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Seneca's Philosophical Predecessors and Contemporaries

JOHN SELLARS

1. Intellectual Background

Lucius Annaeus Seneca lived, thought, and wrote during a complex and comparatively neglected period in the history of philosophy.¹ The philosophical scene of the first century AD was quite different from the much better known philosophical culture of the Hellenistic period that came to an end in the previous century. During the third and second centuries BC the majority of philosophical activity in the ancient world took place in Athens, just as it had during the days of Plato and Aristotle, and aspiring philosophers from all over the Eastern Mediterranean travelled to Athens where they could join in with the intellectual activity taking place at the Academy, Lyceum, Garden, and Painted Stoa. By the time of Seneca's birth at the end of the first century BC Athens was no longer the predominant centre of philosophical activity in the ancient world; philosophy had undergone a process of dispersal and decentralization.² Philosophical schools sprang up locally – in Rome, Alexandria, Rhodes, and no doubt elsewhere – and in Italy people had already started writing philosophy in Latin.³ Seneca first studied philosophy within this decentralized and bilingual philosophical climate,

¹ For general studies of philosophy in Rome see Griffin and Barnes 1989, Morford 2002, Trapp 2007b, Sorabji and Sharples 2007. For studies of Stoicism in Rome see the above plus Arnold 1911, Chevallier 1960, Haase 1989, Gill 2003, Reydams-Schils 2005. For Seneca's place within Roman Stoicism see Grimal 1989.

² On the decentralization of philosophy see Frede 1999, Sedley 2003b, Ferrary 2007, and, with specific reference to the Stoa, Sedley 2003a: 24–32.

³ In the period before Seneca's birth the most famous examples of Latin philosophical texts were those of Cicero and Lucretius, but predating both of them were earlier Italian Epicureans who wrote in Latin, notably Amfinius, on whom see Cicero *Tusc.* 4.6–7 with Ducos 1994 and Sedley 2009: 39–40.

drawing upon both the earlier Greek tradition and this new contemporary situation.

The tales of the rise of philosophy in Rome and the decline of philosophy in Athens are inevitably intertwined. The introduction of Greek philosophy into the Roman world is traditionally connected with the famous embassy of three Athenian philosophers who visited Rome in 155 BC, ostensibly there to ask for a fine imposed on Athens to be lifted, but since remembered for their fine oratory (and also their beards).⁴ The earliest generations of Romans attracted to philosophy travelled to its natural home, Athens, in order to learn more. A little later Cicero followed in their footsteps and went on to send his son to do the same, although by then the situation had already changed. A key moment in the transformation occurred in 88 BC when Athens sided with King Mithridates against Rome and the city was subsequently put under siege by Sulla.⁵ Both the Academy and the Epicurean Garden were probably damaged, if not destroyed.⁶ Leading intellectuals fled the city, including the head of the Academy, Philo of Larissa.⁷ Some, like Philo, went to Rome, while others found a variety of new locations: Alexandria, Rhodes, and the Bay of Naples, to name the best known.⁸ Cicero observed first hand many of these upheavals.

⁴ On the embassy see e.g. Aulus Gellius 6.14.8-10 and Plutarch *Cato Maior* 22.1-3 with Griffin 1989: 2-5 and Ferrary 2007. On beards see Sellars 2003: 15-19.

⁵ On Athens and Mithridates see Posidonius *apud* Athenaeus 5.211d-215b (= fr. 253 Edelstein-Kidd 1972). On the siege of Sulla see Plutarch *Sulla* 12.1-13.4 and Appian *Mith.* 30-45.

⁶ Clay 2009: 27 suggests both the Academy and Garden were destroyed. The evidence he cites (Plutarch *Sulla* 12.3 and Appian *Mith.* 30) makes reference to the Academy, and Plutarch also mentions the Lyceum, but there is no explicit mention of the Garden. Nevertheless, the general descriptions of the siege certainly imply that the Garden, just outside the city walls and close to the Academy, would have suffered severely. See also Frede 1999: 790-3.

⁷ See Cicero *Brutus* 306.

⁸ Antiochus (the Academic), Posidonius (the Stoic), and Philodemus (the Epicurean) all studied in Athens around this time but left for Alexandria, Rhodes, and Herculaneum respectively.

He welcomed exiled Athenian philosophers into his own home, and visited Athens in the aftermath, as well as new centres of philosophical activity that sprung up, such as Rhodes.⁹ Cicero also played a key role in the further decentralization of philosophy by writing popular accounts in Latin of the principal doctrines of the main Hellenistic schools, in the process laying the foundations for a comprehensive Latin philosophical vocabulary.¹⁰

Seneca's own philosophical education took place in the aftermath of these dramatic changes. He wrote in Latin but unlike previous Latin philosophical authors such as Cicero and Lucretius, who simply made available to a Latin audience ideas derived from Greek philosophers, Seneca tried to do philosophy in Latin and for this reason it has been suggested that his works are the earliest properly *Latin* philosophical works that have come down to us.¹¹ Indeed, they are the only properly Latin philosophical works to survive from pagan antiquity, for the majority of Seneca's Roman contemporaries (Cornutus, Musonius Rufus) and successors (Marcus Aurelius) reverted to Greek for their philosophical writing. We have to wait until Augustine to find the next significant body of philosophical work in Latin. This turn to Latin no doubt reflects in part the fact that Seneca's own philosophical education took place in Rome, as well as the fact that he came from the monolingual Western

⁹ On Cicero's travels to Athens and Rhodes see Cicero *Brutus* 315-16 and Plutarch *Cicero* 4.1-4. For his reflections on state of Athens see *Fin.* 5.1-5.

¹⁰ Previous philosophical work in Latin, by Amfinius and Lucretius, was limited to Epicureanism. As well as his discussions of Stoic, Epicurean, and Academic doctrines, Cicero also produced a Latin version of Plato's *Timaeus*. On Cicero and philosophy in Latin see Levy 1992.

¹¹ See Inwood 2005: 13, "Seneca stands out for his striking choice to do what I would call primary philosophy (rather than exegetical or missionary work) in Latin"; also *ibid.* 20, "Seneca, much more than Cicero, is thinking creatively and philosophically in Latin". However, Seneca also complained of Latin's limitations (*Ep.* 58.1), echoing the earlier complaint of Lucretius (1.136-9). On philosophy in Latin see Grimal 1992.

Mediterranean rather than the bilingual East, but it also reflects the much wider changes in philosophical culture outlined above.¹² The decentralization of philosophy led to a number of flourishing philosophical communities in Italy, such as the circle of Epicureans around Philodemus in Herculaneum, while the works of Cicero and Lucretius opened up the Greek philosophical tradition to a new audience. Seneca's philosophy was formed in a new specifically Roman intellectual context that would prove to be relatively short lived.

2. *Seneca's Teachers*

Seneca names three teachers with whom he studied philosophy: Papirius Fabianus, Sotion of Alexandria, and Attalus the Stoic.¹³ Taken together these teachers reflect the transformed character of ancient philosophical culture. Attalus was from Pergamum in the East, while Fabianus and Sotion were both products of a Roman school of philosophy founded by Quintus Sextius. Via both his pupils and his writings, Sextius also proved to be an important influence on Seneca, so it may be appropriate to begin with him.¹⁴

Sextius was the founder of his own philosophical school in Rome and it was probably handed down to his son, Sextius Niger, though Seneca reports

¹² Seneca clearly knew Greek (he translates some lines from Cleanthes at *Ep.* 107.10-11), but it seems reasonable to presume that it was learnt in the classroom and as such would not have been his natural medium of thought.

¹³ Seneca is himself our principal source of evidence for his teachers. For discussion of his three teachers and the school of the Sextii see Zeller 1880: III.1, 675-82 (trans. in Zeller 1883: 180-8), Grimal 1978: 247-62, Fillion-Lahille 1984: 256-72, Lana 1992, Inwood 2005: 1-22.

¹⁴ Seneca mentions Sextius at *Ep.* 59.7, 64.2-5, 73.12,15, 98.13, 108.17-19, *De Ira* 2.36.1, 3.36.1, *Nat. Quaest.* 7.32.2.

that the school did not last for very long.¹⁵ Sextius wrote his philosophy in Greek, but combined this with a Roman sensibility.¹⁶ He also drew upon both Stoic and Pythagorean doctrines, and Seneca characterizes him as a Stoic, while noting that Sextius himself rejected the label.¹⁷ It is tempting to imagine someone in the mould of Cato the Younger, embodying the implicit Stoic values of traditional Roman morality, and such a comparison is given some credence by the fact that Sextius refused to accept an offer of public office from Julius Caesar.¹⁸ The Pythagorean influence on Sextius manifested itself in vegetarianism and the practice of daily self-examination, both of which Seneca adopted.¹⁹ Indeed, Seneca appears to have admired and emulated Sextius greatly. From what we know, Sextius combined a focus on practical ethical concerns with continual self-examination, ascetic training, and a broadly Stoic worldview, without accepting the limitations of doctrinal conformity. All of this is highly reminiscent of Seneca himself, and it also prefigures many of the features of subsequent Imperial Stoicism, such as what we find in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. Although only a shadowy figure to us, it may be that Sextius influenced the subsequent development of subsequent Roman Stoicism far more profoundly than has hitherto been noted.²⁰

¹⁵ On the school of Sextius see Zeller 1880: III.1, 675-82 (trans. in Zeller 1883: 180-8), Griffin 1976: 37-42, Fillion-Lahille 1984: 256-7, Lana 1992, Morford 2002: 133-4. On its specifically Roman character, the plurality of Sextii, and its short life see *Nat. Quaest.* 7.32.2. On Quintius Sextius as *pater* see *Ep.* 64.2, 98.13.

¹⁶ See *Ep.* 59.7.

¹⁷ See *Ep.* 64.2. On the Pythagorean influence on Sextius see *Ep.* 108.17-18 with Kahn 2001: 92-3.

¹⁸ See *Ep.* 98.13; see also Plutarch *Moralia* 77e.

¹⁹ See *Ep.* 108.22 and *De Ira* 3.36.1 respectively, with Kahn 2001: 92-3 for further discussion. Seneca later dropped the vegetarianism (*Ep.* 108.22).

²⁰ Having said that, Inwood 2007b: 139 refers to the “widespread but misleading impression that later Stoicism is concerned excessively with ethics” and he notes late Stoic texts concerned with physics such as Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones*, Cornutus’ *Theologiae graecae compendium*, and Cleomedes’s *Caelestia*. While Inwood is right to remind us of these texts, I still think there is room for a strong Sextian influence on later Stoicism. First, we might note that despite a focus on ethical matters within the school, the Sextian Fabianus

Two of Sextius' pupils contributed to Seneca's own education. The first of these, Papirius Fabianus, noted as a rhetorician as well as a philosopher, is said to have written more works of philosophy than Cicero, although all of these are now lost.²¹ He took from Sextius a scepticism about obscure theoretical studies (or at least about their value for practical matters) but retained a healthy interest in physics, writing a book on natural causes.²² Seneca also reports a book on politics.²³ This suggests a range of interests not too dissimilar from Seneca's own. The second pupil, Sotion of Alexandria, followed Sextius' Pythagorean habits of vegetarianism and self-examination, both of which Seneca adopted.²⁴ We have limited information about Sotion but a fragment from his work *Περὶ ὀργῆς* preserved by Stobaeus parallels material in Seneca's *De Ira*, suggesting an influence.²⁵ Indeed, it is worth noting that Seneca also cites Fabianus on how to cure emotions, and so this topic may well have been a wider preoccupation of the Sextian school.²⁶ It is striking how closely the

also had strong interests in physics and may well have been a key influence behind the *Nat. Quaest.* (see below). Second, Sextius' adoption of Pythagorean ascetic practices prefigures the focus on mental training (or 'spiritual exercises' or 'techniques of the self') that we find in Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, and which some have argued sits rather uneasily alongside Stoic monistic psychology inherited from Socrates. One person who has hinted at the influence of Sextius is Frede 1999: 787.

²¹ Seneca mentions Fabianus at *Ep.* 11.4, 40.12, 52.11, 58.6, 100.1-12, *Ad Marc.* 23.5, *Brev. Vit.* 10.1, 13.9, *Nat. Quaest.* 3.27.3. He is discussed by Seneca's father in *Contr.* 2.pr.1-4, who also purports to record extracts of his declamations throughout Book 2 of the *Controversiae*. On the quantity of his writing see *Ep.* 100.9. See further Fillion-Lahille 1984: 258-9, Lana 1992: 117-22, Ducos 2000.

²² For his scepticism see *Brev. Vit.* 10.1, 13.9; for his work *Libri causarum naturalium* see Charisius *Artis Grammaticae Libri V* 135,19-23 (note also 134,13; 190,8; 186,6 Barwick), which Seneca may well be citing at *Nat. Quaest.* 3.27.3.

²³ See *Ep.* 100.1.

²⁴ On Sotion see *Ep.* 49.2 and 108.17-22.

²⁵ Compare Stobaeus 3,550,7-17 (Wachsmuth-Hense) with Seneca *De Ira* 2.10.5 and see the discussions in Fillion-Lahille 1984: 261-72 and 1989: 1632-6, who suggests that Sotion is the third key influence on *De Ira* after Chrysippus and Posidonius.

²⁶ The two passages where Seneca cites Fabianus' scepticism towards technicality and sophistry (*Brev. Vit.* 10.1, 13.9) are both concerned with the emotions. Fabianus' point, as

interests of the Sextian philosophers correlate with Seneca's own concerns, to the point that it is tempting to think of Seneca as simply an *ex officio* member of the school. However, by way of caution, it should also be remembered that almost all of our information about the Sextians comes from Seneca himself and so is no doubt to some extent coloured by his own interests.

Seneca's third teacher, Attalus, differed from the Sextians insofar as he was a self-proclaimed Stoic.²⁷ He came to Rome from Pergamum, a noted centre of Stoic activity in the new decentralized philosophical world.²⁸ Seneca records that he was a regular attendee at the lectures of Attalus, "the first to arrive and the last to leave", and that he used to talk with him outside the classroom as well.²⁹ It was from Attalus that Seneca first learned his Stoicism and, notwithstanding the impact of the Sextians, Seneca always described himself as a Stoic, never a Sextian.³⁰ Having said that, Attalus and the Sextians had much in common, including a preference for simplicity in life and the practice of regular self-examination, both themes that would mark Seneca's own work.

Seneca reports it, is that overcoming powerful emotions requires more than mere theoretical subtlety.

²⁷ On Attalus as a Stoic see *Ep.* 67.15 and Seneca the Elder *Suas.* 2.12. Seneca mentions Attalus at *Ep.* 9.7, 63.5, 67.15, 72.8, 81.22, 108.2-3, 13-16, 23, 110.14-20, *Nat. Quaest.* 2.48.2, 2.1.1-3. For further discussion see Fillion-Lahille 1984: 260-1, Follet 1994.

²⁸ On Stoics in Pergamum see Pfeiffer 1968: 234-51. The first Stoic associated with Pergamum was Crates of Mallus, who moved there on the invitation of King Eumenes II. The most famous Stoic associated with the place was Athenodorus Cordylion of Tarsus, librarian and expurgator of Zeno's *Republic* (Diogenes Laertius 7.34), who was visited by Cato and travelled with him to Rome (Plutarch *Cato Minor* 10.1, 16.1; *Moralia* 777a). This is an example of the decentralization of philosophy commencing well before the siege of Athens.

²⁹ See *Ep.* 108.3.

³⁰ At *Nat. Quaest.* 7.32.2 Seneca refers to the Sextians alongside the Academy and the school of Pythagoras as if it were a distinct philosophical school to which one might claim to belong.

3. Stoicism

It was from Attalus, then, that Seneca probably gained his introduction to Stoicism. Whatever Stoic texts may have been available in Rome at the time, Attalus would presumably have had access to even more during his time in Pergamum, so it seems reasonable to assume that Seneca would have had access to a wide range of Stoic material, even if some of his knowledge was only second hand.³¹ One of the consequences of the decentralization of philosophy that took place in the previous century was an increased focus on the foundational texts of each philosophical school by its members.³² It seems likely that Seneca would have spent much time reading the canonical texts of the early Stoics.³³ There is some evidence of such reading in his philosophical works. The founder of the Athenian Stoa was, of course, Zeno of Citium, and Seneca mentions him throughout his works.³⁴ He also quotes from “our Zeno” (*Zenon noster*) a number of times, although in a number of cases only to mock his syllogisms, and it is difficult to detect any specific influence.³⁵ Seneca also had access to texts by Zeno’s pupil and successor as Scholarch, Cleanthes of Assos, and he

³¹ We know that quite technical Stoic texts did make it to Italy by this time, thanks to the fragments of Chrysippus’ *Λογικὰ ζητήματα* found at Herculaneum (*PHerc* 307). Note also Cicero’s reference to Lucullus’ library of Stoic texts (*Fin.* 3.7) and the report that Seneca’s younger contemporary Persius owned a substantial collection of works by Chrysippus (Suetonius *Vit. Pers.*).

³² On this see Sedley 2003b: 36-7.

³³ A little later we find a number of passages in Arrian’s reports of Epictetus’ lectures that indicate that much time was spent reading through works by Chrysippus, although Epictetus warns against forsaking philosophy for philology; see e.g. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.4.14, 1.17.13-18, 2.23.44.

³⁴ Seneca mentions Zeno at *Ep.* 6.6, 22.11, 33.4,7,9, 64.10, 82.9, 83.9-11,17, 104.21, 108.38, *De Ira* 1.16.7, *Vit. Beat.* 18.1, *De Otio* 1.4, 3.1,2, 6.4,5, *Tranq. An.* 1.10, 14.3, *Brev. Vit.* 14.5, *Ad Helv.* 12.4, *Ben.* 4.39.1-2, 7.8.2, *Nat. Quaest.* 7.19.1.

³⁵ See e.g. *Ep.* 82.9 (= *SVF* 1.196), 83.9 (= *SVF* 1.229); note also *De Ira* 1.16.7 (= *SVF* 1.215), *De Otio* 3.2 (= *SVF* 1.271), *Tranq. An.* 14.3 (= *SVF* 1.277).

translates into Latin some lines from Cleanthes for the benefit of Lucilius.³⁶ The most important of the early Stoics, however, was Cleanthes' successor, Chrysippus of Soli. Seneca mentions him frequently,³⁷ usually in glowing terms, although he is willing to criticize Chrysippus where necessary.³⁸ Given the importance of Chrysippus to subsequent Stoics, a number of scholars have tried to point to Chrysippean sources behind some of Seneca's works, especially his longer essays such as *De Beneficiis* and *De Ira*.³⁹ However, in general there is little explicit debt to or sustained engagement with the Stoa's canonical early texts. Occasional quotations and allusions suggest familiarity but there is no effort on Seneca's part to join the slowly developing commentary tradition within ancient philosophy. Instead, like his Stoic compatriot Epictetus a little later, Seneca warns against becoming a philologist at the expense of philosophy, which, again like Epictetus, is for him above all a way of life.⁴⁰ Seneca's debt to the early Stoa is, then, a broad philosophical debt of the sort shared by any admirer of the Stoic philosophy, but it is nevertheless a genuine debt to the orthodox Stoicism exemplified by Chrysippus.⁴¹

³⁶ See *Ep.* 107.10-11 (= *SVF* 1.527). The same lines are preserved in Greek in Epictetus *Ench.* 53 (= *SVF* *ibid.*). See also *Ep.* 108.10 (= *SVF* 1.487) and *Ben.* 5.14.1 (= *SVF* 1.580). Beyond these passages, Seneca also mentions Cleanthes at *Ep.* 6.6, 33.4, 7-8, 44.3, 64.10, 94.4-5, 113.23, *De Otio* 6.5, *Tranq. An.* 1.10, *Ben.* 6.11.1-2, 6.12.2.

³⁷ Seneca mentions Chrysippus at *Ep.* 9.14, 22.11, 33.4, 56.3, 104.22, 108.38, 113.23, *Const. Sap.* 17.1, *De Otio* 3.1, 6.4-5, 8.1, *Tranq. An.* 1.10, *Ben.* 1.3.8-9, 1.4.1, 2.17.3, 2.25.3, 3.22.1, 7.8.2.

³⁸ See *Ben.* 1.3.8-4.4 (= *SVF* 2.1082).

³⁹ For a Chrysippean source behind *De Ira* see Fillion-Lahille 1984: 51-118 and 1989: 1619-26, with critical discussion in Inwood 2005: 27 ff. Braund 2009: 22 suggests a Chrysippean influence behind *De Beneficiis*, citing Chaumartin 1985, although in fact the latter suggests that the main source standing behind *De Beneficiis* is the Περὶ Καρίτων of Hecaton. Seneca mentions both Chrysippus and Hecaton at *Ben.* 1.3.8-9.

⁴⁰ For Seneca's famous warning against philology see *Ep.* 108.23 (within the context of reminiscing about the examples set by Sotion and Attalus). For parallel sentiments in Epictetus see n. 33 above. For how the Stoics conceived philosophy see Sellars 2003.

⁴¹ Inwood 2005: 47-8 argues for Seneca's orthodoxy and agreement with Chrysippus on issues relating to psychology and the emotions, against charges of innovation; compare *De Ira* 1.7.4 with Chrysippus *apud* Galen *Plac. Hipp. Plat.* 4.2.8-18 (= *SVF* 3.462).

Just like any Stoic, then, Seneca owes a debt to the early Stoa. But what about the so-called ‘middle Stoa’? The division between an early and a middle Stoa has recently been called into question.⁴² On the traditional view, members of the middle Stoa watered down the high ideals of the early Stoa, shifting focus from the moral perfectionism embodied in the idealized sage to the everyday moral concerns of real individuals. This shift in concern is most evident in the views of Panaetius, and Seneca is one of our key sources here:

I think that Panaetius gave a very neat answer to a certain youth who asked him whether the wise man should become a lover: ‘As to the wise man, we shall see later; but you and I, who are as yet far removed from wisdom, should not trust ourselves to fall into a state that is disordered, uncontrolled, enslaved to another, contemptible to itself.’⁴³

Seneca cites this with approval. Cicero suggests that this shift in focus evident with Panaetius, and perhaps initiated by Diogenes of Babylon, was the product of the influence of Plato and Aristotle on these two Stoics.⁴⁴ He adds that the shift in emphasis in ethics was mirrored by a similar shift in political philosophy as well.⁴⁵ These two shifts are evident throughout

⁴² The idea of a distinctive ‘Middle Stoa’ inaugurated by Panaetius was first proposed in Schmekel 1892; see Dyck 1996: 17. For a recent questioning of the notion see Sedley 2003a: 23-4.

⁴³ *Ep.* 116.5 (= Panaetius fr. 114 Straaten 1952): *Eleganter mihi videtur Panaetius respondisse adulescentulo cuidam quaerenti an sapiens amator esset. “De sapiente” inquit “videbimus: mihi et tibi, qui adhuc a sapiente longe absumus, non est committendum ut incidamus in rem commotam, impotentem, alteri emancipatam, vilem sibi”.*

⁴⁴ See Cicero, *Fin.* 4.79 (= fr. 55 Straaten 1952), *Tusc.* 1.79 (= fr. 56/83 Straaten 1952). On the influence of Plato and Aristotle see Frede 1999: 782-5.

⁴⁵ See Cicero *Leg.* 3.13-14 (= fr. 48/61 Straaten 1952). On the political shift see Sellars 2007: 20-4.

Seneca's work: a practical concern with moral improvement for the imperfect and a pragmatic desire to engage in the messy world of real politics. Do these two features of Seneca's work indicate the influence of Panaetius?

While some have argued that Seneca is following Panaetius here,⁴⁶ others have suggested that these apparent shifts away from the orthodox Stoa merely illustrate Seneca's own 'epistemic humility': Seneca prefers to focus on those things to which he has ready access via his everyday experience.⁴⁷ One thing is clear, however, namely that Seneca rarely mentions Panaetius in his works compared with his frequent references to the early Stoic triumvirate of Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus. Beyond the quotation cited above, Seneca mentions Panaetius just twice and neither instance is significant.⁴⁸ There is, then, little explicit evidence for a strong direct Panaetian influence on Seneca.

In marked contrast to this lack of engagement with Panaetius, Seneca often mentions and quotes from Posidonius, especially in the *Epistulae morales* and the *Naturales quaestiones*.⁴⁹ Posidonius' interests in physical phenomena are well attested, so it should come as no surprise to find Seneca drawing on his work in the *Naturales quaestiones*, and within the same context

⁴⁶ See e.g. Cooper and Procopé 1995: xvii.

⁴⁷ See Inwood 2005: 3.

⁴⁸ See *Ep.* 33.4 (= fr. 53 Straaten 1952) and *Nat. Quaest.* 7.30.2 (= fr. 75 Straaten 1952). In the former his name appears in a list of Stoics; in the latter he is cited for his view on comets. Neither offers evidence for an influence of the sort under discussion.

⁴⁹ Seneca mentions Posidonius at *Ep.* 33.4, 83.10, 88.21-8, 90.5, 7-13, 20-25, 30-32, 95.65-6, 104.22, 108.38, 121.1 and *Nat. Quaest.* 2.26.4, 6, 2.54.1-3, 4.3.2, 6.17.3, 6.21.2, 6.24.6, 7.20.1, 4, 7.21.1, and he quotes Posidonius at *Ep.* 78.28, 90.7, 22-3, 25, 31-2, 94.38, 113.28 and *Nat. Quaest.* 1.5.10, 12.

Seneca also draws on the work of Posidonius' pupil Asclepiodotus.⁵⁰ Beyond these explicit references, a number of scholars have argued that Posidonius forms an important implicit source for Seneca's discussion of anger in the second book of *De Ira*.⁵¹ The reason for positing a Posidonian influence in this work seems to have been to explain the apparently dualistic turn that Seneca takes here in his psychology. However, it has recently been argued that no such turn exists and Seneca's position is more orthodox than some have supposed.⁵² Consequently there is no need to posit a hidden Posidonian source behind Seneca's text. Nevertheless, we can see that in general Seneca makes good use of material from Posidonius, citing him as an authoritative Stoic standing alongside Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus.⁵³

4. Other Greek Philosophical Influences

Alongside Seneca's obvious debt to a number of earlier Stoics, his philosophical works also include references to a wide array of other ancient philosophers.⁵⁴ It will not be possible to discuss all of these here, many of which are of limited significance. Of those that are of greater significance,

⁵⁰ Asclepiodotus is cited by Seneca at *Nat. Quaest.* 2.26.2,6, 2.30.1, 5.15.1, 6.17.3, 6.22.2. On this Asclepiodotus, one of a number of ancient philosophers with that name, see Goulet 1994. He is thought to be the author of a short extant treatise on military tactics.

⁵¹ For example Holler 1934: 16-24 (with Inwood 2005: 41-2) and Fillion-Lahille 1984: 121-99 and 1989: 1626-32 (with Inwood 2005: 28, 33).

⁵² See Inwood 2005: 23-64. There is also the question of just how heterodox Posidonius' psychology really was, and whether our principal source for his views, Galen, is entirely reliable, on which see Gill 2006: 266-90.

⁵³ Or sometimes *not* citing him, but simply listing him alongside other eminent Stoics when making the point that philosophy ought not to rely upon quotations from authorities; see e.g. *Ep.* 33.3-4 (= T54 Edelstein-Kidd 1972), 108.36-8 (= T55 Edelstein-Kidd 1972).

⁵⁴ For a complete annotated list of Seneca's references to other philosophers see Motto 1970: 143-60.

the one that has attracted the most attention is Epicurus.⁵⁵ Many readers have noticed that Seneca frequently quotes from Epicurus in his correspondence with Lucilius, especially in the early letters.⁵⁶ Indeed, Epicurus is mentioned more often than any other philosopher in Seneca's prose works, and we might also note that Lucretius is the most cited poet.⁵⁷ How are we to explain this taste for Epicureanism in the works of a supposedly committed Stoic? A number of explanations have been offered. One is to call into question Seneca's commitment to the Stoa and brand him a philosophically muddled eclectic.⁵⁸ Another is to suggest a complex pedagogic strategy within the correspondence to Lucilius, in which Seneca gently tries to draw in his Epicurean addressee at the opening of the exchange by offering him familiar tit-bits.⁵⁹ A third suggests a subtle literary nod to Epicurus in order to indicate to readers that the correspondence with Lucilius is consciously modelled on the form (though not the content) of Epicurus' own philosophical letters.⁶⁰ It may well be that the reason is far more prosaic; Seneca simply happened to be reading Epicurus at the time that he started the correspondence and wanted to share some of what he found. We needn't take this as a sign of burgeoning

⁵⁵ Seneca mentions Epicurus too often to list them all here; for a complete list see Motto 1970: 150-1.

⁵⁶ Any attempt to discuss the motivations at work behind the *Epistulae morales* will open up questions about the status of these texts, such as whether the correspondence is genuine. It is not possible to address this issue here, on which there is a considerable literature. For a helpful overview of the *status quaestiones* and further references see Inwood 2007a: xii-xv, with further recent discussion in Wilson 2001 and Inwood 2007b. Inwood follows Griffin (1976: 416-19) in claiming that the correspondence is "essentially fictitious" (Inwood 2007b: 134). The matter is complicated further by the fact that the collection of letters that has come down to us appears to be incomplete (on which see Reynolds 1965: 17).

⁵⁷ For a list of Seneca's references to Lucretius see Motto 1970: 26. Braund 2009: 28-30 suggests a further potential Epicurean influence on Seneca, in the form of Philodemus in the *De Clementia*.

⁵⁸ See Rist 1989 for a discussion of Seneca's status as a Stoic, although Rist doesn't explicitly address the Epicurean element within the letters to Lucilius.

⁵⁹ See e.g. Hadot 1995: 210.

⁶⁰ See Inwood 2007a: xiv and 2007b: 142-6.

eclecticism either, for, as Seneca himself often says, Epicurus' wisdom is not the sole property of his disciples but rather belongs to all humankind.⁶¹ The fact that Seneca feels the need to make these apologies to Lucilius for quoting Epicurus also counts against the suggestion that Lucilius was an Epicurean waiting to be converted.⁶² The Epicurean apophthegms that Seneca does share function more as examples of generic philosophical wisdom than samples of specifically Epicurean doctrine. If they do have a pedagogic function then it is more likely as part of an exhortation to the philosophical life as such. It is also worth noting that beyond the correspondence with Lucilius Seneca can often be quite hostile towards Epicurus.⁶³

Stepping back further, beyond the Hellenistic schools, we see fairly limited interest in or engagement with the great Athenian philosophers that came before: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Seneca mentions Socrates a number of times, usually as an idealized model of a philosopher, but there is little by way of explicit philosophical influence beyond the wider Socratic flavour of the Stoicism that permeates his work as a whole.⁶⁴ This is in marked contrast to Epictetus a few decades later, for whom Socrates figures far more prominently.⁶⁵

Seneca also has little to say explicitly about Plato, beyond a series of generally praiseworthy remarks,⁶⁶ but he does engage with the Platonism

⁶¹ See e.g. *Ep.* 8.8, 12.11, 14.17, 16.7, 21.9, 33.2. These remarks appear in the opening part of the correspondence where Seneca quotes Epicurus most often. It's also worth noting that Seneca does not restrict himself to Epicurus and often mentions other leading Epicureans too, such as Hermarchus and Metrodorus (see e.g. *Ep.* 6.6, 33.4).

⁶² For the claim that Lucilius was aphilosophical see Motto 1970: xvii n. 25.

⁶³ See e.g. *Ben.* 4.19.1-4.

⁶⁴ For a full list of Seneca's references to Socrates see Motto 1970: 156-8.

⁶⁵ For Epictetus' debt to Socrates see Long 2002.

⁶⁶ See the list in Motto 1970: 154-5.

of his day in one of his few forays into metaphysics.⁶⁷ In *Letter 58* Seneca discusses the nature of being (τὸ ὄν) and recounts a Platonic hierarchy of six senses of being, in marked opposition to the orthodox Stoic account in which being is limited to bodies and (along with certain incorporeals denied being) subsumed under a higher genus of ‘something’ (τί). However, rather than merely oppose this Platonic account to the Stoic position that we might expect him to hold, it has been suggested that Seneca’s account is the syncretic product of a dialogue between the two schools: elements of Stoic ontology are now incorporated within a Platonic schema.⁶⁸ However, Seneca’s stated aim in the letter is simply to present to Lucilius Plato’s account of being, and he doesn’t explicitly commit himself to holding the account he presents.⁶⁹ A little later in the correspondence, in *Letter 65*, Seneca returns to Platonic metaphysics, and is critical of both Platonic and Aristotelian accounts of cause, although the position he outlines in response is not that of an orthodox Stoic.⁷⁰ There is little general evidence for the claim that Seneca was drawn particularly towards Platonism.⁷¹

As we have just seen, Seneca also engages with Aristotle in his works.⁷² He straightforwardly rejects the central Peripatetic doctrines on the emotions and the significance of externals, in just the way that one would expect an orthodox Stoic to do.⁷³ But Seneca does make good use of Aristotle’s

⁶⁷ The key texts here are *Ep.* 58 and 65, on which see Rist 1989: 2010-11, Sedley 2005: 122-38, Inwood 2007c (with references to earlier literature in Sedley 2005: 122 n. 13).

⁶⁸ See e.g. Sedley 2005: 125.

⁶⁹ See e.g. *Ep.* 58.16.

⁷⁰ At *Ep.* 65.11, for instance, Seneca suggests that time and place must be counted among causes.

⁷¹ Rist 1989: 2010 claims that “Seneca’s ‘unorthodoxies’ tend towards Platonism”. It has also been suggested that Seneca Platonizes when he discusses the soul and body, in e.g. *Ep.* 92.1-2, although this seems mistaken; see Inwood 2005: 38-41.

⁷² For a list of Seneca’s references to Aristotle see Motto 1970: 145.

⁷³ On anger see e.g. *De Ira* 1.9.2, 1.17.1, 3.3.1; on externals see *Ben.* 5.13.1.

meteorological research in the *Naturales Quaestiones*,⁷⁴ and in the same place he also draws on the physical researches of Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus.⁷⁵ It is in the *Naturales Quaestiones* that we also see Seneca draw on material from the Presocratics, mainly for their physical theories, and he cites Thales, Anaxagoras, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, among others.⁷⁶

5. Orthodoxy

The presence of this wide variety of philosophical influences upon Seneca has led some to ask whether Seneca is in fact an orthodox Stoic.⁷⁷ It seems fairly clear that Seneca is a Stoic, although one open to outside influences.⁷⁸ This openness to other philosophical influences has traditionally been held to be a characteristic of the so-called Middle Stoa exemplified by Panaetius and Posidonius.⁷⁹ However, recent scholarship has argued that this openness was a feature of Stoicism from the very beginning, and that the innovation supposedly introduced by Panaetius has been overstated.⁸⁰ Indeed, Seneca himself notes disagreements between Cleanthes and Chrysippus in order to justify his own independence of thought while remaining a committed member of the Stoic tradition.⁸¹ So, in this respect it seems that Seneca does not deviate from many of his Stoic predecessors.

⁷⁴ See *Nat. Quaest.* 1.1.2, 1.3.7, 1.8.6, 2.12.4-6, 6.13.1-2, 6.14.1, 7.5.4, 7.30.1.

⁷⁵ See *Nat. Quaest.* 3.11.2-5, 3.16.5, 3.25.4,7, 3.26.2, 4.2.16, 6.13.1-2, 7.28.3.

⁷⁶ See e.g. *Nat. Quaest.* 2.12.3, 2.18.1, 2.19.1, 3.13.1, 3.14.1-3, 4.2.17,22, 4.3.6, 6.6.1-4, 6.9.1-2, 6.10.1-2, 7.5.3. We have already noted a Pythagorean influence on Seneca, via Sextius; see n. 17 above.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Rist 1989.

⁷⁸ See Inwood 2005: 2.

⁷⁹ See n. 42 above.

⁸⁰ See esp. Sedley 2003a: 23-4.

⁸¹ See *Ep.* 113.23 (= *SVF* 1.525; 2.836).

As he himself writes, “we [Stoics] are not subject to a despot”.⁸² He is a committed Stoic, without being an unthinking disciple of Chrysippus.⁸³

6. Contemporaries

Having considered the most important of Seneca’s predecessors, let us now turn briefly to consider some of his contemporaries, beginning with those whom he knew very well. Seneca’s immediate circle included a number of philosophers and poets who shared his Stoic outlook. The most significant of these was probably Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, born in Lybia and possibly a slave in Seneca’s household.⁸⁴ Cornutus wrote philosophical, grammatical, and rhetorical works, in both Greek and Latin, of which his *Theologiae graecae compendium* survives, offering allegorical interpretations of traditional Greek mythology, following a tradition already well established within the Stoa.⁸⁵ He is also known to have dabbled in metaphysics.⁸⁶ Like Seneca, Cornutus was exiled from Rome by Nero, but before his exile Cornutus taught in the city and his pupils included two famous Stoics within Seneca’s circle: Lucan and Persius. Lucan, author of *Pharsalia*, was the son of Seneca’s younger brother, Lucius Annaeus Mela. His epic poem draws on a number of Stoic themes but perhaps the most striking Stoic element in the *Pharsalia* is the portrait of Cato the Younger,

⁸² *Ep.* 33.4: *non sumus sub rege*. See also *De Otio* 3.1.

⁸³ On Stoicism and the question of orthodoxy see Sellars 2006: 10–11. For a concise defence of Seneca as a Stoic and a philosopher see Inwood 2007a: xix.

⁸⁴ For biographical information see Fuentes González 1994: 462–6.

⁸⁵ On the *Compendium* see e.g. Most 1989 and Boys-Stones 2007, who both supply references to further literature. For fragments of his other works see Reppe 1906.

⁸⁶ See Sedley 2005: 117, who notes the survival of a book title attributed to Cornutus in *POxy* 3649, Περὶ ἐκτῶν β (on which see Cockle 1984: 12–13). As well as this hint at a concern with metaphysics, Cornutus is also reported to have written a work entitled *Against Athenodorus and Aristotle*, responding to Athenodorus’ work *Against Aristotle’s Categories*. See Porphyry in *Cat.* 86,23–4 and Simplicius in *Cat.* 62,24 with Hijmans 1975: 106–9.

by now canonized as the archetypal example of a Roman Stoic sage.⁸⁷ In his admiration for Cato, Lucan followed his uncle. Within the same circle around Seneca we also find the satirist Persius who, after losing his father, became a charge of Cornutus and a friend of Lucan.⁸⁸ Persius dedicated his fifth satire to his teacher Cornutus and, after dying young, left to Cornutus both his library and the task of posthumously editing his works. In his philosophical outlook Persius was a committed Stoic, embracing a rigorous version of Stoicism that he may have contrasted with Seneca's supposedly more moderate Stoicism.

Beyond this immediate circle of Stoics, we also know of other contemporary philosophers who contributed to Seneca's intellectual world. The most important was probably Demetrius the Cynic, who has been described as one of Seneca's "living heroes", and whose influence may well have contributed to Seneca's taste for practical moral exhortation over formal philosophical argument.⁸⁹ Seneca admired Demetrius' poverty and simplicity of life, as well as his commitment to conceiving philosophy as a practical guide to living. This admiration for an austere Cynic contrasts with the common image of Seneca as a moderate Stoic, some distance from the more rigorous end of the Stoa.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ On Stoic themes in Lucan see Colish 1990: 252-75, with references to further literature at 252-3.

⁸⁸ On Persius and his Stoicism see Colish 1990: 194-203.

⁸⁹ Seneca mentions Demetrius at *Ep.* 20.9, 62.3, 67.14, 91.19, *Prov.* 3.3, 5.5-6, *Vit. Beat.* 18.3, *Nat. Quaest.* 4.Prol.7-8, *Ben.* 7.1.3-7, 7.2.1, 7.8.2, 7.11.1-2. On Demetrius see Billerbeck 1979 and, within the wider context of Roman Cynicism, Goulet-Cazé 1990: 2768-73, Griffin 1996, and Trapp 2007a. The phrase "living heroes" comes from Griffin 2007: 89. On exhortation over argument see Griffin 1996: 200.

⁹⁰ While Griffin stresses Seneca's admiration for Demetrius, Inwood 2005: 16 suggests that his influence on Seneca was probably minimal, citing Demetrius' "argument *against* the study of physical problems" reported by Seneca himself at *Ben.* 7.1.5 and contrasting with Seneca's own interest in such problems in the *Naturales quaestiones*. However, Demetrius doesn't argue *against* the study of nature, he simply notes that some details may be passed over without great loss: *non multum tibi nocebit transisse, quae nec licet scire nec prodest.*

Alongside these figures whom Seneca knew personally, a number of other contemporaries deserve a brief mention.⁹¹ The first of these is the Stoic Chaeremon who, like Seneca, is reported to have taught the Emperor Nero.⁹² If this is so then Seneca and Chaeremon may have met.⁹³ Like Cornutus, Chaeremon followed the Stoic practice of offering allegorical interpretations of myths, in this case drawn from Egyptian religion, reflecting his position as a scholar in Alexandria. Although Seneca and Chaeremon may have met and may have appreciated one another as fellow Stoics, they inhabited quite different intellectual worlds. A second noteworthy Stoic of the first century is Musonius Rufus, with whom Seneca may have had more in common.⁹⁴ Musonius came from an Etruscan family of the equestrian order. Like Seneca, Perseus, Demetrius, and many others, Musonius found himself a victim of Nero, banished to the island of Gyara. He later brought charges against Publius Egnatius Celer for the latter's involvement in the deaths of the Stoics Thrasea Paetus and Barea Soranus.⁹⁵ Celer was defended by Demetrius, creating the odd spectacle of a Stoic and Cynic fighting in opposing corners of the court. Musonius' philosophy was resolutely practical and exercised an important influence on Epictetus. In particular it displayed a concern with self-examination and practical training of the sort exemplified by the Sextians that would prove to be such an important influence on Seneca. However, there is no evidence

⁹¹ It seems likely that Seneca knew Demetrius personally, although we cannot be sure; see Griffin 1976: 311-12.

⁹² See Suda *s.v.* Ἀλέξανδρος Αἰγαῖος = Chaeremon Test. 3 (in Horst 1987: 2). On Chaeremon see Horst 1987 (containing fragments with facing translation) and Frede 1989.

⁹³ While some have suggested Chaeremon preceded Seneca in the role of Nero's tutor, others have suggested they held roles concurrently; see Horst 1987: ix and 81.

⁹⁴ On Musonius see Lutz 1947, containing text, facing translation, and an extensive introduction. Note also Laurenti 1989.

⁹⁵ See Tacitus *Ann.* 16.21-35.

of any direct contact between Seneca and Musonius, or of any indirect influence. The diatribes that have come down to us under Musonius' name are written in Greek, marking a return to Greek as the natural language of philosophy.⁹⁶ The century or so of Latin philosophy exemplified by Cicero, Lucretius, and Seneca came to an end soon after Seneca's death. Seneca stands as the only Stoic to write in Latin and, indeed, one of the few philosophers of any school in pagan antiquity who tried to do philosophy in Latin.⁹⁷

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⁹⁶ Musonius' diatribes are generally thought to be reports made by a pupil, Lucius; see Lutz 1947: 7. We have already noted that of the works of the bilingual Cornutus, the only surviving work is in Greek. Musonius' pupil Epictetus wrote nothing but he lectured in Greek, and his lectures were recorded by Arrian. A little later the Emperor Marcus Aurelius chose to write his *Meditations* in Greek. We might also note the ethical treatise of Hierocles, in Greek, also dating from the Imperial period.

⁹⁷ In contrast to merely translating Greek materials into Latin, in the manner of Cicero and Lucretius. See n. 11 above.

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