

# The Approach to the Problem of Comprehension in Roman Stoicism

RODRIGO SEBASTIÁN BRAICOVICH

*Universidad Nacional de Rosario*

ABSTRACT: Throughout the sources that have come down to us from the Roman period of the Stoic school, we find an important number of therapeutical practices that can be clearly linked to other schools (such as Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Cynicism or Epicureanism) and can be consequently seen to constitute (part of) the common ground that enables the idea that there is a general Hellenistic approach to the problem of philosophy as therapy. I will argue that a subset of those strategies, which I will refer to as repetition, ascetic and visualization practices, can be better understood as part of an approach to the problem of *comprehension*, a new approach which, contrary to what may seem at first glance, is fully consistent with the intellectualist conception of human agency defended by both Early and Roman Stoics. I will further suggest that this new approach to the notion of comprehension may be interpreted as an expression of dissatisfaction with the Early Stoic excessively abstract approach to the problem of knowledge.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the sources that have come down to us from the Roman period of the Stoic school, we find an important number of polymorphic therapeutical practices that can be clearly linked to other schools (such as Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Cynicism or Epicureanism) and can be consequently seen to constitute (part of) the common ground that enables the idea that there is a general Hellenistic approach to the problem of philosophy as therapy. In what follows, I will argue that a subset of those strategies, which I will refer to as repetition, ascetic and visualization practices, can be better understood as part of an approach to the problem of comprehension, an approach which, contrary to what

may seem at first glance, is fully consistent with the intellectualist conception of human agency defended by both Early and Roman Stoicism. Considered from within this framework, it will become evident that the specific version of repetition, ascetic and visualization practices that Roman Stoics develop can hardly be seen to have anything in common with their Pythagorean, Platonic, Cynic or Epicurean counterparts.

## 2. REPETITION PRACTICES

Most prominently in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, but also present in Seneca and Musonius Rufus, as we shall see, Roman Stoic sources show frequent variations on the idea that certain principles which are essential to the Stoic outlook should be repeated over and over by the student. These repetition practices can take two main forms: either a recurrent repetition by the Stoic teacher of a certain principle (or set of principles), or the *exhortation* to repeat those principles to ourselves. Repetition practices represent, in other words, not only one of the pedagogical tools in the Stoic teacher's arsenal but also a tool that the student must learn to use himself.<sup>1</sup> Whether it is the teacher or the student who does the repetition is, nevertheless, irrelevant for our present purposes, and what becomes relevant is what both modalities have in common, which is the fact that they are conceived of as therapeutical strategies that are essentially linked with the question of *memory*: the effect that these practices are designed to produce on the agent is to make it impossible that she forgives certain specific, crucial theoretical principles, to prevent these ideas we have assented from becoming "like old pieces of armour that have been stowed away" (Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.6.15).

Yet, the goal of these practices goes beyond the mere ideal of *not forgetting*: those principles we are told to repeat to ourselves "from morning till evening" (Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.1.111) must not only not be forgotten but must be *actively remembered*; they must be *present* at all times; they must be *ready at hand*:

That is why I say over and over again, "Practice these things and have them ready at hand, that is, the knowledge of what you ought to face with confidence, and what you ought to face with caution, that you ought to face with confidence that which is outside the province of the *proairesis*, with caution that which is within the province of the *proairesis*."<sup>2</sup> (Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.1.29–30)<sup>3</sup>

You must be continually brought to remember these facts; for they should not be in storage, but ready for use. And whatever is wholesome should be often discussed and often brought before the mind, so that it may be not only familiar to us, but also ready to hand.<sup>4</sup> (Seneca, *Ep.* 94.26)

Training which is peculiar to the soul consists first of all in seeing that the proofs pertaining to apparent goods as not being real goods are always ready at hand and likewise those pertaining to apparent evils as not being real evils,

and in learning to recognize the things which are truly good and in becoming accustomed to distinguish them from what are not truly good.<sup>5</sup> (Musonius Rufus, Fr. 6; Hense 25.14–26.1; Lutz 54.18–23)

Just as physicians always keep their lancets and instruments ready to their hands for emergency operations, so also do thou keep thine axioms ready for the diagnosis of things human and divine, and for the performing of every act, even the pettiest, with the fullest consciousness of the mutual ties between these two.<sup>6</sup> (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 3.13)<sup>7</sup>

So far, however, nothing seems to link these demand that certain principles be *available* at all times (or, at least, when the appropriate time arrives<sup>8</sup>) with any intellectualist conception of human agency: even Pythagoreans or Epicureans connected repetition practices with the idea of active memory or availability—Pythagorean maxims had precisely that function, and Epicurus assigns a similar role to his own practice of epitomizing his own works.<sup>9</sup> What is more, as they stand, these practices seem to present an important problem to the orthodox intellectualist account of human agency: if I have understood that anything other than virtue or vice is indifferent, why should I spend any time repeating it to myself? If I understand that principle and can also correctly classify all the objects that surround me as something other than virtue or vice, why should I practice going through each of those objects at a time reminding myself that all of them are indifferent? To do it would be either gratuitous or a sign that my confidence in the intellectualist account of action is actually not as strong as it might seem.

I believe that a different answer can be reasonably offered. John Sellars has, to begin with, insisted on the important connection we can establish between “the repetitive nature of spiritual exercises” with the process of “habituation” (*ethizō*), a process that allows us to “absorb philosophical doctrines or principles into one’s character which, in turn, will determine one’s habitual behaviour” (Sellars 2003: 120–1). On the basis of this idea, I have recently offered a further elaboration on the issue, arguing that repetition practices acquire a specifically Stoic dimension when we think of them as a (thoroughly consistent) development of the intellectualist theory of action defended by both Early and Roman Stoics.<sup>10</sup> In a nutshell, I have offered the following approach to the relation between repetition and assent: for what is relevant from the perspective of the psychology of action, our soul is basically a collection of ideas (arranged in a more or a less systematic and coherent disposition, depending on the degree to which our soul is virtuous or not), a collection that is conformed by all the ideas we have assented to. Not all of those ideas, however, exhibit the same degree of “availability”: some of them I have indeed assented to but “have been stowed away, are covered with rust” and are now “unexercised and unaccustomed to face the facts” (Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.6.15). Other ideas, on the contrary, are at hand, lying in wait, and it is precisely these ideas that constitute the background against which every new impression that

presents itself to the soul will be evaluated and, ultimately, rejected or welcomed. As is evident, it is completely crucial for a Stoic to secure that the correct ideas are the ones that are available at all times in the soul, and it is there that repetition practices come into play: by repeating to ourselves certain principles we have already assented to in the past,<sup>11</sup> we make sure (or, at least, make it more likely) that it is by those principles by which every new impression will be evaluated and judged (*krinō*).

If this interpretation is correct, repetition practices can clearly be considered as therapeutical devices which are fully consistent with the Stoic intellectualist framework. As such, however, they represent only a part of the wide range of strategies that Stoics developed throughout the Roman period of the school. What some of these strategies have in common is that they constitute what I will call the Roman Stoic's new approach to the problem of comprehension, an approach which will be, I hope, further illustrated by two additional sets of devices: ascetic and visualization practices.

### 3. ASCETIC PRACTICES

Although not nearly as explicit and numerous as the visualization techniques I will mention in the following section, Roman Stoic sources present us with several instances of ascetic practices, which I will define as those practices by which the agent deprives himself willingly, deliberately and programmatically of something that he considers to be desirable (or endowed with a certain value), or (willingly, etc.) puts himself in a position that he would normally avoid and which confronts him with something that he considers undesirable (or endowed with a certain disvalue). This definition is meant to differentiate these practices from what we might call *moderation practices*, which are only meant to help us find (and stick to) a certain natural measure or balance in our actions. Stoic works are indeed crowded with references to the ethical need of avoiding excesses (generally assumed to be contrary to nature) or of suppressing certain habits that have to do with gluttony, sexual licentiousness or even debauchery, etc., but there is nothing particularly Stoic about this: after all, the recourse to self-control and moderation is probably the quintessential ethical device of Greco-Roman culture, a device that becomes more prominent and urgent during periods of peace and socio-economical prosperity, periods when culture becomes—in the eyes of certain philosophers, such as many Roman Stoics—corrupted by luxury, effeminacy, obsessed with ever more exotic and sophisticated goods and practices and during which desire becomes a leaking jar.<sup>12</sup>

The difference between these moderation practices and ascetic ones is that the former consist, in general terms, in setting limits to our desires by resorting to the idea of a certain *minimum* established by nature, the satisfaction of which

is conceived as sufficient for a given goal (vg., we do not need to drink wine imported from Turkey in order to satiate our thirst, but only water; we do not need a wealthy mansion in order to protect ourselves from the cold and the rain, etc.); ascetic practices, on the contrary, force us to go beyond—or below—that minimum, depriving ourselves (in a controlled environment, of course) even of things that we know are necessary for the sheer preservation of life. If we accept this distinction, we may surmise that ascetic practices seem to be a Roman innovation within the School: as far as I can tell, no evidence remains to suggest that Ancient Stoics either performed, or encouraged performing, ascetic practices understood in this specific sense; the evidence rather points to traditional moderation practices (most likely of a Socratic-Cynic inspiration), such as eating frugal meals or avoiding certain luxuries.<sup>13</sup> For reasons I will suggest later, I do not see this as a mere coincidence.

Two clear examples can be extracted from Epictetus's *Discourses*: the first of them comes in 3.12.17, where Epictetus approvingly refers to the practice of putting water in your mouth when thirsty and spitting it out without having drunk a single drop.<sup>14</sup> We find the second one in 3.13.20, where, within the context of Epictetus's recurrent strategy of suppressing (instead of merely moderating) our desire,<sup>15</sup> he urges us to completely abandon eating food and limit ourselves to drinking only liquids.

That these and similar practices (such as hugging a cold statue with one's naked body, keeping a palm tree erected by the sole means of one's strength, living outdoors, or fasting) were common practices in those times becomes evident through a series of references (many of them critical) that we find in Seneca, Musonius, and Epictetus. An interesting coincidence in all them is their reference to funambulism,<sup>16</sup> a practice which, though not an ascetic practice in itself, demands an incredible amount of training. Musonius and Epictetus derive the same conclusion (Epictetus perhaps echoing his teacher's lecture): if funambulists can train themselves to walk on a tightrope, risking their lives for a prize that is ultimately vile and worthless, how is it that we never train ourselves to tolerate adversities, considering that the reward is no other than *eudaimonia*? Seneca's conclusions on the example of the fundambulist are slightly different, which can be explained by the fact that the context of the passage is the question about what power we actually have over our passions: Seneca's answer is that, *before the passion has been unleashed*, our power over our passions is complete, and that, as the case of the funambulist makes clear, "there's nothing so difficult and arduous that human thought (*meditatio*) doesn't overcome it and constant practice make it a comfortable companion; no passions are so wild and independent that discipline doesn't thoroughly tame them" (Seneca, *De ira*, 2.12.3; trans. Kaster). What is relevant to our present purposes is that the context of these coincidental passages reveals a perfect awareness by Roman Stoics concerning the need to never lose sight of

the *function* we assign to ascetic practices: they are not ends in themselves, but rather a means to a certain end (*eudaimonia*); if a given practice does not lead to that end, then it has no value at all and there is no reason whatsoever to practice it.<sup>17</sup> If, despite these warnings, we decide to put them into practice, we are dealing with either ignorance or a farce.<sup>18</sup>

As has been pointed out by Foucault, these practices have both an *evaluative* and a *preparatory* function.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, they are meant to function as a moral test concerning our actual commitment to the theoretical principle that is at stake: if I claim to be committed to the Stoic doctrine of the indifference of everything other than virtue or vice, and fail at restraining myself to a frugal dinner, I have proved to myself (and others) that I was not as convinced of the truth of that doctrine as—perhaps even without hypocrisy—I claimed to be.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, these practices enable us to prepare ourselves—in an artificial and controlled environment, so to speak—to endure certain situations that fortune may throw at us in the future.<sup>21</sup> After all, that is precisely the function that Epictetus ascribes to philosophy, that is: “making preparation to meet the things that come upon us”<sup>22</sup> (Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.10.6), and that also seems to be the function that Musonius assigns to certain practices “common to soul and body,” such as

when we discipline ourselves to cold, heat, thirst, hunger, meager rations, hard beds, avoidance of pleasures, and patience under suffering. For by these things and others like them the body is strengthened and becomes capable of enduring hardship, sturdy and ready for any task; the soul too is strengthened since it is trained for courage by patience under hardship and for self-control by abstinence from pleasures.<sup>23</sup> (Musonius Rufus, *Fr.* 6; Hense 25.6–14; Lutz 54.12–18; trans. Lutz)<sup>24</sup>

A pressing question remains, a question whose answer is absent from Foucault’s analysis: what is the precise way in which these practices are supposed to prepare us to face future events? How is our voluntary and deliberate decision to sleep on a hard bed supposed to prepare us for the eventuality of having to sleep on the floor not out of our own decision but out of necessity? Does Musonius, for instance, suppose that the body merely “gets used,” by these practices, to certain situations, after which a hard bed no longer seems to be something to be avoided? If this is so, an evident problem arises concerning the Stoic intellectualist approach to human agency: given that, within the framework of the Stoic theory of action, the only possible causal source for any of our actions is the belief that that particular course of action is the best option available, why do we need to train our body to tolerate a hard bed, cold or heat? If we are *convinced* that whatever happens to the body is ultimately indifferent, any exhortation to work on the endurance of the body becomes ultimately irrelevant and, as a consequence, unjustified. Do ascetic practices, illegitimately open the door to motivational sources other than

reason? Is the body endowed with a sort of volitional autonomy that can hinder our rational decisions? Musonius's distinction between three types of exercises (to wit, those that pertain to the soul, those that only have to do with the body and those that are common to both of them) seems indeed to support that conclusion.

Musonius's own *Fr.* 1,<sup>25</sup> however, offers us another way of approaching the problem:

When we consider that some men are quicker of wit and others duller, that some are reared in better environment, others in worse, those of the latter class being inferior in character and native disposition will require more proofs and more diligent attention to be led to master the teachings in question and to be moulded by them; just as defective physiques, when the goal is to restore perfect health, require very diligent and prolonged treatment. On the other hand such pupils as are of a finer nature and have enjoyed better training will more easily and more quickly, and with few proofs, assent to sound reasoning and put it into practice. How true this is we may readily recognize if we chance to know two lads or young men, of whom one has been reared in luxury, his body effeminate, his spirit weakened by soft living, and having besides a dull and torpid disposition; the other reared somewhat in the Spartan manner, unaccustomed to luxury, practiced in self-restraint, and ready to listen to sound reasoning. If then we place these two young men in the position of pupils of a philosopher arguing that death, toil, poverty, and the like are not evils, or again that life, pleasure, wealth, and the like are not goods, do you imagine that both will give heed to the argument in the same fashion, and that one will be persuaded by it in the same degree as the other? Far from it. The one reluctantly and slowly, and fairly pried loose by a thousand arguments, will perhaps in the end give sign of assent—I mean of course the dullard. The other quickly and readily will accept the argument as cogent and relevant to himself, and will not require many proofs nor a fuller treatment.<sup>26</sup> (Musonius Rufus, *Fr.* 1; Hense 2.23–4.5; Lutz 32.33–34.22; trans. Lutz)

One of the elements we can gather from this passage (and this is my main contention concerning ascetic practices) is that, besides their undeniable *evaluatory* aspect, the ultimate goal of these practices is a *cognitive* one: what makes ascetic practices an effective therapeutic device (and a legitimate strategy concerning the intellectualist framework) is that *they enhance our understanding of a certain theoretical principle*. If ascetic practices *prepare* us for future events, it is precisely because they allow us to deepen our *comprehension* of a principle that we have only so far apprehended in a merely abstract fashion.<sup>27</sup> If this is correct, far from representing an anomaly within the intellectualist framework of the Stoic system, ascetic practices become precisely one of its (several) implementations, since they are directed precisely at enabling the conversion of a weak to a firm act of assent.<sup>28</sup> (This provides us with a further reason for distinguishing

ascetic practices from moderation practices, i.e., that the latter never carry any cognitive function: whatever their function may be—avoiding excesses, helping us get rid of whatever is above the natural minimum, etc.—they are not in any way designed to help us understand anything; they are not linked, we might say, with *epistēme*, but rather with *eleutheria*). Seneca’s strategy of a “voluntary poverty” brings together in a clear example all the elements I have assigned to ascetic practices: they are deliberate, programmable, and represent a cognitive process by which the agent can fully comprehend the implications of a certain theoretical truth (in this case, that *eudamonia* is “up to us”):

I am so firmly determined, however, to test the constancy of your mind that, drawing from the teachings of great men, I shall give you also a lesson: set aside a certain number of days, during which you shall be content with the scantiest and cheapest fare, with coarse and rough dress, saying to yourself the while: “Is this the condition that I feared?” It is precisely in times of immunity from care that the soul should toughen itself beforehand for occasions of greater stress, and it is while Fortune is kind that it should fortify itself against her violence. In days of peace the soldier performs manoeuvres, throws up earthworks with no enemy in sight, and wearies himself by gratuitous toil, in order that he may be equal to unavoidable toil. If you would not have a man flinch when the crisis comes, train him before it comes. Such is the course which those men a have followed who, in their imitation of poverty, have every month come almost to want, that they might never recoil from what they had so often rehearsed. . . . Endure all this for three or four days at a time, sometimes for more, so that it may be a test of yourself instead of a mere hobby. Then, I assure you, my dear Lucilius, you will leap for joy when filled with a pennyworth of food, and you will understand that a man’s peace of mind does not depend upon Fortune. . . . Let us practise our strokes on the dummy; let us become intimate with poverty, so that Fortune may not catch us off our guard. We shall be rich with all the more comfort, if we once learn how far poverty is from being a burden.<sup>29</sup> (Seneca, *Ep.* 18.5–8; trans. Gummere)

From a historiographical perspective, it is clear that ascetic practices are not a Stoic innovation, and neither do they die with the gradual disappearance of the Stoic school: although the final institutionalization of this type of practices will not take place until the advent of monastic and ascetic tendencies within Christianity, their history as philosophical practices within Greek culture goes back, at the very least, to pre-Socratic philosophy. Such practices, therefore, are not a Stoic innovation, and carry evident traces of Pythagorean, Platonic and Cynic elements. Yet, the specific function that Roman Stoics assign to these ascetic practices makes it clear that *i*) they have nothing to do with purification practices, as seems to have been the case in Pythagoreanism and as will certainly be within Christian monasticism, and that *ii*) neither are they quasi-Platonic practices

whose goal would be, as Camps-Gaset and Grau suggest, “to focus on certain solid and immutable truths which belong to the realm of philosophy” (Camps-Gaset and Grau 2011: 87). They are, I have suggested, intellectual or, more precisely, *cognitive devices* and, as such, they may be taken to represent an anomaly in the history of asceticism, rather than a link between ancient Pythagoreanism and Early Christian asceticism.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. VISUALIZATION PRACTICES

So far I have suggested that being prepared to face certain trying situations, such as bankruptcy or the loss of a loved one, is not merely a matter of having given our assent to the Stoic idea that material possessions are indifferent or to the idea that we live in the best of all possible worlds; we (may) need to have experienced in ourselves the actual consequences of having to live daily without (much) money, and to have experienced that kind of loss before being able to say that we are actually prepared. Ascetic practices can't, for obvious reasons, do the latter, and that's where the third, extremely rich and heterogeneous group of practices developed by Roman Stoics comes into play. *Visualization practices*, which are ubiquitous in Seneca and Epictetus, are, in general terms, designed either [a] to dispell fears that the agent may have concerning a potential situation, or [b] to allow the agent to picture in his mind, through extremely varied approaches, the consequences (either positive or negative) of adopting a certain set of principles. Although I will not delve into these practices (mainly because they are one of the dimensions of Roman Stoicism which has received more attention during the last decades<sup>31</sup>), I will provide a few examples that will help us point out their intellectual structure and functions.

The first of these groups of practices (a) includes every strategy that Roman Stoics resort to in order to make us realize that certain things and situations we fear have nothing in themselves that should be feared, either because they are indifferent or because they are actually good. Seneca provides us with examples of both alternatives:

Remember . . . before all else, to strip things of all that disturbs and confuses, and to see what each is at bottom; you will then comprehend that they contain nothing fearful except the actual fear. . . . We should strip the mask, not only from men, but from things, and restore to each object its own aspect.<sup>32</sup> (Seneca, *Ep.* 24.12)

The things that seem to be evils are not really so. . . . those things which you call hardships, which you call adversities and accursed, are, in the first place, for the good of the persons themselves to whom they come; in the second place, . . . they are for the good of the whole human family, for which the good

have a greater concern than for single persons.<sup>33</sup> (Seneca, *De providentia*, 3.1; trans. Basore)

The most obvious method of achieving the goal of removing the mask off of something that frightens us is to analyze it resorting to the parameters provided by Stoic axiology, dissecting the situation into its constituent parts and taking away what *our confused minds* are putting into the situation. This specific practice of analyzing a certain situation that we may have to face before we actually encounter it generally takes the form of a *praemeditatio futurorum malorum*.<sup>34</sup>

Let us place before our eyes in its entirety the nature of man's lot, and if we would not be overwhelmed, or even dazed, by those unwonted evils, as if they were novel, let us summon to our minds beforehand, not as great an evil as oftentimes happens, but the very greatest evil that possibly can happen. . . . Let us rise, therefore, to confront the operations of Fortune, and whatever happens, let us have the assurance that it is not so great as rumour advertises it to be.<sup>35</sup> (Seneca, *Ep.* 91.8–10)<sup>36</sup>

The aim of this *praemeditatio*, it must be noted, is not merely to remove the element of unexpectedness; it is (also) to prepare ourselves so as not to be thrown into the situation still considering it to be something negative. Being prepared for a future event is, in other words, not merely to *expect* it; it is to welcome it or, at the very least, not fear it, knowing that it is not something bad. Premeditation practices are (along with the frequent Roman Stoics' exhortations to work on a preparation for death—*praeparatio mortis*—and even a preparation for suicide), once again, essentially cognitive processes.<sup>37</sup> Both Seneca and Epictetus, however, seem to be well aware that it may not be enough to have assented to the idea that the death of a relative is something that belongs to the realm of the indifferent; we (may) need to somehow experience that situation before it actually happens. Epictetus's hair-raising exhortation to picture our own child as no longer living every time we kiss him goodbye carries precisely that intention:

With everything which entertains you, is useful, or of which you are fond, remember to say to yourself, beginning with the very least things, "What is its nature?" If you are fond of a jug, say, "I am fond of a jug"; for when it is broken you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your own child or wife, say to yourself that you are kissing a human being; for when it dies you will not be disturbed.<sup>38</sup> (Epictetus, *Ench.* 3)<sup>39</sup>

When the theoretical approach fails,<sup>40</sup> what the individual may need is the aid of a dynamic and appealing dramatization of the situation that the individual fears, even if this means staging hyperbolic or even gruesome scenarios. What I have left out of Seneca's *Ep.* 91.8–10 above is precisely the long, elaborate description, filled with visual images, of the ruin and fall of many great cities, a description whose attention to details would be uncalled for if it weren't for this objective of

placing before our eyes (*ante oculos ponere*) that which we fear in order to show that there is no reason to be anxious even over the worst version of it.<sup>41</sup>

This tendency to dramatize a certain situation, rather than merely analyze it through a theoretical approach, becomes equally evident in the second group of practices I mentioned above (*b*), the goal of which is not to dispell fears but to allow the agent to comprehend the consequences (either positive or negative) of adopting a certain set of principles. Epictetus vivid and somewhat disheartening description of the requisites of being a philosopher should suffice to illustrate this particular strategy:

In each separate thing that you do, consider the matters which come first and those which follow after, and only then approach the thing itself. Otherwise, at the start you will come to it enthusiastically, because you have never reflected upon any of the subsequent steps, but later on, when some difficulties appear, you will give up disgracefully. . . . In the same way, when some people have seen a philosopher and have heard someone speaking like Euphrates (though, indeed, who can speak like him?), they wish to be philosophers themselves. Man, consider first the nature of the business, and then learn your own natural ability, if you are able to bear it. Do you wish to be a contender in the pentathlon, or a wrestler? Look to your arms, your thighs, see what your loins are like. For one man has a natural talent for one thing, another for another. Do you suppose that you can eat in the same fashion, drink in the same fashion, give way to impulse and to irritation, just as you do now? You must keep vigils, work hard, abandon your own people, be despised by a paltry slave, be laughed to scorn by those who meet you, in everything get the worst of it, in honour, in office, in court, in every paltry affair. Look these drawbacks over carefully, if you are willing at the price of these things to secure tranquillity, freedom and calm.<sup>42</sup> (Epictetus, *Ench.* 29)<sup>43</sup>

A strategy with the reverse goal can be found in several passages from Seneca's *De ira*, and, more prominently, in his *Tragedies* (particularly *Hercules Furens* or *Medea*). Seneca's aim there is not, as was the case in Epictetus's passage quoted above, to bring to light the requisites that we have to fulfill if we want to achieve a certain goal, but rather to reveal the *consequences* that derive from certain decisions, such as allowing our anger to reign free.<sup>44</sup> Although we are urged to exercise the strategy of premeditating on impeding evils before they arrive in order to rip the mask off from what frightens us, that goal can be better accomplished if it can be clearly *shown to us*, by any means necessary, what its actual value is, and this demands the presence of a teacher/writer with specific rhetorical skills.

What is common, then, to both types of practices (*a* and *b*) is that they are both meant to help the agent *understand* in a deeper way certain principles (truths, opinions, etc.) that she has so far only approached in a superficial, merely abstract, manner. As such, visualization practices are *cognitive devices* in exactly the same

way as ascetic practices, i.e., in that the specific way that they are meant to produce a certain effect in the individual is through intellectual means. As Armisen-Marchetti defines it: “la *meditatio* est un *exercice de visualization du concept*” (Armisen-Marchetti 2004: 170),<sup>45</sup> a process through which we can fully capture either the true (dis)value of a certain situation we fear or the actual consequences that derive from something. We can at least conclude, therefore, that Roman Stoics *i*) had a clear sense of how these practices were meant to work (unlike, one might assume, Cynics and Epicureans, who shared many of these practices but who do not seem to have provided any concrete explanation of how they were supposed to produce the desired effect), and that *ii*) the way these practices worked was by producing a cognitive effect on the individual (and not, for instance, through mere *katharsis*, or by moving the individual to compassion, fear, etc.).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In the previous pages I have attempted to offer a brief outline of three of the multiple strategies that Roman Stoics developed as part of the therapeutical dimension of philosophy: repetition, ascetic and visualization practices. The differences between these completely heterogeneous practices, not only concerning their dynamics but also concerning their immediate goals, are important and numerous, but two main differences stand out: the first is that while repetition and ascetic practices are strategies we can perform on our own (i.e., we can make the habit of repeating to ourselves a certain dogma we want to have ready at hand all the time or decide to live for a certain period on nothing but water), visualization practices almost necessarily presuppose the intervention of the teacher or, at least, someone with the rhetorical skills which are necessary to provide us with a dramatical presentation of a certain situation that will help us comprehend it in a more systematic and meaningful manner. The second difference is that, from the perspective of the Stoic theory of action, not all of these practices have the same function: repetition practices are aimed at ensuring that the correct *dogmata* are at hand whenever we have to assent to an impression (i.e., all the time); ascetic and visualization practices, on the other hand, are intended to make us reach a better, deeper understanding of certain specific ideas or general theoretical principles.

These differences notwithstanding, I believe that the common ground between these practices is that they are part of the new approach that Roman Stoics provide to the problem of comprehension, which, as I have suggested, can be summed up in the idea that the merely abstract apprehension of a theoretical principle is not equivalent to a comprehensive and complete grasp of it and of its consequences or preconditions. The three types of practices I have briefly sketched above are only some of the strategies that may help us cover the distance that separates one from the other, the distance, in other words, that separates a weak act of assent from

a firm and unwavering one. Whether we assume that this new approach to the notion of comprehension is an expression of dissatisfaction with the Early Stoic excessively abstract approach to the problem of knowledge, or, alternatively, the acknowledgment that at least some of the criticisms raised against the orthodox intellectualist account of human agency were legitimate, we must concede, I believe, that the Roman Stoic new approach to the problem of comprehension is surprisingly consistent with the orthodox account of human agency.<sup>46</sup>

A reconstruction of the consequences of the adoption of this new approach is important, I believe, for our understanding of the Roman developments of Stoicism. Although this is not the place to tackle them, two elements are worth mentioning: the first has to do with the fact that the new approach provides an extremely rich and consistent account of human agency that still denies, as Early Stoics did, the very existence of the phenomenon of *akrasia*, while incorporating, at the same time, the general criticisms that had been leveled against it. As such, the Roman Stoic approach to that problem can plausibly be seen as an improved and more interesting version than the one we can reconstruct out of the fragmentary sources of Early Stoicism. The second element concerns the fact that this new approach to the problem of knowledge may prove crucial to our understanding of the relationship between philosophy considered as a *technē* and the final goal of *epistēmē*, a relationship that has received, from the works of Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault onwards, an uneven focus, the dimension of *technē* generally being the favored aspect.<sup>47</sup>

## NOTES

1. This leads to an important difference with the “visualization practices” we will briefly examine later, which can hardly be conceived as practices that the individual should perform by his own means.
2. Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω πολλάκις, ταῦτα μελετᾶτε καὶ ταῦτα πρόχειρα ἔχετε, πρὸς τίνα δεῖ τεθαρρηκέναι καὶ πρὸς τίνα εὐλαβῶς διακειῖσθαι, ὅτι πρὸς τὰ ἀπροαίρετα θαρρεῖν, εὐλαβεῖσθαι τὰ προαιρετικάς.
3. I have followed the following translations, with occasional, minor modifications: Gummere, Basore and Kaster (Seneca); Oldfather (Epictetus); Lutz (Musonius Rufus); Haines (Marcus Aurelius).
4. Itaque subinde ad memoriam reducendus es; non enim reposita ilia esse oportet, sed in promptu. Quaecumque salutaria sunt, saepe agitari debent, saepe versari, ut non tantum nota sint nobis, sed etiam parata.
5. ἰδία δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄσκησις ἐστὶ πρῶτον μὲν τὰς ἀποδείξεις προχείρους ποιεῖσθαι τὰς τε περὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τῶν δοκούντων ὡς οὐκ ἀγαθὰ, καὶ τὰς περὶ τῶν κακῶν τῶν δοκούντων ὡς οὐ κακὰ, καὶ τὰ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθὰ γνωρίζειν τε καὶ διακρίνειν ἀπὸ τῶν μὴ ἀληθῶς ἐθίζεσθαι.

6. “Ὡσπερ οἱ ἰατροὶ ἀεὶ τὰ ὄργανα καὶ σιδήρια πρόχειρα ἔχουσι πρὸς τὰ αἰφνίδια τῶν θεραπευμάτων, οὕτω τὰ δόγματα σὺ ἔτοιμα ἔχε πρὸς τὸ τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἀνθρώπινα εἰδέναι, καὶ πᾶν καὶ τὸ μικρὸ τατον οὕτω ποιεῖν ὡς τῆς ἀμφοτέρων πρὸς ἄλληλα συνδέσεως μεμνημένον.
7. Cf. also Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.1.21–25; 1.27.6; 2.1.29–30; 3.10.18; 3.18.1–2; 3.24.101–103; 3.24.115; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.3; 6.48; 9.42; 11.4; 12.24
8. “When the need arises for each separate belief, we ought to have it ready; at lunch our beliefs about lunch, at the bath our beliefs about a bath, in bed our beliefs about a bed. . . . Again, in a fever have ready the beliefs which apply to that.” / “Ἐκάστου δόγματος ὅταν ἡ χρεία παρῆ, πρόχειρον αὐτὸ ἔχειν δεῖ· ἐπ’ ἀρίστῳ τὰ περὶ ἀρίστου, ἐν βαλανεΐῳ τὰ περὶ βαλανείου, ἐν κοίτῃ τὰ περὶ κοίτης. . . . πάλιν ἐν πυρετῷ τὰ πρὸς τοῦτο (Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.10.1.4).
9. Cf. *Ep. Men.* 135; *Ep. Hdt.* 35–6, 83; *Ep. Pyth.* 84–85. For a brief comment on these practices, cf. Tsouna 2009, 254–255.
10. Vid. Braicovich 2012.
11. This idea must be stressed: repetition practices are not meant to work by hammering in certain ideas into the soul of the student: the principles that he is supposed to constantly repeat to himself are ideas *he has already assented to* in the past. What these practices enable is merely that they do not become a *mere* event in the past.
12. Cf. inter alia, Seneca, *Ep.* 108.13–22; Musonius Rufus, *Fr.* 18a.
13. Cf. Finn 2009: 26–7.
14. Cf. also Epictetus, *Ench.* 47. As Oldfather points out, Stobaeus assigns a similar practice to Plato: cf. Stob. *Flor.* 3.17.35 (Wachsmuth).
15. Cf. Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.12.8; 3.22.13; 4.4.33; *Ench.* 2.2.
16. Cf. Seneca, *De ira* 2.12; Musonius Rufus, *Fr.* 7, Lutz 58.5–20; Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.12.1–5.
17. “We ought not to take our training in things that are unnatural or fantastic, since in that case we who profess to be philosophers will be no better than the mountebanks. For it is a hard thing also to walk a tight-rope, and not merely hard but dangerous too. Ought we also for this reason to practise walking a tight-rope, or setting up a palm, or throwing our arms about statues? Not a bit of it. Not every difficult and dangerous thing is suitable for training, but only that which is conducive to success in achieving the object of our effort.” / “Τὰς ἀσκήσεις οὐ δεῖ διὰ τῶν παρὰ φύσιν καὶ παραδόξων ποιεῖσθαι, ἐπεὶ τοὶ τῶν θαυματοποιῶν οὐδὲν διοίσομεν οἱ λέγοντες φιλοσοφεῖν. δύσκολον γάρ ἐστι καὶ τὸ ἐπὶ σχοινίου περιπατεῖν καὶ οὐ μόνον δύσκολον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπικίνδυνον. τούτου ἕνεκα δεῖ καὶ ἡμᾶς μελετᾶν ἐπὶ σχοινίου περιπατεῖν ἢ φοίνικα ἰστάνειν ἢ ἀνδριάντας περιλαμβάνειν; οὐδαμῶς. οὐκ ἔστι τὸ δύσκολον πᾶν καὶ ἐπικίνδυνον ἐπιτήδειον πρὸς ἄσκησιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ πρόσφορον τῷ προκειμένῳ ἐκπονηθῆναι. τί δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ προκειμένον ἐκπονηθῆναι; ὀρέξει καὶ ἐκκλίσει ἀκωλύτως ἀναστρέφεσθαι.” (Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.12.1–4).
18. “Whenever a man drinks water only, or has some ascetic practice, he takes every opportunity to talk about it to everybody “I drink water only!” Why, do you drink water just for the sake of drinking water? Man, if it is good for you to drink water, drink it! Otherwise your conduct is absurd. But if it does you good and you drink water only,

don't say a word about it to the people who are annoyed by such persons. Why, what's your object? Are these just the ones you wish to please?" / "Όταν τις ύδωρ πίνη ἢ ποιῆ τι άσκητικόν, έκ πάσης άφορμής λέγει αυτό πρὸς πάντας. 'έγώ ύδωρ πίνω' διά γάρ τοῦτο ύδωρ πίνεις, διά γάρ τὸ ύδωρ πίνειν; άνθρωπε, εἰ σοι λυσιτελεῖ[ν] πίνειν, πίνε· εἰ δὲ μή, γελοίως ποιεῖς. εἰ δὲ συμφέρει σοι καὶ πίνεις, σιώπα πρὸς τοὺς δυσαρεστοῦντας τοῖς άνθρώποις. τί οὖν; αὐτοῖς τούτοις άρέσκεῖν θέλεις. (Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.14.4–6). Cf., also Epictetus, *Ench.* 47.

19. Cf. (Foucault 1978: 58–60).
20. As is evident, the converse also holds: success in carrying through ascetic practices is (or, at least, can be interpreted as) a clear sign of my commitment to a certain doctrine. A complement to this can be found in the idea that we cannot judge the moral virtue of an agent until she has actually faced adversity; cf., inter alia, Seneca, *De providentia*; Musonius Rufus, Fr. 9; Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.24.1; 3.24.113.
21. We might say, on account of this, that there is a certain Popperian element to these practices, given that they are meant to “die in our stead.”
22. παρασκευάσασθαι πρὸς τὰ συμβαίοντα.
23. [κοινή μὲν οὖν άσκησις άμφοῖν γενήσεται,] συνεθιζομένων ἡμῶν ρίγει, θάλλει, δίψει, λιμῶ, τροφῆς λιτότητι, κοίτης σκληρότητι, άποχῆ τῶν ἡδέων, ύπομονῆ τῶν ἐπιπόνων. διά γάρ τούτων καὶ τῶν τοιούτων ρώννυται μὲν τὸ σῶμα καὶ γίνεται δυσπαθές τε καὶ στερεὸν καὶ χρήσιμον πρὸς άπαν ἔργον, ρώννυται δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ γυμναζομένη διά μὲν τῆς ύπομονῆς τῶν ἐπιπόνων πρὸς άνδρείαν, διά δὲ τῆς άποχῆς τῶν ἡδέων πρὸς σωφροσύνην.
24. James Francis suggests interpreting these as practices to be performed by the student “only until the mind is sufficiently trained to look upon externals with indifference” (Francis 1995: 12–13). Although there is no clear evidence of this within Musonius's text, if we take it together with Seneca's *Ep.* 18 (quoted below), it certainly becomes a plausible interpretation.
25. “That there is no need of giving many proofs for one problem,” according to Stobaeus.
26. ἐπειδὴ τῶν άνθρώπων οἱ μὲν ὀξύτεροι οἱ δ' άμβλύτεροί εἰσι καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐν ἔθεσι κρείττοσιν, οἱ δὲ ἐν χείροσι τεθραμμένοι, οἱ μὲν ἤθους ἢ φύσεως ὄντες χείρονος πλειόνων δέονται' ἂν άποδείξεων καὶ πραγματείας μείζονος, ὥστε δέξασθαι ταυτὶ τὰ δόγματα καὶ τυπωθῆναι κατὰ ταῦτα, καθάπερ οἶμαι καὶ τὰ πονηρὰ τῶν σωμάτων, ὅποταν μέλλη καλῶς ἔξειν, πάνυ πολλῆς ἐπιμελείας δεῖται· ὅσοι δὲ τῶν νέων εὐφύεστεροι καὶ άγωγῆς μετεσχηκότες κρείττονος, οὗτοι ῥᾶόν τε καὶ θάπτον καὶ δι' ὀλίγων άποδείξεων συναινοῖεν ἂν τοῖς λεγομένοις ὀρθῶς καὶ άκολουθοῖεν. ὅτι δ' οὕτως ἔχει ταῦτα, γνοίημεν ἂν ῥαδίως, εἰ νοήσαιμεν μερικάκιον ἢ νεανίαν, τὸν μὲν ἐν τρυφῇ πάση τεθραμμένον καὶ τὸ τε σῶμα τεθηλυμμένον καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐκλελυμένον ὑπὸ ἐθῶν άγόντων εἰς μαλακίαν, ἔτι δὲ νωθῆ παρεχόμενον καὶ δυσμαθῆ τὴν φύσιν· τὸν δ' αὖ Λακωνικῶς πῶς ἠγμένον καὶ τρυφᾶν οὐκ εἰθισμένον καὶ καρτερεῖν μεμελετηκότα καὶ τῶν λεγομένων ὀρθῶς εὐήκοον ὄντα· εἴτα τοὺς δύο τούτους νεανίας εἰ θείημεν άκούοντας φιλοσόφου λέγοντος περὶ θανάτου, περὶ πόνου, περὶ πενίας, περὶ τῶν ὁμοίων, ὡς οὐ κακῶν ὄντων, πάλιν δ' αὖ περὶ ζωῆς, περὶ ἡδονῆς, περὶ πλούτου, περὶ τῶν παραπλησιῶν

τούτοις ὡς οὐκ ἀγαθὰ ἔστιν, ἄρα γε ὁμοίως ἄμφω προσήσονται τοὺς λόγους καὶ παραπλησίως ἑκάτερος <ἀν> πίθοιτο τοῖς λεγομένοις; οὐκ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν. ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν μόγις καὶ βραδέως καὶ ὡσπερ μοχλευόμενος ὑπὸ μυρίων λόγων τάχ' ἂν ἐπινεύσειεν, ὁ νωθέστερος· ὁ δ' αὖ ταχέως καὶ ἐτοίμως δέξεται τὰ λεγόμενα ὡς οἰκεία καὶ προσήκοντα αὐτῷ, μῆτε ἀποδείξων δεόμενος πολλῶν μῆτε πραγματείας μείζονος.

27. As has been pointed out by an anonymous referee, it may be objected that certain passages cannot be straightforwardly interpreted from this perspective, such as Seneca, *Ep.* 13.3: “Manliness gains much strength by being challenged” / *Multum enim adicit sibi virtus lacessita*.” Although the objection cannot be denied in itself, it can be replied that although the expression does not offer additional *support* to my interpretation, it does not either *preclude* it; it merely remains silent as to *how* challenges are supposed to strengthen the agent’s virtue.
28. I disagree, for this reason, with Hadot’s refusal to consider ascetic practices prior to Christianity as “spiritual exercises” (cf. Hadot 1993: 77–78). If we accept his definition of the concept of “spiritual exercises” as “des pratiques, qui pouvaient être d’ordre physique, comme le régime alimentaire, ou discursif, comme le dialogue et la méditation, ou intuitif, comme la contemplation, mais qui étaient toutes destinées à opérer une modification et une transformation dans le sujet qui les pratiquait” (Hadot 1995: 22), I see no reason why the practices referred to so far should be excluded from that category.
29. Ceterum adeo mihi placet temptare animi tui firmitatem ut ex praecepto magnorum virorum tibi quoque praecipiam: interponas aliquot dies quibus contentus minimo ac vilissimo cibo, dura atque horrida veste, dicas tibi 'hoc est quod timebatur?' In ipsa securitate animus ad difficilia se praeparet et contra iniurias fortunae inter beneficia firmetur. Miles in media pace decurrit, sine ullo hoste vallum iacit, et supervacuo labore lassatur ut sufficere necessario possit; quem in ipsa re trepidare nolueris, ante rem exerceas. Hoc secuti sunt qui omnibus mensibus paupertatem imitati prope ad inopiam accesserunt, ne umquam expavescerent quod saepe didicissent. . . . Hoc triduo et quadriduo fer, interdum pluribus diebus, ut non lusus sit sed experimentum: tunc, mihi crede, Lucili, exultabis dipondio satur et intelleges ad securitatem non opus esse fortuna. . . . Exerceamur ad palum, et ne inparatos fortuna deprehendat, fiat nobis paupertas familiaris. Securius divites erimus si scierimus quam non sit grave pauperes esse.
30. My reading goes against the bulk of the interpretations on the history of asceticism. Cf., by way of example, the omnipresence of Stoicism in the collection of works gathered in Wimbush and Valantasis 1995 and in Vaage and Wimbush 1999. Cf. also Swain 1916: 104–42.
31. Concerning Seneca’s strategies, besides Staley’s thorough reconstruction of the philosophical agenda behind Seneca’s tragedies (Staley 2010), cf. Sorabji 2000: 76–81; Armisen-Marchetti 2008 and 2004; Michaud 1994; Vogt 2006; Van Hoof 2007; Manning 1976; Nussbaum 1996: 439–83. Concerning Epictetus, cf. Wildberger 2013; Erler 2007.
32. Illud autem ante omnia memento, deniere rebus tumultum ac videre, quid in quaque re sit; scies nihil esse in istis terribile nisi ipsum timorem. . . . Non hominibus tantur,

- sed rebus persona demenda est et reddenda facies sua. Epictetus resorts to the same image of removing the mask off of what frightens us: “Just as masks appear fearful and terrible to children because of inexperience, in some such manner we also are affected by events, and this for the same reason that children are affected by bugbears. . . . What is death? A bugbear. Turn it about and learn what it is. . . . What is hardship? A bugbear. Turn it about and learn what it is.” (Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.1.15–19; on the implications of the passage concerning Epictetus’s attitude towards Socrates, cf. Erler 2007). Cf. also Epictetus, *Ench.* 5; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 8.14.
33. Non sint quae uidentur mala . . . ista quae tu uocas aspera, quae aduersa et abominanda, primum pro ipsis esse quibus accidunt, deinde pro uniuersis, quorum maior dis cura quam singulorum est.
  34. For an excellent analysis of this particular technique and its implications in the discussions with Epicureanism, cf. Armisen-Marchetti 2004 and 2008. Cf. also Sorabji 2000: 235–8; Hadot 1993: 150–1; Hadot 1997: 222–4.
  35. Tota ante oculos sortis humanae condicio ponatur, nec quantum frequenter evenit sed quantum plurimum potest evenire praesumamus animo, si nolumus opprimi nec illis inusitatis velut novis obstupefieri. . . . Consurgamus itaque aduersus fortuita et quidquid inciderit sciamus non esse tam magnum quam rumore iactetur.
  36. As Armisen-Marchetti points out, the topic of *praemeditatio malorum* lends itself to be turned into an analysis of (recent) past events, aimed at persuading us that nothing bad has actually happened (cf. Armisen-Marchetti 2008: 105), and that is precisely what Seneca does, going back and forth between *praemeditatio* and *consolatio*.
  37. Cf. Cicero’s distinction between the effects of time (on a psychic wound) and the effects of the practice of *ante meditare* in *TD* 3.58.
  38. Ἐφ’ ἐκάστου τῶν ψυχαγωγούντων ἢ χρεῖαν παρεχόντων ἢ στεργομένων μέμνησο ἐπιλέγειν, ὁποῖόν ἐστιν, ἀπὸ τῶν σμικροτάτων ἀρξάμενος· ἂν χύτραν στέργῃς, ὅτι ‘χύτραν στέργω’· κατεαγείσης γὰρ αὐτῆς οὐ παραχθήσῃ· ἂν παιδίον σαυτοῦ καταφιλήσῃς ἢ γυναῖκα, ὅτι ἄνθρωπον καταφιλήεις· ἀποθανόντος γὰρ οὐ παραχθήσῃ.
  39. Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.24.84–86 provides a broader context: “Whenever you grow attached to something, do not act as though it were one of those things that cannot be taken away, but as though it were something like a jar or a crystal goblet, so that when it breaks you will remember what it was like, and not be troubled. So too in life; if you kiss your child, your brother, your friend, never allow your fancy free rein, nor your exuberant spirits to go as far as they like, but hold them back, stop them, just like those who stand behind generals when they ride in triumph, and keep reminding them that they are mortal. In such fashion do you too remind yourself that the object of your love is mortal; it is not one of your own possessions; it has been given you for the present not inseparably nor for ever, but like a fig, or a cluster of grapes, at a fixed season of the year, and that if you hanker for it in the winter, you are a fool.” Cf. also Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.10.25–30.
  40. I surmise that the purely theoretical approach *must fail*, since its failure is not the result of a defective teaching but of the very constitution of our *psychē*. Even if we may grant that the Stoic sage might probably not need to submit himself to repetition,

ascetic or visualization practices, that is an ideal that bears little relevance within the realistic approach to human psychology we encounter in the sources of Roman Stoicism.

41. Marcus Aurelius's writings can, up to a point, be interpreted in a similar fashion, i.e., as dramatizations that he stages *for himself*. On the *Meditations* as therapeutical exercises, cf. Hadot 1997: 62–6 and Sellars 2012: 460–3.
42. Ἐκάστου ἔργου σκόπει τὰ καθηγούμενα καὶ τὰ ἀκόλουθα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὕτως ἔρχου ἐπ' αὐτό. εἰ δὲ μὴ, τὴν μὲν πρώτην προθύμως ἤξεις ἅτε μηδὲν τῶν ἐξῆς ἐντεθυμημένος, ὕστερον δὲ ἀναφανέντων δυσχερῶν τινων αἰσχυρῶς ἀποστήσῃ. . . οὕτω θεασάμενοι τινες φιλόσοφον καὶ ἀκούσαντες οὕτω τινὸς λέγοντος, ὡς Εὐφράτης λέγει (καίτοι τίς οὕτω δύναται εἰπεῖν, ὡς ἐκεῖνος;), θέλουσι καὶ αὐτοὶ φιλοσοφεῖν. ἄνθρωπε, πρῶτον ἐπίσκεψαι, ὁποῖόν ἐστι τὸ πρᾶγμα· εἶτα καὶ τὴν σεαυτοῦ φύσιν κατάμαθε, εἰ δύνασαι βαστάσαι. πένταθλος εἶναι βούλει ἢ παλαιστής; ἴδε σεαυτοῦ τοὺς βραχίονας, τοὺς μηρούς, τὴν ὄσφυν κατάμαθε. ἄλλος γὰρ πρὸς ἄλλο πέφυκε. δοκεῖς, ὅτι ταῦτα ποιῶν ὡσαύτως δύνασαι ἐσθίειν, ὡσαύτως πίνειν, ὁμοίως ὀρέγεσθαι, ὁμοίως δυσχερεστεῖν; ἀγρυπνῆσαι δεῖ, πονῆσαι, ἀπὸ τῶν οἰκειῶν ἀπελθεῖν, ὑπὸ παιδαρίου καταφρονηθῆναι, ὑπὸ τῶν ἀπαντῶντων καταγελασθῆναι, ἐν παντὶ ἤττον ἔχειν, ἐν τιμῇ, ἐν ἀρχῇ, ἐν δίκῃ, ἐν πραγματίῳ παντί. ταῦτα ἐπίσκεψαι. εἰ θέλεις ἀντικαταλλάξασθαι τούτων ἀπάθειαν, ἐλευθερίαν, ἀταραξίαν.
43. Cf. also the whole of Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.2; 1.18.17; 4.1.107–111.
44. Cf., on this last play, Nussbaum's assessment: "What does this awful nightmare have to do with us? Seneca's claim is that this story of murder and violation is our story—the story of every person who loves. Or rather, that no person who loves can safely guarantee that she, or he, will stop short of this story" (Nussbaum 1996: 441).
45. An excellent complement to Armisen-Marchetti's analyses can be found in Gareth Williams's wonderful reconstruction of the manifold dramatization techniques that Seneca resorts to in his *Naturales quaestiones*. Vid. Williams 2012.
46. This does not, of course, mean that *every* therapeutic strategy we find in Roman Stoicism is consistent with their intellectualist theory of action. Seneca's works are perhaps the most problematic source on this issue, specially concerning his interpretation of the effects of music on the soul (to which Sorabji offers a partial analysis; cf. Sorabji 2000: 76–84) and his reception of the Hippocratic humoral theory (which I have analyzed elsewhere; cf. Braicovich (forthcoming)). As has been pointed out by an anonymous referee, another set of scattered passages that can be seen to pose a problem for the intellectualist conception of human agency is comprised, among others, by Seneca *Ep.* 59.9, Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.5.8–10, 3.8.2, Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 5.16, and Musonius Rufus, *Fr.* 6. (Lutz 52.29–54.2). Although a thorough analysis of those passages would be required to support my reading, I do not see them as presenting any real obstacle to the general intellectualist account: both the positive use of the notion of "dyeing one's soul with certain doctrines" and its negative counterpart (i.e., that our past acts of assent—to false ideas—imprint a certain pattern or tendency in our soul), can be easily interpreted as variations on the notion of a sort of "settled" ignorance, which can be interpreted in turn as nothing more than a

- certain set of false ideas that are present in the soul and which have (perhaps) become more systematically intertwined with each other. In the specific case of Musonius, I have argued for an intellectualist reading of his notion of “corruption” (διαφθορά) in Braicovich 2013: 63–65; in the case of Epictetus, I have suggested an intellectualist interpretation of his repetition practices and techniques in Braicovich 2012.
47. In its broad strokes, my interpretation is in line with (what I understand are) Cooper’s recent and previous attempts to approach Stoicism by *focusing* on the intellectualist elements that act as the structure on which the whole of their philosophical therapy is built (Cooper 2007; Cooper 2004a; Cooper 2004b; Cooper 2012). As has been recently pointed out by Sellars (2014) and Sharpe (2014), Cooper’s interpretation of Stoicism is not as distant from Hadot’s or Foucault’s, or even Sellars’s own, as he seems to think. I believe, however, that Cooper is right on what he takes to be the most fruitful way to approach Stoic therapeutic strategies, i.e., not from the perspective of considering Stoicism as essentially a *technē*, but rather as a *téchne* that depends on a specific theory of action and, above all, a *technē* which sets itself the goal of reaching a certain *epistēmē*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Armisen-Marchetti, Mireille. 2004. “*Tota ante oculos sortis humanae condicio ponatur*: exercice moral et maîtrise des représentations mentales chez Sénèque,” *Incontri triestini di filologia classica* 4: 161–79.
- Armisen-Marchetti, Mireille. 2008. “Imagination and Meditation in Seneca: The Example of *praemeditatio*,” in *Seneca*, ed. John G. Fitch, 102–13. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Braicovich, Rodrigo Sebastián. 2012. “Critical Assent, Intellectualism and Repetition in Epictetus,” *Apeiron* 45: 314–337.
- Braicovich, Rodrigo Sebastián. 2013. “Teoría y práctica en Musonio Rufo. Un análisis crítico de las *Disertaciones* 5 y 6,” *Contrastes* 18(1–2): 49–68.
- Braicovich, Rodrigo Sebastián. Forthcoming. “Estrategias terapéuticas e intelectualismo en el *De ira* de Séneca,” *Ideas y Valores* 158.
- Camps-Gaset, Montserrat, and Sergi Grau. 2011. “Philosophy for the Body, Food for the Mind,” *Coolabah* 5: 83–101.
- Cooper, John M. 2004a. “Moral Theory and Moral Improvement: Marcus Aurelius,” in *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy*, 335–68. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Cooper, John M. 2004b. “Moral Theory and Moral Improvement: Seneca,” in *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy*, 309–34. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Cooper, John M. 2007. “The Relevance of Moral Theory to Moral Improvement in Epictetus,” in *The Philosophy of Epictetus*, ed. Andrew S. Mason and Theodore Scaltsas, 9–19. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cooper, John M. 2012. *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

- Epictetus. 1961. *The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, the Manual and Fragments*, ed. W.A. Oldfather. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Erler, Michael. 2007. "Death Is a Bugbear: Socratic 'Epode' and Epictetus' Philosophy of the Self," in *The Philosophy of Epictetus*, ed. Andrew S. Mason and Theodore Scaltsas, 99–11. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Finn, Richard D. 2009. *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *Histoire de La Sexualité. 3. Le Souci de Soi] The Care of the Self. Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Francis, James A. 1995. *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Hadot, Pierre. 1993. *Exercices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Hadot, Pierre. 1995. *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Paris: Gallimard.
- Hadot, Pierre. 1997. *La Citadelle Intérieure. Introduction Aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle*. Paris: Fayard.
- Lutz, Cora. 1947. "Musonius Rufus: The Roman Socrates," *Yale Classical Studies* 10: 3–147.
- Manning, C. E. 1976. "Seneca's 98th Letter and the 'Praemeditatio Futuri Mali,'" *Mnemosyne* 29(3): 301–4.
- Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. 2003. *The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Emperor of Rome: Together with His Speeches and Sayings*, trans. Charles Reginald Haines. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Michaud, Jean-Noël. 1994. "L'Hercules Furens: de la folie dans la tragédie à la tragédie, spectacle de la folie," *Vita Latina* 136(1): 8–20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3406/vita.1994.913>
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1996. *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Praxis in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Sellars, John. 2003. *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Sellars, John. 2012. "The Meditations and the Ancient Art of Living," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren, 453–64. Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Sellars, John. 2014. "Review of John Cooper's *Pursuits of Wisdom*," *Mind* 123 (492): 1177–80. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzu136>
- Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. 1917. *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. Richard M Gummere. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. 1970. *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore. London: Heinemann.
- Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. 2010. *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*, trans. Robert A. Kaster and Martha Craven Nussbaum. The Complete Works of Lucius Annaeus Seneca. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sharpe, Matthew. 2014. "How It's Not the Chrisippus You Read: On Cooper, Hadot, Epictetus, and Stoicism as a Way of Life," *Philosophy Today* 58:3 (Summer): 367–92. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/philtoday20145225>
- Sorabji, Richard. 2000. *Emotion and Peace Of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*. The Gifford Lectures. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Staley, Gregory Allan. 2010. *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Swain, Joseph Ward. 1916. *The Hellenic Origins of Christian Asceticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tsouna, Voula. 2009. "Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, ed. James Warren, 249–65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vaage, Leif E., and Vincent L. Wimbush, eds. 1999. *Asceticism and the New Testament*. New York: Routledge.
- Van Hoof, L. 2007. "Strategic Differences: Seneca and Plutarch on Controlling Anger," *Mnemosyne* 60: 59–86.
- Vogt, Katja Maria. 2006. "Anger, Present Injustice and Future Revenge in Seneca's De Ira," in *Seeing Seneca Whole: Perspectives on Philosophy, Poetry and Politics*, ed. Katharina Volk and Gareth D. Williams, 57–74. Leiden: Brill.
- Wildberger, Julia. 2013. "Paraenesis and Argument in Arrian, *Discourses of Epictetus* 1.4.," in *Argument Und Literarische Form in Antiker Philosophie: Akten Des 3. Kongresses Der Gesellschaft Für Antike Philosophie 2010*, ed. Michael Erler and Jan Erik Hessler, 411–34. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Wimbush, Vincent L., and Richard Valantasis, eds. 1995. *Asceticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

