

CHAPTER SIX

Seneca: Morals and Suicide

Although Hume obviously is an A.D. person, living within the first half of the eighteenth century A.D. and Lucius Annaeus Seneca is a B.C. person, born at Cordoba, Spain about 4 B.C. and died about 65 A.D., the similarities are too dramatic to ignore. John Calvin, for instance read Seneca's writings and commented extensively on Seneca's essay *On Clemency*. So, a basic so-called Stoicism permeates the writings of Calvin as well as the Calvinist David Hume. I chose to place Hume's *Essay on Suicide* first and to follow by using the two letters of Seneca, the one, number 70 *On Suicide*, the second, number 92 *On The Happy Life* because they clearly show the influence of this Stoic, Seneca on the Calvinist, Protestant Christian religion of David Hume - Calvinists from John Calvin through Hume to Sartre gravitated toward the Roman Stoics because the Stoic view of the body and pleasure and pain mirrored John Calvin's negative view of the human body, woman and living within the world.

...the body...is a sort of garment with which Nature has clothed the soul: it is the soul's sheath.

The Stoics viewed the body as a prison and thus a punishment for some transgression of the soul which resulted in the punishment of its being condemned to a mortal life within a body. Actually, this Stoic view finds roots in Plato's *Republic* wherein Plato plays with the Greek vowels *omega* and *epsilon* as he alternately calls the body a *soma* and a *sema*, the first meaning, *body*, the second also meaning body but specifically is the word for a *cell, prison. or cave*. Of course, Plotinus, the foremost disciple of Plato, adopts this view completely, to the extent that his secretary, Porphyry, writes that "Plotinus...seemed ashamed of being in the body". Moreover, Plotinus contends that "...that part which communicates life to the body (namely, the soul) receives nothing from the body". Both Martin Luther and John Calvin had roots in this Plotinian view of Plato. Seneca observes:

My remarks about clothing you may apply to the body, for it is a sort of garment with which Nature has clothed the soul; it is the soul's sheath. But who has ever valued clothes by the rack? The scabbard does not make a sword good or bad. (*Letter # XCII, p. 242*)

A Spaniard, Seneca was born at Cordoba, Spain about 4 B.C. his aunt took him to Rome as a baby, nursed him through a sickly childhood and set him upon a career as a Roman citizen. He became a lawyer, entered the Roman government as a *Questor*, under the Emperor Tiberius, in 33 A.D., achieved counselor rank and became the virtual prime minister of finance under the Emperor Nero in 54 A.D. Seneca wielded the same kind of power within the Roman empire under Emperor Nero as Thomas More did within England under Henry the VIII in the fifteenth century A.D.

Seneca left them “his only, but fairest, possession, the pattern of his life...”

But, Seneca “blew the whistle” to the Roman Senate on Nero’s involvement in the murder of Agrippina in 59 A.D., so Nero ordered Seneca to take his life - this early sentence parallels the decision of the Athenian Senate in the case of Socrates within the *Apology* of Plato and the decision of the Japanese Emperor Hideyoshi in the case of Rikyu within the *Book of Tea* of Okakura. Should Seneca not take his own life, then the Emperor would order his execution by a person appointed by him. Seneca’s situation, therefore, predated that of Rikyu by some seventeen hundred years. Tacitus, the renowned Roman historian, who disliked Seneca, describes his last hours within his *Annals*, 15. 62:

Seneca calmly requested tablets for making a will and on the centurion’s refusal turned to his friends and declared that as he was prevented from showing gratitude for their deserts, he would leave them his only, but fairest, possession, the pattern of his life. If they heeded this, they would win a reputation for good character and the reward of steadfast friendship. At the same time, now by persuasion and now by rebuke, he led them from tears to fortitude, asking them repeatedly, ‘Where are those philosophical precepts, where is the logic you have so long studied for just such an event? Has Nero’s savagery been a secret? After the murders of his mother and brother, it is natural that he should add the death of his guardian and tutor’.

When he had discoursed in this fashion to all in common, he embraced his wife. He relaxed his stern fortitude to get and implore her to temper her grief and not nourish it forever but rather to find honorable solace for the loss of her husband by contemplation of a life spent in virtue. In return, she declared that she too had resolved to die and asked for the executioner’s

stroke. Seneca would not oppose her nobility and would not leave behind for insult one he had dearly loved. 'I have shown you a cushioning for life', said he, 'but you prefer the glory of death. I do not begrudge you the gesture. Let the constancy of our departure be alike for both of us, but greater fame in your end'. Then with the same stroke they severed the arteries of their arms.

Seneca and Socrates viewed virtuous living more important than living a long life.

Various writers contemporary with Seneca have written divergent descriptions of his life, some commending his virtue, others condemning his hypocrisy. Dio Cassius, a Roman Senator who also served during Seneca's period of public service writes:

While denouncing tyranny, Seneca was making himself the teacher of a tyrant; while inveighing against the associates of the powerful, he did not hold aloof from the place himself; and though he had nothing good to say of flatterers, he himself had constantly fawned upon Messalia and the freedmen of Claudius, to such an extent, in fact, as actually to send them from the island of his exile a book containing their praises, a book that he afterwards suppressed out of shame. Though finding fault with the rich, he himself acquired a fortune of 300,000,000 sesterces; and though he censured the extravagances of others, he had 500 tables of citrus wood with legs of ivory, all identical and he served banquets on them. In stating this much, I have also made clear what naturally went with it - the licentiousness in which he indulged at the very time that he contracted a most brilliant marriage and the delight that he took in boys past their prime, a practice which he also taught Nero to follow. (Note that the Roman "sesterces" was a coin whose value was the equivalent of four asses, THE Roman "workhorse" as it were; thus, Dio Cassius is saying that Seneca had assets equal to 1 billion 200 million "asses", a fortune which might parallel that of the contemporary William Gates!)

An interesting comment which Dio makes elsewhere somewhat undermines this condemnation of Seneca. Dio observes that Seneca was "...superior in wisdom to all the Romans of his day and to many others as well". The question then becomes: is this stated condemnation of the vices

of Seneca merely an manifestation of jealousy? We do not know, nor can we find out, so we are left with the statements of Seneca to study and to understand. If both Dio's descriptions are accurate, then a comparison of Seneca with Socrates would find Socrates the clear winner, as it were, ethical to the core. Socrates would then be the living example of Heraclitus' Fragment 10:

To be temperate is the greatest virtue. Wisdom consists in speaking and acting the truth, giving heed to the nature of things.

Seneca, however, would be moral in practice, yet ethical in intention and through his writings. A final judgment about Seneca, however, is impossible for us human beings, even if we are scholars of history. The issue is simple: whether or not Seneca's views are truthful, not necessarily whether or not Seneca's daily life was consistent with the views of him left by history.

Plato, his student provides history a unique view of Socrates, one perhaps, which can not be replicated in the case of Seneca. Indeed, only recent scholarship establishes that Seneca, the poet and Seneca, the philosopher are the same person. Seneca wrote both poetry and prose and among his poems are tragedies, one entitled *Medea* and recognized by Quintillion as written by Seneca. An essay, entitled *On Clemency*, for instance, addressed to Nero in his eighteenth year as Emperor, contains a section glorifying the quality of mercy in a head of state. If we read this section together with Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, we note an almost perfect paraphrase by Portia, indicating the Shakespeare also read Seneca. So even Seneca's prose, therefore, influenced later poetry. As Portia tries reasoning with Shylock to be merciful, Shylock asks "On what compulsion must I? Tell me that." Portia then comments:

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesses him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,

Wherein does sit the dread and fear of kings';
 But mercy is above this sept'red sway;
 It is enthronéd in the hearts of kings,
 It is an attribute to God himself,
 And earthly power does then show most like God's
 When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
 Though justice be your plea, consider this:
 That, in the course of justice, none of us
 Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
 And that same prayer does teach us all to render
 The deeds of mercy...

Seneca was a so-called "later" Stoic, the outstanding Roman Stoic who wrote in

***Stoic* refers to the porch where Seneca instructed in contrast to the garden where his contemporary Epicurus**

classical Latin. ***Stoic*** is a Greek word, translated as porch where Zeno, the original Stoic taught as contrasted to Epicurus who wandered through a garden when he taught. So Stoic primarily indicated the place where Zeno taught as opposed to the place where his contemporary rival Epicurus taught. To understand Seneca's view of human happiness and suicide, we must recognize that many of the early and middle ***stoia*** listed were from the oriental side of the world. Early stoics were, for instance, Aeno of Tarsus, Diogenes from Babylonia and Antipater of Tarsus, the same place from which the celebrated St. Paul came. This oriental influence accounts for a difference in how humans know and view the world about them. This Stoic view parallels the oriental view both of Lao-tzu and Okakura, namely, living in the world without being of the world, in other words, living a detached life, considerably more spiritual than material.

All these ***stoics*** made logic central to their philosophy in the sense of a disciplined manner of thinking and, consequently, of speaking. In addition and basic to their logic theory is the claim that sense impressions of objects are real, that is, sensed reality enters the senses and irresistibly forces conviction upon the mind, if, that is, these sensed beings are true. These Stoics viewed the universe to be an embodied spiritual reality, conveyed through sense impressions. So, these Stoics projected their self-view, namely, of themselves as embodied spirits into the world, indeed, onto the universe under, around and above them.

Now, although some textbooks and commentators term this Stoic view “pantheistic

***To live is not the important thing,
but *how one lives* is important.***

materialism”, *pan*, a Greek word meaning *everywhere* and *theos*, a Greek word meaning *God*, this author does not think these interpreters are correct in calling these Stoics “materialists” for two basic reasons. First, take a practical example of typing a term paper, or writing notes within a classroom “lecture”. Whether typing or writing, we observe words appearing upon a piece of paper. These words are arrangements of material letters, both vowels and consonants, as well as various material parts of speech, as grammarians would call them. In addition, these various words are conveyed through other material means, a person’s physical bodily parts, a mechanical typewriter or keyboard, a material pencil or pen. Yet, no one states that the spiritual meaning conveyed is pantheistic or *pan*-spiritual dissemination of the person’s mind or spiritual soul. But, THAT my mind and/or spiritual soul is present within these material instruments and within these material expressions is clear, yet in no way is the spiritual characteristic of a person’s mind or soul transferred or dissipated through these material instruments. However, in a very true sense, a person’s mind and soul is present within all these material instruments, yet, not at all identified with any of them. If, therefore, God “created” everything, it is reasonable to assume that God is present in every created being. Even so-called “right wing” Protestant Christians claim this to be true, yet, all would reject any implication that they were “pantheists”. So, these Stoics can view God to be present within the world and themselves without any impunity and clearly be accurate and true in their view.

Secondly, all such generalizations as “Communist”, “pantheist” or even “atheist” are usually defense mechanisms and thereby projections, either resulting from fear that an admission of their truth means that I am wrong, or defense mechanisms against the possibility of being wrong. The fact is all such generalizations merely distract us from recovering an insight into the same experience which these Stoics understood and tried to describe. Whatever pantheism means or is, the fact remains that all major denominational religions, both oriental and occidental maintain that God is everywhere. So, although some commentators on Seneca would call him a “pantheist”, such a way of describing him, or indeed, of describing the reality of writing, painting or sculpting are stupid and seek to conceptualize and, worse, verbalize that which can only be experienced and described.

The fact that our spiritual thoughts and insights seek to

communicate through material media, whether that media be prose, painting or sculpting neither identifies spirit with matter, nor reduces spiritual to material reality. Spiritual reality is not cheapened, nor is material reality enhanced, any more than the oriental awareness of *yin* and *yang*, *female* and *male* identify one with the other or reduce one to the other. These are two irreducible, yet distinct and real elements of reality as we experience reality. So also the Stoics recognized material and spiritual realities to be mutually present and inter- penetrating.

How a human lives determines how that human dies.

Now, the beginning of Seneca's view of suicide is his view about human living. He states this view within his seventy-seventh letter, as he discusses advice given to Tullius Marcellinus by an unnamed Stoic:

Do not torment yourself, my dear Marcellinus, as if the question which you are weighing were a matter of importance. It is not an important matter to live; all your slaves live and so do all animals; but it is important to die honorably, sensibly, bravely. Reflect how you have been doing the same thing: food, sleep, lust - this is one's daily round. The desire to die may be felt, not only by the sensible man or the brave or unhappy man, but even by the man who is merely surfeited. (Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, Vol. II, pp. 171-181.)

Then Seneca comments on this advice:

No one is so ignorant as not to know that we must at some time die...Would you not think him an utter fool who wept because he was not alive a thousand years ago? And is he not just as much of a fool who weeps because he will not be alive a thousand years from now? It is all the same; you will not be and you were not. Neither of these periods of time belongs to you. You have been cast upon this point of time; if you would make it longer, how much longer shall you make it? Why weep? Why pray?

That humans die is inevitable, however, how a human dies is a matter of choice.

Of course, we may find here an echo of Socrates' reasoning

within the *Apology*. However, this is not surprising because many of the Greek and Roman Stoics claimed Socrates to be their inspiration. Yet, just as forceful a case can be made that each life is a gift, whether of or from nature and/or God, to say nothing about life being in addition the unique fruit of love between two human beings. Yet, Seneca seats his reason for suicide

upon what he terms to be the commonality of life, its being “cast” upon living beings and consequently, the inevitability of death.

Seneca compares the death of a young boy who by suicide refused to be a slave with the death of an old man.

Have you anything worth waiting for? Your very pleasures, which cause you to tarry and hold you back, have already been exhausted by you...You know the taste of wine and cordials...What else is there which you would regret to have taken from you? Friends? But who can be a friend to you? Country? What? Do you think enough of your country to be late to dinner? The light of the sun? You would extinguish it, if you could; for what have you ever done that was fit to be seen in the light of the sun?...You are afraid of death...You wish to live...But come now: is this life of yours anything but death?

Seneca’s compensating comment is that “There is no life that is not short”. His closing statement is: “It makes no difference at what point you stop. Stop whenever you choose; only see to it that the closing period is well turned”. Seneca, therefore, focuses not upon the fact of death, but how a human being dies, whether by “blind” natural causes or by voluntary causes according to “enlightened” reason.

Of course, this is a truism: *how* we live determines *how* we die. However, Seneca both states a truism and begs the question. Notwithstanding the certainty of death, the issue concerning suicide is not “enlightened” reason, but the value a given person places on his or her unique life, as Frankl observes within his work entitled *The Meaning of Man*. Yet we must view this statement of Seneca as we view Rikuu’s self-immolation and Socrates’ drinking of hemlock, that is, within the context of the civil state in which each lived and by which each was ordered to die. All lived within authoritarian states, yes, including the Athenian “democracy”, since it constituted an aristocracy and stands as a type of so-called totalitarian state.

However, the question is: whether or not suicide is the way which is a “virtuous how” for any human

The body is to the soul what the clothes are to the body.

being? When we turn to Seneca’s essays, we find an answer, but the answer is not what we would expect. The answer begins in his essay ninety-two, “The Happy Life”. Seneca defines the “happy life” as: “self-sufficiency and abiding tranquility”. This definition is tolerable enough, however, we find that he defines the “happy life” as an “attitude” of mind, not unlike Hume’s “feeling”.

Only perfect reason keeps the soul from being submissive and stands firm against Fortune; it assures self-sufficiency in whatever situation...A man is happy, I maintain, when no circumstance can reduce him...(p. 239)

But, what is the origin of this “self-sufficiency”?

...When the mind is at liberty to survey the universe and nothing distracts it from the contemplation of nature, it is free of disturbance. (p. 240)

Notwithstanding the fact that Seneca maintains the purpose of the human being is to be virtuous and that “So great a good is virtue that it is impervious to such visitations as shortness of life, pain and assorted physical infirmities”, (p. 244), yet, he states unequivocally:

The soul knows, I declare, that riches are stored elsewhere than in vaults; it is the soul which needs to be filled, not the money chests...When the soul has raised itself to this sublimity it regards the necessary burden of the body not as a lover but as a steward and it does not submit to its ward. No man who serves his body is free. (p. 247)

Seneca calls the human body “...the husk that it (the soul) has left behind” and rates the body as no more significant to the soul “...than the afterbirth to the newborn child”. Although such a view might be compatible with Plato (whom the Stoics admired) and surely with Plotinus, whether such a view is compatible with Aristotle is questionable but surely is antithetical to the New Testament view as the four traditional evangelists portray Christ expressing it. Indeed, Seneca parallels the relationship of clothes to the body to that of the body to the soul:

My remarks about clothing you may apply to the body, for it is a sort of garment with which Nature has clothed the soul; it is the soul's sheath. But who has ever valued clothes by the rack? The scabbard does not make a sword good or bad. In regard to the body, then, my response will be the same: if I have the choice I shall take health and strength, but the good involved will not be these things per se but my choice of them. (p. 242)

The English word *clothes* translates the Latin word *habitus*, meaning literally, *the way one has oneself*, whether the way one dresses the body or the way one's soul is dressed either with virtue or vice. Of course, this Latin word comes directly into English as *habit*, both the *habit* Catholic Christian nuns used to wear (and some still do), as well as having a good or bad habit, referring to a virtuous (such as, courage) or vicious tendency (such as cowardess) resulting from a repetition of actions. So, Seneca works from the Latin meaning of *habitus* and compares the body to a physical clothing for the soul. But, Seneca's view of suicide must be viewed within the context of his view of the value of a human, or any life and the relationship between the life of the soul as well as that of the body to which the soul gives the activity of being alive.

Seneca's letter to his friend, Lucilius on suicide begins with his reflection living within the body as compared to sailing on a ship to a port as its destination. Humans, he maintains, embarked on a journey at birth and continue that journey until death - indeed, my description of living is that living is what humans do while they are waiting to die. Seneca evokes the example of Socrates as he views suicide as a choice for the virtuous man, yet, as did Socrates, Seneca concentrates on the motivation of a person when contemplating dying:

It is folly to die for fear of dying. A man will come to kill you; wait for him. Why take the initiative? Why take on the discharge of someone else's cruel assignment. Is it because you envy the executioner his job or because you want to spare him? Socrates might have ended his life by fasting and have died of starvation rather than poison, yet he spent thirty days in jail awaiting death. His motive was nothing like 'Anything can happen', or 'while there is time, there is room for hope', but to conform to the laws and make the ultimate Socrates profitable to his friends. Could anything have been stupider than to despise death and be afraid of poison? (p. 203)

Seneca is straightforward:
 “A man’s life should
 satisfy other people as
 well, his death only

**If the reason to commit suicide is to
 be free to make a choice, then why
 can one not choose to die naturally?**

himself and whatever sort he likes is best”. (p. 204) But, when and why is suicide virtuous? Seneca generalizes for us and credits “Eternal law” with being “...generous...in affording us so many exits from life to one entry”:

The situation of humanity is good in that no one is wretched except by his own faulty. If you like, live; if you do not like, you can go back where you came from...What is it, then, which makes us stolid and slow to move? Do you want to be free despite your body? Live in it as if you were ready to move. Keep in mind that you will one day lose your quarters and you will have greater fortitude for necessary departure. (p. 205)

Actually, Seneca fails to provide two essential reasons for his defense of a human committing suicide: first, he never states why suicide is best compared to natural dying; secondly, given his emphasis upon the perfection of the mind and the mind’s ability to live contemplatively, he does not explain why suicide would become an issue at all - if the human mind is so perfect in the act of contemplating, why and how does suicide become an issue? Indeed, as Seneca says, “If you like, live; if you do not like, you can go back where you came from...Do you want to be free despite your body? Live in it as if you were ready to move” - So, why does not the Stoic choose to “live in it as if you were ready to move” and choose to obey the law of Nature and await natural death to result rather than committing suicide? Seneca provides no answer because he does not ask this question. Yet, anyone who adopts Seneca’s viewpoint must ask this question, or, otherwise live a contradiction, saying one thing and yet contradicting that one thing by committing suicide!

Zeno, the “father” of the *Stoa*, for instance, used the celebrated Greek and Roman *mean* (perhaps the virtue of temperance, that is, living in a way such that a person did not act too little or too much, so being cowardly and being foolhardy were avoided in order to be courageous) as his guideline. So, when the pain of living became so intrusive that Zeno could no longer ignore it, he prepared a warm water bath, climbed in and slashed his wrists.

The fact remains that the one recurrent theme present in all Stoic writings

The basic reason Seneca seems to advocate suicide is the negative view the Stoics have of the human body.

is the disdain for slavery and the preference of freedom to slavery. At the same time, Seneca, as with all other Stoics, clearly views the relation of the soul to the body, the mind to the senses, thought to feelings and passions as that of being free (as to soul and mind) but to being enslaved as to being in a body. So, inherent in the Stoic view of the soul's relationship to the body and the value of free choice is a negative view of the body, or, literally the soul being bound to the body, free truly and finally only through death of the body. Of course, this reminds us of the play on Greek vowels within the *Republic* of Plato, namely, his use of *soma*, literally, *body* and *sema*, literally, *prison, cell, cave* interchangeably. The Greek Stoics replicate this interchange of the vowel *omicron* with *epsilon* within their writings. Seneca frequently uses examples of slaves seeking freedom through suicide and, in these examples, emphasizes the issue of motive. Yet, Seneca remember lives within a Roman aristocracy. Indeed, Seneca's view of the relationship of mind to body resembles that political life style, so it is "reasonable" for Seneca to consider the mind/body relationship as a relationship of the aristocrat to the slave.

Actually, reflection provides a "reason" for the Stoic and thus Seneca's position. Given the Stoic view of the mind as perfect and, thereby controllable and controlling, one can understand why the Stoic views being in a body as being enslaved. The one fact of being in the body is that one has no control over the autonomic nervous system, for instance. Indeed, being in a body places the human mind within the course of Mother nature, thereby forcing one to be seasonal, that is, move from being an infant, to being an adolescent, to being in the prime of life and then tasting the fall season of life, finally moving into the winter of aging and then facing the experience of dying. Perhaps this reflection provides us a reason for this clear contradiction in Seneca's thinking and his advocacy of suicide.

The "reason" one has in considering or committing suicide is of paramount importance to the Stoic and this "reason" determines the "how" of death. (Recall the Roman view of suicide, as explained within the *Preface*.) So, the virtuous issue for Seneca is:

Recently when a gladiator was being carried to the morning show under guard, he simulated sleep and nodded his head far enough down to get it between the spokes and kept his seat

until the turning wheel broke his neck. The very tumbrel that was carrying him to punishment he used to escape the punishment. (p. 206)

The issue is the exercise of free choice in one's death, notwithstanding the situation of a forced death as a gladiator - whether a Christian, a criminal or a slave, Seneca does not tell us.

So, implied within this self-view of the relationship between the soul and body, or the mind and emotions is the premise that the critical issue is choice, namely, that to be human means to be able to decide how and thus when the person is to die. This premise, however, ignores the fact that notwithstanding our humanness, we are still within nature and thus, subject to nature's laws, one of which is the cycle from birth to death, as witnessed within the seasons Mother nature places before humans!

Nothing stands in the way of a man who wants to break loose and get away. Nature's corral is an open space and when pressure reaches the allowable point a man can look around for an easy exit. If a number of devices for claiming freedom are available, a man can exercise choice and consider what mode of liberation is best for him; but if opportunity is difficult, let him snatch the nearest means as the best, though it be unprecedented, though it be novel. If you have the courage to die, you will have the ingenuity...It is a great man who not only orders his own death but contrives it. (p. 207)

This view of Seneca is interesting in another respect. Notwithstanding his respect for human free choice and his insistence on the virtue of freely choosing as a condition of being free, his case for suicide is not compelling. The very arguments he uses to justify suicide are the same arguments to justify living until the natural process, or human intervention visits death upon a person. If, for instance, it is virtuous to choose the manner and time of death, then why would it not be just as or more virtuous to choose to die in the manner and at the time that nature and/or human intervention decreed? Seneca's question about the imposition of death is recurrent:

Scribonia was an austere woman. She was the aunt of young Drusus Libo...When Libo was carried out of the senate in a litter, sick, he had a very small retinue, for all his connections deserted him - disloyally, for he was no longer a culprit but virtually a corpse. He held a consultation on whether he should

compass his death or await it. Said Scribonia: ‘Why are you pleased to do another man’s business?’ She failed to convince him and he laid hands upon himself. And with some justification, for if a man is sure to die in two or three days at his enemy’s pleasure, then by living he is ‘doing another man’s business’. (p. 204)

So, Seneca’s comment about Drusus Libo is contradictory to his comment about Socrates whom all Stoics admired. He commends Libo for taking his own life “...for if a man is sure to die in two or three days at his enemy’s pleasure, then by living he is ‘doing another man’s business’”. However, he also commends Socrates for not taking his own life because he “...spent thirty days in jail awaiting death” “...to conform to the laws and make the ultimate Socrates profitable to his friend”.

The question, therefore, which Seneca does not answer is: if a human chooses to respect the laws of nature and to await a natural death, would this not mean the highest act of courage as well as respect for Divine providence, or short of that, respect for Mother nature? If the issue is freedom of choice, then the option of suicide is moot - I choose to die when and as nature (or men) determine. Seneca’s use of Socrates as a model would seem to undermine his claim to the rational virtuous choice of suicide as an act of free choice and thereby an act of virtue.

