

Care of the Self and Social Bonding in Seneca : Recruiting Readers for a Global Network of Progressor Friends

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Cet article interprète la retraite démonstrative de la vie publique et la promotion du **souci de soi** dans les oeuvres des dernières années de Sénèque en tant qu'**entreprise politique**. En développant des thèses de THOMAS HABINEK, MATTHEW ROLLER et HARRY HINE, je propose que Sénèque conçoit une vision politique d'une **communauté cosmique de personnes en progrès vers la vertu**. Cette communauté se fonde sur une forme spéciale d'**amitié** entre personnes en progrès, qui est une innovation théorique de Sénèque, introduite dans les *Epistulae morales*, par rapport à ces prédécesseurs stoïciens. Le réseau d'amis s'étend dans l'espace ainsi que dans le temps et est ouvert à toute personne qui partage l'engagement des autres membres envers l'amélioration personnelle et des autres. En faisant la publicité de ce souci de soi et **courtisant ses lecteurs** en tant que futurs amis, l'auteur des *Epistulae morales* vise à recruter de nouveaux membres pour cette communauté, notamment dans les premières lettres (*Ep. 1-9*).

This paper interprets the demonstrative retreat from public life and the promotion of **self-improvement** in Seneca's later works as a **political undertaking**. Developing arguments by THOMAS HABINEK, MATTHEW ROLLER and HARRY HINE, I suggest that Seneca promoted the political vision of a **cosmic community of progressors toward virtue** constituted by a special form of progressor **friendship**, a theoretical innovation made in the *Epistulae morales*. This network of like-minded individuals spanning time and space is open to anyone who shares the other members' commitment to the improvement of one's own self and that of others. By advertising such self-care and **courting his readers** as prospective friends, the author of the *Epistulae morales* aims to recruit new members for that community, in particular in the first nine letters (*Ep. 1-9*).

The sender of the *Epistulae morales* does not tire to exhort his friend Lucilius to retreat from public life as much as he can. The author's own well known, and continuing,¹ career as a senator of consular rank and mentor as well as Friend of the Emperor appears as an error from which the sender of the *Epistulae morales* is, at last, recovering (*Ep. 8, 3*). He forsakes all political ambition and praises retirement for philosophical studies as the only worthy pursuit, one that affords greater dignity and more valuable rewards than any public office (*Ep. 73*). Care of the self seems to replace active care for the wellbeing of the *res publica*. Nevertheless, scholars have proposed readings in which care of the self turns out to be another form of caring for one's community. Some stress the political nature of such gestures, as a form of « oppositional writing » that conspicuously distances itself from and thus disparages the ambitions that L. Annaeus Seneca stood for as a powerful figure at Nero's court². Others see an intention to serve the larger *res publica* by instructing and recruiting new citizens for the cosmic city at a time

¹ See, e.g., E. ASMIS 2001 : 130f.

² P. VEYNE 2003 : ch. 3, quote from p. 160.

when more direct political activity was impossible³. In a specifically Roman sense the author may be presenting himself as a role model, as a self mediating between the exigencies of social reality and Stoic ideal, or as the member of a new, alternative, nobility of virtue⁴. There is certainly much truth in all these readings. However, as I have argued in more detail elsewhere, HARRY HINE's observations with regard to the *Naturales quaestiones* suggest yet another reading, according to which Seneca's later writings imply a different adaptation of Early Stoic political thought : What he envisages is not only a Roman nobility of virtue, but a cosmic community of progressors constituted by a special form of philosopher friendship⁵. This open network of like-minded individuals spans time and space and can be joined by anyone who shares the other members' commitment to self-improvement. It is by advertising such self-care oriented toward a both transnational, as it were, and transgenerational community that the author of the *Epistulae morales* aims to recruit new members for that very community. On the following pages I will explore how he uses the medium of writing in this work to reach out from his own time into the future and to court new friends, his readers.

Generally, key tenets of Stoic philosophy are developed in increasing detail throughout the corpus of letters at a leisurely pace⁶. As concerns friendship, however, the discussion reaches a high point of sophistication already in the first book of the collection, and this is an indication of how central friendship is to the project of the *Epistulae morales*. Whereas Seneca blends Epicurean and Stoic tenets at the beginning of the corpus, he demarcates the Stoic position on human sociability already in the earliest letters, long before he has properly introduced even such a basic Stoic concept as reason (*ratio*)⁷. Rejecting alienating forms of Cynic asceticism in *Ep.* 5, he presents sociability as the central project of the philosophy he advocates.

Hoc primum philosophia promittit, sensum communem, humanitatem et congregationem.
(Sen. *Ep.* 5, 4)

« It is sociability, first of all, that philosophy promises to achieve : love of other human beings and togetherness ».

The term *sensus communis*, which I translate as « sociability », probably renders Greek κοινωνία and is the umbrella term for the two aspects singled out in the apposition. The Stoics defined humans as beings that are by nature sociable (κοινωνικοί)⁸. *Humanitas* is φιλανθρωπία, while *congregatio* from *grex* (« herd ») alludes to the Greek term συναγελαστικός (« disposed to flock together ») used in Stoic sources to describe both human and non-human social animals⁹. Even more technical is his argument in *Ep.* 9 where he develops the meaning of such

³ V. LAURAND 2005 : 126-135.

⁴ G. REYDAMS-SCHILS 2005 (with regard to Musonius Rufus see also V. LAURAND 2014) ; T. HABINEK 1998 ; M. ROLLER 2001. On the nature of that virtue see also E. ASMIS 2001. On the *Epistulae morales* as modelling a new form of learning, see J. SCHAFER 2001, on the letters as a new form of Roman philosophy : J. WILDBERGER 2014.

⁵ H. HINE 2006 ; J. WILDBERGER 2018 : ch. 9.3.2.

⁶ See in particular G. MAURACH 1970 and E. HACHMANN 1995 ; as concerns Epicureanism also J. WILD-BERGER 2014.

⁷ This happens from *Ep.* 31 to *Ep.* 41 ; see E. HACHMANN 1995 : 238-283.

⁸ Stob. 2.7.11m, p. 109 Wachsmuth = *SVF* 3.686; Diogenes Laërtius 7.123 = *SVF* 3.628; A. BANATEANU 2001 : 98-110.

⁹ Hierocles. *Foundations of Ethics*, col. 11, 15-16 ; Marcus Aurelius 6, 16, 1.

terms in subtle distinctions that differentiate Stoic other-oriented self-sufficiency from both Epicurean individual utilitarianism and radical indifference. In that letter, he presents the perfect man as a particularly likable being (*Ep.* 9, 6) and master in the art of making friends (φιλοποιία ; see *Ep.* 9, 5 : *faciendarum amicitiarum artifex*), which is the skill of a Stoic sage in love, and as someone who « would not want to live if that meant living without fellow human beings » (*Ep.* 9, 17). Not only does Seneca thus introduce the deep social eroticism of Stoic sages, whose « effort to make friends » is the recruiting tool by which the Early Stoic cosmic city of sages replenishes the ranks of its citizens¹⁰; even earlier than that, already in *Ep.* 6, he describes his understanding of philosophy as a practice in which progress is made by living in a community of friends around a seminal figure (6, 5-6), whose influence radiates far beyond the original circle in that it shapes successors who replicate not only his ideas but also his character.

In the same letter, Seneca proposes his own theoretical innovation of a progressor friendship, which combines features of Stoic *erōs* with traits of Stoic *philia*, the kind of friendship that, strictly speaking, can only obtain between sages since they are in complete agreement with themselves and have real virtue, from which true goods accrue. According to traditional Stoicism, all non-sages are incapable of friendship and thus enemies of each other. They depend on sages who reach out to them with *erōs* and help them acquire the sagehood they need for becoming real friends themselves. Seneca acknowledges this fact, e.g. in *Ep.* 35, 1, but his theoretical innovation allows non-sages to bond in friendships of a different kind, one that every fool at whatever stage of progress can practice in its fullest sense. It comes about

cum animos in societatem honesta cupiendi par uoluntas trahit. [...] sciunt enim ipsos omnia habere communia, et quidem magis aduersa. (Sen. *Ep.* 6, 3)

« when equal volition pulls minds into a partnership of desiring what is honorable. [...] they know that they have everything in common, and even more so their problems ».

As a form of « harmony » (συμφωνία), full Stoic *philia* consists in « having the same beliefs about the things in life » and « knowledge of common goods »¹¹. As such it is exclusive to sages. Fools are in disagreement with themselves and thus cannot consistently entertain the same beliefs ; nor do they have permanent knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) or possess real goods. By replacing « the same beliefs » and « knowledge » in the standard definition with the friends' awareness that they share their shortcomings (*aduersa*) and by substituting the common possession of goods, i.e. virtue and the honorable things that accrue from it, with a shared volition and the desire for what is honorable, i.e. for what the friends currently still lack, Seneca defines a relation under which progressors may fall. Progressors give a serious effort to become better persons but know how far they are still removed from virtue – otherwise they would not strive to achieve it.

At the same time, progressor friendship is similar to traditional *erōs*. This concerns, first, the nature of the impulse : The sage's *erōs* is only an « effort » (ἐπιβολή), not a perfect « reaching » (ὄρεξις) toward a good that is attainable with certainty, and so is the volition that drives Seneca's progressor friends¹². This is so because the aim of that impulse, that the other become a sage and thus capable of perfect *philia*, is beyond the control of the wise lover or, in Seneca's case, the progressor friend. A second similarity consists in the attraction of the person

¹⁰ For the Stoic concept of *erōs*, see *SVF* III, 716-722 and for the political function of *erōs*, e.g. Athenaeus, 3.12, 561c = *SVF* 1.263. Further literature and more detailed discussion in J. WILDBERGER 2018, chapters 6.5-6 and J. WILDBERGER 2017. A helpful discussion of Sen. *Ep.* 9 and the image of the sage presented there is provided in V. LAURAND 2008.

¹¹ Stobaeus. *Anthologion* 2.7.11h, p. 106 Wachsmuth.

¹² J. WILDBERGER 2017 : 412-419.

loved : Progressor friends are attracted to the commitment observed in the other and in the signs of the other's progress ; the sage is attracted by the "bloom of virtue" in the beloved, i.e. by manifest signs that the other may become a sage too. Third, the practices characteristic of the two relations are similar as well : The Stoic sage will encourage the talented beloved to become a sage, while the beloved, if she reciprocates the sage's love, will give her best to follow her lover's guidance. Senecan progressors share both of these functions, training and encouraging each other and at the same time letting themselves be supported in their efforts by the other in turn. Progressor friends are thus united by the close bond of two shared efforts, both the quasi-erotic desire to gain a *philia*-friend and the desire to become a sage and thus capable of *philia*-friendship oneself.

This adaptation provides a model for Stoic friendship among ordinary, non-wise people that does not undercut the conceptual rigor required to maintain the essence of Stoic ethics. There is no need for the presence of sages ; persons of all ages can practice it ; and it lacks the objectionable hierarchy, both physiological and mental, of an erotic, even pederastic relationship. Senecan progressor friendship can be practiced in many of the social forms and rituals of Roman *amicitia*, such as morning visits, sick bed attendance, participation in a council of friends, or shared meals – to such a degree that the difference may not have been readily apparent to an outside observer¹³. Nevertheless, it reorients this institution toward a new, ethical purpose¹⁴. And just as *amicitia* is not a 'private' institution but intrinsic to the functions of Roman politics, so is Seneca's Stoic progressor friendship.

Unlike Roman *amicitia*, however, progressor friendship is not a purely Roman institution. Seneca writes as a Roman citizen for Roman citizens, a fact which is underscored by his choice of the Latin language¹⁵. But this is rather a matter of perspective than one of purpose. Rome is where Seneca comes from, but his teleological orientation is toward the world and humanity as a whole. In the *Naturales quaestiones* the author takes his readers on a tour of their true home, the divine cosmos, and disparages the imperial aspirations of kings and nations (*Nat.* 3 praef. 5-10). That retirement, if spent in philosophical contemplation, affords greater glories than political power is a claim made also in *Ep.* 73, the letter cited at the beginning of this paper¹⁶. In an earlier letter, Seneca connects this claim with the idea that the philosopher living in retirement is still a public figure, as it were, namely a citizen of the world state.

Praeterea cum sapienti rem publicam ipso dignam dedimus, id est mundum, non est extra rem publicam, etiam si recesserit, immo fortasse relicto uno angulo in maiora atque ampliora transit et caelo inpositus intellegit, cum sellam aut tribunal ascenderet, quam humili loco sederit.
(Sen. *Ep.* 68, 2 = *SVF* III, 696)

« Furthermore, since we gave to the sage a commonwealth worthy of him, that is, the world, he is never outside the commonwealth, even when he has retired. On the contrary, maybe he leaves behind a small corner to pass on to greater, more significant expanses and, awarded his position in heaven, begins to understand on what a lowly place he sat when he mounted the [consul's] chair or the tribunal ».

The same distinction between the small local and the cosmic state occurs in the fragmentary dialogue *De otio* = *Dial.* 8, 4, 1, where again Seneca rejects the idea that a person

¹³ See also I. HADOT 2014 : 313-319.

¹⁴ Compare M. GRIFFIN 2013 for a similar reading of *De beneficiis*.

¹⁵ See in particular B. M. GAULY 2006.

¹⁶ Sen. *Ep.* 73, 4 ; 73, 8 ; 73, 11-16. On that « alternative hierarchy [...] of moral goodness », see also, e.g., E. ASMIS 2001 : 127-131, quote from p. 127.

should be limited to this or that corner (*angulus*). In line with his Stoic school, he asserts our citizenship in the « truly common wealth » (*res uere publica*) that encompasses both gods and humans.

De otio also provides an answer to the question what the prestigious activity of a world citizen consists in. It is research in ethics and natural sciences (*Dial.* 8, 4, 2) and communication of such results in writing, which Seneca characterizes as legislation and thus a political activity.

[...] *Zenonem et Chrysippum maiora egisse, quam si duxissent exercitus, gessissent honores, leges tulissent ; quas non uni ciuitati, sed toti humano generi tulerunt.* (*Dial.* 8, 6, 4)
« [...] that Zeno and Chrysippus accomplished greater things than if they had been leaders of armies, held the highest offices, or passed legislation. Actually, they passed it, but not for one state only, they did it for humankind as a whole ».

It is this project of understanding and spelling out the Common Law (*κοινὸς λόγος*) that governs the universe, so that the citizens of this cosmos can live by it, which brings together the « wider republic of the learned » that HARRY HINE identifies at the heart of the *Naturales quaestiones*¹⁷.

« In effect Seneca is constructing a community of inquirers that stretches across the centuries, backwards as far as the Presocratics, and far forwards into future generations, and in this community no one is a privileged authority deserving to be treated with special respect. [...] we might see in this imagined academic community some influence from the Stoic idea of the greater republic of men and gods, the world-state that transcends individual states, [...] »
(H. HINE 2006 : 58, 59)

In this context, HINE also underscores the importance of the idea of progress for Seneca (p. 57). This is relevant for our present inquiry in two respects. First, it shows that the cosmic republic is one of learners rather than omniscient sages ; it is made up of progressors (to which class also belonged the fathers of Stoicism themselves)¹⁸. Second, it implies that the republic of progressors extends not only over space but also over time. When retiring for his research, the sage in *De otio* (6, 4) is active for the benefit of future generations (*posterius*), just as the sender of the *Epistulae morales* describes his own work in *Ep.* 8 and 21¹⁹. In *De breuitate uitae*, the great Greek philosophers are like friendly patrons who do not send away visitors seeking their friendship, unlike the haughty potentates of the author's own day (*Dial.* 10, 14, 3-5). When such a philosopher publishes his insights, Seneca tells us in *De otio*, « he settles the public affairs (*ordinet*) of generations upon generations ; nor does he speak to an assembly of a few individuals but to all human beings of all nations, all those there are now and those who will be in the future » (*Dial.* 8, 6, 4).

In the *Epistulae morales* Seneca both defines and displays his new type of progressor friendship, which establishes the ties that constitute the network of his republic of learned learners, his aristocracy of the not-yet-virtuous. Sender and addressee interact with each other and numerous further progressors in the *Epistulae morales*, teachers as well as fellow learners and students and mentees, and the reader is thus presented with a possible way of life and role models to emulate²⁰. At the same time, Seneca never omits to mark the difference between the

¹⁷ H. HINE 2006 : 60.

¹⁸ R. BROUWER 2014.

¹⁹ See in particular *Ep.* 8, 2: *posterorum negotium ago*; 21, 5 : *habebō apud posteros gratiam*.

²⁰ J. WILDBERGER 2014.

relations among progressors and the full Stoic friendship discussed, e.g., in *Ep.* 109. The reader should not forget that as a member of an aristocracy of the not-yet-wise, his purpose is to eventually join the ranks of full citizens in the world state. Most importantly, however, through his persona, the letter writer, the author of the *Epistulae morales* reaches out to his readers and invites them to become part of the network themselves.

Seneca's Lucilius is a somewhat hazy figure, and several scholars have suggested that this is so because he is a stand-in for the reader himself²¹. While the real Lucilius Iunior cannot have been much younger than Seneca, the addressee of the letters often appears as young man. There is little personal detail in what we learn about the content of Lucilius' letters to which the sender of the extant letters is supposed to reply. In fact, by designing the majority of the *Epistulae morales* as replies, Seneca forces the reader to take the role of Lucilius by mentally supplying, i.e. in a way, formulating the « missing half of the dialogue »²².

While the reader thus morphs into the addressee and, with it, assumes the role of the sender's friend, that sender too assumes a reality and presence that exceeds a fictitious persona created for a work of art. Literary criticism may require the distinction between the sender of the letters, who is a function of this literary work, and the creator of the corpus, L. Annaeus Seneca himself. But as MARGARET GRAVER has shown in her perceptive reading of *Ep.* 84, this distinction will not do full justice to what Annaeus seems to have wanted to achieve.

« [...] writing as Seneca describes it becomes a means of externalizing one's locus of identity, one's very thoughts, reasonings, and reactions, fixing them for the future and making them available to others ». (M. GRAVER 2014 : 270)

There are numerous passages that illustrate to which degree for Seneca an author materializes in his writing. We have already noted how famous philosophers can be friendly patrons. They are also companions one spends time with (*Dial.* 10, 14, 2-15, 2) and men whose households (*familia*) one can join (*Dial.* 10, 15, 3), such that those reading and conversing with them may eventually resemble them like a son his father²³. Receiving a letter from a friend is better than seeing his image since the letter bears true traces of its author (*Ep.* 40, 19). That these traces are not just the friend's handwriting becomes evident, for example, in *Ep.* 46, where Seneca describes his rendezvous with Lucilius' new book. The book « coaxed » him to read further on (*Ep.* 46, 1 *blanditus est*); it « clung » to Seneca and « pulled » him « toward itself with its sweetneets » (*Ep.* 46, 1). The book has features of a living being with a mind : It is spirited (*quantum animi*), has a forceful agenda (*impetus*, literally « impulse ») that it sustains throughout (*tenor*, literally : « tension of a soul »). At the end, the book and Lucilius become indistinguishable : « How tall you rise, how upright you are! » (46, 2 : *Grandis, erectus es!*).

How Seneca himself may have wished his own books to come to life and speak to his readers is illustrated by a passage in *Ep.* 64 :

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, « Viuit, uiget, liber est, supra hominem est, dimittit me plenum ingentis fiduciae ». [...] Nam hoc quoque egregium Sextius habet, quod et ostendet tibi beatae uitae magnitudinem et desperationem eius non faciet :

²¹ E.g. M. WILSON 1987 : 104 ; E. HACHMANN 1995 : 65 ; C. CONDOÑER 2000 : 389.

²² This is a definition of the genre 'letter' reported in Pseudo-Demetrius' treatise *De elocutione*, 223.

²³ Sen. *Ep.* 84, 8 ; compare in *Dial.* 10, 15, 2 : *ad quorum similitudinem se effingat.*

scies esse illam in excelso, sed uolenti penetrabilem. Hoc idem uirtus tibi ipsa praestabit, ut illam admireris et tamen speres. (Sen. Ep. 64, 2-3, 5-6)

« Then we read a book by Quintus Sextius the Elder, a great man – trust me ! – and even if he himself denies it, a Stoic. Good gods, how much power he has, what greatness of mind ! You won't find that in all philosophers. There are some famous names whose writings are dry and lifeless. They instruct, argue, quibble ; these books cannot impart greatness because they don't have it themselves. When you read Sextius, you'll say : « He's alive, he's thriving, he's a free man, more than a human being. I come away from him bursting with confidence ». [...] Sextius has this outstanding feature too that he both shows you the greatness of a good life and does not discourage you from trying to attain it. You'll know that it is far up there, but accessible to one who's determined. Virtue itself will do the same for you, that you both admire and hope for it »²⁴.

Seneca speaks about his reading experience in such a way as if he had encountered the author in person. Not the book but Sextius himself is full of vigor and spirit. In Seneca's mind, the voice speaking through the written text becomes a living man, just as virtue becomes a person when he considers her. That this encounter with favorite authors can be a form of friendship is suggested already in the second letter of the corpus :

Vitam in peregrinatione exigentibus hoc euenit, ut multa hospitia habeant, nullas amicitias ; idem accidat necesse est iis qui nullius se ingenio familiariter applicant sed omnia cursim et properantes transmittunt. (Sen. Ep. 2, 2)

« Those who spend their life abroad end up with passing acquaintances with their various hosts but lack friendships ; necessarily, the same happens to those who seek no close relationship with any writer's mind but hurry on and let everything rush by ».

This is one of the passages in the *Epistulae morales* that JOHN SCHAFER calls « self-referential ». While discussing the nature of education and learning, « Seneca is signaling to us to apply his advice about reading to the text in which it is contained » (2011 : 33). In other words, while encouraging his readers always to return to the same readings, he not only intimates that one of those readings should be his *Epistulae morales* themselves. He also indicates that this process of faithful reading will forge a bond between author and reader similar to that between friends.

The courtship begins already with the first two words of the collection. The reader has taken some time off to spend it with quiet reading of a good book, and the first thing the book says to him is : *Ita fac !* – « Yes, that's exactly what you should do ! »²⁵ Not only does the book begin with such a surprising encouragement, pulling the reader into the middle of things ; the encouragement is also perfectly suited for the purposes of someone who, like the reader, has decided to study some philosophical prose. He should dedicate his time to himself, just as he is doing now, so that he can reflect on his own situation. The pressing urgency of the voice speaking to the reader is a sign of care and concern. The author warns the reader not to lose himself ; to make sure he does not squander the only possession at his disposal. Like Sextius he indicates the difficulty of the task but also its possibility. Even such an old man like him can improve his situation. How much more can be achieved by a younger person !

The third letter connects Seneca's confessional tone to the idea of friendship. That the reader is entrusted with the innermost thoughts of the author is a sign not of chattiness but of a

²⁴ For the specific kind of heroism inspired by Sextius and its political import, see E. ASMIS 2001.

²⁵ Compare, e.g., M. VON ALBRECHT 1983 : 138 : « Recht so » ; P. VEYNE 2003 : 65 : « Yes, dear Lucilius, [...] ». Without correlating particle in a following dependent clause, *ita* at the beginning of the sentence always is used anaphorically in Seneca's prose (e.g. also Ep. 5, 7 ; 19, 1 ; 67, 1 ; 70, 10). The anaphoric nature of *ita* is confirmed when Seneca takes up the idea in 1,2 : *fac ergo, [...] quod facere te scribis*.

close bond. Just as the reader, by continuing to stick faithfully with the book, shows his loyalty and demonstrates that he rates Seneca among the tested and approved authors (*Ep.* 2, 4 : *probatos*), so Seneca talks to Lucilius/the reader as openly as one friend should speak to the other (*Ep.* 3, 2).

The friendly but urgent encouragement in *Ep.* 1 is a leitmotif in the letters to come. One also notes a climax in the insistence and care that is expressed in this manner. Seneca has great confidence in Lucilius/the reader's progress (*Ep.* 2, 1) and exhorts him to hurry up so that he may enjoy his happiness for a longer time (*Ep.* 4, 1). In *Ep.* 5, Seneca is the one to rejoice about the other's success, and he not only encourages him but even begs him to continue (5, 1 : *rogo*). It is in the sixth letter, in which he defines his new brand of progressor friendship (*Ep.* 6 3), that the relation between Seneca and Lucilius (and thus also the reader if he has embraced the identification) is explicitly called *amicitia* for the first time. There is no way to distinguish how much of the author's didactic fervor is directed at Lucilius, the addressee of the letter, and how much at his readers generally, when he writes :

Ego uero omnia in te cupio transfundere, et in hoc aliquid gaudeo discere, ut doceam ; nec me ulla res delectabit, licet sit eximia et salutaris, quam mihi uni sciturus sum. Si cum hac exceptione detur sapientia, ut illam inclusam teneam nec enuntiem, reiciam : nullius boni sine socio iucunda possessio est. (Sen. *Ep.* 6, 4)

« But that's exactly my desire : to transfer everything to you. It's for this reason that I love learning something, in order to teach it. I would not enjoy any knowledge –be it as exceptional and salutary as it may – if I were obliged to keep it to myself. Suppose wisdom were given under the condition that I must enshrine it in my mind and not express it : I would reject it. There is no pleasure in possessing goods without a partner ».

Lucilius receives books with reading notes (*Ep.* 6, 5), while the reader of the *Epistulae morales* is regaled to an image of Seneca's own life, an almost « live voice » (*Ep.* 6, 5 : *uiua uox*) that allows the reader to accompany the author while he is making the spectacular progress and acquires the knowledge of which he writes.

In *Ep.* 7, Seneca elaborates on the kind of friendships he recommends as worthwhile : those in which one partner helps the other to become a better person and in which friends teach each other (*Ep.* 7, 8), as described in the sixth letter (*Ep.* 6, 7). Seneca himself avoids the crowd, even public lectures, and urges Lucilius to do the same. Those with whom one can share a progressor friendship are a rare species (*Ep.* 7, 9). The reader who identifies with Lucilius and Lucilius' motivation to become a better man will thus feel flattered to be addressed as that one single individual with whom Seneca will share his insight of that day « in order not to have learned it for myself alone » (*Ep.* 7, 10).

What has been implicit in the first seven letters, namely that the author of the *Epistulae morales* addresses not only Lucilius but also directly the reader, is made explicit in the eighth letter. Again, the relation between author and reader appears as a form of friendship, and in this way *Ep.* 8 constitutes a suitable prequel to the long letter, *Ep.* 9, in which Seneca develops his sophisticated affirmation of Stoic sociability and commitment to the institution of friendship. It is in *Ep.* 8 that Seneca for the first time describes his writing as a service to future generations, i.e. his future readers :

Posterorum negotium ago. Illis aliqua quae possint prodesse conscribo. (Sen. *Ep.* 8, 1)
« I'm working in the interest of future generations. For them I write up what I think can benefit them ».

By now, the reader has understood what Seneca means by benefitting (*prodesse*) another person. Still, Seneca includes an example of the kind of wholesome exhortation he has in mind (*Ep.* 8, 3-5), thus indicating that the writings for future generations include the *Epistulae*

morales themselves. Seneca is also working in the interest of the person who is just now reading that text. Even though the exhortation is diatribic in its high-pitched, emotional tone, its author describes it as « talking (*loquor*) to himself, talking to future generations » (*Ep.* 8, 6), a phrase that not only denotes a certain intimacy between author and reader but also evokes the advice from *Ep.* 3, 2 that Lucilius should « talk » (*loquere*) as confidently with his friend as he would talk to himself. The alternatives that Seneca rejects as less beneficial provide further confirmation that the benefit, the service rendered in this manner is not just any form of unspecific altruism but a gift of friendship. Instead of helping his readers with their self-improvement, Seneca could help his contemporary friends with their affairs, such as a court case, a testament, or a candidacy for some public office (*Ep.* 8, 6).

At the end of the letter, Seneca switches back to the singular, addressing Lucilius as a friend speaking to his friend. However, the reader who is willing to be Seneca's 'Lucilius' may see himself confirmed in his choice : Just as the reader and Lucilius blend in the role of Seneca's progressor friend, so the advice given to Lucilius in *Ep.* 8, 7-10 is a mirror image of what the reader was told in the diatribe directed at future generations. The warning not to get 'hooked' by the gifts of fortune and the advice to admire nothing but the mind, is reiterated in an inverted form in the quote from Epicurus (*Ep.* 8, 7) that « you must serve philosophy » (i.e. the mind) in order to acquire true freedom (i.e. from the material contingencies of life). Epicurus' aphorism also evokes the first time when Seneca turned to his reader to exhort him to lay claim to his time and, with it, his life by making the decision to engage in reflective observation (*Ep.* 1, 1 : *si uolueris attendere*), which is nothing else but the beginning of a philosophical life.²⁶

With *Epistulae morales* 8 and 9 ends the section in which the author of that work reaches out to his reader most explicitly in an invitation to the new form of progressor friendship he has designed. It is therefore remarkable, that *Ep.* 8 also hints at possible active contributions by the reader. Various passages point to the reciprocity of the friendship between author and reader. Like Lucilius, the reader benefits the author of the *Epistulae morales* by his mere existence and as a witness to Seneca's progress. He allows Seneca to live with and for someone even when he is alone in his study, and thus to maintain the other-oriented way of life which is the only one he would choose, just like the sage in *Ep.* 9, who may follow the example of Jupiter during a phase of world conflagration and retreat into himself and plan his creations – but would not wish to exist in a world devoid of other rational beings (*Ep.* 9, 16-17). By being there as someone he can befriend, the reader allows Seneca to practice, if not the full virtue of *philia*-friendship (*Ep.* 9, 8), at least a progressor friendship that makes it worthwhile for him to learn something because there is another, the reader, with whom he can share his bounty (*Ep.* 6, 4). However, it is only in *Ep.* 8, that the addressee Lucilius, and with him the reader of the *Epistulae morales*, appears as more than an addressee of Seneca's words. Here Lucilius is also an author, who has verbalized the very same ideas conveyed by his friend in that letter. Seneca does not only instruct Lucilius ; Lucilius himself is a teacher, someone who can instruct others. What is more, Seneca introduces yet another type of voice in addition to the living voice of a mentor (cf. *Ep.* 6, 5, discussed above) : « Public voices » (*Ep.* 8, 8-9 : *uoces publicae*) express ideas shared by many and belong to a multitude of authors, even those writing in the most humble genres. With this concept Seneca suggests that not only Lucilius but his reader and progressor friend may become such an author of shared, public voices too. Just like Lucilius and Seneca

²⁶ Compare also the parallel between the assertion in *Ep.* 8, 6 that « those who appear to do nothing actually do greater things » (*qui nihil agere uidentur maiora agunt*) and the distinction between the three types of agents in *Ep.* 1, 1 : *male agentibus [...] nihil agentibus [...] aliud agentibus*. C. RICHARDSON-HAY (2006 : 287) notes the parallel between the Epicurus quote and the beginning of the book : « It was, of course, with an image of liberty that Seneca began the *EM* (*vindica te tibi, ep.* 1.1) [...] » ; see also G. MAURACH 1970 : 48. Seneca even alludes to the liberation ceremony (*Ep.* 8, 7 : *circumagitur*), the *vindicta* that many readers associate with the phrase at the beginning of the first letter.

himself, the reader himself may thus continue the tradition and win further generations of progressor friends for the the great project of a cosmic republic of the not-yet wise preparing for the moment, when philosophy will enroll them in the list of those enjoying full citizenship in the world state)²⁷.

²⁷ Compare Sen. *Ep.* 4, 2 : *cum [...] te in uiros philosophia transcripserit*, and see J .Wildberger 2018 : chs. 6.4.4-6.6.

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