to address it in two different ways. First, he argues that such radical poverty would alienate those whom the Stoic would wish to convert to his philosophy, an argument which makes the clearest sense when we realise that the potential converts Seneca has in mind would be members of his own, wealthy class. Second, in one striking passage he claims that because the Wise Man has the proper attitude of nonchalance toward his wealth he has in fact achieved the philosophical ideal of poverty despite his wealth: *magnus ille qui in diuitiis pauper est* (20, 10)” (1995:97-98).

Rosivach explains that Seneca does not recommend his readers to give away the things, which they fear losing, quite possibly because to do so would be too much to ask of them. “Instead, at different points in the *Epistulae Morales* he commends three other strategies: frugality; the practice, or at least the contemplation, of poverty; and nonchalance” (1995:96). The attitude of nonchalance has been mentioned. The practice of poverty or frugality is now discussed.

### **Practising poverty**

He fights against the fear of poverty by voluntarily living simply. Simple living is necessary in order to have the time to practise philosophy; in other words, poverty is an aid to wisdom (17.5). Also, poverty is without burden; it is free from care (14.10 and 17.3-4).

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<sup>14</sup> Hadas explains that *natura* means more than our “nature”, and living according to it more than leading an unpretentious life. The word is derived from a verb (*nascor*) which signifies “to be born,” “to burgeon,” and implies a realisation of a potential. “Life according to nature” is not merely a life stripped of non-essentials but one which strives towards consummation (1958:23).

Another benefit of poverty is that it reveals his true friends (17.20). If one does not live simply, one will spend one's time on useless toil; one will use one's time to gather superfluous things. Worst of all, one will not have the time to study and practise philosophy! A person with a practical moral identity despises useless toil, rather spending his time and energy on useful toil, i.e. studying and practising philosophy in order to improve his soul and the souls of others (8.5-6). He practises poverty, not because it is better, but so that it is easy to endure. Then he need never fear it (20.12). He strives to be constant, i.e. to neither seek the things, which lure one to luxury, nor to be led into them (18.3). One way of strengthening his constancy is to practise poverty. By practising poverty he also learns to control his fear of poverty (18.5-6). In *Ep.* 18.9 Seneca advises that one should practise frugality, which is basically the same as practising poverty. By regularly practising frugality one increases one's ability to subsist on less expense.

### **Philosophy's role concerning the fear of poverty**

Philosophy helps one to overcome the fear of poverty. Rosivach comments:

“Philosophy...helps the wealthy cope with their fear of poverty. Now it might strike us that philosophy would do a far greater service if it urged the wealthy to help the poor, or at least consoled the poor in the poverty... [In Seneca's eyes] only the wealthy are really miserable, because only they need constantly fear that they will lose their wealth; by contrast, the poor, by being poor, have no such worry, and are thus better off than the rich” (1995:94). “The real issue for Seneca is how to live with one's wealth without continually being afraid of losing it” (1995:95).

## **Group 3: Duty**

### **Theme 6: One's position in society**

#### **The correct attitude towards society**

A person with a practical moral identity does not withdraw from the crowd, but does things differently; in other words, he does not make himself conspicuous, nor does he become one of the crowd (18.4). He conforms to society outwardly, but inwardly he is different (5.2). Therefore, he is always improving himself, but without being conspicuous (5.1). His

appearance and lifestyle must not repel, because it is his duty to improve others (5.3). Philosophy undertakes to give fellow feeling to all men, in other words, sympathy and sociability. Therefore, he does not try to be different from other men (5.4). He strives to maintain a higher standard of life than that of the multitude, but not a contrary standard; otherwise, he will frighten away and repel the very persons whom he is trying to improve (5.3). He observes the mean between the ways of the sage and the ways of the world (5.5).

He avoids crowds, but should he be faced with a crowd, he withdraws into himself as far as he can (7.8). Motto and Clark summarize: “Seneca exhorts withdrawal from the crowd into private life, *Epp.* 19.8; 20.1.6-8; 21.1-6; 22.1-12; 68.1; one should particularly seek solitude to escape the crowd, 25.7; and one should devote such solitude to study, 94.72” (1968:10, n.14). Solitude seems to be the perfect answer. But perhaps it is not. Motto and Clark point out: “Yet [Seneca] also warns of the dangers of contemplative philosophy” (1968:6): “*Ep.*25.5: ‘...*omnia nobis mala solitudo persuadet.*’ One should not seek Epicurean isolation, *Ep.* 68.10-11, nor is solitude safe for fools, *Ep.* 10.2. At best, one must almost be the Stoic *sapiens* to render solitude fruitful, *Ep.* 25.7” (1968:10, n.15). To sum up, he avoids crowds and solitude.

## Retirement

A person with a practical moral identity recognizes man’s problem: he thinks that his condition in the world is one of importance, but it is mere brightness in comparison to the real light of philosophy. Therefore, he leaves worldly activities (if he is involved in any) for the life of philosophy (21.2 and 19.1).

Philosophy is an essential component of retirement. Motto and Clark point this out: “[Seneca] argues that those who elect retirement without philosophy are passive, inanimate, inert - as good as dead” (Motto and Clark 1978-1979:212). The right use of *otium* (see page 133) is connected to the issue of the one’s retirement: “Of all human beings, they alone achieve leisure who devote time to wisdom, to philosophy, to studies; they alone truly live” (Motto and Clark 1978-1979:212).

## **Reasons for retirement**

Because he avoids crowds, it does not mean that he loathes people. Neither does he withdraw from a worldly career in order to shun men and be idle. Rather, he withdraws into himself as far as he can and he withdraws from his worldly career, in order to spend his time practising philosophy with the purpose of bettering himself and his friends, and also mankind (7.8-9 and 8.1). In other words, he withdraws from public life into privacy for the purpose of improving men's existence and framing laws for the human race (14.14).

Griffin points out: "*De Otio* gives Seneca's view of the proper reasons, in Stoic terms, for withdrawal from political life: the claims of the greater *res publica* and the natural drive toward knowledge" (1968:375). He does not seek publicity with his knowledge. Rather, he learns for himself and his friends (7.9). Another reason for retiring is that it serves as a refuge. A person with a practical moral identity takes refuge (from men in power; from hatred, jealousy and scorn) in philosophy (14.11). He thus chooses a life of practising philosophy, without incurring the displeasure of those in power or upsetting the customs of the people (14.14).

## **Is retirement necessary?**

A person with a practical moral identity realises that it does not matter how he got involved in his worldly career; what matters is that he makes the choice to retire from it (19.4). The ideal is for him to retire from a worldly life and pursue philosophy full time. But does he have to let go of his worldly career in order to practise philosophy?

In order to answer this question, we have to understand what Seneca means by retirement. Does Seneca speak of retirement in a literal sense? Does it share the modern meaning of retiring from one's job at a certain age? Does withdrawal from worldliness necessarily mean retirement? Is withdrawal not rather a state of mind? Perhaps retirement should not be understood literally. Hadas seems to suggest this: "The figure of the stage role is invoked repeatedly. Each man must play out to the best of his ability the role assigned him; he is as worthy a performer if he plays a slave well as if he had played a king well, and neither role affects his inward self" (1958:23). A person with a practical moral identity may have a worldly role to play, but that should not stop him from also playing the role of the philosopher.

The actions of the man, Seneca, define retirement as withdrawal from all worldly activities. Motto points this out: “Leaders are not permitted to retire from a totalitarian state. When Nero refused to grant Seneca’s request for withdrawal from public life, the philosopher boldly, on his own, assumed the posture of retirement: he avoided the court and the city, eschewed all factions and crowds, and embraced a life of self-exile, reclusion, and study” (1985:8).

According to *Epistula 22* retirement is necessary. In this letter Seneca makes it very clear that Lucilius has no choice but to retire: “It is my opinion that you should withdraw from that kind of existence, or else from existence altogether” (22.3). In this regard Motto and Clark’s words are noteworthy: “Seneca knows that the man who withdraws from political service is too fastidious; his haughty and punctilious refinement will end in his isolation from life itself. For, in Seneca’s view, one must lead the active life: ‘*extendamus vitam; huius et officium et argumentum actus est*’ [Ep. 122.3]” (1968:9). Hadas points out: “Essential in every man’s role is obedience to the naturally ordained overseers of the grand plan; in other words, the Stoic is bound to do his duty to the state” (1958:23-24). Seneca’s view thus seems contradictory: on the one hand retirement from worldly activities is essential, but on the other hand one has to fulfill one’s worldly duty.

Motto and Clark are able to solve this contradiction: “In his writings Seneca constantly revives the debate between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*; the dichotomy is never done. For Seneca never makes overt an choice; now he advocates one path, now the other... In the last analysis, Seneca urges the Aristotelian ‘mean’ between the two ways of life. Nor is such mediation a mere platitude or verbal sleight; Seneca very distinctly acclaims action and thought; he deftly plants one foot in either world” (Motto and Clark 1968:7).

So is it possible to do both? Can one have a worldly career and practise philosophy? In *Ep. 19.1-2*, Seneca makes it sound as though he and Lucilius deserve to retire, because they have led a hard and successful worldly life. What does this say about the role a man must play in the world? Must he first have a successful worldly career and then retire?

It is possible to have a worldly career and interests and practise philosophy, even at the same time. Motto and Clark comment: “It is enough, Seneca thought, for one to turn, at some point, from public service and external affairs to the life of leisure - whether it be

early in life or late did not absolutely matter (*De Otio* 2:1-2). Moreover, as we learn from the *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, one may forge moments of leisure and contemplation *even while* one is daily leading the active public life. Thus, Lucilius is repeatedly given ‘thoughts’ or ‘*debita*’ or ‘*mercedulae*’ or ‘*pecunia*’<sup>15</sup> on each letter, matter quoted from great men; he is expected to find the time to contemplate their importance and their meaning. Presented with such ‘models’ of past wisdom, even the business-man, if he be a Stoic *proficiens*, is expected to grow, to progress, to learn” (“*Hic situs est: Seneca on the deadliness of idleness*”, 1978-1979: 210). In *Ep.* 17.5 Seneca says *simul et parare te disce* (learn while you are acquiring something to live on).

It is now clear that a person with a practical moral identity does not necessarily have to retire from his worldly career and interests. It is possible for him to practise philosophy and also have a worldly career and interests. If he can juggle a worldly career and practise philosophy (with the emphasis being on the latter), he may do so. What is important is that philosophy should be his first priority.

However, in certain cases one would be forced to let go of one’s worldly career and interests. A person with a practical moral identity would retire if his life looks like Lucilius’ (since Seneca specifically advises Lucilius to retire: *iam intellegis educendum esse te ex istis occupationibus speciosis et malis*, *Ep.* 22.1), or if he is unhappy in his worldly life: “[T]hey are lingering of their own free will in a situation which they declare they find it hard and wretched to endure” (*Ep.* 22.10).

In spite of being able to juggle a worldly life and philosophy, practising philosophy full-time remains the ideal. Why would a person with a practical moral identity want to pursue a worldly life anyway? In *Ep.* 8.6 Seneca speaks of the positive side of his *secessus*; a life of studying and writing philosophy is in fact more useful than a life of legal and political services to friends. A person with a practical moral identity would prefer to spend all his waking hours practising philosophy, since a life of practising philosophy full-time is the ideal.

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<sup>15</sup> See Allen (1966).

A very important question to ask is whether the retirement, which Seneca advises, is practical? If everyone who wants to follow Seneca's philosophy has to retire, who is going to keep the world going? What if a man is poor and has a family to support? In this regard it is worth looking at how Seneca handles Lucilius when he raises this objection in *Ep.*

20.7. In such instances one gets the impression that Seneca's audience consists of people that are financially well-off.

### **How to retire**

How does a person with a practical moral identity go about retiring? He despises the rewards of business, because only then can he leave his worldly life behind to enter the noble life of pursuing wisdom through philosophy (22.17). He does not try to win fame by his retirement; he retires obviously but not conspicuously (19.2). He is prepared to take the risk of retiring (19.8). What is this risk? Seneca says to Lucilius: "Reflect how many hazards you have ventured for the sake of money, and how much toil you have undertaken for a title! You must risk something to gain leisure also" (19.8). Letting go of one's worldly life is difficult, but it is also difficult for one's worldly life to let go of one! Lucilius' position in the world expects certain things of him, hence the risks involved in retiring. In order to take on the difficult task of retiring, a person with a practical moral identity takes counsel in the presence of the actual situation. Thus he is always attentive, looking for an opportunity. When he sees one, he will grasp it and devote all his energy to it, so ridding himself of his business duties (22.2).

## **Theme 7: One's understanding and practice of friendship**

### **Socializing**

A person with a practical moral identity makes it his goal to be the best man for himself to associate with (10.2). When he himself is the best man for himself to associate with, he should live to himself (10.1). In the meantime, he is very careful with whom he associates. He associates with those who will make a better man of him and he welcomes those whom he himself can improve. The process is mutual, for men learn while they teach (7.8).

A person with a practical moral identity does not learn only for himself (5.1; 7.9). He understands that the purpose of acquiring knowledge is to be capable of bettering oneself

and others (7.9-10). One must acquire knowledge and share it carefully. With whom should one associate; with whom should one share one's knowledge? A person with a practical moral identity shares his knowledge with his friends. First he takes his time in choosing a friend; then he shares his knowledge with that friend without reservation: "Ponder for a long time whether you shall admit a given person to your friendship, but when you have decided to admit him, welcome him with all your heart and soul. Speak as boldly with him as with yourself" (3.2). A person with a practical moral identity must choose friends, because it is his duty to share his knowledge with friends, while at the same time learning from them for his own benefit (19.10-11). Seneca says: "No good thing is pleasant to possess, without friends to share it" (6.4), even such a good thing as knowledge or wisdom (6.4). In fact, one should learn in order to teach (6.4).

Does he share his knowledge with his friends only? Seneca says: *inimica est multorum conversatio: nemo non aliquod nobis vitium aut commendat aut inprimit aut nescientibus adlinit. utique quo maior est populus cui miscemur, hoc periculi plus est* (7.2). Seneca thus stresses that our relationships with our fellow human beings should only be in the form of true friendship. However, Seneca's words "*nondum illi tuto committeris*" in *Ep.* 7.1 make it clear that there comes a time when, as a true Stoic, one must enter the crowd. It is the duty of a person with a practical moral identity to lead his fellow men on the right path towards happiness. It is, however, important that he must first concentrate on himself. He must sort himself out and make himself strong before he entrusts himself to other people and their opinions. Then the worldly influences will not throw him off balance. A person with a practical moral identity thus also learns for mankind (5:3; 7.10).

### **Understand the meaning of friendship**

Before he chooses friends, he firstly makes sure that he fully understands what true friendship is (3.1-3). Gummere points out that the word "friend" has a special significance for the Stoics, indicated by the words *proprio illo verbo* in *Ep.* 3.1 (1917:10 n.a). In *Ep.* 6.3 Seneca explains what true friendship is: true friendship happens when souls are drawn together by identical inclinations into an alliance of honourable desires; in such cases men know that they have all things in common, especially their troubles. Motto rephrases this: "For in the companionship of well-chosen friends there grows up a *sensus communis*, which is an instinctive dedication to sharing and progressing together" (1973:59). Friends

help with one another's moral progress, because they want the same thing, namely wisdom. It does not matter at what stage of moral progress the participants of the friendship are. A person with a practical moral identity is always busy sharing his knowledge with his friends, no matter how far he himself is on the road of progress (6.6). A friend is someone one should trust as one trusts oneself (3.2). One should discuss everything with a friend; but first discuss the man himself. When friendship is settled, one must trust; before friendship is formed, one must pass judgement (3.2). Trust thus forms an integral part of true friendship. The true friendship cannot be severed by hope or fear or self-interest. It is for the sake of true friendship which men meet death (6.2).

### **Retire!**

Retirement is almost a prerequisite for friendship. Only as a man retired from worldliness, is one in a position to choose one's friends. Seneca explains: "This privilege [of choosing your friends] will not be yours unless you withdraw from the world; otherwise, you will have as guests only those whom your slave-secretary sorts-out from the throng of callers" (19.11). In other words, one will have as friends only those who befriend one for one's money, power, etc. and who want favours from one. It is a mistake to think those men to be one's friends, to whom one is not oneself a friend, or to think that one's favours will be effective in winning friends (19.11). A person with a practical moral identity is very careful in choosing to whom he offers kindnesses, because he realises that debt breeds enemies (19.11-12).

### **Amount of friends**

A person with a practical moral identity does not need a lot of friends, indicated by the words "*unus mihi pro populo est, et populus pro uno*" (7.10). Seneca relates what Epicurus wrote to one of his partners in studies: "I write this not for the many, but for you; each of us is enough of an audience for the other" (*haec... ego non multis, sed tibi; satis enim magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus*, 7.11). A person with a practical moral identity shares this attitude.

### **Friendship and self-sufficiency**

A person with a practical moral identity strives to be self-sufficient, but he also has true friends (7.10-11; *Epistula* 9). What then is the connection between the Stoic ideal of self-

sufficiency and its corresponding dependence upon help from fellow human beings? The Wise Man is fully cognizant that friendship is essential in order to put into practice one's knowledge. Intimate association and comradeship with worthy friends confer mutual benefits (Motto and Clark 1993:95). It is the Wise Man's duty to share his knowledge with friends, but he does not need friends. A person with a practical moral identity - the aspiring *proficiens* - on the other hand, needs friends to help him make progress. Friendship is one of the ingredients necessary in achieving self-sufficiency.

## **Theme 8: One's reformation of oneself and others**

### **Reform yourself**

A person with a practical moral identity makes it his first priority to morally improve himself and he is always busy working at improving himself (5.1 and 6.1). Since the divine seed has always been within him, the changes he needs to make to himself do not require a transformation. He simply needs to shape the elements he already has (6.1). This is called reformation. It is about developing the divine seed of virtue within himself.

How does he go about reforming himself? He examines his moral progress, by looking at from where and to where he has made progress, and this gives him an idea of the distance left to go (29.9). He searches for his sins: he hunts up charges against himself; playing the part first of accuser, then of judge, and last of intercessor, being at times harsh with himself. Only when he knows his faults, can he correct them. His reformation is thus dependent on his knowledge of his sins (28.10). He improves himself by identifying faults of which he was previously ignorant and correcting them (6.1). He regularly examines his efforts to determine whether they are genuine or not simply forms of self-display (5.1). He avoids all forms of self-display (5.2). A very important part of his progress is that he is willing to be taught (6.4). He can learn a lot from others, but he must be careful with whom he associates and from whom he accepts knowledge.

Reformation takes place inside of one. Therefore, a person with a practical moral identity realises that by changing his abode he will not be reforming his soul. Rather than seek a change of place, he seeks a change of soul (28.1). It is his belief that the whole world is his country (28.4). Therefore, he is happy anywhere and everywhere, because that which he

seeks, namely to live well, is found everywhere (28.5). No matter where in the world he is, he can continue making moral progress. Motto explains the Stoic idea behind the words ‘*non sum uni angulo natus, patria mea totus hic mundus est*’ (28.4): “As a Stoic, Seneca frequently propounds the thesis that every man is born into two communities - into his local and native city, the Athens or Carthage to which he is committed by the accident of birth, but also into the great universal society of gods and men, wide as the courses of the sun, the Cosmopolis. The wise man will esteem this larger community, to which all men belong, far above any particular city in which he resides... Amid this great citizenry of the world all distinctions of race, nationality, and class are to be subordinated to a sense of kinship and brotherhood” (1973:63).<sup>16</sup> “All men are equal, because every man, irrespective of his rank or social position, has the possibility of becoming wise” (Jones 1984:30).

### **Reform others**

Whilst in the process of reforming himself, he helps reform others by sharing his remedies (27.1). Even if he still has a long way of progress to go, he is allowed to make a valuable contribution in helping others (6.6 and 27.1). He understands what a real philosopher must do: he must improve himself (5.1) and also mankind (5.3). A philosopher has a responsibility towards himself and his fellow men, as well as towards the name of philosophy itself. He improves himself without being conspicuous (5.1). Therefore, he does not do things which will rouse comment as regards his dress or general way of living (5.1-2). His reason for not wanting to be “different” is that philosophy undertakes to give fellow feeling with all men; in other words, sympathy and sociability (5.4). He strives to maintain a higher standard of life than that of the multitude, but not a contrary standard; otherwise, he will frighten away and repel the very persons whom he is trying to improve (5.3). It is his duty to improve mankind. The way he lives can help make or break society. This is not an exaggeration. He has a very big responsibility towards his fellow men and - in the bigger picture - mankind. Every person who takes up philosophy has a responsibility towards mankind. All those who act wrongly in the name of philosophy damage its name and lose many who could have been saved through philosophy. Holland remarks: “The

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<sup>16</sup> For this reason Seneca absolutely condemns warfare: “In an era that celebrated military action, Seneca called carnage into question” (Motto 1973:63).

most mischievous of mortals [Seneca] declares to be those who bring their philosophy to market and by not practising what they preach seem a living proof of the futility of their doctrines” (1920:177).

He helps mankind by sharing his knowledge and personal experience, whilst leaving himself open to learn from the knowledge and experience of others (8.1-2). But he chooses carefully from whom he accepts knowledge and also with whom he shares his knowledge. Whom does he reform? He associates only with those who will make him a better man or whom he himself can better (7.8). Reforming only friends is the most safe option. But he also has a responsibility towards those he would not necessarily befriend. Therefore, he reforms only those who want to be reformed (29.1). In other words, he teaches only those who are willing to be taught (6.4). He chooses to reform only those who will make progress, withdrawing from the hopeless, yet not giving up too soon and even using drastic remedies when all seems hopeless (29.3). If he cannot root out all his “patient’s” faults, he tries to put a check on them, because relief is a substitute for health (29.8). His attitude towards those he tries to reform is that he would rather lack success than faith in their progress, but he does not spend forever on the job; he passes on to others who also need his help. He knows that it is never too late to reform; one is never too old (25.2).

How does he go about reforming others? He is careful that pride in advertising his abilities does not lure him into publicity. Rather than seek publicity with his knowledge, he learns for the improvement of himself and others (7.9). He teaches by setting an example through his life. Therefore, he strives to live among men as if God beheld him and speak with God as if men were listening, from which it can be inferred that if he lives like this, his life will be an example to others (10.5). His method of teaching includes not only giving precepts, but also setting a living example; in other words, he practises what he preaches. He himself learns, not only from precepts, but also from living examples (6.5).

### **Some practical aids to reformation**

He himself follows these practical steps of reformation, and he also teaches them to those whom he is trying to reform:

1) Live according to nature (25.4). One should get rid of one’s excess baggage; none of one’s possessions are essential. Seneca explains: “The things which we actually need are

free for all, or else cheap; nature craves only bread and water. No-one is poor according to this standard” (25.4). We must limit our desires within these bounds.

2) Appoint a guardian over oneself and, in the meantime, engage in making oneself one’s own guardian, i.e. someone in whose company one would not dare to sin (25.5-6).

3) Withdraw into oneself when one is forced to be in a crowd (of course one should avoid crowds), provided one is a tranquil, good and self-restrained man. Until one is, one should in the meantime seek out certain individuals, because then any company is better than being by oneself (25.6-7).

## **Theme 9: One’s practice of philosophy**

### **The goal of wisdom**

Man’s ultimate goal is to be wise. One can only achieve wisdom through philosophy. What is the difference between philosophy and wisdom? According to Timothy “There is first of all a distinction to be drawn between wisdom and philosophy. Wisdom is the perfect good of the human mind, whereas philosophy is the love of wisdom and the endeavour to attain it or the attempt to reach the goal already reached by wisdom... [S]o is it with philosophy and wisdom, the one being the outcome of the other and its reward; philosophy is the vehicle, while wisdom is the destination at which philosophy arrives” (1973:27).

### **Other reasons for practising philosophy**

Apart from wisdom, the practice of philosophy has other benefits also. Philosophy teaches one not to cater for the crowd, but to prefer to please oneself rather than the populace. Philosophy teaches one to weigh, not merely count, men’s judgements. Philosophy teaches one to live without fear of gods or men. Philosophy teaches one to either overcome or end evils (29.12). One learns from philosophy how to live; philosophy guides one’s life (16.3). A person with a practical moral identity fully grasps philosophy’s various functions and how philosophy helps us in everything, everywhere; in great and small matters (17.2).

Another reason for practising philosophy is that it serves as a refuge. By practising philosophy one does not incur the displeasure of those in power, whereas a worldly career does. One does not upset the customs of the people, which would upset those in power

(14.14). A person with a practical moral identity thus practises philosophy with calmness and moderation (14.11). In *Ep.* 14.11 Seneca says, “One must therefore take refuge in philosophy; this pursuit, not only in the eyes of good men, but also in the eyes of those who are even moderately bad, is a sort of protecting emblem.” But in *Ep.* 5.2 Seneca says, “The mere name of philosophy, however quietly pursued, is an object of sufficient scorn.” This is definitely a contradiction and it is too obvious not to be on purpose! What is Seneca’s purpose with such an obvious contradiction? Or is Seneca simply inconsistent? The following are also contradictions in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29: *Ep.* 12.4-5 contradicts *Ep.* 1.5; *Ep.* 28.3, 5 contradicts *Ep.* 2.1; and *Ep.* 25.7 contradicts *Ep.* 10.1. Motto and Clark remark: “It is sometimes urged that Seneca’s psychological flaws place him outside the pale of serious art. By this view, Seneca’s prose reveals inconsistencies and contradictions so considerable that it is concluded, happily, that he is neurotic or even quite insane” (1970:102).<sup>17</sup>

Yet another reason for pursuing philosophy rather than worldly achievements, is that philosophy alone can bring real renown (21.2). What is meant by renown? In *Ep.* 19.3, Seneca says to Lucilius: “Renown has already taken you by storm.” Seneca uses the word “*notitia*” for renown. Here Seneca is speaking of worldly renown. This kind of renown is attached to ambition. The danger of ambition is that one can easily become enslaved by it (22.10-11). Motto points out that *Ep.* 102.17 explains the difference between renown and glory and also between renown and reputation (1970:180). If one is interested in being renowned, philosophy alone can bring true renown: *studia te tua clarum et nobilem efficient* (21.2). Therefore, a person with a practical moral identity pursues philosophy rather than worldly achievements.

In *Ep.* 21.3 Epicurus says to Idomeneus (which is what Seneca wants to say to Lucilius also): ‘*si gloria... tangeris, notiores te epistulae meae facient quam omnia ista quae colis et propter quae coleris*’. This renown is about keeping one’s name from perishing: *nomen*

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<sup>17</sup> Also see Barker (1949) on the view that Seneca is a neurotic. Rozelaar (1974) makes it his goal to “enhance the understanding of Seneca’s personality in the spirit of Barker’s remarks, that is, on the basis of clinical-psychological research and well-verified philological data” in his paper “Seneca - a new approach to his personality”.

*Attici perire Ciceronis epistulae non sinunt (21.4); profunda super nos altitudo temporis veniet, pauca ingenia caput exerent et in idem quandoque silentium abitura oblivioni resistent ac se diu vindicabunt (21.5); and ingeniorum crescit dignatio nec ipsis tantum honor habetur, sed quidquid illorum memoriae adhaesit excipitur (21.6).* But a person with a practical moral identity does not devote his life to philosophy so that he can become famous and be remembered for many generations (although he probably will, if he is anything like Seneca!). Rather his motive for pursuing philosophy is to better mankind. This is not about ambition. Rather, it is his duty to better mankind. A person with a practical moral identity withdraws from public life into privacy to practise philosophy, for the purpose of improving men's existence and framing laws for the human race (14.14 and 22.17). He practises philosophy not only for himself, but also for mankind. Therefore, he searches for the universal truth by means of philosophy, because only through such a truth can mankind be bettered, since only the universal truth cannot be misused (21.9).

### **When to practise philosophy**

He does not postpone practising philosophy (17.8). Rather he strives to attain understanding and thus everlasting freedom now (17.6, 8). His priorities are right because he secures philosophy before all other interests (17.5). He is always studying philosophy, no matter what else he has to do (17.5). Practising philosophy is thus a life-long commitment. He reflects daily - so that this idea is strengthened and implanted more deeply - that a happy life is only possible through the practice of philosophy (16.1). He does not put confidence in himself too quickly. He examines himself to see if he is making progress in philosophy or merely in life itself (16.2). The ideal is to retire from his worldly career and activities and practise philosophy full-time. By despising the rewards of business, he can leave such worldly things behind to enter the higher life of practising philosophy (22.9). Leaving behind his worldly life does not mean that he is alone. He has his friends from whom to seek advice (22.11). In fact, solitude should be avoided.

## Group 4: Goals

### Theme 10: One's goal of achieving virtue

#### Virtue

Virtue is perfect reason (Motto 1970:221). A person with a practical moral identity seeks virtue (27.3). He gives all his waking hours and all his efforts towards this goal (27.4). He is alone in this matter, because finding virtue cannot be delegated to someone else. His soul has to discover virtue for itself within itself (27.4). Philosophy helps him find virtue. Wilson states that for Seneca the paramount aim of philosophy is to shape virtuous character and a philosopher himself is a person who teaches virtue (1987:109). Wilson points out that in *Ep.* 89.8, Seneca explains how dependent virtue and philosophy are on one another: "There is no philosophy without virtue and no virtue without philosophy. Philosophy is the pursuit of virtue through exercise of virtue... Virtue and philosophy coalesce one into the other" (1987:109).

#### True joy

Virtue alone can give him true and everlasting joy (27.3). He strives towards true joy, which is soundness of mind. Soundness of mind is to find joy only in useful things and to be independent of externals (23.2). Motto explains how virtue and the true joy which it brings are independent of externals: "Virtue is conceived as flawless, self-sufficient, perfect (*Ep.* 74.12). Because virtue is one thing, and not many, it offers man a unified perception of the good and renders his life consistent, whole (*Ep.* 74.30). Hence, the happiness that such virtue affords can be neither increased nor diminished by extraneous conditions and indifferent things (*Ep.* 66.9; 74.24, 26; 92.14)" (1973:50-51). Therefore, in order to attain true joy, a person with a practical moral identity casts aside all that glitters outwardly and comes from others and rejoices in his soul (23.6). The closer he comes to achieving true joy, the better he is able to despise death with a care-free countenance, open his door to poverty, hold the curb on his desires and endure pain (23.4).

## **The real good**

He avoids the various sects, which profess to teach how happiness is to be obtained. He knows that there is only one way of achieving true joy, namely by finding the real good (23.6). Virtue is the real good. The real good comes from a good conscience, honourable pursuits, right actions, contempt for the gifts of Chance, and an even and calm way of life or constancy (23.7). In order to attain the real good, he finds a guiding purpose with which to control himself and his affairs. In order to do this, he decides what he wishes and abides by his decision, not leaping from one purpose to another (23.8).

## **Theme 11: One's goal of achieving constancy**

A person with a practical moral identity strives towards the goal of constancy. The goal of achieving constancy is connected to his goal of achieving virtue. Motto points out that, according to *Epistula* 31, consistency is a necessary requirement for perfect virtue (1970:54).<sup>18</sup>

### **Practise what you preach**

Wisdom means always desiring the same things and always refusing the same things (20.5). In other words, the goal is constancy. The test of constancy is to have one's words and deeds accord. Therefore, a person with a practical moral identity strives to practise what he preaches. This Stoic principal is explicitly stated in *Epp.* 20.1, 2 and 24.15, and implicitly stated in *Epp.* 1.4, 2.5, 6.5-6 and 29.5-7. He practises what he preaches, since Seneca's philosophy - which is a practical philosophy - demands this (24.15). Philosophy teaches us to act, not to speak. It exacts of every man that he should live according to his own standards, that his life should not be out of harmony with his words, and that his inner life should be of one hue and not out of harmony with all his activities (20.2). By practising what he preaches, his life sets an example for others. He himself learns from those who adhere to this principal (6.5-6).

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<sup>18</sup> Motto differentiates between consistency and constancy (1970:54), but I have taken them to be one and the same thing.

### **Practise poverty**

He strives not to seek things that could lure him into luxury and he strives not to be led into them. Success in this is the surest proof a man can get of his own constancy (18.3). He practises constancy, by practising poverty. Seneca says “It is precisely in times of immunity from care that the soul should toughen itself beforehand for occasions of greater stress... If you would not have a man flinch when the crisis comes, train him before it comes” (18.6). Practising poverty is one of the ways in which one can practically practise one’s constancy, specifically one’s ability to be “untouched” should poverty strike! But practising poverty does not only help with constancy in this particular issue, namely one’s ability to handle poverty. It also strengthens one’s constancy over-all, i.e. in all the other aspects of life also.

## Conclusion

The objective of this study is to contribute towards the discussion of the literary technique which Seneca uses to present and develop his moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*. In order to understand this literary technique, we have to understand what Seneca tries to achieve with it. I suggest that the goal of Seneca's moral philosophy is the development of a practical moral identity. What literary technique does Seneca use to develop a practical moral identity? Seneca uses the epistolary form to achieve this goal. The epistolary form enables him to create certain personae. These personae demonstrate the phases of moral progress. It is in these phases of moral progress that we see the development of a practical moral identity.

This study has cast new light on the issue of Seneca's choice of the epistolary form for a discussion of his practical moral philosophy. It has thus helped to explain Seneca's choice of genre. This study has also demonstrated how Seneca uses this genre to expound his philosophy. This study proves that the *Epistulae Morales* ask to be read as a collection of letters, not essays.

By understanding the literary technique which Seneca uses to lead his reader along the path of moral progress in the *Epistulae Morales*, we gain a better understanding of what Seneca actually does in the *Epistulae Morales*. This leads to a better understanding of the *Epistulae Morales* itself. This study may cast light on some of the controversial aspects of the work, such as the genuine versus the fictional nature of the work, the arrangement of the work, the literary style of the work, the discrepancy between Seneca's character and his work, and other controversies concerning the *Epistulae Morales*.

Our understanding of the literary technique which Seneca uses to present and develop his practical moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*, has helped us to understand how Seneca makes his philosophy practical. The personae, and especially the practical moral identity they create, contribute towards the practicality of the philosophy.

The literary technique, which Seneca uses to present and develop his practical moral philosophy in the *Epistulae Morales*, explains the roles which Seneca and Lucilius play in

the *Epistulae Morales*. They contribute towards the development of a practical moral identity. In these roles they specifically contribute towards making Seneca's philosophy more practical and humane. They also demonstrate the practicability of Seneca's philosophy.

The discussion of the themes representing the main aspects of the development of a practical moral identity in *Epistulae Morales* 1-29, has shown us a glimpse of the systematic plan behind Seneca's moral education. Should the model of this study be applied to the whole *Epistulae Morales*, it may lead to an enhanced view of Seneca's educational thought.

Seneca's letters "proffer a wide variety of universal, fundamental reflections relevant to man's humanistic concerns" (Motto 1985:3). They consist of "perennially 'modern' topics that forever beset man in a complex urban civilization" (1985:3). Seneca wrote the *Epistulae Morales* to address a practical problem in his world: the loss of identity. We struggle with the same problem in the globalized world of today. The practical moral identity of the *Epistulae Morales* makes the concept of identity more accessible for all people through its universality and modernity. Therefore, Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* still speak to anyone, anywhere, today. "Seneca's continuous and insistent quest for tranquility of soul was especially welcome to his contemporaries, who had witnessed the cruelties and tumult of the Neronian era. But to men of all centuries, Seneca's ardent zeal to enlighten the weary wanderer has had a most unusual appeal" (Motto 1973:129). The issue of identity extends over many disciplines, such as sociology, psychology and philosophy. Students in these fields of study could benefit by looking at what Seneca has to say on this issue in the *Epistulae Morales*.

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