

INDIFFERENCE AND COMMITMENT AS ETHICAL-INTELLECTUAL APPROACH: EPICURUS, PYRRHO AND SENECA

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ABSTRACT

Choosing a way of life is not located at the end of a process of philosophical activity, as an appendix, but at the beginning, as tension between the global vision of a way of living and seeing the world, and the voluntary and theoretical decision itself that involves the creation of a doctrine and a way of teaching. Thus, philosophical discourse originates in a vital choice and an existential choice and not vice versa. In Hellenistic philosophy another unusual and curious fact acquires uniqueness, which is that this decision is never taken alone; no philosophy or philosophers exist outside a group or philosophical school, outside of a vital community, and not just of ideas. This is why one is characterized by a unique way of living, a conversion of his being, which requires a desire to be a certain way and to live in a certain way and to teach this.

Keywords: ethics, skepticism, epicureans, stoicism, Pyrrho, Epicurus, Seneca, Sextus Empiricus.

RESUMEN

La opción por un modo de vida no se localiza al final del proceso de actividad filosófica, como un apéndice, sino al comienzo como tensión entre la visión global de cierta manera de vivir y de ver el mundo, y la decisión voluntaria y teórica misma que supone la creación de una doctrina y su modo de enseñarla. Así, el discurso filosófico se origina en una elección vital y en una opción existencial y no a la inversa. En la filosofía helenística adquiere singularidad otro hecho insólito y curioso, y es que esta decisión nunca se toma en soledad, no hay filosofía o filósofos fuera de un grupo o escuela filosófica, fuera de una

comunidad vital y no solo de ideas, por eso se caracteriza por una singular manera de vivir, una conversión de su ser, que le exige un deseo de ser de una manera y de vivir de un cierto modo y enseñarlo.

Palabras clave: ética, escepticismo, epicúreos, estoicismo, Pirrón, Epicuro, Séneca, Sexto Empírico.

Introduction

In Søren Kierkegaard's unclassifiable work *Johannes Climacus, Or: A Life of Doubt* (1842),¹ the great nineteenth-century Danish philosopher provides a painstaking examination of the tensions inherent in philosophy. A sensitive young man —distinguished, sincere, and passionately in love with thought, or perhaps rather with the act of thinking— foolishly devotes his life to doing, in the most literal terms, everything that philosophers say should be done. Thenceforth, he truly doubts everything, and suffers the agonies of contradiction; his soul turns cunning, he is plagued by his conscience; he concludes, in despair, that his life has been wasted. He laments, moreover, that his days have been frittered away in pointless deliberation and that, because of philosophy, life has never managed to hold any meaning for him.

Why should Kierkegaard display such mistrust of philosophy? Perhaps because (cloaked by a pseudonym that allowed him to focus more freely on matters of aesthetics, ethics or religion) he shared certain misgivings regarding what was, and continues to be, a highly popular approach to philosophy; an approach, however, that has generated profound mistrust, particularly from the eighteenth century onwards. Ever since then, philosophy has been almost the exclusive preserve of the university, and has —for better or worse— become inextricably linked to it. An approach drawing heavily on figures like Wolff, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger has largely (with the notable exception of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) diminished or reduced philosophy to mere philosophical discussion. In the modern university, philosophy is no longer viewed (as it was by the ancients) as a way of life, unless by that we mean the philosophy lecturer's way of life (generally rather a dull one). That approach, in state educational institutions, has long posed a threat to the independence of philosophy itself".²

1. An English translation by T.H. Croxhall has been published: S. Kierkegaard (2001).

2. As Schopenhauer puts it, "philosophy in our universities is akin to fencing in the mirror". The outcome, he concludes, cannot be regarded as serious philosophy, but as "the mere jest of it", cf. Schopenhauer (1988), 180. His views on philosophy are well worth reading, while his comparison of philosophy with the opera *Don Giovanni* (210) has prompted a great deal of debate.

1. Philosophy as a way of life

This idea was untenable for Hellenistic philosophy, which is why in this paper I should like not only to discuss Hellenistic philosophy but also to engage with its real implications. Perhaps its most striking feature is that the choice of a way of life is not the outcome —almost the afterthought— of a process of philosophical deliberation; rather, it arises at the start, from the tension between one's given outlook or world-view, and the conscious, theory-based decision to develop and teach a doctrine. Philosophical discourse, then, results from a life-choice and an existential option, rather than giving rise to them. We might add a further, unique feature of Hellenistic philosophy; unusually, that decision is never taken alone. There could be no philosophy, no philosophers, outside a group (this was common enough in Greek philosophy); the school of philosophy was a living community, not just a community of ideas. It was therefore distinguished by a unique way of living, a conversion of its being, which in turn demanded a desire to be and to live in a certain manner, and to teach others to do so.³

Some years ago (as early as 1982, when my undergraduate dissertation focussed on Lucretius, an Epicurean, and his *De rerum natura*)⁴ I began to perceive in Hellenistic philosophy a view of philosophy as an aid to living, as therapy of the soul.⁵ In this view, one metaphor stands out above the rest; the comparison of philosophy with medicine, *i.e.* of the ignorance of the non-philosopher as a disease, and the learning of philosophy as a path to healing.

This phenomenon was most readily discernible in the Hellenistic and Roman schools of philosophy. It was proclaimed explicitly, for example, by the Stoics and the Epicureans, for whom philosophy was a set of exercises enabling man to live better.⁶ In their opinion, philosophy was not the mere

3. Cf. Bosch-Veciana (2009) on Judaism as viewed in its day as a way of life linked to the therapy required to achieve happiness through philosophy; *vid.*, by the same author “‘Els terapeutes’ com a filòsofs en el ‘De Vita Contemplativa’” (in press, provided by the author).

4. Cf. Román Alcalá (1982); later published in modified form (2002).

5. This idea was shaped and made fashionable by Pierre Hadot (1993) (eng. trans.: 1995), and further developed by other authors including Voelke (1993), with a preface by Hadot himself. The notion is to be found earlier in Vernant (1971), 96 (eng. trans.: 2006, p. 104), linked to the soul's attempt at recollection in order to elevate and purify itself through asceticism, and was enlarged upon by Hadot himself in his prologue to *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (1998), 11-17.

6. Οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἔφασαν τὴν φιλοσοφίαν εἶναι δύναμιν γνωστικὴν καὶ περιποιητικὴν ἀρίστου βίου (For they [the Stoics] said that philosophy was an activity suited to gaining knowledge and a better life), Pseudo-Galen, *Hist. philos.*, 5, 1 (H. Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*, 1879 [Editio Quarta, 1976, 602]). A very similar outlook is to be found in Epicurus, Fr. 219, Usener. “Epicurus said that philosophy was an activity that, through discourse and reasoning, provides a happy life” (Ἐπικούρου

teaching of abstract theories,⁷ much less the interpretation of writings by other authors,⁸ but an art of living, a way of life,⁹ an approach able to engage wholly with existence, with daily life, and thus help us live a little better every day.

This idea, central to ancient philosophy as a whole, has to a great measure been lost; it is our duty to restore it. Taking the city as a metaphor, ancient philosophy is the Old Town. It has a lot of fascinating features, and we are proud of it; we stroll through it whenever we can, and show it to visitors and tourists. But it has its drawbacks: it exists only as a theme park; its residents are few and elderly; it tends to be closed to traffic; it is not a particularly comfortable place to live, offering few amenities and holding little appeal for the younger generation. Continuing with the metaphor, the trend in philosophy has been towards detached houses; proudly gated estates high on the hill; practical, comfortable and functional for their inhabitants, but lonely and inhospitable for everyone else. Postmodernism —so weak, so relativistic, yet so dependent on modernism itself— would clearly be the suburban semidetached home. The city is increasingly losing its presence and its structure; it no longer provides meaning, but instead seeks to encourage relationships between absent partners.¹⁰ As I have suggested elsewhere, moreover, this view is not the exclusive preserve of the ancient philosophers.¹¹

ρος μὲν ἔλεγε τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐνέργειαν εἶναι λόγοις καὶ διαλογισμοῖς τὸν εὐδαίμονα βίον περιποιούσαν), and also appears in DL, VI, 70-71 with reference to the Cynics' view of philosophy. Epictetus insists on this idea of the practice of philosophy as a way of improving life, *Dissert.*, II, 9,13 and 18, 26; III, 8, 1 and 12, 1-7; IV, 12, 13.

7. Seneca frequently argues that philosophy cannot be taught unless it is practised: "*Facere docet philosophia, non dicere*", *Epist.*, XX, 2.

8. "Can this be virtue – to have understood Chrysippus? For if this be so, we must admit that progress is nothing but to understand a lot of sayings of Chrysippus" (μὴ γὰρ ἡ ἀρετὴ τοῦτ' ἔστι Χρυσίππου νενοηκέναι; εἰ γὰρ τοῦτ' ἔστιν, ὁμολογουμένως ἡ προκοτὴ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἔστιν ἢ τὸ πολλὰ τῶν Χρυσίππου σοεῖν), Epictetus, I, 4, 7-8. Paraphrasing, we might say that philosophical progress consists not in explaining Chrysippus better, but in achieving our own freedom in life.

9. It is a widely-expressed view. Epicurus admired Pyrrho for his "way of life" (τὴν Πύρρωνος ἀναστροφὴν), cf. DL, IX, 64, and himself saw in philosophy something akin to an "art for life", τέχνην τινὰ περὶ τὸν βίον, Cf. Sextus Empiricus, XI, 169. Epictetus (I, 15, 2) notes that "Philosophy does not propose to secure for a man any external thing ... For as the carpenter's material is wood, and that of the statuary is copper, so the matter of the art of living is each man's life" (Οὐκ ἐπαγγέλλεται, ἔφη, φιλοσοφία τῶν ἐκτός τι περιποιήσῃν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ... Ὡς γὰρ τέκτονος ὕλη τὰ ξύλα, ἀνδριαντοποιοῦ ὁ χαλκός, οὕτως τῆς περὶ βίον τέχνης ὕλη ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ ἑκάστου). In other words, the art of living (that is to say, philosophy) is aimed at life itself; Cicero *De fin.*, III, 2 "*Ars est enim philosophia uitae*", Seneca, *Epist.*, 90, "*Ars est bonum fieri*" and Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.*, I, 2, 613 B, also stress this idea.

10. I examined this idea in Román (2005), p. 31-48.

11. "Es gibt nicht *eine* Methode der Philosophie, wohl aber gibt es Methodem, gleichsam verschiedene Therapien" (There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods,

Alexander, then, helped to undermine the values which, for cities like Athens, had been embraced as both fundamental and distinctive. If, as Democritus said, “the word is the shadow of the deed”,¹² Hellenism is the shadow, the footprint in the sand, left by Greek civilisation. The footprint, admittedly, is now a very faint one; almost the whole of Hellenistic literature, and particularly of Hellenistic philosophy, has disappeared,¹³ leaving us with no more than a handful of fragments. Had it not been for that catastrophic disappearance, our ideas about Hellenistic philosophy would be radically different.

During that period, philosophers —above all Epicureans, Sceptics and Stoics— fashioned three dreams aimed at defeating unhappiness and disquiet. This led to the emergence of a new awareness, a consciousness of self, an inward-looking approach in which Hellenistic thinkers viewed philosophy as a way of coping with the sorest trials of human existence. The philosopher was seen as a caring physician whose arts could heal countless forms of human suffering. This is the real meaning of Hellenistic philosophy, as noted by Martha Nussbaum in the introduction to her superb book *The Therapy of Desire*: “The idea of a practical and compassionate philosophy —a philosophy that exists for the sake of human beings, in order to address their deepest needs, confront their most urgent perplexities, and bring them from misery to some greater measure of flourishing— this idea makes the study of Hellenistic ethics riveting for a philosopher who wonders what philosophy has to do with the world”.¹⁴

The Hellenistic view of the human condition is both simple and original. Original because, for the first time in the history of philosophy, the “self” set itself to find a way of life, a way of being, that was not reduced to a philosophical discourse wholly detached from the fact of living; for them, the philosopher was not an “artist of reason” concerned only with speculation, to use Kant’s term, but rather a man who practised what he preached.¹⁵ “The

like different therapies). Wittgenstein (1958), p. 133. Wittgenstein also endows philosophy with a therapeutic function.

12. “λόγος ἔργου σκῆ”, DL, IX, 37.

13. I would like, here, to share an interesting detail. According to Diogenes Laertius (VII, 180), Chrysippus —the leading Stoic— was a tireless author, who wrote more than 705 books. Book VII of the *Lives* is the only unfinished book; this is hardly surprising, given that the final paragraphs merely list the titles of Chrysippus’ works; after mentioning the 311 writings on logic and the 122 on ethics, a translator’s note adds: “the remainder of the catalogue of works by Chrysippus, and the whole of the end of Book VII, have been lost”. One imagines the copyist has tired of the endless list, and understandably refuses to continue with this arduous task.

14. Nussbaum (2003), p. 21.

15. Kant himself was aware of this, and quoted Plato to warn against the the pitfalls of a purely theoretical-contemplative attitude: “‘When will you finally begin to *live* virtuously?’ said

philosopher's school is a clinic"¹⁶ warned Epictetus. A clinic complete with medical protocols, whose therapeutic nature is evident first and foremost in the discourse of the master, a discourse which works like a spell, a bite, a violent shock, a drug that cures. But in order to be cured it is not enough simply to be moved; one has to really want to change one's life. And this is where emotions and lifestyle come into play.

A uniquely fascinating example of this approach is to be found in the *Tablet of Cebes*, a prose work written in the first or second century AD, which gives a literary description of a painting on a tablet, an allegory of human life. The ethical-philosophical content provides one of the simplest examples of how one should behave in life, offering a personal ethics for living in which the therapeutic function is highlighted,¹⁷ thus reflecting all the principles of Hellenistic philosophy. Education accompanied by Truth and Persuasion awaits those who come to be healed; they are then taken, once cleansed, towards the Virtues.¹⁸

Plato to an old man who told him he was attending classes on virtue. The point is not always to speculate, but also ultimately to think about applying our knowledge. Today, however, he who lives in conformity with what he teaches is taken for a dreamer". KANT, *Gesammelte Schriften*, XXIX, p. 8-9.

16. Epictetus, III, 23, 30. Cf. Voelke (1993), p. 103.

17. Relatively little is known of the Tablet of Cebes, though it was highly popular in Europe until the dawn of Renaissance Humanism. It is not a religious work, in that the gods are not mentioned; even so, and though largely educational in purpose, it is not without a certain divine sensibility, since the setting is the temple of Chronos, to whom the painted Tablet is an offering, cf. Ruiz Gito (1997), 1 *et seq.*

18. The text is fascinating. Education stands in order to receive those who arrive and wish to progress in knowledge and true life: "ἀλλὰ τίνας ἔνεκεν οὕτως ἔξω τοῦ περιβόλου ἔστηκεν; Ὅπως τοὺς παραγινομένους, ἔφη, θεραπείη καὶ ποτίζη τὴν καθαρτικὴν δύναμιν. Εἴθ' ὅταν καθαρθῶσιν, οὕτως εἰσάγει τοὺτους πρὸς τὰς Ἀρετάς. [2] ...ὥς ἂν, εἴ τις φιλοτίμος κάμνων ἐτύγχανε, πρὸς ἱατρὸν ἂν δῆπου γενόμενος πρότερον καθαρτικοῖς ἐξέβαλλε τὰ νοσοποιοῦντα, εἴτα οὕτως ἂν ὁ ἱατρὸς αὐτον εἰς ἀνάληψιν καὶ ὑγείαν [3]... [4] Τὸν αὐτὸν τοῖνυν τρόπον, ἔφη, καὶ πρὸς τὴν Παιδείαν ὅταν τις παραγένηται, θεραπεύει αὐτὸν καὶ ποτίζει τῇ ἑαυτῆς δυνάμει, ὅπως ἐκκαθάρῃ πρῶτον καὶ ἐκβάλῃ τὰ κακὰ πάντα ὅσα ἔχων ἦλθε. Ποῖα ταῦτα; [5] Τὴν ἄγνοιαν καὶ τὸν πλάνον, ὃν ἐπεπώκει παρὰ τῆς Ἀπάτης, καὶ τὴν ἀλαζονείαν καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ τὴν ἀκρασίαν καὶ τὸν θυμὸν καὶ τὴν φιλαργυρίαν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ πάντα, ὧν ἀνεπλήσθη ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ περιβόλῳ". ("But why is she standing outside the enclosure like this?" "So that she may heal those who arrive here", he said, "by having them drink of her purifying powers. And thus, having purified them, she leads them to the Virtues ... Consider the case of someone who falls seriously ill. Obviously, in the first instance, they would go to a doctor, who would purge the causes of the disease, and in this way lead them back to recovery and health... It is just the same for those arriving here at Education", he said. "She takes care of them and gives them her own power to drink, so that first she may purify them and eliminate all the evils with which they came". "And what are they?" "The error and ignorance of which they drank from Deceit, but also pretentiousness, desire, intemperance, anger, love of money, and all the others with which they were infected in the first enclosure.") Tablet of Cebes, XIX, 2-4.

2. Hellenistic formulae for happiness

There is no agreement among the three great schools. Philosophy is an exercise, in the Stoic sense, and a technique for living, in the Epicurean sense; for the Sceptics, it is the art of leading an untroubled life. Yet these different views share a common feature, that none is merely the teaching of abstract theories. Pierre Hadot remarks that: “Ancient philosophy proposed to mankind an art of living. By contrast, modern philosophy appears above all as the construction of a technical jargon reserved for specialists”.¹⁹ Everyone is free to choose whatever philosophy he wishes, but if he is to remain faithful to ancient philosophy, as Descartes and Spinoza—for whom philosophy was the “exercise of wisdom”—still were, he will have to apply the various trends in philosophical thought as models of life, to human existence.

By contrast, when philosophy is reduced to its conceptual content, and ceases to have any bearing whatever on the philosopher’s way of life, it undergoes an extreme alteration linked to a reflective anorexia, and as a discipline becomes no more than a formula concerned solely with pure speculation. In fragment 221 of the *Usener Epicurus*, Porphyry states that: “A philosopher’s words are empty if they do not heal the suffering of mankind”.²⁰ Just as medicine is of no value if it fails to remove disease from the body, so philosophy is of no use if it fails to remove the illnesses of the soul or the mind, the problems encountered during action or in daily life.

The most striking feature of the statement quoted above is its use of the concept *κενόν*, empty; the philosopher’s discourse is empty if it does not save. Empty, here, means not vain, banal, useless or false, but empty in the literal Epicurean sense: the opposite of being full of material things. According to the Epicurean theory of language, empty discourse is discourse in which names, words (meanings, opinions) do not correspond to real content, *i.e.* to the material things that send their material images to us.²¹

But how is this therapy effected? Therapies must heal, must be efficient and also measurable against some indicator; and here, Hellenistic philoso-

19. Hadot (1995), p. 238. Clearly, not all ancient philosophers agreed with that claim. Seneca himself complains, along the lines of the present paper, that ancient philosophy has become ‘philology’, *cf. Epist.*, CVIII, 23, and warns that no man has treated mankind worse than he who has studied philosophy as if it were some marketable trade, hunting out archaic or far-fetched words, eccentric metaphors and figures of speech instead of precepts and reasons that may be put into practice.

20. “Κενὸς ἐκείνου φιλοσόφου λόγος, ὅφ’ οὗ μὴδὲν πάθος ἀνθρώπου θεραπεύεται”, *Epicurus fragment 221* (221 Us.).

21. *Cf. Román Alcalá* (2002), p. 59-72 and Voelke (1993), preface by P. Hadot, X-XI.

phy makes an original contribution. The act of “philosophising” in its truest sense must be linked to what the Sceptics called *Bíos*, *i.e.* with a daily way of life which most people had by then forgotten, because they neglected their peace of mind, their spiritual serenity. The adoption of this new lifestyle marked the departure from normal practices, and was viewed as odd, comic, sometimes eccentric, by non-philosophers. The Epicureans were certainly deemed eccentric, leading a frugal life, according women complete equality when engaging in philosophical activities; the Sceptics, too, were seen as odd, suspending judgement and denying any belief in the world of appearances; the Roman Stoics chose to administer the province of Empire in a wholly disinterested manner (without profit), taking to heart the laws against excessive luxury.

How, then, did the three most influential Hellenistic schools set about achieving their aims? Although each did so in a different way, they all accepted happiness as the measure of their success. Morality, thenceforth, was measured in terms of happiness itself: well-being, right action, εὖ πράττειν and the feeling that went with it. Morality thus became subordinate to aesthetics, so to speak, the σωφροσύνη (healthy common sense, prudence, the practical, the sensible) is a kind of instinct that shapes the way we act in the world; the way we act is “artistic”, in that it is based on a measure of our status in the moral sphere, on our reaction to the changes and tensions inherent in living. A bad conscience thus reflects a subtle, refined sense of happiness and unhappiness; this is not the satisfaction gained as the reward for doing something right, but a lasting, happiness prompted by the feeling of not having done anything wrong.²²

More interesting still, with regard to exhortations to privative or negative virtue, is the development of a positive idea of “health”, not just of the body but also of the mind, which heralded the *ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν* (live consistently) of the Hellenistic philosophers. The aim was to go beyond the privative definition, and seek the lasting happiness of the soul.

22. Perhaps the earliest exhortation to moral inhibition, to the reining-in of the emotions, is to be found in the *Iliad*. When the furious Achilles moves to attack Agamemnon for having taken Briseis away from him, Athene holds him back, saying (I, 207) “I came from the heavens to quell your *anger*, if you will but obey (ἦλθον ἐγὼ παύσουσα τὸ σὸν μένος, αἶ κε πίθῃαι, οὐρανόθεν). [...] Come, end this quarrel, and sheathe your sword. Taunt him with words of prophecy; for I say, and it shall come to pass, that three times as many glorious gifts shall be yours one day for this insult. Restrain yourself, now, and obey (...ἀλλ’ ἄγε λήγ’ ἐριδος, μηδὲ ξίφος ἔλκεο χειρί’ ἀλλ’ ἦτοι ἔπεσιν μὲν ὀνειδίσου ὥς ἔσεται περ’ ὧδε γὰρ ἐξερέω, τὸ δὲ καὶ τετελεσμένον ἔσται καὶ ποτέ τοι τρις τόσσα παρέσσειται ἀγλαὰ δῶρα ὕβριος εἶνεκα τῆσδε· σὺ δ’ ἴσχεο, πείθεο δ’ ἡμῖν)”. Athene is not suggesting something positive to Achilles, but something privative: by avoiding bad actions, curbing malice, restraining passion, one is fighting against the positive act of evil; by abstaining from evil, one is doing good.

2.1. Scepticism and indifference

How did the Hellenistic school approach happiness? Scepticism, first of all, should be viewed as *an activity rather than a doctrine*; it is not a compulsory rule, but rather an ability to act.²³ Applying a medical analogy,²⁴ it proposes a radical cure, consisting in purging human life of any cognitive commitment, of all belief. Pyrrho of Elis²⁵ embodied better than anyone that sceptical ideal par excellence, without himself being aware of this definition. He wrote nothing,²⁶ subscribed to no dogma of any kind, and created no doctrinal corpus of teachings; he did, however, adhere to a certain way of thinking which served as a pattern for right living. Pyrrho refused to espouse a particular philosophy, but chose to “live without belief”²⁷ as a reasonable way of attaining happiness. This argument leads, inevitably, to a refusal of the theoretical outlook regarding the nature of things, to the rejection of speculative philosophy as being incompatible with peace of mind, and to the acceptance of a practical approach as an essential requirement for any subsequent Sceptical reflection.²⁸

23. “Scepticism is an ability ... We call it an ability not in any fancy sense, but simply in the sense of ‘to be able to’ (‘Εστὶ δὲ ἡ σκεπτικὴ δύναμις... “δύναμιν” μὲν οὖν αὐτὴν καλοῦμεν οὐ κατὰ τὸ περιεργὸν ἀλλ’ ἀπλῶς κατὰ τὸ δύνασθαι)”. Sextus, *Hypotyposis Pyrrhoniae*, I, 8 (henceforth *H.P.*).

24. The medical analogy was often applied to philosophy in classical antiquity. Cicero, in his *Disputatio Tusculanae*, 3, 6 clearly states: “Philosophy is certainly the medicine of the soul, whose assistance we do not seek from abroad, as in bodily disorders, but we ourselves are bound to exert our utmost energy and power in order to effect our own cure” (*Est profecto animi medicina, philosophia; cuius auxilium non ut in corporis morbis petendum est foris, omnibusque opibus uiribus ut nosmet ipsi nobis mederi possimus elaborandum est*); Sextus Empiricus also makes use of this metaphor in *H.P.* I, 206, when noting that the arguments of scepticism can not only be used to refute, but can also be self-refuting: “just as purgatives not only drive the humours out of bodies, but are themselves driven out with the humours” (καθάπερ τὰ καθαρτικά τῶν φαρμάκων οὐ μόνον τοὺς χυμοὺς ὑπεξαίρει τοῦ σώματος ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑαυτὰ τοῖς χυμοῖς συνεξάγει), cf. Chrysippus, the greatest of the Stoic philosophers, who also makes obsessive use of this metaphor, e.g. in *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (S.V.F.), 3, 471.

25. Born in Elis, in the northwestern Peloponnese, close to the region of Achaea, around 360/365 BC. Cf. Román Alcalá 1994, 181-239 and 2011, 23-25.

26. Cf. DL, I, 16. For Marcel Conche (1973, 27), this was deliberate rather than accidental; the wise man who aspires to ataraxia cannot at the same time be a writer/author.

27. Some scholars suggest that this idea borders on a kind of epistemological nihilism, cf. Bailey (2002), 25 *et seq.*

28. “Happy is he who lives an untroubled life” (Εὐδαίμων μὲν ἐστὶν ὁ ἀπαράχως διεξάγων), Sextus Empiricus, XI, 141. Goedeckemeyer (1905, VIII, 337; II ed. 1968, 8, note 8), points to the influence of Homer, while Declava Caizzi (1981, 247) suggests Democritus, see DL, IX, 45 and Plutarch *De tranq. an.*, 465c.

Pyrro sought to solve the problems of the individual by means of an ethical-intellectual approach,²⁹ which marked a new departure from reality, leading to a “revolutionary” way of life, stripped of beliefs; surprisingly, it was respected and even admired by many of his peers.³⁰ According to Antigonos of Carystus, his thought was perfectly mirrored by his behaviour; he took no undue precautions, and left nothing to the arbitration of the senses, facing the risks of daily life (carts, precipices, dogs) with equal indifference. So impassive was he that his friends, following close behind, would keep him out of harm’s way.³¹ Pyrro was unique in this blending of theoretical criteria and practical outlook;³² the theory prepared and directed him towards the praxis that was its purpose.³³ But that praxis was marked by a distinctive indifference in life, by an abstention that led to happiness. Imperturbability and indifference are not *a priori* states; they are determined by the very indeterminacy of things.

Freed of the conflicts that plague the man who is bound to choose, Pyrro discovered the legitimate spiritual state of the Sceptic sage, defined as “*the Sceptic way of life*”, unusual though consistent, that strengthened his fame as a detached, serene man. The lack of commitment skilfully heals the disease of dogma: the treatment consists in cleansing human life of the anguish prompted by the constant need to choose between options. The result of this indifference is stability, the most serene balance possible in life.

Pyrro withdrew into himself, tending more to individualism and solitude, avoiding the crowds in order not to be trapped by the social commitment that

29. Cf. DL, IX, 65. Diogenes Laertius respects Pyrro’s philosophy on account of this approach, but not that of Arcesilaus or Carneades, two Sceptical followers of Plato’s Academy, who were more concerned with gnoseological issues. Cf. Román Alcalá (2007), introduction and Román Alcalá, (2013), p. 115-125.

30. Cf. DL, IX, 64, 65 and 66.

31. Cf. the many anecdotes provided by DL, IX, 62.

32. The general importance of the passage by Timon (Aristocles in Eusebio, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, XIV, 18, 1-4) is clear because it reveals the foundations Sceptics used in order to take life as a guide and a criterion, and also indicates the development of Pyrro’s stance. In this regard, the detailed account of this fragment of Timon by Richard Bett in his book *Pyrro his antecedents and his legacy* (New York: 2000), cap. I, p. 14-59, is very interesting. Having meticulously defined the different meanings of each of the elements studied here, Bett defines the theory of the indeterminacy of reality as that of a “non-Sceptical philosopher”, an elegant and polite way of saying “dogmatic”, which continues to deal with the classical problems of phýsis and Pre-Hellenistic philosophy. I agree with this, but I believe that from this thesis, which in itself is not Sceptical, his attitude tones down a certain philosophical dogmatism and substitutes it with a limited practical scepticism, cf. Román Alcalá (2009), p. 105-109 and Laursen, (2004), p. 220-222.

33. “This, Pyrro, this my heart is fain to know / Whence peace of mind to thee doth freely flow / Why among men thou like a god dost show” (τοῦτό μοι, ὦ Πύρρων, ἰμείρεται ἦτορ ἀκούσαι, πῶς ποτ’ ἀνὴρ ὅτ’ ἄγεις ῥᾶστα μεθ’ ἡσυχίης μούνης ἐν ἀνθρώποισι θεοῦ τρόπον ἡγεμονεύων), DL, IX, 65.

would prevent him from attaining the sought-after *ataraxia*. The Sceptics, then, were distinguished by a detachment that culminated in a simple, austere, irreproachable life.³⁴ Yet that detachment had to have limits, otherwise Scepticism could not be lived in an “absolute” manner. Nussbaum makes this clear when asserting that radical, absolute scepticism runs counter to human nature, one of whose distinguishing marks is to be a social being “one among others, and able to form stable commitments to others, both individually and as a group”.³⁵

In my view, Pyrrho himself was aware of those limits. Diogenes Laertius tells us that Pyrrho once grew angry with a man who had insulted his sister Philista,³⁶ suggesting that fraternal love and the need to protect a defenceless woman —*i.e.* the simplest and most natural concern for others— brought him out of that indifference whilst remaining consistent with Scepticism.³⁷ Perhaps, and whilst acknowledging the scope of Pyrrhonism, there are two spheres in which one cannot be radically Sceptical: the person and the city one loves. In these two spaces, living a wholly untroubled life would lead to an absence of compassion and commitment; the much-vaunted indifference would ultimately render null and avoid any appeal to happiness.

34. Cf. DL, IX, 66. Here Diogenes, quoting from Eratosthenes’ essay *On Wealth and Poverty*, provides examples of that austere, detached, family life that earned Pyrrho the title of “happy”.

35. Nussbaum (1994), p. 315. She later notes (610) that this lack of commitment to loved ones, or country, or even to one’s own past, one’s character, one’s tastes, gives one a life of remarkable safety; but it impoverishes the self, and makes the self untrustworthy for others. However, this criticism cannot be applied unreservedly to Pyrrho, and contrasts with his popularity among the townsfolk of Elis, who regarded him as both praiseworthy and memorable.

36. “Once he got enraged in his sister’s cause (her name was Philista), and he told the man who blamed him that it was not over a weak woman that one should display indifference” (καὶ χολήσας τι περὶ τῆς ἀδελφῆς, Φιλίστα δ’ ἐκαλεῖτο, πρὸς τὸν ἐπιλαβόμενον εἰπεῖν ὡς οὐκ ἐν γυναικὶ ἢ ἐπιδεικνύς τῆς ἀδιαφορίας), DL, IX, 66. J. Brunschwig, drawing on additional details of this anecdote provided by Aristocles (quoted by Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.*, XIV, 18), sees in this statement not a proof of ordinary misogyny but rather a subtly ironic refutation of his interlocutor’s criticism, *vid. AAVV* (1999), note 6, 1103, which is more interesting in the light of the following passage.

37. A further anecdote also mentioned by Aristocles, which appears immediately afterwards in Diogenes Laertius, gives an idea of Pyrrho’s admission that it was impossible to live “absolutely” a life without beliefs: “When a cur rushed at him and terrified him, he answered his critic that it was not easy entirely to strip oneself of human weakness”, DL, IX, 66.

2.2. Epicureanism and group friendship

The Epicurean approach to the issue of happiness starts out from an acceptance of the body, of the flesh and its needs,³⁸ and a firm resolve to free it of pain as a first step in attaining pleasure. In Epicurus, we are reintroduced to the image of a man with an extremely rational outlook on nature. This man, convinced that the laws of nature are not superior to the potential of human knowledge, may seek and find his happiness. His action is neither collective nor political; it is a single, individual commitment.

Epicurean philosophy is an activity “that, through discourse and reasoning, provides a happy life”.³⁹ The original hallmark feature of Epicurean ethics is its emphasis on *private life* and *human sympathy*. The stress on inner life, which may seem indicative of an egoistic morality,⁴⁰ is offset by another Epicurean trait, the *mira conspiratio amoris* recognised by Cicero.⁴¹ If we label the Epicurean way of life “egoistic”, we have failed to fully accept the true spirit informing it. In recognising the value of spiritual pleasure, this system of ethics went beyond the limits of “egoism”.⁴² The ideal of the Epicurean wise man is self-sufficiency (*autarkia*), which attains necessary virtue through generosity: “The wise man who has become accustomed to necessities knows better how to share with others than how to take from them, so great a treasure of self-sufficiency has he found”.⁴³ This claim is implicit in the later doctrines of the mystics, for whom spiritual good —as distinct from material goods— is not lost when generously shared, but rather increases as a result. The wise man’s ideal, then, recognises the preeminent value of spiritual good; for the wise man, there is greater satisfaction in charitable, altruistic action. Egoism places a constraint on happiness, in that it signifies the denial of love for others. By contrast, altruism leads to the fullness and elevation of the spirit.

38. “The cry of the flesh (σαρκὸς φωνή) is not to be hungry, thirsty, or cold; for he who is free of these, and is confident of remaining so, might rival even [Zeus] in happiness” (Σαρκὸς φωνὴ τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥιγούν’ ταῦτα γὰρ ἔχων τις καὶ ἐλπίζων ἔξειν κἄν [Διὶ] ὑπὲρ εὐδαιμονίας μαχέσσαιτο), Epicurus, *Gnomologio Vaticano*, 33.

39. Sextus Empiricus, *M.*, XI, 169 (Fr. 219 Usener), cf. *supra*, note 8.

40. Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura.*, II, 1-4. Many see in these verses a frank and sincere indication of Epicurean egoistic individualism.

41. *Vid.* also Diogenes Laertius, X, 120. “He will be armed against fortune and will never give up a friend” (τύχη τ’ ἀντιτάξεσθαι, φίλον τε οὐδένα προήσεσθαι), and a little further on: “And he will on occasion die for a friend if necessary” (καὶ ὑπὲρ φίλου ποτὲ τεθνήξεσθαι); *Vid.*, Festugière, 1946, 24-31.

42. Mondolfo (1941), p. 59 and Annas (1993), p. 188-200.

43. Ὁ σοφὸς εἰς τὰ ἀναγκαῖα συγκριθεὶς μᾶλλον ἐπίσταται μεταδιδόναι ἢ μεταλαμβάνειν’ τηλικούτων αὐταρκείας εὖρε θησαυρόν, Epicurus, *Gnomologio Vaticano*, 44.

The *sophos* is happy because he recognises what is valuable in life and discards what is unnecessary, obtaining goods in accordance with nature. It is a wisdom which, though not excluding theory, focuses above all on *practice and ethics*. In Epicureanism, the ultimate aim of life and of philosophy is to ensure the health of the subject (of the spirit in a material sense, however subtle); this is achieved by freeing the body of evils (fear of the gods, a false perception of pleasure and pain); the attainment of pleasure as a real good is the ideal of the wise man.⁴⁴ Here again, we encounter this tension between indifference and commitment. Epicurus despises political and social activity, since it offers no hope of salvation for mankind, yet he is by no means indifferent to others. This withdrawal from politics, “the wise man will not take part in politics” (Οὐδὲ πολιτεύσεται),⁴⁵ ran counter —both in theory and in practice— to philosophical tradition. Plato and Aristotle created their own political models, the Stoics devised an ideological programme, while the Cynics constructed a Utopian *politeia*. The essential idea behind the withdrawal from politics is the need to ensure safety from men.⁴⁶ This safety is attained by separation, by isolation. Once safe, the wise man can live in communion with himself, and on friendly terms with others. This is a summary outline of life in the Garden. There is no indifference, but nor is there political commitment; perhaps at best a weak commitment to others in the Garden.

2.3. Stoicism and political commitment

The Stoics, by contrast, are the philosophers of commitment; commitment to philosophy, to politics, to the health of the soul, and so on. They share with Epicureans and Sceptics the idea of philosophy as the medicine of the soul; only through philosophy can the individual attain self-sufficiency, peace of mind, human tranquillity. Stoicism contributes an idea not found in the other schools: the success of the therapy can be ascribed to active practical reason-

44. Cf. Robin (1928), p. 305-322.

45. Epicurus, *Epistula ad Pythoclem*; DL, X, 119.

46. “*passimque uidere errare atque uiam palantis quaerere uitae, certare ingenio contendere nobilitate, noctes atque dies niti praestrante labore ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri*” (And see others wandering aimlessly in search of a way of life, pitting their wits one against another, disputing for precedence, struggling night and day with unstinted effort to scale the pinnacles of wealth and power). Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, II, 9-13. A little further on, he notes: “*Quapropter quoniam nil nostro in corpore gazae proficiunt neque nobilitas nec gloria regni, quod superest, animo quoque nil prodesse putandum*” (Therefore, if our bodies are not profited by treasures or titles or the majesty of kingship, we must go on to admit that neither are our minds), II, 37-40.

ing by every man. Chrysippus, Cicero and Seneca⁴⁷ make more subtle use of the medical analogy than the other schools, arguing that the therapeutic function of the *logos*, i.e. of rational discourse, is what marks us out as humans.

Unlike the Epicureans and Sceptics, then, the Stoics follow Aristotle's teachings with regard to certain functions of reason, giving rise to a philosophical activity based on the guiding principles of rational self-government and universal citizenship. This first notion has one highly significant effect on Stoic doctrine, not to be found in the other two schools: anyone can be convinced —without needing to be a Stoic— that there are reasons for subscribing to the Stoic project of compromise between personal love and political activity. This serves to reinforce a political theory developed, guided and strengthened by philosophy as therapy. It accepts that we need not withdraw from politics in order to ensure the *eudaimonia* of individual followers or disciples (or groups of friends); rather, we need to moderate our private passions and desires, and strive for social change. Political upheaval, wherever it arises, is caused by the illness prompted by over-exuberant passions; the extirpation of these passions gives rise to new political virtues which will improve both the state and the individual. The world is commitment;⁴⁸ the message of Stoicism for the philosopher is as follows: bad philosophy is any philosophy that lets itself be carried away by self-serving specialist jargon, scorning the world of human beings.

Nowhere is this commitment to society more apparent than in Roman Stoicism. Yet it is not without its tensions. Of all the issues addressed by the Greek schools of philosophy, none was more important to the Romans than the vexed choice between a life of service to the *Res Publica* and a life of leisure devoted to philosophy. Seneca pondered these alternatives, though his own involvement in public life led him to rethink his position: whilst advising Paulinus (his father-in-law) to withdraw from public life, he himself accepted

47. Cf. Chrysippus, S.V.F., 3, 471. Here he compares the medicine that heals the body with the philosophy that heals the sick mind, arguing that the latter is by no means inferior to the former. Cicero, in his *Disp. Tusc.* (III, 6) insists that philosophy is the medicine of the soul, whose assistance comes not from outside us but from within ourselves. Seneca, in *Epist.*, VIII, 2, notes that "There are certain wholesome counsels, which may be compared to prescriptions of useful drugs; these I am putting into writing". In this respect, an interesting study by Rodríguez Fernández (1976) highlights not just the "illness of the soul" and the "medicine of the soul" but also the "illness of the body" and the "medicine of the body", which are closely linked, 13-15.

48. A philosophical education benefits not just the philosopher, but everyone. Seneca notes that: "No man can live a happy life, or even a supportable life, without the study of wisdom" (*neminem posse beate vivere, ne tolerabiliter quidem, sine sapientiae studio*), *Epist.*, XVI, 1. One can devote oneself to philosophy regardless of one's social status: free or enslaved, man or woman. Musonius Rufus readily concludes that anyone whose five senses are in working order, and also displays a capacity for reason and moral responsibility, can and should study philosophy, *Diatriba*, 6.

first the post of tutor to Nero and, later, that of praetor and consul.⁴⁹ Yet curiously enough, Seneca's attitude is popularly viewed as that of the indifferent, sceptical sage, distancing himself from politics and accepting his fate with willing resignation.

The Hellenistic schools were unable to agree on the implications of involvement in public life, a key feature of Greek culture. Seneca embodies the opposing views of Epicureans and Stoics,⁵⁰ and also perhaps of the Sceptics. For Epicurus, the wise man should remain aloof from public life, and thus not become involved in politics; for the Sceptics, the wise man should be indifferent to things,⁵¹ and should thus suspend judgement and act in accordance with phenomena, with what is apparent. For Zeno the Stoic, the wise man should on no account seek power for its own sake or as an end in itself, but rather as a means of improving and benefitting society as a whole. Political commitment provides a link between philosophy and public life, between leisure (*otium*) and action. Yet Zeno is fully aware that commitment of this kind will inevitably disturb his peace of mind, so essential to contemplation. Seneca, as we have seen, advises withdrawal from politics (for Paulinus at least), yet is himself fully prepared to pursue power and wealth. How are we to account for this contradiction?

There are certain circumstances in which the wise man should distance himself from politics, among them poor health, old age, and the perception that all effort is useless. This latter circumstance is particularly interesting, for whenever corruption renders all effort futile, involvement in political affairs is unadvisable. If a society is so corrupt that all political effort becomes pointless, then the wise man should refrain. It is, I believe, the awareness that this is the default situation in public life that leads Seneca to voice a certain social pessimism, and thus to undervalue the work of the politician and opt for critical resistance against the prevailing injustice.

Despite this rather disconcerting guide to moral behaviour, Seneca's most original contribution —and the most relevant to our present purpose— is his added conviction (at least in his writings) that good is inextricably bound to honour (as I shall show, Seneca clearly held to this at the end of his days). For most schools of philosophy, by contrast, honour never appeared in definitions of good, which was seen as arising from virtuous —and therefore unclear— experiences. Seneca argued that good and honour were equivalents (*summum bonum est, quod honestum est*); put baldly, there can be no good

49. Seneca clearly feels that the two options —contemplation and action— are not, in fact, mutually exclusive, cf. Martín Sánchez (1984), p. 187-194. Even so, contemplation might lead to action, thus giving rise to unresolvable tensions. *Vid.* Grimal (1979).

50. Cf. Seneca, *De otio*, III, 2.

51. DL, IX, 63, 66, 68; *vid.* Román (2009), p. 105-111 and Piantelli (1978), p. 146-150.

without honour (*nihil est bonum, nisi quod honestum est*). Honour adds a precision to good that renders it perfect; the two are thus inextricably bound.⁵²

Shifting away from theoretical ideals, opinions vary as to Seneca's own display of honour when he and Burrus ruled the Empire as regents for the young Nero. For all his greater benevolence towards slaves, and for all his mild fiscal and legal reforms, Seneca appears to have abused his power and position, amassing considerable influence together with enormous wealth of obscure origin; he also displayed a surprisingly uncaring attitude towards his political enemies. Indeed, his *De vita beata* was intended as a defence against his enemies' accusations with regard to his time in power. The world of politics is like that, as Seneca himself argues, and corruption will inevitably flourish in it. This led him to review, drawing on his own experience, the whole question of the wise man's involvement in politics.

For that reason, nearing the end of his life and to all effects retired from politics, Seneca was aware that it was impossible to reconcile political activity with self-possession, independence and freedom of thought; and this is the view popularly attributed to him. Seneca advises his friend to make time for leisure in the midst of his many occupations, and to remember that devotion to others entails a loss of self.⁵³ He favours the recovery of one's own privacy and of one's own leisure, which is a prerequisite of wisdom. And that wisdom is essentially the foundation of right action. Political activity is beneficial only if it is accompanied by *otium*, which is the *humus*, the quintessential seed-bed, of reflection. Leisure, for all its apparent uselessness, is in fact an immensely productive activity; being able to retire is productive because it opens the way to reflection which benefits the whole of mankind.

Opinions differ as to whether Seneca wholly grasped the implications of what he himself was explaining. He was criticised for his longing for wealth, which raised doubts as to his ethical sincerity. He responded to those criticisms in *De vita beata*, arguing that the wise man had no need to dispense with material goods. This view underlies his theory regarding the use of goods: the wise man has no love of riches, for he does not consider them good. He acquires wealth as an indifferent material, but then uses it for good purpose.

52. "I too say that no-one can live pleasantly unless he lives honourably also, and this cannot be the case with dumb animals who measure the extent of their happiness by that of their food" (*ego enim nego quemquam posse iucunde uiuere nisi simul et honeste uiuit, quod non potest mutis contingere animalibus nec bonum suum cibo metientibus*), Seneca, *De Vit. Beat.*, X, 1; cf. IV, 2 and 3.

53. "Act thus, my dear Lucilius - set yourself free for your own sake; gather and save your time, which till lately has been forced from you, or filched away, or has merely slipped from your hands" (*Ita fac, mi Lucili: vindica te tibi, et tempus quod adhuc aut auferebatur aut subripiiebatur aut excidebat collige et serua*), Seneca, *Epist.*, I, 1.

According to Stoic reasoning, riches are neither good nor evil in themselves; they are indifferent things, and the wise man admits them not to his heart (Golden reins do not make a better horse)⁵⁴ but to his house, where he will make righteous use of them to help others. Wealth is the slave of the wise man and the master of the fool; the fastest way to amass wealth is by despising it.

But everything in this life slips from our grasp, and the Stoic experience reflects an acute awareness of the tragic situation of man at the mercy of his fate. It would appear that we are not free in any sense; we cannot choose to be handsome, strong, healthy; we yearn for unobtainable goods, we strive to flee from evils, even though they are inevitable. But there is one thing, just one, that does depend on us, and that cannot be taken away from us: the desire to do good rather than evil, the desire to act in accordance with the dictates of reason.⁵⁵ The aim is the well-being of the soul,⁵⁶ which is not the same as pleasure, as it has been misinterpreted by some; it is rather a state in which the soul remains at peace and at equilibrium, untroubled by fear, superstition or any other passion.

Yet this is by no means easy. Seneca feels oneself pessimistic and powerless against the evil, unable to avoid it; he has wearied of life, and is on the brink of “moral ennui”. Seneca was the first of the ancient philosophers to describe the symptoms of *taedium vitae*, thus adumbrating the major features of a typical modern “depression”. This is the most dangerous illness of all, in that the person least aware of it is the patient himself.⁵⁷ No man will confess his vices, says Seneca, because a confession of vice is a proof of sound mind: “Let us, therefore, rouse ourselves, that we may be able to correct our mistakes”.⁵⁸

54. *Epist.*, XLI, 6, Cf. also, *Epist.*, LXII, 3.

55. In Stoicism, a link is identified between human personality —what, leaping ahead, we would now call the conscience— and universal reason; this, in brief, is what Zeno understood by “living in harmony, in accordance with Nature”, cf. DL VII, 87; S.V.F., I, 179. Only the wise man can understand and assume all the elements of nature. This ideal, heroic morality had its fiercest critic in the Academic Sceptic Carneades, who countered the Stoic view with a non-dogmatic rule for the conduct of life based on well-founded probabilities, cf. Román Alcalá 2007, 136-142.

56. The term *Εὐθυμία* (Cf. DK 68 B 4) was to achieve considerable respect and success in the writings of the Romans Cicero (Cf. DK 68 A 169) and Seneca (*De tranquillitate animi* II, 3-4, in which he asserted that Democritus had written extensively on *euthymia*), although they opt to translate it as “peace of mind” or “spiritual stability or serenity”. Cf. G. Onodera, “Diogenes Laertius IX 45 (Demokritos Fr. A 1)”, *Philologus*, 137 (1993), p. 106-107.

57. “The opposite holds true of diseases of the soul; the worse one is, the less one perceives it” (*Contra evenit in his morbis quibus afficiuntur animi: quo quis peius se habet, minus sentit*). Seneca, *Epist.*, LIII, 7.

58. Cf., Seneca, *Epist.*, LIII, 8.

Seneca draws a distinction between melancholy and sorrow. Melancholy may have various different causes, and may have been triggered by sorrow or grief, but its effects and its symptoms are independent of the evil that gave rise to them. Sorrow is more direct, simpler, more primitive, less subtle. In sorrow, it is the world which seems to make no sense; something is missing, and that constraint prompts our indolence. In melancholy, by contrast, it is I myself that have no value, I have lost my significance in the world at large, I have become socially and spiritually useless, I have lost the taste for living.

These are the symptoms of *taedium vitae*, the modern illness so comprehensively described by psychoanalysis: the nameless disease. Tedium is the disease of time, an inability to place oneself in time and understand it. We must learn to live, for all life is brief: "It is with life as it is with a play—it matters not how long the action is spun out, but how good the acting is".⁵⁹ When we are aware of this, we are happy; when we lose that awareness, we must be able to name and understand the sickness that prevents it. That is the job of the philosopher-doctor, an analyst who detects and soothes the inner uproar of the soul,⁶⁰ reducing it to an occasional bearable murmur. Seneca's lucid position is by no means a comfortable one. It reflects a paradoxical situation: we are required to behave wisely in order to tackle the sickness latent in ourselves. There is an uncertain but necessary tension between solitude and friendship, between detachment and commitment, between intellectual activity and political action, between solitary meditation and shared dialogue with others. It is here that reason can act to reconcile us with ourselves, avoiding the convulsions of despair and the lethargy of melancholy or ennui. The healing of *taedium vitae* involves the use of time; the right use of time to some extent entails a focus on self.

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59. "*Quomodo fabula, sic vita: non quam diu, sed quam bene acta sit, refert*", Seneca, *Epist.*, LXXVII, 19.

60. Cf., Seneca, LVI, 8.

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