

## **Pre-Emotions and Reader Emotions in Seneca** *De Ira and Epistulae Morales*

It is well known that the description and management of common emotions like anger, grief, fear, and desire is a central theme of Seneca's work. He develops his literary profile around this theme from the earliest phase of his writings, with the three Consolations and especially the *De Ira*, and is still deeply involved with the theme in the last extant volume of the *Epistulae Morales*. In general, he speaks as a committed advocate for the Stoic position on the emotions, which insists that all the responses properly called emotions (*pathē*) are moral errors and should be eliminated in favor of the tranquil demeanor of the sage. At the same time (and this too is well known) Seneca is also a highly skilled writer and rhetorician. As such, he tends to be extraordinarily thoughtful about the writer's art, and in particular about the power of good writing to stir a visceral response in the reader. In today's session, I would like to consider the point of intersection between these two central concerns of our author. My questions are about the psychological model Seneca has in mind when he refers to emotions, or emotion-like reactions, that occur while reading. How does this model compare with the general Stoic analysis of the emotions? Is it consistent over time? And what are its ethical implications?

Ultimately, the case I want to make is that on this issue, Seneca actually goes beyond his Stoic predecessors. While he intends to conform to their position, he also extends that position, developing a possibility that is otherwise only implicit in Stoic theory. His ability to articulate the thought is limited, however, because what leads him to innovate is not simply his philosophical understanding; rather, it is his experience and intuitions as a creator of effective texts. Consequently he shows us, more than tells us, where his ideas are headed.

I will proceed as follows. First, I will give a general overview of the position Seneca adopts throughout his works on the psychological causes of emotional response. I have argued elsewhere<sup>1</sup> that this position is in its essentials that of the older Stoic school; here, I only sketch the position in its broad outlines, as an aid for those who are not familiar with it. Once that is done, I will turn more specifically to the emotional experience of readers. I trace the position

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<sup>1</sup> I argue more substantively for this reading of Seneca's position in "Action and Emotion," in *Brill's Companion to Seneca: Philosopher and Dramatist*, edited by Gregor Damschen and Andreas Heil (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2014)

Seneca takes on that issue in his early work *On Anger*; it is quite a radical view and one that tends to limit the prospects for therapeutic writing. Finally, I turn to the *Letters*, where we can observe how Seneca depicts the reading event as well as how he describes it. Reading with attention, we can find in this work the beginnings of a different position on the feelings of readers, a position that is ultimately more satisfying both from a literary and from a philosophical standpoint.

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In his treatise *On Anger*, Seneca makes a great effort to convey to his readers a particular understanding of the psychological causes of that emotion. For our purposes it is helpful to begin with the basics of that position, which is indeed consistent with the position he takes throughout his works. The essential point is made very clearly in passage A, from early in Book 1. In brief, what this passage says is that anger is not, as some people suppose, a purely natural and involuntary reaction. Rather, it is a choice that one makes when one perceives one's situation in a certain way. It may be a disastrous choice for oneself, and the feeling it engenders may be impossible to control, but it is nonetheless a choice. Indeed, the uncontrollable force of the anger impulse is a reason for us to refrain from anger altogether. It is like throwing yourself off a cliff: once you do that, you can no longer decide *not* to do it, but you do have a choice at the outset, whether to do it or not. It is an *action* that you perform.

The beginning of Book 2 supplies us with more details about the choice that takes place when one becomes angry. Here, Seneca argues that anger is not like an involuntary reaction because an involuntary response is only a very simple mental event (*simplex*). Anger is more complex ; it is *compositus*, requiring that two or more perceptions be linked together in our minds.

*Iram quin species oblata iniuriae moueat non est dubium; sed utrum speciem ipsam statim sequatur et non accedente animo excurrat, an illo adsentiente moueatur quaerimus. Nobis placet nihil illam per se audere sed animo adprobante; nam speciem capere acceptae iniuriae et ultionem eius concupiscere et utrumque coniungere, nec laedi se debuisse et uindicari debere, non est eius impetus qui sine uoluntate nostra concitatur. Ille simplex est, hic compositus et plura continens: intellexit aliquid, indignatus est, damnauit, ulciscitur: haec non possunt fieri, nisi animus eis quibus tangebatur adsensus est.*

That anger is stimulated by an impression of injury is not in doubt; what we are asking is whether it follows immediately upon the impression itself, rushing forth without the mind's agreement, or whether it is generated when the mind assents. We hold that anger dares nothing on its own; rather, it comes about with the mind giving its approval. For to gain an impression of injury received, and conceive a desire for revenge, and to link together the two ideas that one ought not to have been wronged and that one ought to

take revenge—none of this is characteristic of that impulse that is stirred involuntarily. The one is simple (*simplex*), the other complex, made up of many things: it understands something, thinks it wrong, condemns it, and punishes it. These things cannot happen unless the mind assents to that which impinges upon it.

In order for a response to count as anger, one has to have made a connection between, at minimum, two thoughts: (1) an impression that one has been unjustly harmed (*speciem acceptae iniuriae*), and (2) the thought that one ought to get revenge (*se vindicari debere*). One cannot have an actual desire for revenge unless one has both these points in mind together – but that is a sort of calculation, an act of reasoning:

1. I have just received an injury;
2. An injury is unjust harm;
3. When unjustly harmed, I ought to take revenge;

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Therefore, I ought now to take revenge.

Such implicit reasoning, Seneca holds, is characteristic of human action, properly so called: it is the very feature that makes a response *voluntary*, that is, up to us or a matter of choice.

Now, this view of anger is very much in keeping with the general view of emotions within Hellenistic Stoicism, as known to us from other sources. Fragments quoted by various authors from the works of Zeno and Chrysippus, founders of the Stoic school during the third century BCE, match closely with all the points I have just mentioned, as does the very full explanation in Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3 and 4, which drew heavily from Chrysippus' treatise *On the Passions*.<sup>2</sup> These other sources show us also how the reasoning process works with other emotions. In each case, one has an impression concerning some object that one perceives as either good or bad, beneficial or harmful. One sees such an object as either present to oneself or about to happen to oneself, and then one links that impression with a belief about how one ought to respond. These combine into what I sometimes label “the pathetic syllogism” [C]:

1. Objects of type T are good/bad.

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<sup>2</sup> My analysis is laid out in full in M. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago, 2007), which gives the evidence for the account that follows. Concerning the sources of Cicero's account, see Appendix C to my commentary (*Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputations 3-4*; Chicago, 2002), together with Teun Tieleman, *Chrysippus' On Affections: Reconstruction and interpretation* (Leiden, 2003).

2. If some good/bad circumstance is present or in prospect, it is appropriate for me to have X reaction.
3. Object O, being of type T, is now present or in prospect.

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It is now appropriate for me to have X reaction.

In the case of fear, for instance, one recognizes some object that one believes is bad, like injury or illness, as likely to happen in the near future, and as the sort of thing that merits the characteristic response of alarm. Similarly with distress, one is responding to a perceived bad thing as already present, and in the same way delight responds to present goods and desire to goods in prospect. This gives rise to the standard fourfold classification of ordinary emotions seen in many authors. These are the genera of which further kinds of emotion are the species; for instance, anger is classified as a type of desire, a desire for revenge.

If we ask then why the ordinary emotions are regarded by Stoics as moral errors that one ought to try to eliminate, the easy answer is that every one of them implies some kind of belief about the value of external objects. A fear of illness implies that illness is thought of as bad; delight in winning the lottery implies that getting a lot of money is thought of as good. But it is an axiom of Stoic ethics that only that which belongs to one's own character or conduct is good or bad for oneself. Externals like money, reputation, or even health are not what determine the overall goodness of one's life. If we were truly wise by Stoic standards, we would get this right, and so would not experience any emotion that conforms to this familiar model.

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A further clarification is in order. We see that in Stoic thought, an emotion is a judgment with certain content. However, this does not preclude its being also a corporeal change with certain phenomenological characteristics. A persistent pattern of Stoic terminology designates emotional reactions not only as judgments but also as alterations in the material psyche. For instance, delight is an "elevation" of the psyche; distress a "lowering" of the psyche; fear a "shrinking" or "withdrawing". These psychic movements are what happens physically when one has an emotion, and it is my belief that they explain the way emotions feel to us: the psyche, by its inherent property of sensitivity, is aware of its own movements. But this feeling is not what

the emotion *is*: the psychic movement merely supervenes on the judgment. That is to say that every such judgment is accompanied some one of the psychophysical movements, but not every such movement has to have been produced by such a judgment.

This leaves open the possibility that one might experience an “elevation” or “lowering” or “shrinking” even when not having an emotion. One can tremble when not afraid; the heart can race even when one is not upset. The evidence on this issue from the early Stoa is difficult to interpret, but there is at least one fragment of Chrysippus’s treatise that refers to it [E]. It concerns cases of involuntary weeping and involuntary laughter, linking these in some way with what Chrysippus calls “the beginnings of the circumstances bringing about the movement.”<sup>3</sup> The idea seems to be that the feelings and corporeal manifestations we have in emotion sometimes come about even before one has had a chance to decide what is going on. In that moment, they really are involuntary, and by the same token they are not yet emotions – indeed they may never become emotions, if we do not make the relevant judgment. Later authors will use the term “pre-emotion,” *propatheia*, to refer to this point.<sup>4</sup>

And beyond this, Stoic psychology also includes another way that emotional responses may be free of fault. The Stoic sage—the person of perfect wisdom who is the moral exemplar in this system—has some responses that one could say are emotional in nature, but that aren’t counted as regular emotions by the Stoics. Cicero and other sources list joy in present goods, wishing for prospective goods, and “caution” (or in some texts “boldness”) toward prospective evils. The Greek term is *eupatheiai*. These wise reactions differ from the ordinary emotions, the *pathē*, primarily in the nature of their objects. Ordinary people respond to external things, regarding them as goods or evils; as we’ve seen, such judgments are false in the Stoic system of value, and it is primarily for that reason that ordinary emotions count as moral errors. Clearly the Stoic sage is not making that mistake in evaluation. If he responds to something as a present

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<sup>3</sup> Chrysippus, *On Emotions* [in Galen, *Precepts of Hippocrates and Plato* 4.7.16-17]: “People who are weeping stop, and people weep when they do not want to, when the impressions created by underlying facts are similar, and there is either some impediment or no impediment. For it is reasonable that in such cases [i.e., those of involuntary weeping] something happens similar [*Omitting a negative (S&E p. 229n13)*] to the way that the cessation of weeping and lamentation come to pass, but rather in the beginnings of the circumstances bringing about the movement. It is just as I said in the case of the circumstances that bring about laughter and other similar cases.”

<sup>4</sup> For the history of the term see, in addition to Graver 2007 (above note 1), M. Graver, Philo of Alexandria and the origins of the Stoic *προπάθεια*, in *Phronesis* 44 (1999), 300-325. Seneca does not have the term itself, but it is possible that he is acquainted with it: note his slightly inapposite use of the expression *principia proluentia adfectibus* in *De ira* 2. 2.5.

good, it must be because it *is* good, and this can only be true for Stoics if it is a feature of his own character or conduct. Just as the ordinary person experiences an “irrational elevation” at winning a large sum of money, so the sage experiences the “well-reasoned elevation” of joy when performing some generous or courageous action.

The philosophical writings of Seneca demonstrate a good understanding of these further aspects of Stoic theory as well. Let’s take the most recent point first. Although Seneca does not seem to know the Greek term *eupatheia* or any Latin equivalent, he does certainly know that joy is the characteristic emotional state of the Stoic sage. Joy is a major theme in his works, and although the meaning of the term is somewhat variable in his usage, he is quite capable of assigning it the canonical signification.<sup>5</sup> In *Letter 59.2 [H]*:

*Scio, inquam, et uoluptatem, si ad nostrum album uerba derigimus, rem infamem esse et gaudium nisi sapienti non contingere; est enim animi elatio suis bonis uerisque fidentis.*

I know, say I, that if we make words adhere to our statutes, then pleasure is discreditable, while joy pertains only to the wise person, for it is the elevation of a mind toward goods that are real and its own.

Seneca is also familiar with the concept of involuntary reactions prior to judgment. He gives a characteristically Stoic explanation of these in several works: already in the *Consolation to Marcia*, extensively in *De Ira*, and again later in several of the *Epistulae Morales*.<sup>6</sup> He says repeatedly that such responses are indeed natural and that they are blameless; even the sage would experience them. He also provides numerous examples. Of particular interest is the long list given in passage **I** of specific phenomena that belong to this category. Included are some low-level corporeal responses, like goosebumps when one is sprinkled with cold water; some aesthetic responses, like being moved by a gruesome painting; some sympathetic reactions, like laughing or crying when others do, and also some higher-level responses that require processing of information presented verbally: bristling at bad news or blushing at a dirty joke. What groups all these together is only that all of them fall below a certain threshold: in none of them has anyone come to believe that something good or bad has happened or is about to happen. Regardless of how they feel, they do not count as emotions, because they do not come about

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<sup>5</sup> I survey the varying signification of Seneca’s word *gaudium* in a recent article: “Anatomies of Joy: Seneca, Claranus, and the *Gaudium* Tradition,” in *Hope, Joy and Affection in the Classical World*, ed. Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster (Oxford, forthcoming 2016).

<sup>6</sup> See below, note --.

through a *judgment* of one's surroundings. The list thus serves to emphasize the determining factor of assent in the definition of emotion.

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I turn now to the second part of my topic, with a more particular interest in the strong reactions a person might experience while reading a book. Are these feelings actually emotions, *pathē*, as Seneca understands that Stoic term, or do they belong to some other category of feeling? The passage we have just been looking at offers us one very clear answer to that question.

Let's look again at Seneca's list in [I] of phenomena that do not count as emotions. There was some brief mention of reactions to music (*cantus .. et citata modulatio ... Martiusque ille tubarum sonus*) and the visual arts (*atrox pictura*): you hear a stirring melody and you feel like dancing, or rather marching; you look at a gruesome painting and you feel some sort of shock or disgust. There is a little bit also about reacting to drama, with the "comic stage-shows" (*ludicra scaenae spectacula*) and also with the mention of the "staged shipwreck" (*mimici naufragii*). But Seneca seems particularly interested in the experience of reading, and especially in the reading of historical narratives. We "think we are becoming angry" (*uidemur irasci*) -- but are not really angry -- when we read about Clodius causing Cicero's exile, and about Antony causing his death; one "gets stirred up against" the actions of Marius and Sulla; one "is annoyed" at Theodotus and Achilles, and at the child-ruler -- that is, at the people who murdered Pompey in the rowboat.



Similarly there is something that *is not fear* that "runs through the minds" of readers when Hannibal lays siege to the city after the battle of Cannae.

In all these cases, a reader is aware of some mental disturbance that resembles emotion at the level of feeling. Yet these feelings are not emotions, and the passage makes it very clear why they are not. Readers—or at least *these* readers—don't think about the material they are reading as directly involving themselves. We would be afraid if we thought Hannibal's army were

coming for *us*, but when we only read about it, we don't form that belief. We are like teenagers at a horror movie, who if they thought the things they were seeing really threatened their safety would jump up and run from the theater. Similarly, we are not really angry at Pompey's killer: if we were, we would be seeking to exact revenge upon them. It is assent that determines action: by definition, a reaction that doesn't involve assent cannot change one's behavior.

As Richard Sorabji has observed, the model Seneca uses in this passage is thus quite different from what Aristotle says in the *Poetics* about the *katharsis* effected by pity and fear.<sup>7</sup> In Aristotle, emotional response is essential to the work of art and is a primary vehicle for any lasting effect it might have on the character of the hearer. On Seneca's Stoic analysis, even the most visceral reaction is an essentially trivial phenomenon. It may perhaps be an indicator of our intelligence and sensitivity, but because it doesn't involve any new mental commitment, it *cannot* produce any change in one's character.

Let's now compare this way of describing the reactions of readers with what we find in the *Epistulae Morales*. As context, I should point out that the *Epistulae Morales* is not only Seneca's longest and most creative work; but it is also the one out of all his works that is most given to explaining, theorizing, and controlling the act of reading. Right from the outset we find already the second letter devoted entirely to the effects of philosophical reading, the approach to be taken and the potential pitfalls, and the theme is carried forward in various ways in letters 33, 38, 45, 84, and 108, and several others. Seneca, Lucilius, and all their friends seem to live amid a world of books and papers and to care deeply about their contents. At the same time the work is deeply concerned with problems of emotion. We are now quite a bit later than *De Ira*, twenty years or more, but the mature Seneca has not backed away from the Stoic analysis of the passions: quite the contrary, he explores it with much greater detail and sophistication, not forgetting to mention those emotion-like responses that take place in the absence of assent.<sup>8</sup> It

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: the Stoic Legacy* (Oxford 2000), 76: "Seneca's 'first movements' ... may provide the Stoic reply to Aristotle's theory of tragic catharsis.... Most interpretations agree that catharsis lightens emotions in the audience by first arousing them, whether catharsis is the analogue of purgation by laxative and emetic, or of religious purification. If the Stoics think they have a reply, this would also explain ... why despite their discussion of the theatre, they make virtually no reference to Aristotle's brilliant theory."

<sup>8</sup> Letter 9 gives us a careful explication of the word *apatheia*; Letter 85, a debate with the Peripatetics on the meaning of that term; Letter 116, a further debate on naturalness and moderation. Quite a few letters point out the connection between our emotional responses and the valuation placed on external objects, and a number of others explore the wise emotion of joy. The pre-emotion is mentioned frequently, notably in letters 11, 57, 71, and 99. For the remarkable passage in letter 99 see M. Graver, "The Weeping Wise: Stoic and Epicurean Consolations in



stands to reason, then, that this work of Seneca's might be especially interested in the emotional or quasi-emotional experience of readers, and might try to supply a Stoic analysis for them along the lines we have seen in *De Ira* 2. When we study the text, however, we do not ever find the feelings of readers described in terms of inconsequential emotion-like reactions. What we find is something quite different.

Let me direct your attention now to the series of passages you have in items **J** to **N** on the handout. All five of these passages offer descriptions of what we might call *reading events*: acts of reading reported not just for their content but also for their components of feeling. Not coincidentally, all five are presented from a first-person perspective, as giving Seneca's own inner sensations during the encounter with a text. Let's read through these together, and then consider what analysis of reader emotions they suggest among them.

The first three all come from the beginnings of letters. They are passages in which Seneca speaks of his inner experience when reading the intervening letters of Lucilius – since the whole premise of the *Epistulae Morales* is that it is supposed to represent one side of a two-person correspondence. Thus the beginning of letter 19 [**J**]:

*Exulto quotiens epistulas tuas accipio; implem enim me bona spe, et iam non promittunt de te sed spondent. Ita fac, oro atque obsecro--quid enim habeo melius quod amicum rogem quam quod pro ipso rogaturus sum?*

I am thrilled every time I get one of your letters. For they fill me with great hope. No longer are they making promises on your behalf; now we have a solemn pledge. Do that, I beg—no, I beseech you, for what better request can I make of my friend than what I would ask on my friend's behalf?

Similarly, the opening of letter 34 [**K**]:

*Cresco et exulto et discussa senectute recalesco quotiens ex iis quae agis ac scribis intellego quantum te ipse--nam turbam olim reliqueras--superieceris. Si agricolam arbor ad fructum perducta delectat, si pastor ex fetu gregis sui capit uoluptatem, si alumnum suum nemo aliter intuetur quam ut adulescentiam illius suam iudicet, quid euenire credis iis qui ingenia educauerunt et quae tenera formauerunt adulta subito uident?*

I swell—I exult—I shake off my years and feel again the heat of youth, each time I learn from your letters and from your actions how far you have surpassed even yourself. For you broke from the pack some time ago. If a farmer takes delight when a tree bears fruit, if a herdsman is pleased when his animals bear young, if one who sees a protégé reach adulthood always feels as if it were his own coming of age, then how do you think a person feels when he has been in charge of someone's intellectual development and sees that immature mind grown up all at once?

And again, the opening of letter 40 [**L**]:

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Seneca's 99th Epistle," in *Tears in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. T. Fögen. 235-52 (Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 2009).

*Quod frequenter mihi scribis gratias ago; nam quo uno modo potes te mihi ostendis. Numquam epistulam tuam accipio ut non protinus una simus. Si imagines nobis amicorum absentium iucundae sunt, quae memoriam renouant et desiderium falso atque inani solacio leuant, quanto iucundiores sunt litterae, quae uera amici absentis uestigia, ueras notas adferunt? Nam quod in conspectu dulcissimum est, id amici manus epistulae inpressa praestat, agnoscere.*

I am grateful to you for writing so often, for you are showing me yourself, in the only way that you can. It never fails: I receive your letter, and right away we are together. If portraits of absent friends are a delight, refreshing our memory and easing the pain of separation with a kind of comfort, though false and empty, how much more delightful are letters, which bring us real traces, real news of an absent friend! For what is sweetest about seeing someone face to face is also to be found in a letter that bears the imprint of a friend's hand—a moment of recognition.

In this same vein, but describing a different reading situation, the very short letter 46 describes what purports to be a reaction to a book authored by Lucilius that Seneca has just received as a present [M].

*Librum tuum quem mihi promiseras accepi et tamquam lecturus ex commodo adaperui ac tantum degustare uolui; deinde blanditus est ipse ut procederem longius. Qui quam disertus fuerit ex hoc intellegas licet: leuis mihi uisus est, cum esset nec mei nec tui corporis, sed qui primo aspectu aut Titi Liuii aut Epicuri posset uideri. Tanta autem dulcedine me tenuit et traxit ut illum sine ulla dilatione perlegerim. Sol me inuitabat, fames admonebat, nubes minabantur; tamen exhausti totum. Non tantum delectatus sed gauisus sum.*

*Quid ingenii iste habuit, quid animi! Dicerem 'quid impetus!', si interquieuisset, si ex interuallo surrexisset; nunc non fuit impetus sed tenor.*

*De libro plura scribam cum illum retractauero; nunc parum mihi sedet iudicium, tamquam audierim illa, non legerim.*

Your book arrived as promised. I opened it, thinking to read it later at my convenience and meaning for the moment only to take a taste; then the work itself seduced me to continue. How eloquent it was you may learn from this fact: it seemed light to me, though its bulk would seem at first glance to be that of Livy or Epicurus, not of your writings or mine. Yet with such sweetness did it hold me and draw me on that I read it through without delay. The sunshine beckoned—hunger nagged—a storm threatened—and still I read it through to the end. It was not only delight that it gave me: it was joy.

What talent it showed—what spirit! I would have said, "What impact!" had there been in it any quiet stretches—had it roused itself only at intervals. But as it was, it was not impact, but a steady state. ...

I will write more about the book when I have been over it a second time; at present my judgment is hardly settled. It is as if I had heard these things rather than read them....

Yet another example is from near the beginning of Letter 64. This one sets a scene for the reading event. Some friends have stopped by, an occasion for a quiet dinner party. A modest plume of smoke rises from Seneca's kitchen; conversation moves from topic to topic in typical dinner-party fashion.

*Lectus est deinde liber Quinti Sextii patris, magni, si quid mihi credis, uiri, et licet neget Stoici. Quantus in illo, di boni, uigor est, quantum animi! Hoc non in omnibus philosophis inuenies: quorundam scripta clarum habentium nomen exanguia sunt. Instituunt, disputant, cauillantur, non faciunt animum quia non habent: cum legeris Sextium, dices, 'uiuuit, uiget, liber est, supra hominem est, dimittit me plenum ingentis fiduciae'. In qua positione mentis sim cum hunc lego fatebor tibi: libet omnis casus prouocare, libet exclamare, 'quid cessas, fortuna? congregere: paratum uides'.*

Then there was a reading. It was a book by Quintus Sextius the Elder—a great man, you may be sure, and a Stoic, even if he denies it. Good gods, what vigor there is in the man—what spirit! That’s not something you’ll find in every philosopher. Some of them are widely renowned and yet what they have written is dry and lifeless. They construct arguments, debate issues, and raise objections, yet they never rouse the spirit, because they are spiritless themselves. When you read Sextius, though, you will say, “He is alive—vigorous—free—he soars above humankind; he sends me away full of tremendous confidence.”

I will tell you what is my own state of mind when I read him: I yearn to challenge every stroke of fortune—to shout, “Why let up, fortune? Do your worst! See, I am ready!”

What strikes me about this set of passages is first of all, the language of interiority, that seems designed to suggest strength of feeling. Over and over we find expressions that draw us into Seneca’s private mental space and his inner awareness of movements and changes in his mind – expressions like “they fill me with great hope” (19.1); “I feel again the heat of youth” (34.1); “a moment of recognition” (40.1); “my judgment is hardly settled (46.3).” Characteristics of the style contribute to the effect: the accumulation of brief bursts of utterance : “I swell—I exult!” (34.1); What talent it showed—what spirit!” (46.2); the exclamations: “I beg—no, I beseech you!” (19.1); “Do your worst!” (64.4). Vivid similes evoke the inner state of the farmer whose trees have borne fruit, the herdsman whose ewes have given birth, the hunter who longs for excitement.

A second point to observe is that the feelings that are on display are at the opposite side of the color-wheel from what we saw in *De Ira*. Where before we had anger, fear, disgust, and grief, here we find confidence, eagerness, hope, and joy. Third, and crucially, we may consider the role of assent in producing these feelings. In the *De Ira* passage (I), the reason the reactions of readers were not counted as emotions was that the readers did not endorse the state of affairs within the book as true for themselves. But now we are dealing with a different kind of reading material and a different relation between text and reader. Before, the response was to narrative history of events in the distant past; here in the *Epistulae Morales*, it is either to letters by Lucilius describing his own moral progress, or to books of moral philosophy – for Sextius wrote nothing else, and Lucilius’s book appears to be of that nature as well, insofar as we can judge from the reference to “Livy and Epicurus” (46.1). (Livy counts for Seneca as a philosopher in *Letter* 100.9.) But if it is moral philosophy, then assent is surely implied, for in Seneca a major concern about the reading of moral philosophy is that one should accept the contents as true. In passage N especially, Seneca’s assent to the content of the reading as true for himself is the very

basis of the emotional reaction, resembling reactions he describes elsewhere to speeches by Fabianus (*Ep.* 52.11) and Attalus (*Ep.* 108.13-14).<sup>9</sup>

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So I think we must be looking at a response that belongs to a different psychological category from the pre-emotions of *De Ira*, one that involves assent and that therefore has the potential to generate action. Moreover, this would seem to be a kind of response that Seneca approves of and wants to model to his readers, not a moral error he seeks to eliminate. But does the Stoic analysis have room for such a response?

I think that it does. Let's go back to the Stoic analysis we considered earlier. You remember that the primary reason ordinary emotions were considered erroneous by the Stoics was their evaluative premise (handout C-1), the one in which a non-wise person regards external things as either good or bad. When the sage has emotion-like reactions, they are toward genuine goods or evils. But if you think about it, there ought to be another possibility. Why should not the ordinary flawed agent also be aware of moral goods and evils and have some kind of affective response toward them? Something ought to be said here at least as concerns progressors in philosophy, persons who have been instructed in Stoic axiology but are not yet wise. Such people might not be in a position actually to experience moral goods, but they should at least be able to believe that virtuous activities are good and activities of vice are bad. If they then respond emotionally to the prospect of acquiring virtue or to the depressing reality of vice, their responses will not be ordinary emotions, but neither will they be the *eupatheiai* of the sage. It would be better to assign them a different term, something like "progressor emotions."<sup>10</sup> These would be exemplified by the weeping of Alcibiades, in an ancient story.<sup>11</sup> Socrates convinces his protégé that he is so morally flawed that he is not worthy the name of a human being; Alcibiades responds with tears, begging Socrates to take away his vicious character and give him a virtuous one. The possibility that such reactions could occur was in fact acknowledged within the Stoic tradition. It

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<sup>9</sup> By contrast, *Letter* 100 describes Fabianus's writings as having practically no effect on the emotions, though still as beneficial for the character of the hearer.

<sup>10</sup> "Progressor emotions" in *Stoicism and Emotion* ch. 9; Tad Brennan, in *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate* (Oxford, 2005) uses the term "veridical emotions".

<sup>11</sup> Among the numerous sources for the anecdote are Plato, *Symposium* 215e-216c and *Alcibiades* 118bc, 127d; Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 3.77-78; Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 4 and *How to Tell Flatterer from Friend* 69ef.

was suggested by Posidonius as a challenge to Chrysippus, and we find it also in Cicero.<sup>12</sup> But the idea was not fully worked out by the Hellenistic Stoics. It is an area they perhaps ought to have explored, but it doesn't appear in the record.

My suggestion, then, is that in these passages from the *Epistulae Morales* we can see Seneca working out the model for himself, led by his own experience and rhetorical instincts. He has no formal account of the progressor emotions, just as other Stoic authors do not, but he does in a sense know about them. We see his understanding not in any clear explanation of doctrine, but rather in the way he uses the concept to construct effective representations of reading events throughout the *Epistulae Morales*. He is well aware of what he is trying to achieve, even if he is unable or unwilling to articulate the concept he has in mind.

Within this framework it is, I think, very interesting to see how he struggles with the terminology of emotion at the beginning of letter 59 [passage P]. This is again a description of how Seneca feels upon reading a letter from Lucilius:

*Magnam ex epistula tua percepi uoluptatem; permittite enim mihi uti uerbis publicis nec illa ad significationem Stoicam reuoca. Vitium esse uoluptatem credimus. Sit sane; ponere tamen illam solemus ad demonstrandam animi hilarem adfectionem. Scio, inquam, et uoluptatem, si ad nostrum album uerba derigimus, rem infamem esse et gaudium nisi sapienti non contingere; est enim animi elatio suis bonis uerisque fidentis. Vulgo tamen sic loquimur ut dicamus magnum gaudium nos ex illius consulatu aut nuptiis aut ex partu uxoris percepisse, quae adeo non sunt gaudia ut saepe initia futurae tristitiae sint; gaudio autem iunctum est non desinere nec in contrarium uerti. .... Tamen ego non inmerito dixeram cepisse me magnam ex epistula tua uoluptatem; quamuis enim ex honesta causa inperitus homo gaudeat, tamen adfectum eius inpotentem et in diuersum statim inclinaturum uoluptatem uoco, opinione falsi boni motam, immoderatam et inmodicam.*

From your letter I derived great pleasure—for you must allow me to use common parlance; you mustn't recall my words to their Stoic meanings. It is our doctrine that pleasure is a fault. Be that as it may, "pleasure" is the word we generally use to refer to a glad feeling of the mind. I know, say I, that if we make words adhere to our statutes, then pleasure is discreditable, while joy pertains only to the wise person, for it is the elevation of a mind toward goods that are real and its own. Nonetheless, in our ordinary speech we often say that we are overjoyed that one person was elected consul, or that another was married or that his wife has given birth, events which, far from being causes for joy, are frequently the beginnings of future sorrow. For it is an attribute of joy that it never ceases nor turns into its opposite. ... Still, I was not wrong to say that I derived great pleasure from your letter. For even though the untrained person may be rejoicing for an honorable reason, still I refer to his emotion as "pleasure," because it is unruly and swift to revert to the opposite state, and because it is set in motion by belief in a false good and is uncontrolled and excessive.

Ordinary speech seems at war with the specialized terminology of Stoic doctrine. To say that he took pleasure in Lucilius' letter sounds harmless enough; but in a Stoic context, *uoluptas* names

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<sup>12</sup> The existence of progressor emotions is denied by Posidonius *apud* Galen, *PHP* 4.5.26-28 (= fr. 164 EK, lines 12-25); a partial parallel (possibly Chrysippian in origin) is in Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 3.68-70; 4.60-62.

the wrongful emotion of delight in external things. To avoid that implication he replaces “pleasure” with “joy,” referring it to the Stoic sage and giving the canonical definition of eupathic joy [cf. **G, H**]. This will not do either, as Seneca does not claim to be a sage, yet to default to the non-specialized meaning of *gaudium* would lose some of what he wants to convey: he does not want to assimilate *this* glad feeling to one that could be engendered by some transient external satisfaction. As in the earlier letters we looked at [*Epp.* 19, 34, and 40, passages **J, K, L**], he means to represent Lucilius’s message as a moral good; hence the Stoic notion of joy *would* be appropriate if he, Seneca, were capable of feeling it. Neither the ordinary nor the specialized usage seems to fit, until finally he digs deeper into the theory and finds that a Stoic notion of pleasure will do after all, since the ordinary person’s pleasure even in an integral object (“for an honorable reason”) still has the unstable phenomenology of the *pathē* (“it is unruly and swift to revert to the opposite state”) and is still subject to error on another occasion (“it is set in motion by belief in a false good”).<sup>13</sup> For a moment Seneca has within reach the entire account of progressor emotions as I’ve just sketched it, but he lacks confidence, and his account is far from satisfactory. He just doesn’t quite have the conceptual resources to give a philosophical account of the reaction he seeks to portray.

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Highly trained in the techniques of rhetoric, Seneca has a definite idea in view of how reader emotions need to work to achieve the purposes of a philosophical therapy within this large-scale project. In the *Epistulae morales* he has created a new genre, an ongoing fictive correspondence with a stated therapeutic aim. The novel literary frame of the work, the vivid characterization of friends interacting working together on their moral development, the effort at first-personal representation of the encounter with moral truths, supply him with the pieces that fit together into a new way of thinking about Stoic moral psychology. That way of thinking is internally consistent, it fits with other elements in the system, and it has some highly promising practical implications. But it hadn’t been worked out before, and was never to be worked out in **full** by any of the ancient Stoics. On this issue, then, Seneca’s aesthetic sensibilities actually extend the boundaries of his philosophical achievement.

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<sup>13</sup> Unless we are to believe that Seneca flatly contradicts himself within a single sentence, the word *motam* must be taken to indicate potentiality: “such as to be moved” rather than in fact “moved”.