PROGRESSION OF THOUGHT
IN SENECA'S *DE PROVIDENTIA* C. VI

by Louise Theron
(Rand Afrikaans University)

The emperor Caligula is alleged to have said that Seneca's style was like 'sand without lime'.¹ This judgement, which referred to the many short and apparently disconnected sentences in the author's works, is understandable, since Seneca did adopt the 'pointed style' so greatly in vogue in his day, a style which had as main characteristic frequently occurring 'disconnected, jerky, antithetic and epigrammatic sentences'.² But this judgement on Seneca's style was later taken over by critics and applied to the inner thought-development of his works: these short sentences, in other words, were regarded as emptily rhetorical without any coherent and continuous progression of thought. Macaulay for instance said of Seneca: 'I cannot bear him ... His works are made up of mottoes. There is hardly a sentence which might not be quoted; but to read him straight forward is like dining on nothing but anchovy sauce.'³ K. Reinhardt, too, could see no artistic arrangement in Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* or *Epistulae Morales*, and called the author a mere 'Antithesenfänger'.⁴ E. Albertini, again, saw no logical coordination in Seneca's philosophical works,⁵ while as recently as 1963, A.D. Leeman still criticised Seneca's works in general for their 'lack of composition' which is so 'painfully evident'.⁶

Valuable work on Seneca has, however, been done recently, as a result of which the author's stylistic skill, the ingenious manner of his argumentation and the occurrence of various structural patterns in his works have been

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¹ *Harena sine Calce*, Suet. Cal. 53.2.
² J. W. Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age* (London, 1963) p. 185. Cf. also H. MacL. Currie, *Bull. Inst. Class. Stud.* (London) 13 (1966) 77ff. In Seneca's case, however, this 'pointed style' can be shown not to have been employed for rhetorical effect only, but to have been functional in so far as 'pointed' sentences were very often used to indicate the conclusion of successive blocks of thought.
⁴ *Poseidonios* (Munich, 1921), pp. 51ff., 140. One should, however, read his excellent appreciation on pp. 157ff. and 393.
brought to light. It is, then, the purpose of the present study, following up these researches in defence of Seneca, to ascertain whether the author's use of the 'pointed style' necessarily excludes a logical progression of ideas and a continuous thought-development, as the above-mentioned negative judgements seem to imply. For this purpose the sequence of thought in a section of one of Seneca's dialogues, namely the *De Providentia*, will be examined against the background of the Stoic doctrine as a whole, allowing, of course, for a certain amount of formal knowledge which Seneca assumed in his reader, Lucilius, a potential Stoic, to whom the work is dedicated. This dialogue was in 1965 still censured by René Waltz as 'un des plus confus et des plus mal composés de Sénèque'.

The sixth and final chapter of the *De Providentia* offers the best opportunity for observing Seneca's method of composition. The chapter opens with a question (*Quare tamen bonis viris patitur aliquid mali deus fieri?, c. VI.1*) which has in some guise or other already occurred five times in the course of the dialogue, like a *Leitmotiv* constantly reminding one of the theme, i.e. of the problem around which this dialogue centres, namely *quare aliqua incommoda bonis viris accident cum providentia sit?* This touches on the problem of theodicy, especially as it appears in Stoic philosophy where complaint about the ways of god implied that god's justice was being questioned, and this, of course, threatened the belief in the existence of god. Seneca, however, does not give a comprehensive


9. cc. I.1; II.1; IV.8; V.3; V.9.

10. Cf. W. Capelle, 'Zur antiken Theodicee' (*Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 20, 1907). Abel (p. 102), however, has quite rightly pointed out that this dialogue is much more than a mere discussion of the theodicy problem; it is, in fact, 'eine beinahe gewaltsame sittlich-religiöse Umerziehung' which proposes to lead man to a heroic resignation to his fate, and even to an *amor fati sive dei*.

11. Seneca used many expressions for the manifestation of divine power: *sic nunc naturam voca, fatum, fortunam; omnia eiusdem dei nomina sunt varie utentis sua potestate* (*Ben.* 4.8.3); to those expressions should of course be added *providentia*. In this he followed the pantheistic materialism of the Old Stoics who maintained *ἐν τὶ ἐἶναι θεόν καὶ νόμον καὶ ἐξαρματήν καὶ Δία πολλαῖς τε ἐκτέραις ὁμομάζεις προσονομάζονται* (*SVF* I. 102: D.L. VII.135).
discussion of this problem, but confines himself to a justification of the suffering of external hardships.12

The answer to the question with which c. VI is opened, introduces, to my mind, the discussion of the fifth argument in the scheme of five arguments by means of which Seneca proposed to prove the thesis quam non sint quae videntur mala which was announced in c. III.1.13 This argument, persuadebo enim tibi, ne unquam boni vii misereris; potest enim miser dici, non potest esse, is developed in three stages in the course of the chapter:

A. In c. VI. 1–5 Seneca tries to prove that far from inflicting real mala on the vir bonus,14 god actually grants him the greatest bona. This first stage of the argument is developed antithetically: in contrast to the true mala (c. VI.1) are the true bona (c. VI.5); these two members of the main antithesis are separated from each other by a subordinate antithesis where, at greater length, false mala (c. VI.3f.) are contrasted to false bona (c. VI. 3f).15 A closer look reveals that the true mala are moral evils16 which god removes from the vir bonus and against which he even protects him.17 In contrast to these true inner mala are the false outer mala, such as wealth, which seems

12. I cannot agree with Abel (p. 98) who maintains that the mala-concept which is discussed here 'umschliesst einen doppelten Sinn', namely external and moral evils. That Seneca intends to justify the suffering of external hardships only, is to my mind already revealed in the introductory statement of the dialogue by Seneca's use of the technical philosophic term accidere (quid ita, si providentia mundus regeretur, multa bonis viris mala acciderent c. I.1). This word denotes that something befalls man from outside (cf. A. Pittet, Vocabulaire Philosophique de Sénèque (Paris, 1937) p. 41. s.v. accidens; so too Aristotle Top. I.5.102b and Metaph. 3.4.1007 a.31–32), whereas moral mala come from within and can thus not 'happen to' man. This supposition is confirmed by Seneca's statement in c. VI.1 that god himself removes all moral evils from the vir bonus.13

13. The objection may well be raised that since the second argument in this scheme – nunc illud dico, ista, quae tu vocas aspera, quae adversa et abominanda ... pro universis (sc. esse quibus accident) quorum motor dis cura quam singulum est, c. III.1 – reaches its conclusion in c. VI.2 only (here Seneca at last explains why it is good that boni viri should suffer, by stating that they endure hardships ut alios pati doceant; nati sunt in exemplar), the discussion of the fifth argument cannot start before that. This device of allowing lines of argumentation to overlap one another, is however a most effective means of bringing about an inextricable connection and interlinking of the work as a whole, and is a good argument against accusations that the work lacks cohesion and coordination. It occurs again elsewhere in this dialogue where c. VI.3–9 overlaps c. VI.1–5 (cf. p. 69–70); cf. too Maurach, Gymnas. 74 (1967) 550, right centre.

14. It should be noted that Seneca used the term vir bonus as a general expression which is also the equivalent of sapiens, as does Cicero: Quos dicam bonos perspectum est; omnibus enim virtutibus instructos et ornatos tum sapiens, tum bonos viros dicimus (Tusc. 5.28).

15. Abel (p. 106 n. 26) has pointed out the chiastic arrangement of this section: true mala – false mala – false bona – true bona.

16. Seclera et flagitia et cogitationes improbas et avida consilia et libidinem caecam et alieno imminentem avaritiam (c. VI.1).

17. It is clear that Seneca follows the old Greek doctrine here in maintaining that moral evil does not come from the gods: oi theoi ti drôsan aîôxhôn, oûs oîs òs theoi (Nauck, fragm. tr. p. 447; SVF. II,1125).
to be a *bonum*, as well as events which seem to be *mala* but which are voluntarily sought by the *vir bonus*, for instance the loss of children, exile and death. From these, however, god need not protect man because man himself despises them as externals, or to use the technical philosophic term, as διάφως. Apart from the fact that these outer *mala* can then not really be *mala* (else the *vir bonus* would not submit himself to them voluntarily), they even have a positive effect: the noble endurance of such suffering gives the *vir bonus* the opportunity to teach others to endure: *Quare quaedam dura patiuntur? Ut alios pati doceant; nati sunt in exemplar* (c. VI. 2).

Having shown in parr. 1 and 2 that the *vir bonus* cannot be unhappy because god protects him from real *mala* and he himself despises all apparent *mala*, Seneca now proceeds to show through a contrast of apparent and real *bona* that the *vir bonus* is actually the only person who can really be regarded as happy. In parr. 3 and 4 the author reveals the superficiality and irreality of the *bona falsa*, and points out that the happiness of the possessors of these apparent *bona* depends on external things and is therefore neither sound nor genuine. In strong contrast stand the *bona certa* which god grants the *vir bonus* and which consist in an attitude of complete spiritual self-sufficiency that knows no fears and no desires (the Stoic ideal of αὐτάρκεια). The happiness of the Stoic sage is therefore not dependent on external things (*non egere felicitate felicitas vestra est*, c. VI. 5), but the source of his bliss lies inside himself (*bona vestra introrsus obversa sunt*). This, according to Stoic doctrine, is one of the highest stages of spiritual development that the *vir bonus* can reach, since in this respect he equals god: *sic mundus (=deus, SVF I. 530) exteriora contempsit spectaculo sui laetus* (c. VI. 5).

B. In the second stage of the argument Seneca reveals yet another reason why the *vir bonus* cannot be unhappy. It is given in the answer to the eighth
and last repetition of the Leitmotiv-question21: 'At multa incidunt tristia, korrenda, dura toleratu.' Quia non poteram vos istis subducere, animos vestros adversus omnia armavi. By strengthening man's animus, god has thus enabled him to resist those evils which might still befall him. It is then man's animus which gives him the strength to endure suffering and to scorn poverty, pain, death and even Fortuna: the fiercest hardships can be endured if one is armed with the right attitude of mind.

C. The argument is concluded by a discussion of suicide (parr. 7–9), a theme which seems at first sight not to be connected with the rest of the dialogue or with the argument. A closer look, however, reveals that it forms an integral part of the whole and represents the climax of the argument that the vir bonus should not be pitied because he can never really be unhappy. Up to c. VI. 3 Seneca has done his utmost to enforce the positive value of mala; if, however, this theoretical discussion proves to be in vain and the mala seem overpowering, there still remains the ultima ratio: suicide. The ancients did not regard suicide as a cowardly escape from life, nor did Seneca think it contrary to the will of god: it is stated clearly in par. 7 that god himself saw to it that nothing should keep man in life against his will. Indeed, suicide is one of the highest expressions of man's freedom of will22: if the necessitates ultimae23 arrive and man is no longer able to lead an honourable life, he is completely free to depart at any moment. How easy it is to die and how quickly it happens, is explained in parr. 8 and 9. Death is only that short moment when the soul leaves the body, and it happens quickly whichever method of suicide one chooses. The dialogue is concluded rather abruptly by a reproach for cowardice: Ecquid erubescitis? quod tam cito fit, timetis diu!

In the sixth chapter we have thus witnessed the logical development in various stages of the fifth argument adduced to prove Seneca's thesis: quam non sint quae videntur mala. And by revealing that the things which seem to be evils are not really so, Seneca has at the same time provided a

21. The constant recurrence of this question may perhaps be compared to Ravel's well-known orchestral piece, 'Bolero', in which the theme is first played on one instrument only. With every repetition more instruments are added until the last repetition when the theme is played by the whole orchestra in a mighty fortissimo. Similarly the Leitmotiv-question in the De Providentia is every time repeated against a richer background of facts until its last repetition in c. VI.6 when we see the question in perspective against all the facts of the background.

22. The doctrine of θάλαπος διανομή or rationalis e vita excessus played a prominent part in Stoic ethics (cf. SVF III.757–768). For suicide as an expression of freedom, cf. Epist. 70.14: Invenies etiam professos sapientiam, qui vim adferendam vitae suae negent et nefas iudicent ipsum interemptorem sui fiert; expectandum esse exitum, quem natura decrevit. Hoc qui dicit non videt se libertatis viam cludere. Nil melius aeterna lex fecit, quam quod unum introitum nobis ad vitam dedit, exitus multos; so too Epist. 12.10 and Horace, Epist. 16.78f.

23. Cf. Epist. 17.9: Sed si necessitates ultimae inciārunt, tandemum exibit e vita et molestus sibi esse desinet; so too Cic. Fin. 3.18.60.
satisfactory answer to the problem with which the dialogue deals, namely *quid ita, si providentia mundus regeretur, multa bonis viris mala acciderent?* (c. I.1).

A second line of thought can be discerned in c. VI, namely that based on the tripartite expression which occurs in c. I.6: *experitur, indurat, sibi illum (sc. virum bonum) parat (sc. deus)*. This theme, too, provides to some extent an answer to the *Leitmotiv*-question: it is for our own good that we endure these so-called *mala*, since that is God’s way of testing us and inuring us to hardships so that we may become his peers. Abel (p. 107) has already pointed out that this line of thought is developed in three stages: the testing of the *vir bonus* (*experitur*) as the underlying idea in c. III. 2–IV. 8; the hardening of man if he is found worth while (*indurat*) as the undercurrent in c. IV. 9–IV. 16; and the preparation of man to become the equal of God (*sibi illum parat*) as the background of c. V. 1–VI.5. According to Abel, this line of thought reaches its culmination in c. VI.5 where the idea of equality with God is represented by a mental state of absolute spiritual self-sufficiency (*non egere felicitate felicitas vestra est*) in which the *vir bonus* is able to equal God (*sic mundus (=deus) exteriora contempsit spectaculo sui laetus*). To my mind, however, this line of thought is carried on further: these ideas, equality with God and spiritual self-sufficiency, which Abel has taken together in his interpretation of par. 5, separately reach an even higher climax in the remaining part of the dialogue. In par. 6 Seneca makes the astonishing statement: *hoc est quo deum antecedatis: ille extra patientiam malorum est, vos supra patientiam*. Not only can man become the equal of God but he can even surpass him in that he endures suffering whereas God is exempt from suffering. Also, man can surpass God if he can conquer his fear of death to the extent of committing suicide, for again, he conquers fear himself, whereas God is exempt from fear.25 Suicide may at the same time be regarded as the highest expression of spiritual self-sufficiency: if man can reach the stage where he can regard death, the greatest of all *mala*, as a moral *διωκομόν*, then and then only has he reached the highest stage of spiritual self-sufficiency.

A third line of argumentation occurs in this chapter, namely the traditional one of *praeccepta – exempla*. In this dialogue, however, Seneca changed the usual order by starting with a very explicit treatment of *exempla* in c. III.4–14, and following it up with a treatment of *praeccepta* (c. IV.1–VI.9) which encourage man to reach the same heights as the heroes who figure in the

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24. The idea that the *vir bonus* is the equal of God and differs from him only in his mortality (the so-called *διωκομόν* theory) was common in antiquity. Cf. e.g. Const. Sap. 8.2: *sapiens autem vicinus proximusque dis consistit, excepta mortalitate similis deo*.  
25. Cf. Epist. 53.11: *Est aliquid quo sapiens antecedat deum; ille naturae beneficio non timet, suo sapiens.*

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The *praecopecta* which were in the rest of the dialogue for the most part implied rather than explicitly stated, suddenly attract our attention in c.VI where they occur repeatedly in the form of imperatives: *contemnite paupertatem . . . contemnite dolorem . . . contemnite mortem . . . contemnite fortunam* (c. VI.6), and *mortem condiscite* (c. VI.8). A final *praecoceptum* in the form of a sharp reproach concludes the dialogue: *Ecquid erubescitis? quod tam cito fit, timetis diu.* Here we see Seneca the *praecoceptor* at his best, and by speaking in the person of god in the last few paragraphs, he heightens the authority of his *praecopecta*. In striving thus to lead man away from complaint about his fate, an attitude which is so clearly reflected in the Leitmotiv, to an *amor fati*, Seneca is fulfilling his task as philosopher, namely to educate mankind morally.

Beneath the discussion of the five arguments announced so explicitly in c.III.1 runs a more profound structural pattern which, although it is only mentioned at intervals, permeates the last two chapters of the *De Providentia*. This is namely an exposition of the metaphysics of suffering where Seneca explains in his own individual way how and why a Stoic endures adversities. Here we can see why Seneca in this dialogue maintains, or rather *has* to maintain, that the so-called *mala* which the *vir bonus* has to endure, are not really *mala*, but *δούλωρα*.

In c.V, where this line of thought occurs for the first time, Seneca explains that the Stoic sage endures suffering placidly and submits himself to his fate *willingly* in order to maintain his dignity, because he knows that the

26. So too in *Cons. Marc.* 21 where Seneca gives as reason: *Scio a praeceptis incipere omnis, qui monere aliquem volunt, in exemplis desinere. Mutari hunc interim morem expedit; alter enim cum alio agendum est.* Yet another reason for this inversion can be found in Epist. 6.5: *Longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla.* Cf. *Cons. Marc.* 2.1 for the traditional order: *praecocepta – exempla.*

27. Cf. however c. IV.9; IV.12 and 13 where the *praecopecta* are explicitly stated in the form of imperatives or gerundives expressing obligation.

28. Apparently the question *οὐκ ἀμεξίλος*; was typical of the rebuking tone of the Cynic sermons, cf. Abel, p. 118 n. 63.

29. The existence of this structural pattern was pointed out by G. Mauther in his review of K. Abel's *Bauformen in Senecas Dialogen* in *Gymnasium* 14 (1967) 549-551.

30. It is quite in keeping with Seneca's approach to conceal a pattern of thought which is based on a formal philosophic doctrine beneath one which is easier to grasp for the reader, for instance his *Epistulae Morales* – apparently informal letters, yet all based on sound Stoic doctrine. Seneca's thorough knowledge of the Stoic system enabled him to leave the dogmatic aspects in the background; this, of course, makes his work much more appealing than a formal account of Stoic doctrine would be.
result will be the same whether he resists or yields to fate.31 Whatever will be will be, but whether it happens with our consent or without it, changes the whole character of our lives, ‘das macht uns zu Sklaven oder Herren der Dinge’.32 In man’s freedom of choice to accept the course of nature or not, lies his only hope of an honourable and happy existence.33 We see here portrayed the proud, defiant attitude of the Stoic who believed that man can become the equal of god (ὅμοιος ὁ θεός) in all respects save his mortality: man can therefore not afford to be forced to do anything or to admit that he has suffered a loss, since that will mean that he is the slave of god.34 In order to avoid this serious impairment of his dignity and grandeur, he willingly accepts his fate and even tries to forestall the intentions of god so that it may seem as if he had in any case intended to carry out what now stands revealed as his will.

Man’s submission to fate is made easier by the knowledge that the whole universe, yes, even god the creator and ruler of the universe who once wrote the decrees of fate, is governed by an eternal law which has determined long beforehand everything that will happen, from the smallest detail in our own lives to the mortality of the human race.35 This frank admission of the limitation of divine power suddenly adds a new dimension to the picture: we must seek even deeper for the cause of the mala. No longer is god to be blamed for everything that happens to man – although hampered by the

31. The conception of surrender to destiny was first set forth by Cleanthes in his well-known Hymn to Zeus: ἄνευ ἰδίων ὄφελος, ὃς ζητεῖ ζητήσει, ἂν δὲ σὺ γένοιτο ἴδιον ὄφελος, ὃς ἔχεται διὸ μὴ ἐξακολουθήσῃ. οὐκ ἐγείρετε γένος ἢ προσέκαλε, ἢ δὲ γε μὴ ἰδιότητα τεθεία (SVF I.517). This was translated into Latin by Seneca in Epist. 107.11; here the first line is most relevant: ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt.


33. The reconciliation of a deterministic philosophy with the free will of man was one of the thorniest problems in the Stoic doctrine. Chrysippus, who became inextricably involved in the difficulties of this problem, tried his utmost to explain how everything is ruled by fate, but how we nevertheless have some control over our conduct. He is said to have used the image of a dog who is tethered to a moving vehicle and who may choose to run with it, but who will be dragged along willy-nilly if he does not so choose (SVF II.975). The result is a condition of half-slavery (μετάθεσις), as one of Chrysippus’ critics called it (SVF II.978).

34. nihil cogor, nihil patior invitus, nec servio deo sed assentior (c. V.6); cf. too Epist. 54.7: nihil invitus factit sapiens, necessitatem effigit quia valuit quod coactura est; and Epictetus, Diss. 4.7.20. It is close to the Christian idea expressed in Mat. 6.10 and Luke 22.42.

35. Ille ipse omnium conditor et rector scriptit quidem fata, sed sequitur; semper paret, semel iussit (c. V.8). This statement becomes understandable if we realize that god obeys only because his will is perfect and causes no change (cf. Nat. 2.36 and 39); he is not constrained by any external force, but his own will is an eternal law to him; he obeys not from weakness but because he has no desire to stray from the best path, and it was decreed that this is the path to follow (cf. further Ben. 4.23.1–3).
materia he made the world as good as possible; it is fate that rules man's life. Man is thus no longer the victim of providence, but its fellow-sufferer.

In c.VI.6 Seneca takes up his exposition of the metaphysics of suffering again by pointing out how man is able to cope with the hardships which will inevitably befall him due to the limitation of divine power. The clue lies in god's answer to man's last desperate complaint about the mala which befall him; Quia non poteram vos istis subducere, animos vestros adversus omnia armavi: ferte fortiter! God has thus given man a means of defence which enables him to ward off, even to scorn the onslaughs and temptations of the world. The importance of this gift of god cannot be overestimated: man's animus is his only link with god, and it is by virtue of this precious possession that he is able to endure suffering, scorn death, reach a stage of complete spiritual self-sufficiency, and finally become the equal of god himself.

Finally, if it so happens that man reaches a stage in life when the disadvantages outweigh the advantages, and when even the possession of an animus is of no avail, there is still a last solution: suicide. Man is, so to speak, free to leave the stage on which he has acted the drama of his life; in fact Seneca states elsewhere that it becomes his duty to do so if it is no longer possible for him to play his role with dignity.

Tracing the sequence of thought reveals not only the internal structure of the work but also its external form. Until quite recently the De Providentia was considered incomplete and lacking in a conclusion or peroratio. Abel was the first to suggest that there is a peroratio which, according to him, consists of c.VI.6-9. That the dialogue does have a peroratio, and that this peroratio consists of the whole prosopopoeia of god (c.VI.3-9), seems to me beyond doubt. Abel's argument that the peroratio only starts at c. VI.6 since c.VI.1-5

36. Non potest artifex mutare materiam (c. V.9), a statement which presupposes a dualism between creator and materia, between a rational and an irrational principle in Seneca's philosophy. Chrysippus tried to explain god's struggle with materia by saying that in order to create a great bonum, god sometimes had to submit himself to certain inconveniences (SVF II.1170, quoted by Grimal, p. 251).

37. Expressed in technical language this sentence means that once god has written the decrees of fate, he has no control over the συναντώμενα (events which are inextricably connected therewith). In the realization of its ultimate object the eternal law brought about certain inevitable by-effects which were not originally intended, but which followed as incidental results κατά παρακολούθησιν (SVF II.1157,1158,1170). It is these evils that god could not remove from man's path.


forms a unit, presents no real obstacle to such a view: we have already seen that various lines of thought overlap one another, a device which keeps the dialogue closely knit together. Perhaps the most important reason for regarding c.VI.3–9 as a separate unit is that we suddenly find a markedly different approach in this section to the problem around which this dialogue centres. Up to c.VI.3 the dialogue has mainly been an attempt to reveal the positive value of mala – indeed a praiseworthy attempt, but one which provided a rather negative and pessimistic solution: man must, with Stoic dignity and resignation, offer himself to fate. It is indeed a cruel and inexorable world in which the Stoic exists, even though he realizes that many of these mala befall him without the intention of god due to the limitation of his power, and that the endurance of suffering is often to his own advantage, and to that of mankind in general. But in c.VI.3–9 the dialogue is suddenly lifted out of the depths of despair when the Stoic ‘Weltgott’ comes to man’s rescue, as it were, by reproaching him for his complaints and by pointing out that he is really very fortunate. That man has little to complain about becomes apparent in the course of the prosopopoeia when god directs attention to the fact that he has in many respects alleviated man’s lot: he has allowed man to reach a stage of spiritual self-sufficiency in which he equals god; he has armed man’s mind to enable him to ward off hardships; he has provided suicide as a last refuge if life becomes unbearable. In the prosopopoeia the author has thus allowed the reader to see the brighter side of things; he has, so to speak, transposed the theme from a minor to a major key – a heightening of tone which sets this section apart from the rest of the dialogue.

Furthermore, the mere use of a prosopopoeia suggests a break and usually a climax in the development of the argument. In this dialogue the insertion of the speech of the Stoic god right at the end immediately lifts it from a level of impersonal logical argumentation directed to the mind, to one of almost passionate appeal directed to the heart, again setting the prosopopoeia apart from the rest of the dialogue.

A brief examination of the rules of rhetoric seems to be apposite here in order to ascertain whether the prosopopoeia does meet the requirements of a peroratio as component of a speech. Quintilian thought that a prosopopoeia was particularly suitable as peroratio, since it was one way of stirring up the emotions: His praecipue (sc. in perorationibus) utiles sunt prosopopoeiae, id est fictae alienarum personarum orationes, quales litigatorum ore dicit patronus. Nudae tantum res movent: et cum ipsos loqui fingimus, ex personis quoque trahitur affectus. According to this professor of rhetoric, a peroratio should have two ends in view: eius (sc. perorationis) duplex ratio est posita

40. Cf. for instance the prosopopoeia of Plato’s Crito 50, and of the Republic which Cicero inserted at the end of his First Catilinarian Oration (parr. 27–29); further Bion (Stob. 5.67); Hor. Sat. 1.2.69; Boèth. Consol. 2.2.1 (Bieler).
41. Inst. 6.1.25.
The ratio posita in rebus, which may be defined more closely as a recapitulation of the argument, is represented in the De Providentia by the recurrence in the prosopopoia of all the lines of thought treated by Seneca in the course of the dialogue. The ratio posita in affectibus is defined by Quintilian as follows: est igitur utrisque (sc. partibus) commune conciliare sibi, avertere ab adversario iudicem, concitare affectus et compone re. That the prosopopoia possesses the latter qualities seems to be indisputable: the very first sentence of god's speech contains an indignant reproach ('avertere ab adversario', 'concitare affectus'), followed by the explanation that the prosperity and happiness of the wicked are superficial and transient whereas god endowed the boni viri with a genuine and enduring gift. Man's last desperate appeal to god about the hardships that he has to endure is answered in a gentler tone: exhortations to scorn hardships are now followed by explanations attempting to mitigate their sting; in fact, death, the malum malorum, is described in such glowing terms that one cannot help feeling at the end that it is really a blessing that there does exist such a refuge as death. This effort to pacify and conciliate does seem to contain elements which meet Quintilian's requirement: conciliare sibi (sc. iudicem) and affectus . . . compone re.

According to the rules of rhetoric, the prosopopoia in the De Providentia measures up to the requirements of a peroratio. Rhetorically the dialogue is therefore complete. But intellectually it is complete too: the intrinsic meaning of the last three paragraphs refutes all arguments that part of this work is missing. The abrupt end of the dialogue corresponds to the abrupt end which suicide makes to life. What more could Seneca have added?

By this examination of the sixth chapter of the De Providentia we have tried to show that Seneca's use of the 'pointed' style does not necessarily exclude a logical progression of ideas. On the contrary, there is, in fact, a continuous development of thought through the apparently disconnected sentences; various carefully developed lines of thought can be traced through this chapter, everyone of which highlights a different aspect of the theodicy problem with which the author is struggling in this dialogue. These lines of thought which are developed simultaneously and yet independently of one
another, form a complicated network of interwoven and overlapping patterns, nearly like an intellectual fugue.

That Seneca composed consciously and carefully is also confirmed by other findings. In the last paragraph (c.VI.9), for instance, careful reading reveals that the four ways of suicide which are described there, are not merely four possibilities chosen at random out of a multitude, but that they were specifically chosen to correspond to the four elements. There is, too, Seneca’s clever construction of the first five paragraphs of VI where his employment of a figure of speech certainly reveals deliberate composition: the argument in this section is led very skillfully from a discussion of real mala to false mala, (AB), and then from false bona to real bona (BA), whereby man is gradually brought over from a state of complaint about the injustice of god to one of gratitude for his goodness. This chiastic arrangement (ABBA) is thus used not merely for the sake of art, but as a valuable aid in furthering the argument. Finally Seneca’s careful construction and logical development of inner thought has been embodied in the outward formal structure of the work.

47. Albertini (n. 5 above) has pointed out the correspondence: hanging (sive fauces nodus elisit): air; drowning (sive spiramentum aqua praeclusit): water; falling (sive in caput lapsos subiacentis soli duritia): earth; and the swallowing of fire (sive haustus ignis cursum animae remeantis interseclit): fire. The latter was an exceptional way of dying and was obviously added to complete the correspondence to the four elements. One case is, however, transmitted, namely that of Porcia, the daughter of Cato Uticensis, and wife of Caesar’s murderer Brutus, who put an end to her life after the death of her husband by swallowing fire (Val. Max. 4.6.5).
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

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