

SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA

YEARBOOK OF THE ISRAEL SOCIETY
FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES

VOLUME XXXIX

2020

The appearance of this volume has been made possible by the support of

Bar-Ilan University
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Open University
Tel Aviv University
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PUBLISHED BY
THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES
<http://www.israel-classics.org>

Manuscripts in the form of e-mail attachments should be sent to one of these e-mail addresses:
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Books for review should be sent to the Book Review Editor at the following address: The Editors,
Scripta Classica Israelica, c/o Department of Classics, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 5290002,
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Price \$50

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Camera-ready copy produced by the editorial staff of *Scripta Classica Israelica*
Printed in Israel by Magnes Press, Jerusalem

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Drunkenness and Philosophical Enthusiasm in Seneca's *De Tranquillitate Animi**

Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides and Bart Van Wassenhove

Abstract: The paper revisits Seneca's endorsement of wine-drinking as a remedy for mental anxiety in *De Tranquillitate Animi* (17.4-12). Although the locus has been often interpreted as Seneca's endorsement of Platonic enthusiasm, we argue that Seneca does not deviate from the Stoic rejection of drunkenness (e.g. *Ep.* 83.9). Furthermore, a close reading of Platonic texts suggests that Plato opposed physical drunkenness as much as the Stoics. According to Plato, the philosopher may appear but can never be drunk, a notion especially explored in the *Symposium* (e.g. 220a). In his footsteps, Seneca, appreciates the correct use of wine as a means of inducing or maintaining a higher state of consciousness, a state of hyper-reality that is crucial for achieving philosophical breakthroughs. Seneca's *De Otio* offers additional evidence towards this understanding of the role of wine in achieving philosophical enthusiasm.

Keywords: Seneca; inebriation; *mania*

Introduction: Platonic *Mania* and Seneca's "Mistake"

The article aims to re-examine the final sections of Seneca's *De Tranquillitate Animi* (17.4-12) in which the philosopher allegedly advocates drunkenness and adopts the Platonic notion of inspired *mania*.¹ The most controversial part of the text reads as follows (*Tranq.* 17.8-9):²

Indulgendum est animo dandumque subinde otium, quod alimenti ac virium loco sit. Et in ambulationibus apertis vagandum, ut caelo libero et multo spiritu augeat attollatque se animus; aliquando vectatio iterque et mutata regio vigorem dabunt convictusque et liberalior potio. Non numquam et usque ad ebrietatem veniendum, non ut mergat nos, sed ut deprimat; eluit enim curas et ab imo animum movet et ut morbis quibusdam ita tristitiae medetur; Liberque non ob licentiam linguae dictus est inventor vini, sed quia liberat servitio curarum animum et adserit vegetatque et audaciorem in omnis conatus facit. Sed ut libertatis ita vini salubris moderatio est (our emphasis).

* We are grateful to the editor and the anonymous referees for their insightful comments. All ancient texts are taken from the *Loeb Classical editions*, unless otherwise indicated.

¹ According to Algoe and Haidt (2009: 106), *mania* can be defined thus: "[E]levation is elicited by acts of charity, gratitude, fidelity, generosity or any other strong display of virtue. It leads to distinctive physical feelings: a feeling of 'dilation' or opening in the chest, combined with the feeling that one has been uplifted or 'elevated' in some way. It gives rise to a specific motivation or action tendency: emulation, the desire 'of doing charitable and grateful acts also'".

² Trans. Basore 1932: 283.

We must be indulgent to the mind, and from time to time must grant it the leisure that serves as its food and strength. And, too, we ought to take walks out-of-doors in order that the mind may be strengthened and refreshed by the open air and much breathing; sometimes it will get new vigour from a journey by carriage and a change of place³ and festive company and generous drinking. At times we ought to reach the point even of intoxication, not drowning ourselves in drink, yet succumbing to it; for it washes away troubles, and stirs the mind from its very depths and heals its sorrow just as it does certain ills of the body; and the inventor of wine is not called the Releaser on account of the licence it gives to the tongue, but because it frees the mind from bondage to cares and emancipates it and gives it new life and makes it bolder in all that it attempts. *But, as in freedom, so in wine there is a wholesome moderation.*⁴

Seneca's description of philosophical enthusiasm has been described by Schiesaro as "the *locus classicus* for the Senecan theory of the enthused poet".⁵ However, given the vehement castigation of drunkenness by the majority of the Stoics,⁶ and even by Seneca himself in one of his letters to Lucilius,⁷ his seemingly ambiguous treatment of wine-drinking deserves closer examination. Our argument here is that Seneca did not make a mistake, as it has been suggested,⁸ by unwittingly contradicting himself over the use of wine and in fact, he does not depart from the Stoic rejection of physical inebriation; rather, he employs Platonic imagery to evoke a higher level of consciousness that is conducive to philosophical inspiration.⁹ In making this argument, he agrees with Plato's rejection of *actual* drunkenness in the *Symposium* while endorsing his appreciation of wine as a means of emotional (and intellectual, in our view) catharsis in the *Laws*, one of Plato's last dialogues.¹⁰ After reviewing Plato's appreciation of wine and its role in the

³ Cf. *Ep.* 104.7, in which Seneca notes that traveling has healed him of a *marcor corporis dubii et male cogitantis*, restoring his physical and mental energy. Though he recommends traveling and exercising often, Seneca denounces a restless *iactatio* that increases restlessness (cf. *Tranq.* 2.13-15). On his ambivalent position towards travel, see Chambert 2002 and Montiglio 2006: esp. 563-4.

⁴ Cf. *Ep.* 95.36-38, in which Seneca argues that the soul must be freed (*solvendus est*) before it can benefit from philosophical instruction, and that minds suffering from an excess of *audacia* should be restrained, whereas sluggish minds should be aroused and liberated from misguided fear.

⁵ Schiesaro 2003: 21; cf. Ustinova 2017: 272.

⁶ Chrysippus argues that virtue could be lost through drunkenness (*SVF* III.237); Zeno of Citium crafted a syllogism establishing that a good man will not get drunk, which was quoted by Seneca in his own letter condemning drunkenness (*Ep.* 83.9 = *SVF* I.229).

⁷ See Richardson-Hay 2001 on Seneca's *Ep.* 83; Motto and Clark 1990 offer an overview of passages on drinking and drunkenness in Seneca.

⁸ Evenepoel 2014: 62.

⁹ Seneca makes seemingly un-Stoic statements in *De Otio* too, by urging Serenus to occasionally withdraw from public life. He defends his advice on the basis that he follows his teachers' example, rather than their instruction alone (*Ot.* 1.4-2.2). Later in *De Otio* (esp. 3.1-2), he actively compares the doctrines of the Stoics and the Epicureans, arguing that the ability to reflect and adapt the views of one's teacher is a sign of healthy critical thinking.

¹⁰ Belfiore 1986: 432-436 argues that Plato draws here on widespread medical theories about the benefits of wine-drinking, as reflected in the Hippocratic corpus. Plato greatly admired Hippocrates for appreciating the "nature of man" (*Phdr.* 270c-d, esp. 270c4-6). His ideas agree with Heraclitean concepts of the soul as "dry, hot matter", discussed in n. 38 below.

Socratic search for virtue (section I), we examine wine-drinking in Seneca's *De Tranquillitate* with additional insights from his *De Otio* (section II). Finally, we analyze the concept of philosophical enthusiasm in Seneca (section III).

I. Wine and Philosophical Rupture in Plato

In the *Symposium* Alcibiades praises Socrates' ability to drink copiously and at length, and even compares him to Marsyas and the Silenoi-statuettes which were commonly sold in local craft shops (215b1-6). However, despite portraying Socrates as a competent drinker, Plato famously notes that no-one has ever seen him drunk (*Symp.* 220a4-5: Σωκράτη μεθύοντα οὐδεὶς πώποτε ἑώρακεν ἀνθρώπων).¹¹ Hence, Socrates may appear drunk in his philosophical frenzy, but in reality he is no more out of his senses than his audiences who are "astounded" by listening to his speeches to the point of undergoing a quasi-Bacchic experience. Alcibiades relates the experience as follows (*Symp.* 215d6-e4):¹²

...ἐκπεληγμένοι ἐσμὲν καὶ καταχόμεθα. ἐγὼ γοῦν, ὃ ἄνδρες, εἰ μὴ ἔμελλον κομιδῇ δόξειν μεθύειν, εἶπον ὁμόσας ἂν ὑμῖν οἷα δὴ πέπονθα αὐτὸς ὑπὸ τῶν τούτου λόγων καὶ πάσχω ἔτι καὶ νυνί. ὅταν γὰρ ἀκούω, πολὺ μοι μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν κορυβαντιῶντων ἢ τε καρδία πηδᾷ καὶ δάκρυα ἐκχεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων τῶν τούτου, ὁρῶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλους παμπόλλους τὰ αὐτὰ πάσχοντα.

...we are all astounded and entranced. As for myself, gentlemen, were it not that I might appear to be absolutely tipsy, I would have affirmed on oath all the strange effects I personally have felt from his words, and still feel even now. For when I hear him I am worse than any wild fanatic; I find my heart leaping and my tears gushing forth at the sound of his speech, and I see great numbers of other people having the same experience.

Plato draws here on a longstanding tradition, which he famously explored in the *Phaedrus*, of *mania* as a positive phenomenon through which certain individuals can achieve ecstatic union with the divine. To the types of *mania* that he names in the *Phaedrus* [244a-245a: poetic, prophetic, telestic (associated with Dionysus), and erotic], Plato adds philosophy as the purest, most accurate approach to divine knowledge (cf. 256a-d), while in the *Phaedo* (69c3-d2) he refers to those who "practice philosophy aright" (οἱ πεφιλοσοφηκότες ὀρθῶς) as Bacchoi, mystic followers of Dionysus.¹³

Notably, although wine was clearly associated with Dionysus,¹⁴ its role in Bacchic and Corybantic rites is less pronounced; wine was perhaps involved in the little

¹¹ On Socrates as a drinker in the *Symposium* vis-à-vis his extraordinary ability for self-control, see Anagnostou-Laoutides and Payne 2020. The ideas in this section reflect Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides' work from her forthcoming book on *The History of Inebriation from Plato to Landino*.

¹² Trans. Lamb 1925: 221; cf. *Symp.* 218b3-4.

¹³ Ustinova 2017: 315-328, with n. 152 discussing Plut. *Sol.* 12 on sages of Solon's age who "had acquired their knowledge of the divine by means of ecstatic and telestic wisdom" (τὴν ἐνθουσιαστικὴν καὶ τελεστικὴν σοφίαν). For Plato's insistence on being correctly inspired, see *Phdr.* 244e6: τῷ ὀρθῶς μανέντι, "for the rightly possessed".

¹⁴ Ustinova 2017: 119, 124, 134, 137 (wine in mystic rites) and 172, 174, 177, 182, 191 (wine and Dionysus).

understood rite of *craterismos*,¹⁵ however, our sources insist that the correct way of achieving Bacchic ecstasy did not involve wine.¹⁶ Still, Plato is acutely aware of the risk that divine ecstasy (in which the philosopher excels) may be misunderstood for common drunkenness, and in the *Laws* (815c1-5) he criticizes purification rites performed with Bacchic dancing by “those who indulge in drunken imitations of Pans, Sileni and Satyrs (as they call them).”¹⁷ In this context, we can better appreciate his preoccupation in the *Symposium* with differentiating the outward impression of drunkenness that Socrates gives from his extraordinary inner *sôphrosynê* (moderation).¹⁸

Furthermore, in the *Laws* — perhaps assured that he had already made the point about philosophical quasi-drunkenness in his earlier work — Plato has Socrates boldly suggesting that wine is a most effective means for testing one’s moral character (*Leg.* 649d9-650a5). The test of the wine (*Leg.* 649d11: ἡ ἐν οἴνῳ βάσανος), readily points out who can pace his drinking and, therefore, control bodily pleasures and other distractions that typically cause people to deviate from the pursuit of virtue. Immediately afterwards, Plato lays out his stipulations about the role of wine in education, in accordance with both the philosophical and medical advances of his time (*Leg.* 666a-c).¹⁹ Plato believes that after the age of forty men “may join in the convivial gatherings and invoke Dionysus, above all other gods”, acknowledging wine as a medicine “against the crabbedness of old age”, a medicine that allows us to renew our youth and forget our cares; wine softens the temper of our souls and emboldens us, at least in the company of our friends, to worship the god with chants and “incantations”. Notably, Plato here suggests passing a law that would prohibit any exposure to wine for children under eighteen years of age; in addition, he opines that “the young man under thirty *may take wine in moderation, but that he must entirely abstain from intoxication and heavy drinking*”²⁰ (μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο οἴνου μὲν δὴ γεύεσθαι τοῦ μετρίου μέχρι τριάκοντα ἐτῶν,

¹⁵ Ustinova 2017: 148 n. 69.

¹⁶ Hence, in Eur. *Bacch.* 260-262 Pentheus suspects the female followers of Dionysus of drunkenness and wantonness (see line 224), but when the messenger comes to the palace to report on their behaviour, he denies that they showed signs of drunkenness (686-687: σωφρόνως, οὐχ ὡς σὺ φῆς ὄνωμένας κρατῆρι καὶ λωτοῦ ψόφῳ; “soberly. They were not, as you say, drunk with the wine bowl and the sound of the pipe...”); trans. modified from Kovacs 2003: 77; cf. Roth 2004: 45-46.

¹⁷ *Leg.* 815c1-5: ὄση [ὄρχησις] βακχεία τ’ ἐστὶν καὶ τῶν ταύταις ἐπομένων, ἃς Νύμφας τε καὶ Πᾶνας καὶ Σειληνοὺς καὶ Σατύρους ἐπονομάζοντες, ὡς φασιν, μιμοῦνται κατ’ὄνωμένους, περὶ καθαροῦς τε καὶ τελετάς τινας ἀποτελούντων; trans. Bury 1926: 93, with Ustinova 2017: 123.

¹⁸ Alcibiades clarifies that Socrates is the most sober and brave, sensible and resolute man he has ever met (*Symp.* 219d4-8: ἀγάμενον δὲ τὴν τούτου φύσιν τε καὶ σωφροσύνην καὶ ἀνδρείαν, ἐντετυχηκότα ἀνθρώπων τοιοῦτῳ οἴῳ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἂν ᾤμην ποτ’ ἐντυχεῖν εἰς φρόνησιν καὶ εἰς καρτερίαν).

¹⁹ For the similarity of Plato’s views on wine in the *Laws* and the Hippocratic corpus, see Belfiore 1986 cited in n. 10. For Plato’s familiarity with Heraclitus’ ideas about the soul as hot matter, see n. 38 below.

²⁰ The Greek text reads (*Leg.* 666b2-c7): τετταράκοντα δὲ ἐπιβαίνοντα ἐτῶν, ἐν τοῖς συσσιτίοις εὐωγηθέντα, καλεῖν τοὺς τε ἄλλους θεοὺς καὶ δὴ καὶ Διόνυσον παρακαλεῖν εἰς τὴν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τελετὴν ἅμα καὶ παιδιάν, ἣν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐπίκουρον τῆς τοῦ γήρωτος ἀσθηρότητος ἐδωρήσατο τὸν οἶνον φάρμακον, ὥστε ἀνηβᾶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ δυσθυμίας λήθη

μέθης δὲ καὶ πολυοινίας τὸ παράπαν τὸν νέον ἀπέχεσθαι). In our view, following the example of Socrates, Seneca rejects drunkenness but not the consumption of wine per se, which can have positive effects when used properly. Thus, his prescription of drinking to his friend Lucilius highlights the physical symptoms of a sublime experience, which is necessary for harmonizing the self with nature.²¹ To demonstrate this, we will discuss *De Tranquillitate* in parallel with *De Otio*, in which Seneca also argues for the beneficial effect of sublime experiences.

II. Wine-Drinking in *De Tranquillitate* and *De Otio*

Written sometime between 49 and 62, *De Tranquillitate Animi* was designed to give Seneca's friend Serenus, who felt "like a boat tossed about by the rolling of the ship"²² (*Tranq.* 1.18), a practical guide to help him improve his confidence in his ability to philosophize and regain his mind's equilibrium, a task that Seneca took on zealously (*Tranq.* 3.3-4).²³

With his youthful energy and boisterous character, Serenus in some ways recalls Alcibiades, who barges into Agathon's dinner-party at the *Symposium* dejected and drunk because Socrates bypassed his sexual advances and insisted on them having endless discussions on virtue instead (*Symp.* 218c1-221d8). Ambitious and impatient to make his mark in Athenian politics, Alcibiades certainly lacks moderation.²⁴ Like Socrates in *Alcibiades I*, Seneca advises his young interlocutor, who is also interested in entering public life,²⁵ to aim for self-knowledge.²⁶ As Foucault has noted, this theme of returning to self-examination is typically (though certainly not exclusively) Platonic²⁷ and often involves an element of elevation: "the movement by which the soul turns to itself is a movement in which one's gaze is drawn 'aloft'-towards the divine element,

γίνεσθαι μαλακώτερον ἐκ σκληροτέρου τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἦθος... πρῶτον μὲν δὴ διατεθεὶς οὕτως ἕκαστος ἄρ' οὐκ ἂν ἐθέλοι προθυμότερόν γε, ἦττον αἰσχυρόμενος, οὐκ ἐν πολλοῖς ἀλλὰ ἐν μετρίοις, καὶ οὐκ ἐν ἀλλοτριῶις ἀλλ' ἐν οἰκείοις, ἄδειν τε καὶ ὁπολλάκις εἰρήκαμεν ἐπάδειν. Trans. from Bury 1926: 133 and 135.

²¹ For the Stoic idea of living in accordance with nature, see indicatively Colish 1985: vol. 1, 42; Reydams-Schils 2005: esp. 43-44, 70-75.

²² Foucault 1999: 166 (also, in Foucault 2005: 33). The text actually says: "non tempestate vexor, sed nausea" (I am distressed, not by a tempest, but by sea-sickness); trans. Basore 1932: 213.

²³ In *Const.* 3.1 Serenus is described as having "a fiery and bubbly spirit" (*animus tuum incensum et effervescentem*); trans. Roller 2015: 59. As Roller has noted, Annaeus Serenus is addressed in three Senecan dialogues on "calm and equable states of mind: *De Constantia Sapientis*, *De Tranquillitate Animi* and (probably) *De Otio*", which "...play on the addressee's supposed lack of serenity, while Senecan therapy holds out the promise of harmonizing Serenus' disposition with his name". Roller 2015: 59; cf. Williams (2003: 12-13), regarding Serenus being addressed in Seneca's *De Otio*.

²⁴ For Plato's modelling of the tyrannical man in the *Republic* on Alcibiades, see Larivée 2012; Wohl 1999.

²⁵ *Tranq.* 1.10; cf. *Alc.* 105a-b.

²⁶ E.g. *Tranq.* 3.3; cf. *Ot.* I.1-3, cf. *Alc.* 127d-e and 134c.

²⁷ Ortiz de Landazuri 2015 discusses several passages from *Charmides*, *Alcibiades I*, *Phaedo* and the *Republic* where the notion of self-knowledge is developed; cf. Kamtekar 2017.

towards essences and the supra-celestial world in which they are visible”.²⁸ Although Foucault described Seneca’s practice of self-reflection as “a turning round on the spot”, aimed solely at establishing “certain relations with oneself”,²⁹ Seneca’s prescription of drinking as a way of breaking free from mental turmoil and achieving spiritual elevation suggests a systematic engagement with Platonic ideas about the nature of philosophical enquiry, which deserves closer examination.

As we saw, at the end of his long list of philosophical recommendations to Serenus, Seneca concludes his *De Tranquillitate* by encouraging his young mentee to relax occasionally. Along with such innocent recommendations as getting enough sleep (17.6), taking walks to get fresh air, going on a trip, and engaging in social interaction (17.8-9), Seneca — to the surprise of many readers — recommends “more generous drinking” (*liberalior potio*). Still, echoing Plato’s views, Seneca cautions us that we should aim for “healthy moderation” in drinking and should avoid making it a habit. Seneca also cites the examples of Solon, Arcesilaus, and Cato, virtuous men who were all said to have occasionally indulged in heavy drinking (*Tranq.* 17.9).³⁰ Thus, it is important to appreciate that while Seneca’s recommendation to combat an anxious disposition by drinking might come across as un-Stoic,³¹ especially to the extent that it echoes Platonic views about therapeutic drinking, there are in fact Stoic precedents for his approach. Hence, Teun Tieleman has persuasively argued that Zeno and Chrysippus already accepted that psychological conditions could sometimes be treated through physical means such as diet or exercise.³² Several sources even report that Zeno himself combatted his own melancholic disposition by drinking and quipped that the reason why an austere man such as himself drank so freely at social gatherings is that “lupini beans too are bitter, but become sweet when soaked”.³³ As Tieleman notes, this is an application of the principle that food and drink “may serve to reduce certain excesses and deficiencies inherent in one’s physique”, which explains why “Zeno’s too dry and cold soul is brought into balance by means of wine (which was generally considered as a

²⁸ Foucault 2005: 494-495.

²⁹ Foucault 2005: 495.

³⁰ Berger (1960: 351-2) notes that Seneca’s hedging language bespeaks a certain embarrassment about a recommendation that his readers might find surprising or even scandalous; yet, in *Tranq.* 17.4 Seneca appears to prime the reader for this argument by noting that Cato used to relax his mind with wine when he was exhausted by public concerns (*Cato vino laxabat animum curis publicis fatigatum*). Notably, Seneca compares here Cato’s appreciation of wine with Socrates’ engagement with children (17.4: *Cum puerulis Socrates ludere non erubescibat*), evoking Plato’s description of the test of the wine as “παιδιά” (child-play, pastime; *Laws* 649d11).

³¹ This is the conclusion of Berger (1960: 366-68) who argues that Seneca’s therapeutic strategy is to “set one evil against another” (a treatment briefly mentioned in *Tranq.* 9.3). Her suggestion that this strategy derives from a Platonic theory reported in Plutarch and ultimately inspired by Democritus is pure speculation.

³² Tieleman 2003: 162-166.

³³ *SVF* I 285, consisting of very similar excerpts from Athenaeus, Galen, Eustathius, and Diogenes Laertius.

hot liquid)”.³⁴ Zeno seems to be tapping here into the same medical and philosophical traditions that Plato employed in the *Laws*. Indeed, works like the Hippocratic *Regimen* (1.33) but also *On the Sacred Disease* (esp. par. XXI)³⁵ assume a balance between body and soul, achieved by “a correct mixture of hot, cold, moist and dry”.³⁶ When the consistency of this mixture suffers an imbalance, because of age or other reasons, a doctor can intervene by prescribing a specific restorative diet, which may include wine. Wine was believed to induce heat in the body,³⁷ and Plato in the *Timaeus* (60a3-5) describes wine as one of four types of water which have been mixed with fire; this fire-water “warms not only the body but the soul as well”. The key to understanding this approach lies in the concept of the soul as hot matter that is engaged when it carries out its function of learning and inquiring, a thesis mainly associated with Heraclitus.³⁸

Seneca who perceived virtue as the health of the soul and himself as a doctor of the soul,³⁹ endorses the adoption of physical remedies such as those discussed above in his *De Ira* (II.19-20), where he further explains the reasoning of his approach. He distinguishes between minds dominated by the element of fire, which are disposed to anger, and minds dominated by the cold element, which are timid, gloomy and suspicious (19.2; 20.4). Individuals with fiery temperaments, Seneca argues, should engage in games or physical exercise, whereas individuals with cold temperaments “ought to be encouraged and indulged and summoned to happiness” (*Extollenda itaque fovendaque [...] et in laetitiam evocanda sunt*).⁴⁰ Hence, while in book II (19.5; 20.2) he

³⁴ Tieleman 2003: 165-166. On p. 165 n. 100 Tieleman notes that “[t]he portrayal of Zeno as a melancholic is no doubt intended to mark him out as a man of genius, in accordance with current views as reflected by [Arist.] *Probl.* XXX.1”, yet, on p. 166 he rightly observes that “[w]e should not brush these testimonies aside as purely apocryphal” since “[t]he underlying assumption is that a philosopher’s life is, or should, be consonant with his teaching”. He further adds that Zeno’s “general attitude to alcohol seems not to have differed all that much from Chrysippus”.

³⁵ Smith 1979: 47-48 argued that the *Regimen* was indeed written by Hippocrates; also, see Jouanna 2012a.

³⁶ Belfiore 1986: 432.

³⁷ Jouanna 1996: esp. 434.

³⁸ Heraclitus argued that the soul, in reflection of the universe (DK B30 ap. Cl. *Str.* 5.14.104.2), had attributes of fire. Moistening the soul would lead to its death (DK B36 ap. Cl. *Str.* 6.7.2); to maintain it dry and hot, attention should be paid to the righteous conduct of the individual (DK B118 ap. Stob. *Flor.* 3.5.8: ἀγρή ξηρή ψυχή σοφωτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη “a dry gleam of light is the wisest and best soul”). Heraclitus shows notable disdain for Dionysian revelry (DK B15 ap. Cl. *Protr.* 34.5; DK B14 in *Protr.* 22.2). Cf. Herrero de Jáuregui 2008: 142-3 and 156. For Epicurus’ views on the heat-producing atoms of wine, see Plut. frs. 59 (*Adversus Colotem*) and 60 (*Quaestiones Conviviales*) with Reesor (1983: 100). Cf. Xen. *Symp.* 2.24-25 where Socrates reportedly says: τῷ γὰρ ὄντι ὁ οἶνος ἀρδων τὰς ψυχὰς τὰς μὲν λύπας ... κοιμίζει, τὰς δὲ φιλοφροσύνας ὥσπερ ἔλαιον φλόγα ἐγείρει. ... (for wine does in fact ‘moisten the soul’ and lulls our pains to sleep..., at the same time awakening kindly feelings just as oil does a flame). Then, comparing plants to people, Socrates argues that both flourish when “they drink only as much as they enjoy” (ὅσῳ ἡδεται τοσοῦτο πίνῃ); trans. Marchant and Todd 2013: 583 and 585.

³⁹ Brennan 2005b: 127; Richardson-Hay 2009: 76 n. 26.

⁴⁰ Our trans. having consulted Basore 1928: 209.

states that individuals with fiery temperaments should avoid drinking — as alcohol increases heat and kindles anger — in book I Seneca clearly argues that drunkenness (*ebrietas*) can be used as a remedy for spiritless souls. Nevertheless, he cautions that this method does not strengthen the sluggish person’s virtues but only stands in for them (*De Ira* I.13.4-5: *nec uirtutem instruunt, ... sed in uicem*). Based on Serenus’ own description of his weakness of will and on Seneca’s diagnosis of his condition as a form of inertia and self-doubt (*bonae mentis infirmitas*), Serenus comes across as a textbook illustration of such a cold, sluggish temperament.⁴¹ Consequently, Seneca’s suggestions that Serenus should drink, go out, and seek company can be interpreted as a physical remedy, designed to counter his nervous disposition and regain his mental equilibrium.⁴² Furthermore, Seneca’s appreciation of the benefits of wine in healing cold temperaments reflects strikingly Alcibiades’ description of Socrates as a drinker in the *Symposium* (esp. 221c7-222d5).⁴³ The philosopher, it seems, had stunned Alcibiades not only with his imperviousness to wine, but also with his ability to withstand the cold and engage in silent inquiry, during which he was able to totally ignore his surroundings and focus on his thoughts exclusively.⁴⁴ In other words, Socrates, an exceptional philosopher revered by both Plato and the Stoics, had a naturally hot soul, since he was always engaged in philosophical enquiry and, therefore, he was impervious both to the additional hotness of wine and cold. Notably, Socrates did not refrain from actual wine-drinking but was always keen to use it as an opportunity to exercise self-control, a point stressed by Xenophon.⁴⁵ Seneca, similarly argues in *De Otio* (6.3) that the wise man should actively seek to test his spiritual progress:⁴⁶

Quis negat illam debere profectus suos in opera temptare, nec tantum quid faciendum sit cogitare, sed etiam aliquando manum exercere et ea, quae meditate sunt, ad verum perducere?

⁴¹ In *Tranq.* 2.10 Seneca describes Serenus’ condition as *inertia, taedium displicentia sui, animi volutatio, otii sui tristis atque aegra patientia* and *fastidium sui*; importantly, he notes that he needs greater trust in himself (*Tranq.* 2.2: *fidem tibi*).

⁴² Seneca earlier defined tranquillity as an equilibrium of a soul “neither rearing itself up nor thrusting itself down” (*Tranq.* 2.4: *nec attolens se unquam nec deprimens*). Although this definition may sound contradictory to his advice to Serenus, to drink wine for relaxation (17.8: *ut deprimat nos*), Seneca’s point here is that by relaxing Serenus will recover the energy he wastes on worrying and will feel invigorated.

⁴³ Alcibiades’ comparison of Socrates with Marsyas (215b-e) introduces Dionysian elements into the discussion.

⁴⁴ *Symp.* 219e-220d; cf. *Symp.* 174d4-e6; 175b1-4. Also, Ustinova 2017: 318.

⁴⁵ In Xen. *Symp.* 2.26 Socrates reportedly says: ...ἦν μὲν ἄθρόον τὸ ποτὸν ἐγγεώμεθα, ταχὺ ἡμῖν καὶ τὰ σώματα καὶ αἱ γνῶμαι σφαλοῦνται, καὶ οὐδὲ ἀναπνεῖν, μὴ ὅτι λέγειν τι δυνησόμεθα: ἦν δὲ ἡμῖν οἱ παῖδες μικραῖς κύλιξι πυκνὰ ἐπιψακάζωσιν, ... οὕτως οὐ βιαζόμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ οἴνου μεθύειν ἀλλ’ ἀναπειθόμενοι πρὸς τὸ παιγνιωδέστερον ἀφιζόμεθα. (If we pour ourselves immense drafts, it won’t be long before both our bodies and our minds start reeling, and we won’t be able even to draw breath, much less to speak sensibly; but if the slaves frequently ‘besprinkle’ us ... with small cups, we will reach the merrier state not by the wine’s compulsion to drunkenness but instead by its gentle persuasion); trans. Marchant and Todd 2013: 585. Xenophon expresses similar views in *Mem.* 1.3.6-7.

⁴⁶ Trans. Basore 1932: 194-197.

Who will deny that virtue ought to test her progress by open deed, and should not only consider what ought to be done, but also at times apply her hand and bring into reality what she has conceived?

Seneca here seems to appreciate that active reasoning is *not* always conducive to philosophical revelation, or at least that taking a series of steps towards theorizing does not necessarily lead to any anticipated intellectual advances. As many ancient and indeed modern thinkers have reported, the solutions to intellectual challenges are often manifested in states of minimized consciousness, sometimes in dreams, sometimes in a state of slumber, and sometimes in a state of inebriation.⁴⁷ Seneca, aware of the “incubation period” that philosophical insight demands, often when the mind is not actively thinking, perhaps encourages here a method of inducing a state of trance by means of wine during which the philosopher has the chance to reflect on concepts previously negotiated through reason alone.

Notably, *De Tranquillitate* concludes with a reference to Greek sources that accept the benefits of heavy drinking, including Plato’s view that “the sane mind knocks in vain at the door of poetry” (17.10: *frustra poeticas fores compos sui pepulit*; cf. *Phdr.* 245a) and Aristotle’s opinion that “no great genius has ever existed without some touch of madness” (also, 17.10: *nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit*; cf. *Prob.* XXX.1 in n. 34). Considering his advice in the *De Otio*, cited above, Seneca seems to recognize that the active Stoic thinker ought to create the mental space not only for vigorous analysis and well-formed arguments through reason, but also for the trance-like state in which the sublime calm that often precedes “eureka” moments can be achieved. In engaging with Platonic enthusiasm Seneca, much like Plato, does not confuse or equate poetic with philosophical or Bacchic *mania*;⁴⁸ on the contrary, following Plato, Seneca perceives the common symptoms of *mania* across the spectrum of creativity to which he carefully integrates Serenus and philosophical inspiration.

III. Philosophical Enthusiasm in Seneca

Seneca’s view on philosophical enthusiasm is particularly illustrated in his *De Otio*, where he puts forward another provocative and seemingly un-Stoic thesis, advising Serenus to occasionally withdraw from public life. In *De Otio* 5.2-6 Seneca’s argumentation takes a decisively Platonic turn when he claims that our inquisitive disposition urges us to discover “something more ancient than the world itself” (5.5: *aliquid ipso mundo inveniatur antiquius*). To discover something about the state of the universe (*quis fuerit universi status*) “[O]ur thought bursts through the ramparts of the sky and is not content to know that which is revealed” (5.6: *Cogitatio nostra caeli munimenta perrumpit nec contenta est id, quod ostenditur, scire*). Here Seneca seems to echo Plato in arguing that contemplation of the heavenly realm is crucial for our search of “what lies beyond the world” (*scrutor, quod ultra mundum iacet ...*). He adds the proviso, similar to his prescription of wine in *De Tranquillitate*, that leisurely contemplation should be undertaken with acute awareness of the benefits it can bring to the philosopher’s community, rather than for mere pleasure. Hence, Seneca, like Plato,

⁴⁷ Ustinova 2017: 313-317.

⁴⁸ Giusti 2017: 249-250.

recognizes the limits of human reason in our attempt to comprehend the mysteries of the world around us and above all, of the divine, and appreciates wine as a practical medium of effecting the spiritual elevation that is necessary for a genuine philosophical experience. Furthermore, it is perhaps not accidental that in *De Otio* Seneca frequently refers to the examples of Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus (3.1-2; 6.4-5; 8.1), who were conscious of the ways in which their time of contemplative isolation was a kind of public service, as evident by the many benefits it bestowed to their communities but also the world.⁴⁹

Seneca's openness to engaging with arguments from other schools⁵⁰ is also clearly reflected at the end of *De Tranquillitate*, discussed above; however, apart from acknowledging the affinity between the manic symptoms of poetry and philosophical elevation, as famously defended by Plato, Seneca also seems to make a distinction between the philosophical genius of Socrates and the average Stoic who struggles to maintain his mental equilibrium. Accordingly, after prescribing generous drinking as a remedy for Serenus' mental agitation, Seneca proceeds to extol the moral elevation attained when a person's mind is freed from cares (*Tranq.* 17.11):⁵¹

Cum vulgaria et solita contempsit instinctuque sacro surrexit excelsior, tunc demum aliquid cecinit grandius ore mortali. Non potest sublime quicquam et in arduo positum contingere quam diu apud se est: desciscat oportet a solito et efferatur et mordeat frenos et rectorem rapiat suum eoque ferat quo per se timuisset descendere.

When it [=the mind] has scorned the vulgar and the commonplace, and has soared far aloft fired by divine inspiration, then alone it chants a strain too lofty for mortal lips. So long as it is left to itself, it is impossible for it to reach any sublime and difficult height; it must forsake the common track and be driven to frenzy and champ the bit and run away with its rider and rush to a height that it would have feared to climb by itself.

Scholars such as Marie-Paula Berger, Giancarlo Mazzoli, and Alessandro Schiesaro have argued that Seneca's description of poetic enthusiasm and his citation of Platonic and Aristotelean ideas indicates that he is abandoning Stoic ideas and endorsing a form of irrational enthusiasm.⁵² Citing other philosophers, however, need not entail adopting

⁴⁹ Indeed, by concluding *De Otio* with references to Socrates and Aristotle, who received less recognition in their own state (8.1-2), and to the ideal state, whose absence from the world makes leisure a necessity for the wise man (8.3-4), Seneca seems to respond to Plato's *Republic*. At the end of book 9 (591d4-592b), Plato describes the effort that the wise man should put into maintaining his inner constitution even if it means abstaining from public life. Plato's suggestion that the wise man will surely get involved in the politics of the ideal city (if not his native city), echoes Seneca's idea that by refraining from the public life, the wise man can benefit not only his immediate community but, also, the world.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ep.* 16.7 where he argues that *Quicquid bene dictum est ab ullo, meum est* (whatever is well-said by anyone is mine); trans. Gummere 1917: 107.

⁵¹ Trans. Basore 1932: 284-285.

⁵² Berger (1960: 364) concludes that "assurément, c'était trahir l'ancienne orthodoxie de l'école [sc. stoïcienne] que de se rallier ici à Platon et à Aristote" and describes Seneca's argument as an "apologie du mouvement et un éloge de la 'déraison'", despite noting that it is hard to believe that Seneca flagrantly contradicts his previous arguments without explanation (366). Mazzoli (1970: 51) describes Seneca's definition of enthusiasm as a "condizione [...] fuori dei confine della razionalità" and argues that he "knew and followed

their doctrines, and comparing the elevation of the carefree mind with the *mania* of the inspired poet by no means necessitates that Seneca is formulating a poetic theory.⁵³ Rather, Seneca appropriates the chariot allegory from Plato's *Phaedrus* to express a Stoic appreciation for the psychological effort that is required to attain virtue.⁵⁴ Unlike Socrates, Seneca claims no philosophical genius; his wisdom is the result of continuous study and self-awareness which includes his acceptance of the limits of human reason. Hence, in *De Vita Beata* 8.4 (which similarly concludes with explicit references to Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Alcibiades I*)⁵⁵ he writes:⁵⁶

Externa ratio quaerat sensibus irritata et capiens inde principia — nec enim habet aliud, unde conetur aut unde ad verum impetum capiat — at in se revertatur. Nam mundus quoque cuncta complectens rectorque universi deus in exteriora quidem tendit, sed tamen introrsum undique in se redit. Idem nostra mens faciat; cum secuta sensus suos per illos se ad externa porrexerit, et illorum et sui potens sit.

Let reason search into external things at the instigation of the senses, and, while it derives from them its first knowledge — for it has no other base from which it may operate, or begin its assault upon truth — yet let it fall back upon itself. For God also, the all-embracing world and the ruler of the universe, reaches forth into outward things, yet, withdrawing from all sides, returns into himself. And our mind should do the same; when, having followed the senses that serve it, it has through them reached to things without, let it be the master both of them and of itself.

the Democritean-Platonic theory of artistic inspiration" (1970: 52, our translation). Schiesaro (2003: 23 n. 39) argues that "these passages [*Tranq.* 17.10-11, along with *Ep.* 108.7] confirm quite explicitly that yielding to passions constitutes [...] a superior form of knowledge".

⁵³ Cf. Cavalca Schioli (1981: 140), who rightly cautions against this hasty conclusion. Mazzoli (1970: 50-58) sidesteps the fact that this paragraph is not a discussion of poetics, but a metaphorical description of the *moral* elevation experienced by a mind that is liberated from cares. Schiesaro acknowledges that "Seneca is not engaged here in an explicit declaration of poetics and is addressing rather the issue of philosophical reflection", but still proceeds to read the passage as evidence for Seneca's poetics, arguing that "the presence of the Platonic quotation and the term *cecinit* (17.11) suggests that the same state of enthusiastic lack of control lies behind artistic creation and philosophical excitement".

⁵⁴ Seneca frequently alludes to *Phdr.* 245a; see references in Cavalca Schioli 1981: 139. Cf. Gill (2006: 98), who argues that Seneca often exploits Platonic concepts "to make an essentially moral or ethical point", and Porter (2015: 578), who comments on this passage, that "Seneca writes from the perspective of a moralist while dipping into Platonic and literary critical or rhetorical resources for enrichment". Cf. also Del Giovane (2015: 12) who argues that, in *Ep.* 108, Seneca "exploits the comparison between the students in ecstasy with the philosophical *res* and the Phrygians, without alluding to the theorization of poetic *mania*. He just avails himself on the strength and visual suggestiveness that were supposed to be carried by the metaphor". Reydams-Schils (2010), despite criticizing a tendency in the scholarship to see Platonic echoes in Seneca as "mere metaphors, or rhetoric in the service of practical moral philosophy", ultimately agrees that, even if Seneca "explor[es] genuine affinities" with Plato, he always "giv[e]s them a Stoic turn of thought" (214) and "remains quite rooted in Stoic thought" (196).

⁵⁵ *De Vita Beata* 27.5.

⁵⁶ Trans. Basore 1932: 118-119.

Here, despite Foucault's assertion that Seneca recommends a turn-to-one-self for establishing relations with the self alone, it becomes clear that he embraced self-knowledge as a first step towards mastering knowledge about the world and as essential preparation for experiencing truth. Importantly, Seneca appreciated the medium of the senses in achieving spiritual elevation, and the wine drinking he prescribes to Serenus serves exactly this purpose, to release him from everyday anxiety and prepare him for serious philosophical engagement.

Even as Seneca's apology for inebriation and philosophical enthusiasm may seem surprising at the end of a work devoted to the pursuit of tranquility, it does in fact respond directly to Serenus' concerns, after a series of rather generic recommendations.⁵⁷ More specifically, the discussion of elevation and sublimity returns to a worry Serenus articulated towards the end of his self-diagnosis at the beginning of the work.⁵⁸ There, Serenus described how, even as he attempts to cultivate the simple, unpretentious writing style that seems appropriate for a practicing Stoic, he occasionally gets carried away by his inspiration. Serenus deplores this tendency in himself and upbraids himself in strong terms because "being forgetful then of my rule and my more restrained judgement, I am swept to loftier heights by an utterance that is no longer my own forgetting the rule and a more disciplined judgment" (*Tranq.* 1.14: *oblitus tum legis pressiorisque iudicii sublimius feror et ore iam non meo*).⁵⁹ Seneca unmistakably echoes this expression when he returns to the topic of sublimity in *Tranq.* 17.11 and describes

⁵⁷ Berger 1960: 353; Porter 2015: 578; cf. Motto and Clark (1993), who point out that *Tranq.* displays an "almost rhythmic series of shifts in attitude and view" (147), going back and forth between passages in which Seneca dispenses "broadly general advice, reiterating key topoi" (144) and passages in which he addresses Serenus directly (147).

⁵⁸ *Tranq.* 13-14. Commentators who have observed the thematic correspondence between the two passages include Mazzoli (1970: 52), Cavalca Schioli (1981:140), and Porter (2015: 578). Setaioli (1985: 806-10), despite admitting the correspondences, argued that the concluding paragraphs cannot be intended to respond to Serenus' concerns. Briefly summarized, his main arguments are (1) that *Tranq.* 17 only picks up a few of the themes Serenus discusses; (2) that the passage focuses on poetry whereas Serenus is referring to philosophical prose; (3) that Serenus' self-description as *ambitiosus in verba* recalls the kind of puffed-up oratory Seneca disdains rather than any divinely inspired enthusiasm; and (4) that the expression *ore iam non meo* indicates an abandonment of self-control that should probably be read "in senso ironicamente negativo". All four arguments can be challenged: on (1), Seneca probably responds to what he perceives to be a key concern worth returning to. On (2), we need to remember that this passage is not offering a statement of poetics, but a discussion of the *moral* elevation of a mind liberated from cares, and that only the quotation from Plato explicitly refers to the enthused poet (the other two do not mention any literary output). On (3), Setaioli simply assumes that Serenus' self-diagnosis as being *ambitiosus in verba* is accurate. Our reading questions this. On (4), we grant that *Ep.* 28.3, which Setaioli cites in support of his claim, refers to the mind of a *vatis ... iam concitatae multumque habentis in se spiritus non sui* (quoted from *Aen.* 6.78-9) in critical terms, but the comparison between Lucilius' overexcited mind and the rapturous condition of Vergil's Sybil is decidedly bathetic. Cf. Giusti 2017: 240-249.

⁵⁹ Trans. Basore 1932: 211. Note here the strong expression *lex* rather than a more neutral alternative such as *regula*.

how the mind when inspired “chants a strain too lofty for mortal lips”.⁶⁰ In addition, Seneca’s exhortation that the mind “must forsake the common track and be driven to frenzy and champ the bit and run away with its rider and rush to a height that it would have feared to climb by itself”⁶¹ (*desciscat oportet a solito et efferatur et mordeat frenos et rectorem rapiat suum eoque ferat, quo per se timuisset escendere*) can be read as an allusion to Serenus’ habitual anxiety, which is highlighted in the opening chapters.⁶²

Again, the tempting allusion here to the Platonic image of the charioteer of the soul’s horses (*Phdr.* 246a–254e) supplements Seneca’s appreciation of the need for spiritual elevation. After all, the Stoics did pay close attention to poetry and its ability to portray emotional excess albeit always in search of moral *exempla*, primarily ones to be avoided.⁶³ Therefore, Seneca does not cite Plato’s theory of poetic *mania* to advocate its emulation, but employs its imagery of emotional instability — a situation Serenus is most familiar with — to encourage him to disengage from irrational behaviour and seek a reconciliation with Nature. Notably, for the Stoics the harmony of the soul with its own nature and its circumstances is the greatest virtue, as Seneca argues in *De Vita Beata* (3.3; 6.1-2). However, the human soul is perceived as unified with the body and therefore, the embodied soul can react to certain food and drinks.⁶⁴ Therefore, using wine to achieve the desired psychic state is a soundly Stoic attitude. In this context, the fact that Seneca not only condones but recommends succumbing to the enthusiasm Serenus earlier condemned can be understood as corrective to Serenus’ harsh self-judgment and the underlying belief that such feelings, and the kind of writing inspired by them, are necessarily off-limits for an aspiring Stoic.⁶⁵ Indeed, when we look at Serenus’ self-criticism through the lens of Seneca’s own arguments about philosophical style, there seems to be nothing whatsoever to find fault with. Serenus, after all, clearly indicates that when he gets carried away by his literary imagination, he does so not out of vainglorious ambition but to match the dignity of his subject matter. His expression *ad dignitatem rerum exit oratio* is not only reminiscent of Cleanthes’ argument that only poetic speech can adequately express divine greatness but also echoes Seneca’s argument that philosophical writing does not have to be “meagre and dry” but can

⁶⁰ Cf. *sublimius ... ore iam non meo* (1.14) with *cecinit grandius ore mortali. Non potest sublime quicquam ...* (17.11). Both passages in turn echo *Aen.* 6.49, in which the Cumaean Sibyl is described as *maiorque videri / nec mortale sonans*. In addition, Seneca’s argument that “[n]othing sublime and set on high can come to [a mind] as long as it is at home with itself (*apud se*)” may refer not only to Serenus’ fear of speaking with an *ore non iam meo* but also to his tendency to confine his life within his own walls (1.11: *Placet intra parietes suos vitam coercere*).

⁶¹ Trans. Basore 1932: 285.

⁶² Serenus refers to his fears (1.2: *iis quae timebam et oderam*), and Seneca writes that Serenus’ dissatisfaction with himself (cf. 2.5) arises “from a badly tuned mind and desires that are either timid or unrealized” (2.7 *ab intemperie animi et cupiditatibus timidis aut parum prosperis*) and from a “fear of beginning something” (2.8: *incipiendi timor*).

⁶³ See the discussion in Mori 2005: 224-227.

⁶⁴ Long 1982: 36-40; Richardson-Hay 2009: 77-94, esp. 77-82.

⁶⁵ Early on in his response, Seneca gently suggests that Serenus’ main problem is his constant worrying about his moral shortcomings, which are hardly as bad as he himself thinks (2.1-5).

display eloquence as long as it is uncontrived.⁶⁶ Serenus, in other words, is imposing rules of literary restraint on himself that go well beyond what his commitment to Stoicism requires. When Seneca unexpectedly concludes his response by telling him it is okay to occasionally drink to the point of inebriation and to yield to feelings of enthusiasm (or quasi-enthusiasm), what he is offering is a corrective to his friend's excessive uptightness.⁶⁷ But even if we interpret Seneca's apology for philosophical enthusiasm as a direct response to Serenus rather than as a general prescription or a poetic theory, the question remains as to how Seneca can justify the need for an excited mind (*mota mens*) from a Stoic point of view.⁶⁸

Before demonstrating that the *mota mens* Seneca praises in the passage above is not, in fact, an irrational state, it is worth pointing out that recent scholarship has turned away from the belief that *apatheia* was at all times a "fundamental rule" — as Mazzoli (1970: 52) puts it — to which aspiring Stoics were beholden.⁶⁹ As Tad Brennan (1998; 2005a), Margaret Graver (2007; 2017) and others have argued, Stoics of the Imperial period such as Seneca and Epictetus explicitly discussed the possibility that Stoic *proficientes* could feel what Graver calls "progressor emotions" (Graver's term) and Brennan calls "veridical emotions", which are based on a correct valuation of good and evil, going back to our observation that Seneca (certainly in *De Otio*) prescribes regular self-checks on making the appropriate moral progress. Hence, the excited mind praised by Seneca in the passage above can be interpreted as such a "progressor emotion", a feeling of self-transcendence in which the mind is temporarily freed from mundane

⁶⁶ Cleanthes: *SVF* I.486; Sen. *Ep.* 75.3: *Non mehercules ieiuna esse et arida volo quae de rebus tam magnis dicentur ... 5: Non delectent verba nostra sed prosint. Si tamen contingere eloquentia non sollicito potest, si aut parata est aut parvo constat, adsit et res pulcherrimas prosequatur.* It is worth noting that Serenus' neologism *inelaboratus* (sc. *oratio*) is echoed in *Ep.* 75.1, in which Seneca describes his ideal for philosophical speech as *sermo ... inlaboratus et facilis*. Cf. the stark contrast Seneca draws between the frivolous rhetoric of the itinerant preacher Serapio (*Ep.* 40) and the authentic, exemplary philosophical rhetoric of Fabianus (*Ep.* 100). Also, see Vogt 2016, online who suggests that instead of calling "Seneca an orthodox Stoic, ... we might want to say that he writes *within* the Stoic system"; on this, also see Inwood 2005: 23-64 and Rist 1989: 1999-2003.

⁶⁷ We might even conjecture that Seneca's citations of Plato and Aristotle, and his comparison of philosophical enthusiasm to the *mania* of the inspired poet, are intended to mildly shock Serenus' (and perhaps his readers') overly pious sensibility about following Stoic prescriptions.

⁶⁸ Note that Seneca uses the expression *mota mens* and cognates such as *mota animus* to refer to both rational and irrational states. In *Ep.* 94.36 it refers to a form of mild insanity, and in *De Ira* I.9.3 and II.7.3 it refers to a mind affected by emotions. In *Ep.* 39, on the other hand, Seneca writes that ardent enthusiasm sets our soul (*animus*) in motion (*in motu*), and in *Ep.* 109.11-12 he mentions that even the souls of Stoic sages can be moved (*movere*) "skilfully" (*perite*), rationally (*rationaliter*) and "in accordance with nature" (*secundum naturam*). Seneca frequently describes mental tranquillity and stability as involving a lack of movement. Cf. *De Ira* II.12.6 (*immota tranquillitas*) and *Ep.* 71.28 in which he contrasts *mentis volutatio* with *immota stabilitas*.

⁶⁹ Cf. Berger (1960: 365) who notes "[l]a difficulté de concilier l'enthousiasme, au sens du terme, avec l'idéal stoïcien d' 'apatheie'".

worries and gets a foretaste of the sublime joy felt by the Stoic sage.⁷⁰ Further support for this reading can be found by looking at other passages in which Seneca explicitly contrasts a rational form of enthusiasm that strengthens the mind with an irrational counterpart that leads to emotional turmoil.⁷¹ In *Letter* 76.17, for example, he writes:⁷²

Si omne in animo bonum est, quidquid illum confirmat, extollit, amplificat, bonum est; validiorem autem animum et excelsiorem et ampliorem facit virtus. Nam cetera quae cupiditates nostras iniritant deprimunt quoque animum et labefaciunt et cum videntur attollere inflant ac multa vanitate deludunt.

If every good is in the soul, then whatever strengthens, uplifts, and enlarges the soul, is a good; virtue, however, does make the soul stronger, loftier, and larger. For all other things, which arouse our desires, depress the soul and weaken it, and when we think that they are uplifting the soul, they are merely puffing it up and cheating it with much emptiness.

In *Letter* 87.32, Seneca similarly argues that good things “do not corrupt the spirit, and they do not tempt us. They do, indeed, uplift and broaden the spirit, but without puffing it up” (*non corrumpunt animos, non sollicitant; extollunt quidem et dilatant, sed sine tumore*).⁷³ In the *De Ira*, he explicitly dismisses the belief that emotions can ever bring about moral greatness. An enraged person, he argues, may *think* that he “breathes forth something lofty and sublime” (I.20.2: *altum quiddam et sublime spirare se*), but his condition is merely a “swelling” of the soul (*tumor*), without any solid foundation (*nil solidi subest*).⁷⁴ Although Mazzoli cites this argument, he does not draw the logical conclusion that real sublimity, for Seneca, has nothing to do with the irrational and is instead associated with moral strength and greatness of soul.⁷⁵ Seneca’s notion of philosophical enthusiasm, then, is not a form of irrational ecstasy, but a fundamentally rational feeling of moral elevation, as he explicitly describes it in *De Vita Beata* 8.4 cited above. Even though he compares this condition with the inspired *mania* of the poet, the context of the argument and the resonance with parallel passages in Seneca’s work clearly show that he does not regard it as an ordinary, irrational emotion. Rather, he appropriates the vocabulary of sublimity to sketch an inspiring portrait of the mind

⁷⁰ As Graver (2016:139-40) points out, Seneca often describes contemplation as “a form of relaxation of hard labor, as liberation for the mind from the imprisoning body, as raising the spirit to the level of the sublime, and as conferring pleasure”. Her argument that such associations “lend a sense of grandeur and excitement to the familiar message” can also be applied to Seneca’s lofty language in *Tranq.* 17.

⁷¹ In addition to the passages quoted below; cf. *De Ira* I.21.4 and III.6.1, *Ep.* 88.2, *Vit. Beat.* 4.5 and 9.4.

⁷² Trans. Gummere 1920: 156-157.

⁷³ Trans. Gummere 1920: 341.

⁷⁴ Trans. Basore 1928: 161.

⁷⁵ Mazzoli 1990: 93. Halliwell has recently questioned the common assumption that the ancient notion of sublimity is fundamentally irrational. He persuasively argues that the Longinian notion of sublimity need not imply that the mind is forcefully altered by something external to it but can be experienced as “a process which springs from within the mind’s own internal structures and properties, including its cognitive capacities” (Halliwell 2012: 335).

that has been liberated from cares and to demonstrate to Serenus, and his readers, that the pursuit of Stoic tranquillity need not be a glum, uninspired affair.

Concluding Remarks

To return to wine and Seneca's appreciation of it as a medium for achieving spiritual elevation, *when used in moderation*, it is worth visiting his references to wine in his *De Ira*; at I.4 Seneca distinguishes between anger and irascibility, comparing the difference between the two to that between a drunken man and a drunkard (as well as a frightened man and a coward). But anger, Seneca claims in I.13.4, can be very useful (*utilis*), not when it becomes a substitute for bravery, but as aid for the mind "that is other-wise slack and cowardly" (*segnem alioqui animum et ignavum paululum adlevant*).⁷⁶ Such tools are certainly permissible when one knows how to control them, though clearly the best way to deal with anger (and hence, emotional unrest) is reason (*De Ira* I.17.1-2). Equally, reason can be manipulated to achieve philosophical inspiration and illumination; the mind analyses, interprets, considers the philosophical questions, struggling to reach a deeper understanding, an insight that only comes unexpectedly at a time of atypical consciousness, a time that cannot be predicted and can lead young, ambitious disciples like Serenus to anxiety and self-doubt. At such times of peril, when the rigour of the discipline is running the risk of failing the philosopher, Seneca advises prompting the symptoms of intellectual elevation by using wine. After all, even Socrates whom Alcibiades admired in the *Symposium* (219d4-8; 220a4-5) for his ability to consume large quantities of wine, prefers to combine wine-drinking with discourse and values sensible drinking as a way that facilitates moral progress. Seneca, a sensitive reader of Plato, could not have missed the point: to remain sober, one does not have to reject the symptoms of philosophical elevation that wine stimulates.

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⁷⁶ Trans. Basore 1928: 141.

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