Drunk on False Argument—Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales*, Epistle 83

*Epistle 83* is one of Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales* that seems to have engendered only incidental critical interest. R.M. Gummere for instance notes it in the general introduction to his edition of the *Epistulae* for its preaching ‘...against the degeneracy of drunkenness’¹, a reference to the latter sections (17-27) of the letter. His subsequent title ‘On Drunkenness’ has consequently been effective in giving the letter this identification. On the other hand, D.A. Russell and C. Edwards, more interested in Seneca the man and what his letters can reveal of him, mark the importance of *Epistle 83* in terms of its opening sections (1-7).² These are apparently a response to Lucilius (*Singulos dies tibi meos et quidem totos indicari iubes*, 83.1). In sections 3-7, which purport to describe a typical day for Seneca, he goes on to fulfill this request, giving some insight into the man who eats, sleeps, baths and exercises like anyone else. According to Russell, ‘The daily round is a natural topic for a letter’ (*Letters to Lucilius*, 81). And that Seneca should present this information about himself is all the more important in view of the fact that Seneca was, as M. Griffin remarks in her biography of him, ‘a most uncooperative author’³ when it comes to providing personal details of his life.

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The importance of the letter for these readers is, however, a concentration upon the beginning and end of the letter only. Seneca obviously has more to say in Epistle 83, and this, it seems, is actually the main substance, as the bridge between these diverse aspects of the letter (sections 8-16), devolves upon a discussion of syllogistic proofs, a topic which is recurrent throughout the Epistulae Morales.\(^4\) This is the mode of argument used by prudentissimi viri (Zeno for example or Posidonius) and which can be both illogical or inappropriate in its reasoning and ultimately futile in its use (quid sibi voluerint prudentissimi viri qui rerum maximarum probationes levissimas et perplexas fecerint, quae ut sint verae, tamen mendacio similes sunt, 83.8).\(^5\) Seneca plays with his reader’s expectations. The separate intensity of the superlative adjectives prudentissimi and maximarum is at once undercut by the contrasting superlative levissimas which he doubles almost antithetically with the positive perplexas, as he moves the whole statement towards the paradox of quae ut sint verae, tamen mendacio similes sunt. Making Zeno the subject, Seneca immediately focuses on his argument specifically (Vult nos ab ebrietate deterrere Zenon, 83.9).

This shift in subject matter may seem arbitrary but, in the context of the letter itself, the transition is one of natural continuation. What happens today can be part of time’s natural progression. The physical bodily exertion with which Seneca has been filling his time is merely a ploy to an underlying intellectual or philosophical interest which has lingered from the day before (Superest ex hesterno mihi cogitatio, 83.8). The shift is almost trite as the word animus makes a pointed contrast with the physical

\(^4\) See for instance Epp. 45.5; 48.4; 49.5; 71.6; 82.8; 85.1; 87.41; 102.20; 108.12; 111.1-2; 113.26; 117.18.

emphasis of his day (*Quid ergo est nunc cui animum adiecerim? dicam*, 83.8), but the movement from Seneca’s activities to his thoughts is clear.

Indeed, Seneca has told us early on that overall the whole day has been divided by rest and reading (*totus inter stratum lectionemque divisus est*, 83.3). Can it be therefore that the letter from section 8 onwards is a commentary on Seneca’s *lectionem*, and the thoughts that have arisen out of that? The likelihood that he has been reading Zeno is increased by a similar attack on him in the preceding *Epistle* 82:

> Zenon noster hac collectione utitur: “nullum malum glorioum est; mors autem gloria est; mors ergo non est malum”. Profecisti! liberatus sum metu; post hoc non dubitabo porrigere cervicem...Non mehercules facilis tibi dixerim utrum ineptior fuerit qui se hac interrogatione iudicavit mortis metum extinguerre, an qui hoc, tamquam ad rem pertinentem, conatus est solvere. (82.9 cf. 19-20)

It is relevant then that in the following letter, *Epistle* 84, Seneca should turn his attention towards reading, and the relationship that ought to exist between reading, thought and writing (*Nec scribere tantum nec tantum legere debemus: altera res contristabit vires et exauriet (de stilo dico), altera solvet ac diluet. Invicem hoc et illo commendum est et alterum altero temperandum, ut quidquid lectione collectum est stilius redigat in corpus*, 84.2). As Seneca also indicates at the beginning of *Epistle* 65, these activities are intrinsically intertwined and dependent on each other, confirming how sections 8-27 are essentially a continuation of Seneca’s account of his day. Moving from bodily to mental occupations, he now presents the action of his day in terms of reading and thinking. It seems that rather than employing any strict rules of epistolary organisation, Seneca’s letter is moulded and hangs together through the energy and influence of his reading, the interest and development of his thoughts and the progression and conjunction of his ideas.

Hence, it is as a counter to the philosopher’s use of syllogistic reasoning that Seneca turns to preach ‘...against the degeneracy of drunkenness’ (Gummere) half-way through section 17. Instead of arguments of dissuasion against drunkenness that are false and illogical (cf.
sections 12-16), one should, says Seneca, censure it openly and expose its vices directly (Quanto satius est aperte accusare ebrietatem et vitia eius exponere, 83.17). Alternative moral arguments are reiterative (Dic quam turpe sit plus sibi ingerere quam capiat et stomachi sui non nosse mensuram, quam multa ebrii faciant quibus sobrii erubescant, nihil aliud esse ebrietatem quam voluntariam insaniam, 83.18). By section 19, Seneca is cataloguing the vices and characteristics of the drunken man and an attack on drunkenness proper has begun (Omne vitium ebrietatis et incendit et detegit, obstantem malis conatibus verecundiam removet, 83.19). He extends this through the use of historical exempla, first with a repeated reference to Alexander (83.19; 22), and then with a bitter attack on Mark Antony (83.25), probably influenced by Cicero’s depiction of him in Philippic 2.63:

Cogita quas clades ediderit publica ebrietas: haec acerrimas gentes bellicosasque hostibusque tradidit, haec multorum annorum pertinaci bello defensa moenia patefecit...Alexandrum, cuius modo feci mentionem, tot itinera, tot proelia, tot hiemes per quas victa temporum locorumque difficultate transierat...intemperantia bibendi et ille Herculaneus ac fatalis scyphus condidit...M. Antonium, magnum virum et ingeni nobilis, quae alia res perdidit et in externos mores ac vitia non Romana traecit quam ebrietas nec minor vino Cleopatrae amor? (83.22-25)

Historical exempla are, in fact, a distinguishing feature of this epistle6 (Instruenda est enim vita exemplis inlustribus, nec semper confugiamus ad

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6 The use of exempla to endorse and fortify his argument is a fundamental aspect of Seneca’s style, particularly in the Dialogi. R.G. Mayer in fact notes that the ‘Letters ... generally make little use of exempla, although some (e.g. 24 and 71) rely heavily on them’ (‘Roman Historical Exempla in Seneca’ Sénèque et la prose latine (Geneva, 1991; = Entretiens Fondation Hardt, Tome XXXVI), 139-71 at 159). M. Griffin notes ‘Seneca’s preference for Roman exempla, and among them, for the public figures of the late Republic and the Empire’ (A Philosopher in Politics [as in n.3], 9, cf. Ep. 98.13). Cato is generally recognised as having the supreme place amongst Seneca’s exempla (see Mayer, 148). G.B. Lavery writes: ‘Cato’s final moment of fame is presented in terms of the demise of a valiant soldier; Cato wounded his own wounds (Tranq. 16.4). Under the impetus of Stoicism, Cato combined philosophy with medicine; his wound became his cure.’
vetera, 83.13). In order to dismiss Zeno’s syllogism about the untrustworthiness of a drunk man (‘ebrio secretum sermonem nemo committit; viro autem bono committit; ergo vir bonus ebrius non erit’, 83.9), Seneca has already used the examples of Tillius Cimber (nimius erat in vino et scordalus, 83.12), the very opposite, it seems, of Gaius Cassius (tota vita aquam bibit, 83.12), Lucius Piso (urbis custos, ebrius ex quo semel factus est fuit, 83.14) and Cossus, seemingly an image of sobriety (urbis praefectum, virum gravem, moderatum, 83.15) but, in truth, mersum vino et madentem, (83.15). Although all these men gave themselves up to drinking, they were nonetheless trustworthy men.

Drunkenness is no reason in itself for distrust and, having used Cossus and the rest to show that a drunk man can engender the trust of another, Seneca might seem then to be arguing against himself in sections 22-25 where drunkenness mocks the integrity of men such as Alexander and


This statement perhaps gives some definition to Seneca’s use of exempla in this epistle. Although there was ample possibility for such (because drinking poems were in themselves a Greek genre), there are no verse quotations in the letter (cf. Horace’s Odes which are full of references to drinking wine). Presumably for the purpose of greater impact, Seneca’s exempla are focused upon the real world and are negative. He does not, for example, give instances of great people, such as Julius Caesar, who did not drink (Vini parcissimum ne inimici quidem negaverunt Marci Catonis est: unum ex omnibus Caesarum ad evertendam rem publicam sobrium accessisse, Suetonius Divvs Julius 53. What is significant about Seneca’s use of exempla in Epistle 83 is his omission of the Younger Cato (cf. n.6) who was a familiar example of a heavy drinker. At the end of De Tranquillitate Animi, recognition of Cato’s drinking habits is almost an accommodation of the man: Solonem Arcesilanque indulsitse vino credunt, Catoni ebrietas obiecta est: facilius efficiet, quisquis obiecit [et], crimen honestum quam turpem Catonem (De Tranq. An. 17.9), cf. et Cato vino laxabit animum curis publicis fatigatum (De Tranq. An. 17.4). Plutarch also makes reference to Cato’s drinking habits in his Life of the Younger Cato: ‘At first, he was wont to drink only once after supper, and then go away; but in process of time he grew to drink more, insomuch that oftentimes he would continue till morning.’ (translation from A.H. Clough (ed.) Plutarch’s Lives IV [London, 1893], 376).
Mark Antony, and destroys their credibility as military conquerors and leaders. The argument has changed however. Seneca is no longer speaking against the deceptiveness of a spurious means of argument. It is now the actual evils of drunkenness with which he is concerned. And Seneca’s further use of historical *exempla* works unconsciously to the effectiveness of his preceding argument, as it seems to confirm the superiority of *exempla* to syllogisms as a means of persuasion (cf. 49.7-8). Seneca’s exhortation against drunkenness carries him on to the final section of the letter where he returns to reiterate the precept with which he began this discussion of drunkenness. It is better, he says, having just demonstrated its effectiveness, to argue *rebus, non verbis* (*Dic ergo quare sapiens non debeat ebrius fieri; deformitatem rei et inportunitatem ostende rebus, non verbis, 83.27*).

Even as the importance of the autobiographical material is acknowledged (and it is yet to be ascertained whether there is not yet more relevance to these opening sections), no one should be prepared to accept *Epistle* 83 as a letter simply about drunkenness. The whole discussion of drinking is framed by, and comes as an adjunct to, the more pressing question of the Stoic use of syllogistic logic and what sort of argumentative technique the philosopher should use. Drunkenness, which has its own moral reference, illustrates his point, and its inclusion and the realisation of its viciousness is undoubtedly philosophical capital of which Seneca then takes advantage. Seneca’s essential purpose here is an attack on the false and illogical methodology of philosophers and he is not afraid to focus in particular on the exponents of his own school, especially Zeno, the founder of the Stoics, and Posidonius.

There is a decided irony in his first seemingly respectful acknowledgment of him (*vir maximus*, 83.9 cf. *prudentissimi viri*, 83.8), as he shows immediately how he gives no credence to Zeno’s approach to the discouragement of drunkenness (*Audi ergo quemadmodum colligat virum bonum non futurum ebrium: ‘ebrio secretum sermonem nemo committit,*

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8 The urgency of this message is captured in *Epistle* 108: *urge, hoc preme, hoc onera relictis ambiguitatibus et syllogismis et cavillationibus et ceteris acuminis inriti ludicris* (108.12). He reiterates this again in section 35; cf. *Epistle* 82.19-20.
viro autem bono committit; ergo vir bonus ebrius non erit'. Quemadmodum opposita interrogatione simili derideatur adiende (satis enim est unam ponere ex multis), 83.9). Any defense Posidonius might make of Zeno is reduced to an inevitability (Quo uno modo potest Posidonius Zenonis nostri causam agit, 83.10), and then shown to have no veracity anyway (sed ne sic quidem, ut existimo, agi potest, 83.10). The complaint of the final sections of the preceding letter is still fresh in our ears, adding now a strong sense of disparagement to Seneca’s assessment (verba mihi captiosa componis et interrogatiunculas nectis? Magnis telis magna portenta feriuntur...subula leonem excipis? Acuta sunt ista quae dicis: nihil est acutius arista; quaedam inutilia et inefficacia ipsa subtillis redis, 82.23-24). It is not enough or even correct (quod faciendum non est, ubi veritas quaeritur, 83.11) to make clever play, which can be false and deceptive (levissimas et perplexas, 83.8) with words. Thus, it is not perhaps without some deliberate subtlety that the transition from Seneca’s discussion of his daily tasks, to his attack on Zeno, should pivot around the phrase, et ceteris sine intellectu sonantibus (83.7)9 — a phrase which would seem in hindsight to be an oblique anticipation of Seneca’s complaint. The syllogisms of Zeno, which are so ineffectual, could possibly be classified in the same way.

Syllogistic Logic

Using his daytime activities as an elaborate introduction, and before he even comes to consider the ‘degeneracy’ of drunkenness, Seneca gives strong voice to a topic central to his own doctrine and approach to philosophy, and one which will inevitably reflect on its dignity and value as a way of life, its understanding and dissemination. But, in the context of the neighbouring letters, Epistles 82 and 84, Epistle 83 also has a centrality in terms of subject matter and ‘narrative’ interaction, which seems, in the first place, to give some resolution to the energy and like-minded

9 There is a direct echo here of Epistle 56.3-5 where Seneca explains at greater length how he does not find noise in general (ie without words) disturbing or distracting: Magis mihi videtur vox avocare quam crepitus; illa enim animum adducit, hic tantum aures implet ac verberat (56.4), cf. verborum inanium sonitus (108.7).
complaint of *Epistle* 82, and then helps to define the direction of *Epistle* 84.

Certainly, in *Epistle* 83, Seneca does not hold back in his attack on Zeno. His first statement against him, an imperative command, has the initial aural emphasis of a reiterated -*um* ending, which is then carried over into Zeno’s own words (cf. -*em*) (*Audi ergo quemadmodum colligat virum bonum non futurum ebrium: ‘ebrio secretum sermonem nemo committit’*, 83.9). Seneca at once plays Zeno at his own game. Maintaining essentially the same word order, he counters Zeno’s syllogism with another that is equally illogical, and not without a hint of scorn — *Quemadmodum opposita interrogatione simili derideatur adtende (satis enim est unam ponere ex multis): ‘dormienti nemo secretum sermonem committit, viro autem bono committit; vir bonus ergo non dormit.’*, 83.9). Having argued for the indefensibility of Zeno’s logic, and using the essential fallacy of Posidonius’ defence of Zeno’s meaning of *ebrius*, Seneca again focuses pointedly on Zeno himself at the end of the paragraph. Reminding us that he was a man who used his words carefully, and would not misuse them unless he wanted to be deliberately deceptive, Seneca clinches his argument as he turns Zeno’s own reputation against him (*itaque id intellego quod significari verbo isto solet, praesertim cum ab homine diligentiam professo ponatur et verba examinante. Adice nunc quod, si hoc intellexit Zenon et nos intellegere noluit, ambiguitate verbi quaesit locum fraudi, quod faciendum non est ubi veritas quaeritur, 83.11)*.

In a context of word-play and verbal definition, it is not enough however to dispose of Zeno merely in terms of his words. It is at this point therefore that Seneca uses the irrefutable proof of real life or the exempla of Tillius Cimber, Lucius Piso and Cossus. He confidently challenges everyone to present his own proof, and implicitly this is not difficult (*Sibi quisque nunc nominet eos quibus scit et vinum male credi et sermonem bene*, 83.13). Seneca moves resolutely and without hesitation from one man to another, initially having suggested that he had only one example to

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10 In *De Ira*, Seneca again uses this distinction between the man who is drunk and the drunkard. He compares the difference between anger and irascibility with the difference between the drunken man and the drunk (1.4.1).
tell (unum tamen exemplum quod occurrat mihi referam, ne intercidat, 83.13). The persuasiveness of this presentation is suddenly capped with an example of a *declamatio*. This was a rhetorical school exercise where speakers would speak for or against a set theme, and, like Zeno’s syllogisms, was an example of verbal dexterity with a tenuous hold on fact that was ultimately fallacious, ambiguous or would even obfuscate an issue. Knowing that to demonstrate the type of argument he is rejecting has its own particular type of compulsion, Seneca is clear from the start that he is introducing it only to dismiss it (Itaque declamationes istas de medio removeamus, 83.16).

The whole speech in section 16 is based upon simile and analogy. But in a discourse against drunkenness, Seneca is clearly overplaying his hand as wine and wine-vat become the points of comparison (quemadmodum musto dolia ipsa rumpuntur et omne quod in imo iacet in summam partem vis caloris eiecit, sic vino exaestuante quidquid in imo iacet abditum effertur et prodit in medium. Onerati mero quemadmodum non continent cibum vino redundante, ita ne secretum quidem, 83.16). While the conclusion is expected and convenient (quod suum alienumque est pariter effundunt), the connection between the effervescing wine of the first sentence and the drunk vomiting man of the second, is as arbitrary and contrived as the correspondence of *cibum* with *secretum* is illogical. The moment is one of rhetorical demonstration and its failure as a persuasive argument is only reinforced by the pragmatism of Seneca’s following statement (Sed quamvis hoc soleat accidere, ita et illud solet, ut cum iis quos sciamus libentius bibere de rebus necessariis deliberamus; falsum ergo est hoc quod patrocinii loco ponitur, ei qui soleat ebrius fieri non dari tacitum, 83.17).

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11 There were two types of declamation, the *controversia* and *suasoria*. The former were judicial declamations where the pupil spoke either for the prosecution or defence in a mock legal case. The *suasoria* were persuasive or deliberative declamations in which the speaker might offer advice to an historical personage in a particular situation. Examples of both these kinds of speeches can be found in the works of the Elder Seneca (the Rhetorician).
In keeping with this, the style of the speech is inflated and stilted as both parallelism of structure (*quamadmodum*...*sic*...*quamadmodum*...*ita*) and phrase (*omne quod in imo iacet*...*quidquid in imo iacet* or *vino exaestuante*...*onerati mero*...*vino reduntante*) becomes intrusive. The replacement of *mero* for *vino* in the final example equally seems to be part of a conspicuous variation of the word for ‘wine’, if one also takes into account the preceding *musto*. The style is all the time drawing attention to itself and does not work to enhance the argument. It is what Seneca himself might describe as *accersitum fictum* (75.1), the opposite of *inlaboratus et facilis* (75.1). A statement from *Epistle* 115, which also considers style, seems to justify the small attention section 16 deserves (Cuiusque orationem videris sollicitam et politam, scito animum quoque non minus esse pusillis occupatum. Magnus ille remissius loquitur et securius; quaecumque dicit plus habent fiduciae quam curae, 115.2).

**Style**

Seneca’s manipulation of a particular style here draws us to acknowledge its importance in any discussion of Senecan prose. He is generally acknowledged for the skilful accomplishment of his style\(^{12}\) which, ideally, should not detract from the substance, reasoning or truth of an argument, but serve as a channel towards truth and understanding (*Non delectent verba nostra sed prosint...sit talis ut res potius quam se ostiendat. Aliae artes ad ingenium totae pertinent hic animi negotium agitur, 75.5*).\(^{13}\)

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\(^{12}\) J.M. Cooper and J.F. Procopé, for example, write that ‘Seneca’s works are acknowledged masterpieces of “silver” Latin artistry, of the pointed and brilliant style that dominated Latin literature in the century after the death of Augustus.’ (*Seneca: Moral and Political Essays* [Cambridge, 1995], xxvii). C.D.N. Costa agrees that Seneca’s ‘Latin style represents the perfection of a type of Latin prose that developed from the infusion of rhetorical elements’ (*Seneca: Dialogues and Letters* [Harmondsworth, 1997], xii).

\(^{13}\) Similarly, Seneca writes of Fabianus in *Epistle* 100, *animus scripsit ista, non auribus* (100.2). This letter, which deals with Lucilius’ criticisms of Fabianus, also considers the style of Cicero, Asinius Pollio and Livy (100.7-9). Of Fabianus, however, Seneca writes, *non erat neglegens in oratione sed securus ... electa verba sunt, non captata, nec huius saeculi more contra naturam suam posita et*
The strategies of Seneca’s style in *Epistle* 83 are proof of what he is saying, and his use of rhetorical devices (anaphora or antithesis for example), word arrangement, sentence structure and syntax, are part of the letter’s persuasion and effectiveness. Indeed, although the epistle begins in an essentially familiar and good-humoured tone as a response to Lucilius’ request, it quickly shifts in section 8 to a more direct, insistent and impersonal mode of address. For most of the letter Lucilius is actually forgotten, and merges with us, the reader, Seneca’s public audience. The second person verb becomes an occasional usage only, no longer conveying a sense of intimacy or personal reference, just as Seneca also drops the use of the first person singular verb (cf. videbimus, 83.18).

In fact, use of the second person verb is, in all instances, concentrated into separate sections, where it deliberately turns the focus upon the reader, who is made to acknowledge directly and with a sense of his own responsibility, Seneca’s argument. Take section 24 for example (*Quae gloria est capere multum? cum penes te palma fuerit et propinationes tuas strati somno ac vomitantes recusaverint, cum superstes toti convivio fueris, cum omnes viceris virtute magnifica et nemo vini tam capax fuerit, vinceris a dolio*, 83.24). The passage is a contemptuous and derisive parody of a military victory, unceremoniously deflated in the final words into defeat (*vinceris a dolio*). Occurring as it does between descriptions of Alexander and Mark Antony, two military heroes, this humiliating lesson of debasement should speak to them. But, instead, it is the reader who is left feeling uncomfortable and self-aware. Again, at the end of the letter, it

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\text{inversa \ldots Sensus honestos et magnificos habes, non coactos in sententiam, sed latius dictos \ldots nullas videbis angustias inanis, (100.5).}
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\[15\] vis, agis, dubitabis (18); fueris, viceris, vinceris (cf. te, tuam) (24); argumentaberis, colligas, existimes (27).
is we who are left to answer Seneca's question (Sed si temptantur pedes, lingua non constat, quid est quare illum existimes in parte sobrium esse, in parte ebrium? 83.27). ‘We hear’, writes H. MacL. Currie, ‘the voice of a man addressing men directly and familiarly. Seneca cannot with justice be called obscure.’

This ‘directness’ (MacL. Currie, 80) is evidenced further in Epistle 83 by a persistent use of the imperative voice, while statements also become insistent through the use of anaphora from one section to another. The three-fold repetition of *tunc*, in decreasing members, in section 20 (*tunc libidinosus...tunc inpudicus...tunc petulans*), reinforced by the accompanying *non linguam, non manum*, changes to *haec* in sections 22 (four times) and 25 (three times), where polyptoton (*hostem/hostibus; res/rei*) has its own subtlety. This statement (*Haec illum res hostem...haec crudelem fecit*) is itself encapsulated within three-fold anaphora of *cum* in section 24 and then in section 25 as the sentence continues (*cum capita principum civitatis cenanti referrentur*). In section 23, the exploits of Alexander are qualified five times by *tot* (*tot itinera, tot proelia, tot hiemes...tot flumina...tot maria*). This is essentially a catalogue, a means both reiterative and unequivocal, that Seneca also finds effective, the arrangement being asyndetic, for marking out the effects of drunkenness (*ignorationem sui, dubia et parum explanata verba, incertos oculos, gradum errantem, vertiginem capitis, tecta ipsa mobilia velut aliquo turbine circumagente totam domum, stomachi tormenta cum effervescit merum ac viscera ipsa distendit, 82.21*).

Antithesis, structurally balanced, expands and sharpens the phrases, *plures enim pudore peccandi quam bona voluntate prohibitis abstinent* (83.19) and, *et vinum male credi et sermonem bene* (83.13). The phrase, *quidquid mali latebat emergit* (83.20), in which antithetical verbs are directly juxtaposed, is reinforced by the adversative balance of verbs at the beginning and end (‘the peaks of prominence in any language’, Coleman, 276) of the following sentence—*Non facit ebrietas vitia sed protrahit,*

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(83.20), a structure copied in the following phrase (tunc libidinosus ne cubiculum quidem expectat, sed cupiditatis sui...permittit). Apart from the actual substance of what Seneca is saying, this repetition of structure is compelling, as it combines with a repetition of the juxtaposed nouns vitium ebrietatis (19) / ebrietas vitia (20), a telling arrangement in itself (cf. potest et qui ebrius est tunc primum esse nec habere hoc vitium, 83.11; Quanto satius est aperte accusare ebrietatem et vitia eius exponere, 83.17).

Repetition is an economic means of moral condemnation in the description of Mark Antony. Seneca concludes section 25 with the statement —Intolerabile erat quod ebrius fiesbat cum haec faceret: quanto intolerabilius quod haec in ipsa ebrietate faciebat! Essentially, the whole statement consists of three words, facio, intolerabile and ebrius. But, while facio is varied, shifting with the progressiveness of Antony’s vice, from the action of the man upon himself (the passive verb), to his behaviour as an event in the past (cum...faceret) and finally to his action as something regular and continuous (faciebat), the adjective ebrius, as reinforcement of this, is superseded by the noun ebrietate (i.e. the man is set against the condition). Clearly intolerabilius also tops off intolerabile and Seneca gives this the forcefulness of an exclamation (quanto). In the wake of Mark Antony’s cruel action, Seneca might almost seem to be underplaying his reaction, but the tone of quiet disgust which picks up on the preceding metaphor (sitiret tamen sanguinem) has its own special potency.

It is difficult not to be taken up and carried along by the force and motivation of Seneca’s argument and, when we get to the final section of the letter, where the argument against syllogisms is revisited, the vigour and thrust of Seneca’s argument has not slackened (Die ergo...deformitatem rei...ostende, proba istas quae vohuptates vocantur). Seneca’s position is forthright and unequivocal, confronting the reader, and compelling him directly with persistence and conviction. He has stated with authority—Quanto satius est aperte accusare ebrietatem et vitia eius exponere (83.17)—and then sets out to prove it. His style is part of the means to the end.

The Preoccupations of a Philosopher’s Day (Sections 1-7)
Most of this letter and its motivation has stemmed from the thought that has lingered in Seneca's mind from the previous day. The business of one day can of course be bound up with and become the activity of another, just as the focus of Seneca's day has not actually been merely upon his daily external routine, but upon the more serious matters of his philosophy, its purpose and its goals. In fact, the clue to this was already there in the opening sections of the letter in Seneca's first response to Lucilius' enquiry. Instead of simply giving Lucilius the information he wants to know, Seneca first invests it with an ethical dimension and meaning. And this tendency defines the whole of the opening section which is only superficially a representation of Seneca's day. What Seneca says is either philosophically specific, or has enough resonance at this point in the epistolary sequence to realise its underlying significance. Thus, even as Seneca acknowledges his own need to live up to the precepts he presents to Lucilius (*bene de me iudicas si nihil esse in illis putas quod abscondam*),

This is, in essence, a recognition of God (*Quid enim prodest ab homine aliquid esse secretum? nihil deo clusum est; interest animis nostris et cogitationibus medius intervenit—sic ‘intervenit’ dico tamquam aliquando discecat*, 83.1). Or, of man's proper relationship with God, a concept which Seneca is keen to make Lucilius understand early in the *Epistulae Morales* (*sic vive cum hominibus tamquam deus videat, sic loquere cum deo tamquam homines audiant*, 10.5). The notion of God Seneca presents here is a part of Stoic pantheism.17 Under the names, usually of Nature or

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17 Seneca writes in *De Beneficiis: Quid enim aliud est natura quam deus et divina ratio toti mundo partibusque eius inseria?* (4.7.1, cf. 4.7.2). Cooper and Procopé comment: ‘For Seneca, as for Stoics generally, there is just one god (the cosmic reason), who, however, has many personalities, in accordance ... with the different “powers or products of things in the heavens”.’ (*Seneca Moral and Political Essays* [as in n.12], 278 n.9, cf. xviii n.14). V. Sørenson reiterates: ‘God ... Fate ... reason or nature ... to the Stoics all these are the same thing. Unlike the Epicureans the Stoics do not place God outside the world, and unlike Plato and
Reason, God is perceived as a rational principle that pervades the universe and is present everywhere (Non sunt ad caelum elevandae manus nec exorandus aeditus, ut nos ad aurem simulacri, quasi magis exaudiri possimus, admittat; prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est. Ita dico, Lucili: sacer intra nos spiritus sedet, malorum honorumque nostrorum observator et custos, 41.1-2 cf. 73.16). Man does not need temples, idols or the rituals of prayer, because God is always with him, and can know his very thoughts. 18

This is the notion that underlies Seneca’s statement (bene de me iudicas si nihil esse in illis putas quod abscondam, 83.1) at the beginning of Epistle 83 and distracts him briefly into an exposition of doctrine. This diversion underplays the energy and commitment of Seneca the Stoic, whose daily life is a constant struggle and progression (Parum adhuc profeci, 87.5) towards any achievement of the virtuous perfection of the ideal sapiens or the summum bonum of Stoic thinking. As man reasons with and struggles through the vicissitudes of Fortune, or against the distractions and temptations of ordinary life (virtutes discere vitia dediscere <est>, 50.7), the acquisition of wisdom and virtue is fraught with difficulties and setbacks and only gradually developed and achieved. Seneca exhorts Lucilius and all men—Exergiscamur ergo, ut errores nostros coarguere possimus...Omnibus aliis rebus te nega, fortiter, aperte; non est quod precario philosopheris (53.8-9, cf. 27.4).

It is to this end—the goal of virtuous achievement—that Seneca invokes the need for individual scrutiny and self-evaluation in Epistle 83

Aristotle they do not place him above the world, but they identify the divine and the natural and thus replace Plato’s dualism with a monistic theory.’ (Seneca the Humanist at the Court of Nero, W. Glyn Jones [trans.], [Chicago, 1984], 30-1).

18 It was also the case that when man reached his philosophical summit and became a sapiens, he could be regarded as having an equality with God (Denique ut breviter tibi formulam scribam, talis animus esse sapientis viri debet qualis deum deceat, 92.3, cf. 92.27). In Epistle 53.11, in which the wise man is even recognised for his advantage over God, Seneca describes the situation more explicitly.
HE EXPLAINS THE PROCESS MORE FULLY IN HIS TREATISE *De Ira*:

Faciebat hoc Sextius, ut consummato die, cum se ad nocturnam quietem recepisset, interrogaret animum suum: ‘quod hodie malum tuum sanasti? Cui vitio obstitisti? Qua parte melior es?’ Desinet ira et moderatior erit quae sciet sibi cotidie ad iudicem esse veniendum. Quicquam ergo pulchrius hac consuetudine excutiendi totum diem?...Vtor hac potestate et cotidie apud me causam dico...totum diem meum scrutor factaque ac dicta mea remetior; nihil mihi ipse abscondo, nihil transeo. (3.36.1-3)

He is succinct and to the point in *Epistle 59* when he states—*Illud praecipue inpedit, quod cito nobis placem us* (59.11).

Man must take the trouble to stand still and linger in his own company (*consistere et secum morari*, 2.1), in effect, to make friends with himself. To quote the words of Hecato, as Seneca does, at the end of *Epistle 6*—‘Quaeris,’ inquit, ‘quid profecerim? amicus esse mihi coepit’ (6.7). Self-scrutiny and self-awareness give man the freedom to truly become himself:

Cum secesseris, non est hoc agendum, ut de te homines loquantur, sed ut ipse tecum loquaris. Quid autem loqueris? quod homines de aliis libentissime faciunt, de te apud te male existima: adsuessces et dicere verum et audire. Id autem maxime tracta, quod in te esse infirmissimum senties. Nota habet sui quisque corporis vitia. (68.6-7)

b. Time

It is not out of keeping with Seneca’s concerns that he also underlies this concept of self-analysis and review, and its efficacy as a means to self-improvement, with temporal consequence. Time is, of course, the subject of his very first epistle to Lucilius (*Ita fac, mi Lucili: vindica te tibi, et tempus...collige et serva*, 1.1), and Seneca’s preoccupation with man’s place in time and his proper use of it echoes persistently throughout the whole collection. In *Epistle 83*, the blatant shift of the tense of the verb *facio* (present, future and past) underscores man’s failure to acknowledge
the importance of the past and its likely repercussions for both the present and the future (*Hoc nos pessimos facit, quod nemo vitam suam respicit; quid facturi simus cogitamus, et id raro, quid fecerimus non cogitamus; atqui consilium futuri ex praeterito venit, 83.2*).

Unlike the present which is *brevissimum...ante desinit esse quam venit* (*De Brevitate Vitae, 10.5-6*), or the future which can guarantee nothing (*quod restat, incertum est, 108.27*), it is the past alone that does actually belong to man (*quod egimus certum; hoc est enim in quod fortuna ius perditid, quod in nullius arbitrium reduci potest, De Brevitate Vitae, 10.2*). Unable to be changed or lost by Fate or Fortune, it is the past that is food for recollection and reflection, from which comes experience and knowledge, and with this, possibly the chance and means of influencing the present or improving the future (*quod praeteriit, inter tuta sepositum est. Quomodo gratus esse quisquam adversus beneficia potest, qui omnem viam suam transilit praesentium totus ac futurorum. Memoria gratum facit; memoriae minimum tribuit, quisquis spei plurimum, De Beneficiis, 3.4.2*). It must not therefore be forgotten that it is a lingering thought from the past, the day before (*superest ex hesterno mihi cogitatio*), that drives Seneca on to fresh discussion and greater determination in his philosophical pursuit in section 8.

c. Seneca’s Daily Time and Age

In *Epistle* 83 Seneca does no more than hint at the issues of time which occupy him so much elsewhere, but his recognition of time at the end of section 2 does then surreptitiously become a springboard for the following section where time does actually become a real and specific presence, i.e. the time of a day in the life of Seneca (*Hodiernus dies solidus est, nemo ex illo quicquam mihi eripuit; totus inter stratum lectionemque divisus est, 83.3*). Actions of the present, *hodiernus* (3), *cotidiana* (4), *hodiernum* (5), the past, *qui kalendis Ianuariis...qui anno novo...sic auspicabar in Virginem desilire* (5) and the future, *sed mutabitur...intra paucissimos dies non potero* (4), co-mingle and interact in his description. Yet what Seneca is actually talking about here is not the present time of the day in hand, but the life and experiences of a younger Seneca, who once had more days in his own personal future to which he could look forward. All that Seneca tells us is qualified by his age. He is now at the point of life where one
might perhaps say (referring back to section 2) that his plans for the future (consilium futuri) are virtually overtaken by the past (cf. ex praeterito venit). This takes us right back to the opening sections of Epistle 1 where Seneca, jolting all our preconceptions about death as an event that we look forward to in the future (mortem prospicimus), disconcertingly remarks, In hoc enim fallimur...magna pars eius iam praeterit; quidquid aetatis retro est mors ienet (1.1).

Seneca's references in Epistle 83 to his age begin almost at once (et hoc nomine ago gratias senectuti, 83.3). Through his slave Pharius, he jokes that he is losing his teeth (quia utrique dentes cadunt, 83.4 cf. 12.3), and when he (ille tantus psychrolutes, cf. vetus frigidae cultor, 53.3) speaks of his preference now for his own sun-warmed pool, he is describing the compromises and adjustments that old age brings with it, much like the exhaustion (cum me movi lassus sum (3)...Ab hac fatigatone (5))...non multum mihi ad balneum superest (5) of his physical exercise (ie quod superest, segnus et languidius est et propius a fine, 108.27). In the midst of this, at the end of section 4, his description of the race between Pharius and himself slides imperceptibly into a metaphor for life, an event which Seneca is willing to admit he is losing (Sed iam vix illum adsequor currentem et intra paucissimos dies non potero...Cito magnum intervallum fit inter duos in diversum euntes: eodem tempore ille ascendit, ego descendo, nec ignoras quanto ex his velocius alterum fiat. Mentitus sum; iam enim aetas nostra non descendit sed cadit, 83.4). Undeterred though, he is still quick to indicate that he is not out of the race yet, and can nonetheless compete with distinction (Quomodo tamen hodiernum certamen nobis cesserit quaeris? quod raro cursoribus evenit, hieran fecimus, 83.4).

If Seneca is here a man realising and coming to terms with his age, there is nothing urgent or gloomy in his realisation. In Epistle 49, he again uses the image of a race, but there his attention is distracted by the closeness of the finish-line and the whole statement, which talks in terms of loss (damnum), is pervaded by a sense of agitation (Non solebat mihi

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19 Cf. Stat quidem terminus nobis ubi illum inexorabilis fatorum necessitas fixit, sed nemo scit nostrum quam prope versetur a termino (101.7).
tam velox tempus videri: nunc incredibilis cursus apparat, sive quia
admoveri lineas sentio, sive quia adiendere coepi et computare damnum
meum, 49.4). In Epistle 83, his attitude is closer to that of Epistle 12
which is also recalled by the imagery of the later letter (Lucundissima est
aetas devesa iam, non tamen praeceps, 12.5).

Seneca knows he is an old man, and accepts in good humour the
conditions and natural consequences of a long life. His realism and clarity
of perspective, which is important to any of us, caught up as we are in the
aging process and the daily approach of death, will, however, specifically
serve the benefit of Lucilius who, it seems, is less reconciled than Seneca
to his age (Quid, tu nesciebas haec te optare cum optares senectutem?
Omnia ista in longa vita sunt, quomodo in longa via et pulvis et lutum et
pulvia, 96.3). The longer life’s journey, the more dusty, muddy and rain-
soaked it can become.

The opening sections (3-7) of Epistle 83 are cheerful and refreshing in
their lack of illusion. One might say that it had been a good day for
Seneca, if it were not the point, as he has shown, that he has the personal
resources (a philosophy, an attitude, an understanding and a purpose) to
make every day a good day (Ideo propera...vivere, et singulos dies
singulas vitas puta, 101.10). Man’s life need not be the base summary
Seneca describes, in contrast, in Epistle 77—cibus, somnus, libido—per
hunc circulum curritur, 77.6).

Thematic Interweavings

a. Self-Revelation

Seneca, therefore, begins this letter with some insight into himself. Yet
the notions of scrutiny and self-revelation introduced here are also then
constantly recalled throughout the rest of the letter, the concept becoming
part of its thematic fabric. The question and answer—Quid enim prodest
ab homine aliquid esse secretum? nihil deo clusum est—for example, slyly
glances at and anticipates sections 8-15 where the argument against the use
of false or abstract syllogisms as a means of preventing drunkenness
centres its discussion around the matter of keeping secrets (‘ebrio secretum
sermonem nemo committit, viro autem bono committit; ergo vir bonus
ebrius non erit’, 83.9). Although Zeno’s argument is absurd, and Seneca easily counters it, there is also, underlying this, a sense of the ultimate pointlessness, from a broader philosophical perspective, of keeping and entrusting secrets. As Seneca has said, God interest animis nostris et cogitationibus medius intervent, 83.2). In these terms, there is basically no foundation to Zeno’s argument. The vir bonus can have no real secrets to keep (bene de me iudicas si nihil esse in illis putas quod abscondam). In the greater scheme, it is not what one man tells another that is important (cf. 105.6).

A major reiteration in Seneca’s exhortation against drunkenness, virtually in the form of a sententia, is that drunkenness does not create vice, it simply brings it to light (Non facit ebrietas via sed prostrahit, 83.20). Again, this looks back to section 1 of the letter where Seneca calls for man to open himself up to scrutiny and self-evaluation. Drunkenness, a voluntariam insaniam (83.18, cf. De Ira, 1.13.4-5), is an involuntary revelation of self, or more precisely an exposure (tunc libidinosus ne cubiculum quidem expectat, sed cupidaditabus suis quantum petierunt sine dilatione permittit; tunc inpudicus morbum profitetur ac publicat; tunc petulans non lingam, non manum continet, 83.20, cf. De Ira, 3.37.1). Drunkenness pulls away the facade and, with nothing to stand in its way (obstantem...verecundiam removet), reveals the true man (a synonym for vitium or malum) underneath—Omne vitium ebrietat et incendit et detegit, obstantem malis conatibus verecundiam removet...Ubi possedit animum nimia vis vini, quidquid mali latebat emergit (83.19-20). This is an obvious counter to Seneca’s directive (introrsus bona tua spectent, 7.12) at the end of Epistle 7. The antithesis of the juxtaposed verbs latebat and emergit captures the unavoidable inevitability of this self-exposure which can even be matched on a national scale—haec acerimas gentes bellicosasque hostibus tradidit, haec multorum annorum pertinaci bello defensa moenia patefecit, haec contumacissimos et iugum recusantes in alienum egit arbitrium (83.22).20 And how appropriate is it that vomiting

20 Even in section 16 (Seneca’s example of a declamation), notice how often verbs describing an action of rising up or casting forth (an action of exposure or revelation), usually in opposition to verbs of hiding or inactivity, are used. quod in imo iacet is set against iectat; quidquid in imo iacet abditum against effertur et prodit in medium; cf. non continent cibum and effundunt.
(83.16 and 24) should seem here to be a corporeal metaphor of Seneca’s argument?

Ironically, self-revelation, which was previously self-assessment and self-realisation, has become *illum ignorancem sui* (83.21), just as the moral development towards which it strove has been inverted to a shameful and degrading physical degeneration (*dubia et parum explanata verba, incertos oculos, gradum errantem, vertiginem capitis...stomachi tormenta cum effervescit merum ac viscera ipsa distendit*, 83.21). The drunk man, having lost all sense of decorum and modesty, cannot even recognise himself for what he is. Thus, vice steps forward, as if on a stage, for all to see—*omne vitium laxatur et prodit* (83.20). *Vitium* has now actually become the man.

With deft intricacy, *Epistle* 83 has turned back to look directly at its opening sections and, re-interpreting the concept of scrutiny and self-revelation represented there, has turned it (not unlike the action of a drunk) on its head. The progression through a Senecan epistle, and the transition from one argument or idea can sometimes seem tenuous. This is not, however, to assume any lack of unity. A letter will look back over itself, whether sections are juxtaposed or separated, and answer, exemplify, review, clarify, modify, perhaps even contradict what has been said before, almost becoming a commentary on itself.21

In section 14 for instance, when Seneca introduces Lucius Piso, he presents him in terms which recall his own representation in sections 3-7 where he details his day. Piso, in contrast, lives for the night, his day only beginning at noon (*Maiorem noctis partem in convivio exigebat; usque in horam sextam fere dormiebat: hoc eius erat matutinum. Officium tamen*

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21 Note M. Wilson’s comment on *Epistle* 46. Seneca, he writes, ‘seems to be questioning his own sincerity ... This is the final twist in a letter that persistently turns back upon itself to revise or re-interpret what was said before. The Seneca who wrote paragraphs one and two is accused by the Seneca of paragraph three of having been less than frank.’ (*Seneca’s Epistles to Lucilius: A Revaluation* [as in n.14], 107).
suum, quo tutela urbis continebatur, diligentissime administravit, 83.14). The difference between this and Seneca’s daily round is stark, and a reading of Epistle 8, another epistle which refers not only to how Seneca spent his day-time hours, but the night as well, would make this explicit (Nullis mihi per otium dies exit; partem noctium studiis vindico; non vaco somno sed succumbo, et oculos vigilia fatigatos cadentesque in opere detineo. Secessi non tantum ab hominibus sed a rebus, et in primis a meis rebus: posterorum negotium ago. Illis aliqua, quae possint prodesse, conscribo, 8.1-2). It is not Seneca’s intention, however, to set himself up against Piso. This is again the business of what a man’s life or habits can reveal of him (i.e. Observabo me protinus et...diem meum recognoscam, 83.2), and, implicitly, the responsibility he has for his own actions. This contrast is not so much that between the public official and the retired thinker, but, more particularly, a contrast between two men, two individual people who live their lives in different ways.

b. Sleep

Seneca’s reference to his brief sleep in section 6 (cf. lectionem, 83.3) is another detail that gives rise to contrasting images throughout the letter. His sleep is nothing like that, for instance, of the drunken Cossus who has to be carried from the Senate, oppressus inexcitabili somno (83.15), or the sleep of the drunk, who eventually becomes oblivious to everything (cum somno vitiatur, 83.21; strati somno, 83.24). Pointedly, Seneca also replaces the drunk man of Zeno’s syllogism with a sleeping man in his own (‘dormienti nemo secretum sermonem committit, viro autem bono committit; vir bonus ergo non dormit, 83.9), almost as if he is creating a transition to these other references.

But, in view of the fact that Seneca is merely describing a short nap in section 6, we might also be drawn back to consider the unusual elaborateness of his description of his sleeping requirements (Dormio minimum. Consuetudinem meam nosti: brevissimo somno utor et quasi interiungo; satis est mihi vigilare desisse; aliquando dormisse me scio, aliquando suspicor, 83.6). Seneca’s description does not read like that of a physically tired man, his statement suggesting more than just an afternoon nap. He talks of his habit (consuetudinem meam), and it is enough for him just to have stopped being awake (satis est mihi vigilare
Herein lies the clue to what he is saying. Between Seneca’s sleep and the deep stultifying unconsciousness of the drunk, there is also a difference in terms of self-awareness and perception, already, of course, the concern of the opening sections of \textit{Epistle 83}. As Seneca explains in \textit{Epistle 53}—\textit{nam qui leviter dormit, et species secundum quietem capit et aliquando dormire se dormiens cogitat: gravis sopor etiam somnia extinguit animumque altius mergit, quam ut in ullo intellectu sui sit} (53.7).\textsuperscript{22}

Seneca follows this up with the question—\textit{Quare vitia sua nemo confitetur?}—which he at once answers himself—\textit{Quia etiam nunc in illis est; somnium narrare vigilantis est, et vitia sua confiteri sanitatis indicium est}, (53.8). The statement is an anticipation and reflection of what is to come in \textit{Epistle 83} (\textit{Hoc nos pessimos facit, quod nemo vitam suam respicit}, 83.2). The man who has drunk himself asleep has lost all perception of his Self (or his soul), casting off all ability to rescue himself from the entrapment of vice. The significance of sleep is moral and philosophical (\textit{Sola autem nos philosophia excitabit, sola somnum excutiet gravem} 53.8). Self-awareness, which requires vigilance, is something one is always in danger of losing, even Seneca (\textit{aliquando dormisse me scio, aliquando suspicor}, 83.6).

c. Greed

Greed is one of Seneca’s favourite topics in the \textit{Epistulae Morales}, or in any of his writings and, within any condemnation of drunkenness in \textit{Epistle 83}, there is obviously ample scope to censure this as well. This begins early in the letter with the subtle repetition of the word \textit{satis} or a synonymous phrase—\textit{unus mihi sufficit} (4); \textit{satis est mihi} (6); \textit{satis enim est unam ponere ex multis} (9); \textit{cui satis est sitim extinguere} (17); \textit{nimio vinio} (18); \textit{nimia vis vini} (20). This develops as a terminology of greed, or lack of moderation, which Seneca then continues to make more explicit. In section 24, he asks sarcastically—\textit{Quae gloria est capere multum? cum penes te palma fuerit...cum...nemo vini tam capax fuerit} (83.24).

\textsuperscript{22} Note the similarity of the phrases, \textit{in ullo intellectu sui sit} and \textit{illam ignorancem sui} (83.21).
As the letter reinforces and extends itself, the underlying idea here is again (like the notion of daily review) that of self-evaluation. Seneca’s exhortation in section 18 makes the point in physical (bodily) terms—Dicit quam turpe sit plus sibi ingerere quam capiat et stomachi sui non nosse mensuram (83.18). Eventually greed, which is a failure of self-recognition, is destructive and will fall prey to itself. With the same insistence he expressed in section 17, Seneca demands quod facillimum est, (83.27)—that is, direct and immediate acknowledgment of the real and unavoidable consequences of what greed or insufficiency truly signifies (proba istas quae voluptates vocantur, ubi transcederunt modum, poenas esse, 83.27). The man who is unable to act with moderation at the present moment is setting himself a trap (poenas) for the future. Any ambiguity about what Seneca means here is translated at length in Epistle 114.25 into a prospect of barren futility. The self-indulgent man becomes inutilem. His life, reduced to mere spectatorship and desire, is not only without hope or happiness, but even self-worth.

Seneca and Drunkenness

Seneca’s condemnation of drunkenness in Epistle 83 is unequivocal. His attitude in Epistle 59, where drunkenness is short-lived, even unpleasant, folly is no different (omnes istos oblectamenta fallacia et brevia decipiantur, sicut ebrietates, quae unius horae hilerem insaniam longi temporis taedio pensat, 59.15, cf. 59.11; 122.6). Likewise in De Brevitate Vitae, the drunkard is held up as being amongst the worst of people (In primis autem et illos numero qui nulli rei nisi uino ac libidini vacant; nulli enim turpius occupati sunt, 7.1). In his own case, abstinence was, Seneca tells us in Epistle 108, a life-long habit (Inde vino carens stomachus, 108.16).

23 He might have added here the final section of Epistle 114: Sani erimus et modica concupiscemus, si unusquisque se numeret, metiatur simul corpus, sciat, quam nec multum capere nec diu possit (27). This notion recurs frequently in the letters (8.5; 59.13; 60.2; 108.15; 114.26, cf. De Tranquillitate Animi, 9.2).
In view of the fact that Seneca was a keen viticulturist, his stance in *Epistle* 83 and elsewhere would seem hypocritical—a charge that Seneca the wealthy man, but the philosopher who condemns wealth and greed, has always encountered. Add to this his statement in *De Tranquillitate Animi*, where he actually advocates the drinking of wine (Non numquam et usque ad ebrietatem veniendum, non ut mergat nos, sed ut deprimat; eluit enim curas et ab imo animum movet et ut morbis quibusdam ita tristitiae medetur...Sed ut libertatis ita vini salubris moderatio est, 17. 8-9).

Yet the argument against drunkenness, and the terms in which Seneca presents it in *Epistle* 83, can actually refute such an indictment. What is the real issue here, and what drives Seneca’s discussion, is drunkenness as a manifestation of man’s lack of, or loss of, control. That is to say, the control man has over his *animus*, which is ultimately an individual’s means to ethical and philosophical advancement or, in other words, to wisdom, virtue, freedom, happiness, in effect the *summum bonum*. It is our *animus* which is the source of our being:

Ideo ille curetur: ab illo sensus, ab illo verba exeunt, ab illo nobis est habitus, vultus, incessus...si ille procubuit, et cetera ruinam sequuntur...Rex noster animus; hoc incolumi cetera remanunt in officio, parent, optemperant: cum ille paulum vacillavit, simul dubitant. Cum vero cessit voluptati, artes quoque eius actuque marcent et omnis ex languido fluidoque conatus est. (114.22-3)

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24 D.A. Russell, quoting *Epistle* 104.6, comments: ‘Viticulture was a passion of Seneca’s and a profitable one’ (‘Letters to Lucilius’ [as in n.2], 94 n.15).

25 ‘Aliter loqueris, aliter vivis’: this is the charge that Seneca tried to answer in *De Vita Beata*, and that which his biographers and readers have been pondering ever since.’ (M. Griffin, ‘Imago Vitae Suæ’ in C.D.N. Costa (ed.) *Seneca* (London & Boston, 1974), 1-38, at 29).

26 In *Epistle* 114 it is this same lack of control which distinguishes the literary style described as ‘inebriated’: *quomodo in vino non ante lingua titubat quam mens cessit oneri et inclinata vel prodicta est, ita ista orationis quid aliud quam ebrietas nulli molesta est, nisi animus labat* (114.22).

27 Compare with this the description of the soul as *virtus* in *Epistle* 66.6.
Self-control or self-mastery was, as far as Seneca was concerned, a fundamental goal of the man who strove to be a *sapiens* (*Imperare sibi maximum imperium est*, 113.31; *potentissimum esse qui se habet in potestate*, 90.34; *Vaco, Lucili, vaco et ubicumque sum, ibi meus sum*, 62.1). Such mastery, however, only comes through wise and virtuous living (*Emerge ad meliorem vitam propitiis diis*, 22.12). The morality of self-control is a task that every man must work at everyday of his life (*Quid enim aliud agis quam ut meliorem te ipse cotidie facias, ut aliquid ex erroribus ponas, ut intellegas tua vitia esse quae putas rerum?* 50.1). This is the underlying significance of Seneca’s description of drunkenness in section 18 as a willing or self-induced madness (*voluntariam insaniam*, cf. *de furore*, 83.18).

In *Epistle* 83 Seneca begins his exhortation against drunkenness by inferring this concept of control. The *sapiens*, he says, satisfies or controls his thirst with sufficiency (*cui satis est sitim extinguere*, 83.17), and, even when led on by circumstances, will not be drawn beyond this (*etiam si quando hortata est hilaritas aliena causa producta longius, tamen citra ebrietatem resistit*, 83.17). Surprisingly, there are only two references to ‘thirst’ in *Epistle* 83, and deliberately so it would seem, because this description of the ‘thirsty’ *sapiens* soon comes up against the representation of Mark Antony, who also is ‘thirsty’ (*cum vino gravis sitiret tamen sanguinem*, 83.25-26). Drunk, he is totally out of control, so that he is now almost without humanity. One lapse of control becomes an admission of vice which will invite and allow in another (*Fere vinolentiam crudelitas sequitur; vitiatur enim exasperaturque sanitas mentis*, 83. 26). This is the beginning of a progressive downward spiral towards complete degeneration and bestiality (*ita ebrietates continuae efferant animos*, 83. 26), where now, without the aid of wine, vice has become sufficient in itself to take control and maintain its power (*nam cum saepe apud se non sint, consuetudo insaniae durat et vitia vino concepta etiam sine illo valent*, 83.26). Then, with a sudden twist, Seneca indicates that even the *sapiens*, like anyone else, will succumb to the same degradation, if he lacks the control to avoid indulgence:
Nam si illud argumentaberis, sapientem multo vino non inebriari et retinere rectum tenorem etiam si temulentus sit, licet colligas nec veneno poto moriturum nec sopore sumpto dormitumur nec elleboro accepto quidquid in visceribus haerabit eiecturum deiecturumque. Sed si temptantur pedes, lingua non constat, quid est quare illum existimes in parte sobrium esse, in parte ebrium? (83.27)

It is almost forgotten now perhaps, but in section 18, immediately after his reference to the sapiens for whom sufficiency was enough, Seneca had announced—Nam de illo videbimus, an sapientis animus nimio vino turbetur et faciat ebriis solita (83.18). At the end of the letter, Seneca at last returns to this enquiry, and resolves it, and he is at once pragmatic and realistic. There is no automatic or unlooked-for protection in the status of sapiens. Nor in spite of any euphemisms (in parte sobrium...in parte ebrium), a reference back to his argument against the falseness of syllogistic reasoning, can the wise man who has indulged be said to be anything other than drunk. He will walk as erratically as any other drunk, just as he will be as susceptible as anyone else to either poison or a sleeping potion. What we should consider instead is how, or why, the sapiens would find himself in a situation where he would need a defense such as this. Seneca’s final question is taunting, forcing the reader to acknowledge the responsibility that every man has at all times for his own Self—that is, for his own self-control and self-realisation. This is life’s battle. For this, the sapiens is admittedly better prepared, and there is little likelihood that he will fall down:

nihil stultitia pacatum habet; tam superne illi metus est quam infra; utrumque trepidat latus; sequuntur pericula et occurrunt; ad omnia pavet, inparata est et ipsis terretur auxiliis. Sapiens autem, ad omnem incursum munitus, intentus, non si paupertas, non si luctus, non si ignominia, non si dolor impetum faciat, pedem referet: interritus et contra illa ibit et inter illa. (59.8)

Drunkenness is about self-evaluation and self-command, in much the same way as is the scrutiny of a daily review. Nor is it without point to add that whether or not we tell a secret is again a matter of self-control.
DRUNK ON FALSE ARGUMENT

It is in these terms therefore that we might consider the anomalous passage in De Tranquillitate Animi. Although Seneca talks there of succumbing to drink, he also forbids that we drown ourselves in it (non ut mergat nos, sed ut deprimat), an action which not only describes Cossus in Epistle 83 (mersum vino et madentem, 83.15), but which also clearly indicates in Epistle 12, in the same context, an overstepping of the limits—deditos vino potio extrema delectat, illa quae mergit, quae ebrietati summam manum inponit (12.4). In fact, Seneca specifically advocates moderation (Sed ut liberatiatis ita uini salubris moderatio est, De Tranq. An. 17.9) and particularly cautions against a frequency which will develop into a habit, a state basically without control (Sed nec saepe faciendum est, ne animus malam consuetudinem ducat, De Tranq. An. 17.9). Wine, Seneca insists, can be a healing agent (eluit enim curas et ab imo animum mouet et ut morbis quibusdam ita tristiitiae medetur, Libere non ob licentiam linguae dictus est [inventor uini], sed quia liberat seruitio curarum animum et adserit vegetatique et audaciorem in omnis conatus facit, De Tranq. An. 17.8). Hence, provided one remains alert to its dangers, any occasional indulgence in drink will be beneficial as a means of relaxation and rejuvenation (et aliquando tamen in exultationem libertatemque extrahendus tristisque sobrietas remouenda paulisper, De Tranq. An. 17.9). As a non-drinker himself, Seneca’s attitude is perhaps surprising, but it also brings with it something of the commonsense. A drink can, he knows, be beneficial and, of course, it is a moral point whether we are able to resist or not. This advocation of drinking in De Tranquillitate Animi in fact reinforces Seneca’s argument against drunkenness in Epistle 83.

Epistle 83, having begun with the personal interest of Seneca’s day, and shifted to the argument against syllogisms and the consequent condemnation of drunkenness, nevertheless maintains an internal integrity as the letter draws out and elucidates the arguments of self-recognition and evaluation, self-progress and self-control. In the end, however, the reader is thrown back on himself to have the final say (quid est, quare illum existimes in parte sobrium esse, in parte ebrium?). The answer the reader gives must inevitably bear upon himself and say something about his own animus, his own self-awareness and wisdom. Just as Seneca’s letter talked, initially, about self-examination and discovery, it has, through the challenge of its final question, also become for the reader a means to it. It is now up to the reader to gauge his own progress.
It perhaps only remains to reiterate that the critical neglect of *Epistle* 83 is surprising. As a statement on philosophical issues (syllogistic logic, God, self-realisation, time, greed and control), it is energetic and specific while, as an example of the epistolary form, it reasserts Seneca’s skill as a writer and underscoring the subtlety his use of the form can have. Progressively, and with an innate sense of coherence and emphasis, Seneca gives expansion and understanding to his doctrine, even within the so-called early autobiographical sections. From this personal focus, Seneca creates a philosophical base from which to advance, although it is clearly an added bonus of the letter that it should actually also present us with a picture of Seneca himself. With regard to *Epistle* 83, one might perhaps write of Seneca, as he wrote of Fabianus—Denique illud praestabit, ut liqueat tibi illum sensisse quae scripsit. Intelleges hoc actum ut tu scires quid illi placeret, non ut ille placeret tibi. Ad profectum omnia tendunt, ad bonam mentem; non quaeritur plausus. (100.11)

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