

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS/NOTES DE LECTURE

THREE NOTES ON SENECA *DE PROVIDENTIA*

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I

2.6 *languent per inertiam saginata nec labore tantum sed motu et ipso sui onere deficiunt.*

Seneca has just been comparing the relationship between the *deus* and good men to that between a father and his children. Like a demanding father, in contrast to a cossetting mother, the *deus* says of good men *operibus . . . doloribus damnis exagitantur ut verum colligant robur*. In support of the efficacy of this approach Seneca adduces an analogy from the animal kingdom in the words quoted above. He is thinking in particular of the fattening of fowls; cf. *Ep.* 122.4 *aves quae convivii comparantur, ut immotae facile pinguescant, in obscuro continentur: ita sine ulla exercitatione iacentibus tumor pigrum corpus invadit, et super membra iners sagina succrescit*.

The difficulty in 2.6 lies in how the ablatives *labore*, *motu*, and *onere* are to be explained. The last is clearly an ablative of cause. Their excessive weight and size weaken the *saginata*. But what of *labore* and *motu*? In all translations that I have seen the phrase *nec labore tantum sed motu* has been taken with *deficiunt*. The Loeb translator renders the sentence in this way: "Bodies grown fat through sloth are weak, and not only labour, but even movement and their very weight cause them to break down."¹ But since *per inertiam* implies the *absence* of labor (cf. *sine ulla exercitatione* at *Ep.* 122.4), the second clause makes odd sense. Note too that *saginata* were kept immobile: so *Ep.* 122.4 *ut immotae facile pinguescant*; cf. Varro *Rust.* 3.9.19 *eas includunt in locum tepidum et angustum et tenebricosum, quod motus earum et lux pinguitudini inimica (pinguitudinis vindicta MSS)*. The point is missed, therefore, if we are told that they grow weak because of *motus*. An alternative interpretation is to take *nec labore tantum sed motu* with *languent . . . saginata* and to see the phrase as a parenthesis, as an added afterthought

¹Cf. E. Andreotti (ed.), *L. Annaeus Seneca. De Providentia* (Rome 1971); N. Sacerdoti (ed.), *Senecae Dialogi* (Milan 1971); M. Rosenbach, *Seneca. Philosophische Schriften* 1 (Darmstadt 1969); A. Stewart (tr.), *L. Annaeus Seneca. Minor Dialogues* (London 1889); N. E. Lemaire (ed.), *L. Annaei Senecae Opera Philosophica* 2 (Paris 1978) *ad loc.* (on *motu*). So also Lipsius (who read *mole*): "Libri aliquot scripti 'motu;' nec male. Adeo non labore solum, sed ipso motu suo deficiunt."

expanding on the idea of *per inertiam*—"and (sc. *inertes*) not only with respect to any exertion but also with respect to movement."² But this is cumbersome and I suggest that the passage is improved stylistically and semantically if one supposes that a participle has been omitted after *motu* and that *et* was then added after the loss to connect *motu* and *ipso sui onere*.

One possibility is to read *languent per inertiam saginata nec labore tantum sed motu (prohibita) ipso sui onere deficiunt*. For *prohibere* and the ablative cf. *Cons. Marc.* 26.3 *cibo prohibitus*. It would still be possible to retain *et* in the sense "actually"³ but on balance I am incline to think that it was a corrective interpolation.

II

3.1 *nunc illud dico, ista quae tu vocas aspera, quae adversa et abominanda, primum pro ipsis esse quibus accidunt, deinde pro universis, quorum maior dis cura quam singulorum est, post hoc volentibus accidere ac dignos malo esse si nolint. his adiciam fato ista sic ire et eadem lege bonis evenire qua sunt boni. persuadebo deinde tibi ne umquam boni viri miserearis: potest enim miser dici, non potest esse.*

Here Seneca is specifying the five topics of the main part of the dialogue. He deals with the first at 3.2–4.16, the second in 5.1–5.4. The transition to the third occurs in mid-sentence in 5.4: *boni viri laborant, inpendunt inpenduntur, et volentes quidem*. This section ends in the middle of 5.6 where the transition to the fourth topic takes place: . . . *eo quidem magis quod scio omnia certe et in aeternum dicta lege decurrere. fata nos ducunt . . .*; cf. *fato ista sic ire* (3.1). This third section consists primarily of a quotation of an address of the Cynic Demetrius to the gods, the gist of which is summarized in *a volente feretis quidquid petieritis* (5.5). There is nothing in the section which corresponds to *ac dignos malo esse si nolint*. We must see these words therefore as a corollary of the main topic of the section that men (by which he means *viri boni*) accept alleged *mala* willingly. This main topic itself follows from the first proposition, that so-called *mala* are for the benefit of those whom they befall.

The sentiment that men deserve *malum* if they do not accept *mala* willingly is striking, since Seneca is at pains within the dialogue to point out that what people think to be *mala* are not *mala* at all. Rather they are the means whereby the good man proves himself and sets an example for others to follow. The good man must offer himself to *fatum*. He must endure the storms of life: *multa accident fata, aspera, sed quae molliat et conplanet ipse. ignis aurum probat, miseria fortes viros* (5.9). The idea of *mala* as punishment, as is implied by *ac dignos malo* (for it is difficult not to take

²For *nec tantum* introducing an expansion within the same clause cf. *Ep.* 4.2 *quod auctoritatem habemus senum, vitia puerorum, nec puerorum tantum sed infantium*.

³Cf. *Ep.* 33.2 and see Sommers *ad loc.*

malo as the equivalent of *malis* or *mala fortuna*)⁴ is as foreign to the dialogue as the idea that *bona* such as *divitiae* are rewards for goodness (cf. 5.1–2). In his discussion of the first topic, on which the validity of the third depends, Seneca quotes Demetrius as saying that he thought no man more unfortunate than the one who has encountered no adversity (3.3). Such a man, says Seneca, *indignus visus est a quo vinceretur aliquando fortuna quae ignavissimum quemque fugit* (3.3) . . . *fortissimos sibi pares quaerit, quosdam fastidio transit* (3.4).⁵

If *nec dignos* is read for *ac dignos*, the corollary of the third proposition is consistent with the rest of 3.1 (in particular with *volentibus accidere* and with *pro ipsis esse quibus accidunt*) and with the rest of the dialogue as a whole. What Seneca is saying here is that if men do not willingly face alleged *mala*, they are *unworthy* of them. In other words they are not *viri boni*. The change of *nec* to *ac* was made by a scribe who thought that the censure implied in *si nolint* should suggest punishment. By his change he removed this appearance of the paradox which underpins much of the dialogue.

III

3.2 *sed si cogitaveris tecum remedii causa quibusdam et radi ossa et legi et extrahi venas et quaedam amputari membra quae sine totius pernicie corporis haerere non poterant, hoc quoque patieris probari tibi, quaedam incommoda pro is esse quibus accidunt . . .*

Seneca draws on surgery to show that *incommoda* can benefit those whom they befall. The words *et radi ossa et legi et extrahi venas et quaedam amputari membra* deserve some consideration. Most translators, editors, and lexicographers have taken *et legi* with *et radi ossa*. But while *legere* is used elsewhere of removing bones from the body (cf. *Cons. Marc.* 22.3 *lacerationesque medicorum ossa vivis legentium*;⁶ *Ben.* 5.24.3) its presence here seems inapposite, linked as it is with *radi*. Bones which were scraped were not then removed. It was a diseased bone which was scraped *donec iam aliquid cruoris ostendatur quae integri ossis nota est* (Cels. 8.2.2).⁷

If the text is correct *et legi* is better taken with *et extrahi venas* on grounds

⁴Cf. *Tranq.* 16.3 *non tu dignus mala fortuna dis visus es*.

⁵Cf. *Prov.* 4.8 *idem dicant quicumque iubentur pati timidis ignavisque flebilis: 'digni visi sumus deo in quibus experiretur quantum humana natura posset pati';* cf. passage in preceding note.

⁶There seems to be a play, shown by *vivis*, on the usual connotation of *ossa legere*; cf. *Quint.* 8.5.21.

⁷It could be argued that Seneca was not thinking of two parts of the same procedure in *et radi ossa et legi* but of two different operations. In that case *legi* would be a colourless verb in the company of *radi*, *extrahi*, and *amputari*.

of sense. There is no reason why *venas* should not be subject-accusative of *legi* and *extrahi*. The verb is used of picking out veins prior to their being cauterised or (in the case of varicose veins) being cut. For the former procedure one may note Cels. 7.7.15H *valentior tamen medicina est ubi tenues conditaeque venae sunt ideoque legi non possunt*; cf. 7.7.15I. In the same context (7.7.15K) Celsus says *quemadmodum autem venae legendae sint quidque lectis his faciendum sit cum venero ad crurum varices dicam*.⁸ This points ahead to 7.31 where the procedure relating to the treatment of varicose veins is described. The veins are exposed, drawn out (*adtrahere*), and after removal of part of the veins are joined again.

Stylistically the passage runs a little awkwardly. We have a tricolon structure *et . . . et . . . et* but one member is expanded by another *et*. The passage would run more smoothly if either *et legi* or *et extrahi* were removed as an intrusive gloss. The rarity of *legere* in the sense required by the context here makes it an unlikely candidate as a gloss. If, however, *et extrahi* is expunged, the second member of the series *et legi venas* makes inappropriate sense: the picking out of veins is not itself the cure (note *remedii causa*) for some physical problem.

One possibility is that *legi* has replaced another verb. When Celsus is talking of bones which are not fissured or broken but whose surface has suffered some damage, he says *radi et lēvari satis est* (8.3.11). But to replace *legi* with *levari* (or *levigari*) seems in the final analysis to be a solution that is inferior to keeping the received text. The words, however, should be analysed as (1) *et radi ossa* (2) *et legi et extrahi venas* (3) *et quaedam amputari membra . . .*. The intrusive *et* may be awkward, but the assigning of *et legi* to *extrahi venas* not only gives better sense than the standard interpretation but provides a more satisfactory tricolon crescendo.

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⁸In his second edition of Celsus (Verona 1810) Leonardo Targa cited *Prov.* 3.2 in a note on 7.7.15K, taking *et legi* with *et extrahi venas*. Contrast, however, *OLD lego* 2c; Lewis and Short s.v.; *ThLL* 9².1095.31; Forcellini s. *os*.