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A Commentary on Seneca’s
Epistulae Morales Book IV
(Epistles 30-41)

by

Mark Davies

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Latin,
The University of Auckland, 2010
Abstract

A commentary on Book IV of Seneca’s *Epistles* needs little justification. To date there is no commentary for the entire book and only brief commentaries for some of the individual letters. A commentary on Book IV would be of use to scholars of Seneca and join the recent commentaries on other books such as Richardson Hay’s on Book I and Laudizi’s on Book III.

The thesis has three introductory chapters. The first of these looks at how Seneca’s philosophical writing has been interpreted. It argues that the literary element in Seneca’s writing and his use of Latin are integral to his philosophy and cannot be removed to leave some philosophical core that is readily pliant to reconstructing earlier Stoic thought from its fragmentary remains. Furthermore, Seneca’s own opinions on writing and style offer a more reliable guide to reading his work than forcing it to fit some modern literary theory. What emerges from Seneca’s writing when such prior agendas and assumptions are put aside is a pragmatic philosophy written to appeal to the values of Seneca’s Roman readers.

The second chapter argues from Book IV that the book divisions are relevant to the organization of the *Epistles*. Firstly, one needs to be reminded of the sequential nature of the collection, which Book IV illustrates well, as it marks a shift from the use of quotes to end letters that had been a feature of the first three books. This is an aspect frequently lost in excerpting. Then, the evidence is presented for Book IV being a unitary composition, particularly through the thematic links between the two opening and two closing letters. The third chapter lays out the scope of the commentary.

The commentary is organized with an introductory essay prefacing the commentary on each epistle; this serves to compensate for the fragmenting tendency of the commentary as a scholarly form. The emphasis in these essays and in the commentaries is to relate the letters primarily to the wider context of Seneca’s thought, and then secondarily to the broader context of ancient philosophic and literary thought.
To my family. To my parents and grandparents, particularly to my grandfather, Max, who in many ways has made it possible. To my wife and children, Min Jeong, Ieuan and Anna, who have lived through, or grown up during its gestation. May it be a small return for their forbearance and patience.
The subject of acknowledging benefits that one has received was an important one for Seneca, so it is only fitting that someone who has been studying his works should acknowledge the help he has received from many sources.

My first debt goes to my family, who encouraged me, supported me and put up with me through the long process of writing this thesis. Therefore I want to thank my parents Ian and Francela and my wife Min Jeong, without whose help it would not have been possible to finish. I would also like to thank my children Ieuan and Anna without whose good humour the process would have been much harder.

My next debt goes to my supervisor, Marcus Wilson, whom I want to thank for his enthusiasm for the ancient world and its authors which inspired me to keep studying. He also planted the seeds for a thesis on Seneca as far back as 1989 during my undergraduate studies. As a supervisor he has benefited me hugely with his enthusiasm and knowledge on Seneca; the thesis would be immensely poorer without his help. I would also like to thank the contributions from the audiences of the various conference and seminar papers that I gave, particularly at the ASCS and PacRim conferences and in the departmental seminars.

I should also acknowledge a debt of thanks to two scholarships, the Bright Futures Scholarship and the University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship. These provided vital financial support as well as, in the case of the Bright Futures Scholarship, funding for attending conferences that considerably enriched my research. I am also immensely grateful to Lynne Lindberg in the Education Development Unit of the University of Auckland’s Business School, who has been very supportive of my study as my boss for the time after the scholarships ended.

There is now an incredible range of technical resources available, but I particularly want to thank the people at SoftMaker for their excellent word processor, TextMaker, which puts its bigger rival to shame. It handled the formatting quickly, conveniently and faultlessly. Furthermore, with any queries their staff were always incredibly helpful.
Acknowledgements
Conventions and Abbreviations

The name or abbreviation in the left column is how these works are referenced in the commentary and in footnotes. Apart from the editions of Book IV and the reference works listed here, scholarly publications are cited by name and date and are listed in the bibliography.

Internal cross-references in this thesis are indicated by the lemma when they are to a section of the commentary, e.g. ‘Ep. 30.1 n.’ The lemma is also cited if necessary. Otherwise they are indicated by a page number. Owing to a limitation in the software used to mark these cross-references, only the start of them is indicated, whether they refer to a section of one page or more.

§ and §§ are used to indicate the section numbers of the individual epistles when which epistle being referred to is already clear.

1) Editions of Book IV:

**BOUILLET**

**HENSE 1898**
Hense, O. (1898) *L. Annaei Senecae ad Lucilium Epistularum Moralium quae supersunt*, Leipsig.

**GUMMERE**

**LORETTO**

**PRÉCHAC**

**REYNOLDS**

2) Abbreviations:

a) The abbreviations used in *OLD* or *OCD*³ have generally been used except for a few exceptions. For example, the editions of Fronto cited here are from *PHI 5.3* and are significantly different from those in *OLD*. In the case of Seneca’s dialogues rather than referring to them as *Dial.1-12* the following abbreviations used by Armisen-Marchetti have been adopted:
Conventions and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brev.</td>
<td>De Brevitate Vitae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Const.</td>
<td>De Constantia Sapientis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helv.</td>
<td>Ad Helviam Matrem de Consolatione</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ira</td>
<td>De Ira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc.</td>
<td>Ad Marciam de Consolatione</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ot.</td>
<td>De Otio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyb.</td>
<td>Ad Polybium de Consolatione</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov.</td>
<td>De Providentia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranq.</td>
<td>De Tranquillitate Animi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vit.</td>
<td>De Vita Beata</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) For clarity Seneca the Elder is abbreviated as follows:

Sen. Rh., Con. Seneca the Elder, Controversiae
---, Suas. Seneca the Elder, Suasoriae

c) The common elision of Arrian’s authorship of Epictetus’ Discourses has also been followed for the sake of concision:

Epict. Diss. Arrian, Epicteti dissertationes
Epict. Ench. Arrian, Epicteti encheiridion

d) Other minor variations are:

D.L. Diogenes Laertius
Epicurus, R.S. Epicurus, Ratae sententiae
---, S.V. Epicurus, Sententiae Vaticanae
---, Men. Epicurus, Epistula ad Menoeceum
e) For reference works the following abbreviations have been used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIL</td>
<td>(1863–) Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, Berlin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IG</td>
<td>(1873–) Inscriptiones Graecae, Berlin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAASE</td>
<td>‘Index Rerum Memorabilium’ in HAASE 1853, 484-594.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conventions and Abbreviations


TLL  (1900-) Thesaurus linguae Latinae, Leipzig.


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