

Cato's One-Man Show: Book 9 of Lucan's *Pharsalia* as a commentary on Senecan Didactics

In this paper I argue that the figure of Cato in Book 9 of Lucan's *Pharsalia* can be read as a specific critique of the younger Seneca's approach to Stoic didactics. Ancient writers seem to have been keenly aware of a tension in Stoic thought between the interiority of its fundamental principles and its inherently externally-oriented pedagogical mission. In his own unique approach to didactics Seneca relies heavily on metaphor and *practicum* as a means to inspire a student to pursue virtue, and as tools that will ultimately lead to a true i.e. unmediated understanding of the fundamental Stoic precepts that underlie his teaching. Many scholars have recognized that Stoic belief equates knowledge and virtue. Traditionally, Stoic teaching relied on rigorous and extensive propositional logic in order to advance their arguments from common idiom and metaphor toward unmediated understanding. But, as Shadi Bartsch observes, Seneca frequently derides the potential of such arcane proofs to persuade and motivate an audience.¹

One critique of Seneca's approach, therefore, is that it largely glosses over the question of exactly how metaphor and practice ultimately serve to instill the unmediated understanding of Stoic principals that, according to Stoic doctrine, is necessary for the attainment of virtue. In this paper will argue that the figure of Cato in *Pharsalia* Book 9 can be read as Lucan's critique of this gap in Seneca's pedagogy. Specifically, Cato represents a student of Senecan Stoicism who is acting under the didactic metaphor of the *external observer* commonly used by Seneca as a tool for explaining and justifying a Stoic orientation toward externals. The figure of Cato problematizes Seneca's teaching because, although his actions seem properly Stoic, Cato is ultimately acting without a proper, unmediated, understanding of Stoic truths and thus fails to live up to his traditional role a Stoic exemplar *par excellence*.

¹For a full discussion see: Shadi Bartsch, "Senecan Metaphor and Stoic Self-instruction," in *Seneca and the Self*, ed. Shadi Bartsch and David Wray (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 214–217.

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