

## **José Pedro Serra**

Centro de Estudos Clássicos, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa  
j.p.serra@letras.ulisboa.pt

### **The stoic logos between the tragic logos and the Christian logos**

Regardless of the sympathy or detachment with which one looks at the Stoic doctrine, its importance has been maintained over the centuries. This is indisputable, whether, more generally, in terms of spiritual formation, in the modelling of spiritual life; or, more specifically, in the written traits that have given rise to a vast tradition of authors and literary texts. This is mainly due to two fundamental reasons.

Firstly, there is the nature of the stoic ideal of life. This is the, at least, apparent force with which a regime of life is sculpted. It is affirmed by prudence and balance, embroidered with countless virtues, and seems to protect man, perhaps even to save him, from the always surrounding storms and convulsions that disturb and agitate him. It is not so much in the field of Logic or Physics, but of Ethics that Stoicism won and still wins a vast audience of readers and even, at least apparently, some convinced followers.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For a general overview of the tradition and permanence of Stoicism, see John Sellers, *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, New York: Routledge, 2015; Brad INWOOD, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, Cambridge, 2003; for late antiquity and the middle ages see Marcia L. Colish, *Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought Through the Sixth Century*, Leiden, Brill, 1985; Gérard Verbeke, *Presence of Stoicism in Medieval Thought*, Washington, Catholic Univ of Amer Press, 1983. For the modern period, see Pierre-François Moreau, *Le stoïcisme au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle: le retour des philosophies antiques à l'Age classique*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1999. For the contemporary 'popular success' of Stoicism, in academia and beyond, see John Sellers, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*, Bristol, Bristol Classical Press, 2009; Jason Hemlock, *Stoicism: How to Use Stoic Philosophy to Find Inner Peace and Happiness*,

Secondly, the success of Stoicism is due to the texts and the figure of Seneca –also to the circumstances of his life, which sometimes brought him closer to politics, sometimes distanced him from it. It is, above all, due to the seriousness, the existential density of his reflections, as well as the literary quality of his essays and tragedies and other texts. It is true that, occasionally, there have been some less enthusiastic, more radical voices casting some suspicion on the purposes of stoicism, namely regarding the properly philosophical nature of its statute. This is the case, for example, of the severe judgment that Hegel makes in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, denying stoicism the status of philosophy and simply reducing it to a parenetic.<sup>2</sup> Whether it is a philosophy or not, always depends on a previous discussion of what philosophy is; and this is neither the point that interests us, nor the debate that we want to make here. Considering, as said earlier, that stoicism is affirmed above all through ethical principles, through the ideal elevation of the stoic life, what matters here is to verify the presupposed principles from which these ideals are affirmed and what are the consequences that derive from them. To do so by analysing Seneca’s work, one of the stoic voices most heard, is particularly suggestive and fertile.

As is well known, at the heart of Stoic ethics is a central critique of the passions of the soul, which creates – always (there are no “good” passions) – an imbalance in the hierarchy of the various anthropological instances and, as such, a deviation from the rectitude of behaviour with more or less catastrophic consequences (we could already use the term “tragic”) for the individuals who suffer them. The *passio*, which refers to *patior*, a term of obscure etymology<sup>3</sup> and which means “to suffer”,

---

Bouchard Publishing, 2020. And for its presence on the internet, see Chiara Sulprizio “Why is Stoicism Having a Cultural Moment?” <https://eidolon.pub/why-is-stoicism-having-a-cultural-moment-5f0e9963d560> (consultado em Outubro de 2024). The publication of multiple translations of Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations* is also a strong indicator of the interest in Stoicism.

<sup>2</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, zweiter Band, p. 435, in *Sämtliche Werk*, jubilaüsausgabe in zwanzig Bänden, Achtzehnter Band, Stuttgart, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> For the etymology of the term *Patior*, see A. ERNOUT et A. MEILLET, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Latine. Histoire des Mots*, Paris, 1979, s.u. *Patior*. The word *passio* é “rare et tardif; c’est surtout un mot du latin ecclésiastique pour traduire

“to endure”, “to be passive” can – and should – be related to the Greek verb πάσχω, whose meaning, reinforcing the idea of passivity, is that of “receiving an impression or a sensation, undergoing a treatment (good or bad)”.<sup>4</sup> Following this path, passion is then something *that is suffered*, that is *passively supported*, that is, an *affectus*. As something that gives a model to the soul, *affectus* is prolonged and drags with it a movement, a *perturbatio*: a disordered and unhealthy movement, because it disrespects the hierarchy of the different instances of the soul and because it is averse, and does not conform (*con-form*, with the same form), to the Λόγος that presides over all reality and governs it. This conception can, moreover, claim to be the heir to Platonic philosophy, based on the idea of the tripartition of the soul.<sup>5</sup> According to this understanding, Plato distinguished three parts, designated in ascending order: ἐπιθυμητικόν (the appetitive part), θυμοειδές (the animal part) and a λογιστικόν (the rational part). The harmonic and integrative union of all three parts, the only one that allows an agreement with the Λόγος, and consequently wise conduct, implies a subordination of the lower instances to the higher instance, to the rational part, λογιστικόν, on which ultimately the unity and coherence of the whole depends. This anthropological ordering, with obvious ethical consequences and on which, we could say, the *beata uita* depends, in fact agrees with other instances, namely the ontological, the gnoseological and, ideally, the political; that is, the hierarchical structuring of the *polis*. As Plato states in metaphorical language, it is important to emphasize that only a solar capacity, ἡλιοειδής<sup>6</sup>, will be able to know, contemplate, the Ideas, the Good, τὸ ἀγαθόν in other words, only the rational part will be able to know and conform to universal Reason.

---

le gr. πάθος dans le sens de “passion” du Christ; et de “passion”, mouvement de l’âme (correspondant à classique *affectus*) avec une nuance péjorative.”

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque. Histoire des Mots*, Paris, 1968, s.u. πάσχω.

<sup>5</sup> On this subject, see Plato, *Rep.*, 442a-445e; 588b-589a; 606a-d. Para o tema da alma na República, ver Ferrari, G. R. F., *City and Soul in Plato’s Republic*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press 2003; Gail Fine, *Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, Oxford, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, Berne, 1947. See also Plato, *Rep.*, 508 b-e.

It matters little whether this logical part has an individual autonomy, or whether it dissolves in Universal Reason, a kind of Soul of the world, or in divinity.<sup>7</sup> This and other questions are not relevant at this time. What is important to understand is the disturbing potential of passions that, asserting themselves and triumphing in the soul, unleash disorder and misrule: a gateway to addiction and a foolish life. Passion is, in short, a disordered movement of the soul, *motus animae*, which moves away from the reason that governs everything, or in the words of Zeno, according to Diogenes Laertius, ἡ ἄλογος καὶ παρὰ φύσιν ψυχῆς κίνεσις, ἡ ὀρμὴ πλεονάζουσα. Cicero was to argue, quoting the same Zeno, “aversa a recta ratione contra naturam animi commotio”, a movement of the soul, averse to right reason and contrary to nature.<sup>8</sup>

The passions, therefore, need to submit to reason. Here, however, a subtle question arises: should the passions be dominated, subjugated and weakened, or should they be banished, extirpated. Should they be rooted out of the soul, like a weed in the spiritual life? The question seems a scholarly oddity, and yet the consequences are vast according to the answer given.<sup>9</sup> And the answer depends on how *affectus* is conceived. Passion can be understood as a movement of the soul that emerges strictly from its irrational part. As such, it can also be seen as having a strictly irrational nature, independent of any assent to a belief, independent therefore of any judgment, of any cognitive element. This seems to be the position of Posidonius and Galen, for whom the emergence of passions is not related to judgments, but rather the emerging movements of non-rational powers, which, in Platonic language, we could call ἐπιθυμητικόν, epithumetic, and θυμοειδές,

---

<sup>7</sup> It is not difficult to understand how decisive this question will be for Christianity, since it raises the issue of the autonomy of the the Personal Soul.

<sup>8</sup> See *SVF*, 205.

<sup>9</sup> On this issue, see the enlightening articles by Martha Nussbaum, “The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions” in *Apeiron*, 20, 1987, 129-177; “Poetry and the Passions: two Stoic Views” in *Passions and Perception: Studies in Hellenistic Philosophy of mind*: proceedings of the fifth Symposium Hellenisticum, (eds) J. Brunschwig and Martha C. Nussbaum, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 97-149. The theme of mastery over the passions, particularly anger, has a broad horizon in ancient thought; see William Harris, *Restraining Rage. The Ideology of Anger Control in Classic Antiquity*, Massachusetts/London, Harvard Univ. Press, 2001.

thumoeidetic. We could question the difference between mere appetites or desires (like bodily appetites, such as hunger and thirst) and passions (phenomena like fear, love, grief, anger, envy and jealousy). For what interests us here, however, it is enough to emphasize the independence and the distancing of the passionate element from the intellectual, the rational.

There is a different understanding, according to which, a belief or a judgment is necessary for the emergence of a passion; or even that a belief, or a judgment, constitutes a necessary passionate element. Strictly speaking, we could still add the position of Chrysippus, for whom belief, or judgment, is identical with passion. In this case, it is not only accepted that a rational element determines and structures the irrationality of passions, there is a more radical understanding. According to this, judgment and passion are one and the same. In the latter case, the affective and tumultuous facet of passion is not ignored, it is derived from the dynamics of reason itself. In other words, neither is judgment a cold act, nor is reason static. Conflicts do not arise out of the opposition between irrational impulse and reason, but from the intense alternation between different judgments, between yes and no, between valid and invalid. Since this is not Seneca's position, it will suffice to focus on the opposition between the conception of passion as something exclusively rational, and the conception according to which a cognitive element is constitutive of the passions.

The consequences of these different understandings are diverse and decisive. If the passions, coinciding with the natural dispositions of the irrational part of the soul, do not depend on, nor are related to a judgment, then the only way to deal with the passions is to try to dominate them, weaken them, devitalize them, if I can put it like that. Austere habits and other techniques must help to appease passions, namely by encouraging harmonious movements from rhythms and melodies. It is understandable that the supporters of this thesis value, in poetic art, music to the detriment of text, rhythm to the detriment of content. Passions, irrational, cannot be dealt with through judgments, because what has an irrational nature is not dealt with by rational means. It is, therefore, a matter of keeping them on a low heat, imposing a refined surveillance and an authoritarian dominion on them.

If, in contrast, an intrinsically constitutive element of a cognitive nature is recognized in the passions, a judgment, and if the very profile of the passions derives from it, then the way to deal with these same passions and to escape their enslaving power is to alter the judgment and radically changing the way of looking at the world and life. Passions are always the result of a poor evaluation of external objects, from an error of judgment that distorts the relationship with the world and with others. Only by correcting this judgment, only by making it in accordance with the *logos*, is it possible to free ourselves from the grip of passion, not by mastering it, but by uprooting it, just as the errors and obscurities of ignorance are uprooted through the clear light of truth, to which only reason gives access. Therefore, it is understandable that these supporters value in poetic art the text to the detriment of the music, the content to the detriment of the rhythm. Clear thinking and the strength of doctrine, together with the ability to assert it, is the only way to overcome passions and find the regime of a virtuous life. The doctrine, and in this case the Stoic doctrine, is not only an educational path, a path of *paideia* and *humanitas*, but also a liberating path to the *beata uita*, to a happy life. This, as an ideal, coincides with virtuous behaviour; in other words, with a regime of life unaffected by external contingency.

It is from this point that we can understand not only the pedagogical vocation of Seneca's tragedies, but also the very existence of stoic tragedies, an expression that at first sight seems paradoxical, perhaps even contradictory. In fact, it is not immediately perceptible how the *tragoedia* can transmute the understanding of the real: metamorphosing the foolish man into the wise man. It is legitimate and necessary to ask how the representation of men dominated by very powerful passions that lead them to commit insane crimes can promote such a decisive change.

We can make the question more concrete: in what way can the representation of the destiny of Thyestes, or of Agamemnon or of Phaedra or Medea, summon the spectator to the liberation of passions, guide them not to the illusory shadows, but to reason, in a full conversion of the soul? This objective demanded Seneca break with Aristotle and create an original poetics. For Aristotle, in addition to the tragic action

(the tragic *mythos*), it must be subject to the two pillars that delimit and guide it, verisimilitude and necessity: principles the tragic action must obey.<sup>10</sup> The protagonist cannot be either very good or very bad, and above all, the performance must always allow and request the spectator to identify with the character, recognizing themselves in them and enabling a *sym-patheia*, a *com-passio*. The appearance of feelings of pity terror, for Aristotle the final cause of tragic representation, depends on this identification, without which they cannot be aroused. Terror and pity only emerge if the spectator identifies with the character, admitting that what happened to the character could also happen to them, and with the same violence and lack of deserving with which it befell them.<sup>11</sup> I am, therefore, emphasizing the importance of the idea of undeserving, without which the tragicity of the tragic and the tragic *pathos* are emptied, devoid of content. If the punishment that befalls the person suffering the tragedy is the “just punishment” for the fault committed, then we are only dealing with a case of poetic justice or the triumph of morality. “Behave well, you will not suffer” says the moralist. Only when a punishment of disproportionate severity in the face of the acts practiced insinuates itself from the fragility of the human condition can the tragic arise.

Seneca presents us with a radically different conception of the poetics of tragedy. In his view, tragic representation should not promote identification between the spectator and the character but, on the contrary, must require the spectator to detach and perform an insightful analysis that, in turn, requires the exercise of all their critical capacities. The spectator cannot be passively dragged along by the flow of very strong passions that cross the scene and that, as in a terrible whirlpool, suck them in. As an attentive and critical observer, they must judge what is happening on stage, apprehending the causes that trigger such disastrous events – the passions. This is the aim of stoic tragedy: to show how inevitably tragic is the fate of those who are dominated by passions; urging the spectator, who sees and witnesses

---

<sup>10</sup> See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451a 36-1451b 7. See also 1451a 12-13; 1451b 33-35; 1454a 33-36; 1453b 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> For “pity”, see Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1385b 13-18; for “fear” see *ibidem*, 1382a 21-25; 1382b 24-26.

such misfortunes, to convert their gaze, to change their judgment and to free their passions.<sup>12</sup>

Having reached this point in understanding Seneca's doctrine and the nature of "Stoic tragedy", it is necessary to pose the complex question of the will, of the *uoluntas*. This is the first pillar of his thought and his dramatic work, and a very difficult question for the understanding of Greek tragedy, to which Seneca is heir. The question of will is a complex issue in the context of Greek tragedy because, in my opinion, it constitutes a category of thought and an instance of the understanding of human action that is still totally absent in the work of Aeschylus and, perhaps, still absent in the work of Sophocles and Euripides. This means, I believe, that the category of *will* and, implicitly, of *free will* are deficient.<sup>13</sup> They are not opportune, convenient and effective for the understanding of tragic action and for the strength of the tragic that arises from it. In the texts of Greek tragedians, the theme of destiny, with the inherent questions of submission to fatality (to *ananke*), and freedom, are not yet equated in terms of will and free will, categories of thought that will be central both in stoicism and

---

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes, and with good reason, Seneca and Brecht's conceptions of theatrical poetics are seen as being close, namely with regard to the demand for the active and critical participation of the spectator. In both, the theatrical representation requires the committed participation of the audience, albeit with a healthy reflective distance, which leads to a metamorphosis of the very understanding of reality, with obvious changes in the existential orientation of each spectator. One thing occurs to me, however, in the concrete way in which this metamorphosis is proposed. In Brecht, the deep understanding of what is represented points to the alteration of the relations between the forces of production and the forces of power present in society. In Seneca, however, the deep understanding of what is represented calls for an internal conversion, in which the nature of the relationship between the individual and the world and its seductions is transfigured. See Segurado e Campos, "Sêneca e o teatro de Brecht", *Classica. Boletim de Pedagogia e Cultura*, 23, 1999, pp. 9-26.

<sup>13</sup> For the question of the theme of will in Greek tragedy and its subsequent presence in Stoicism, see José Pedro Serra, *Pensar o trágico. Categorias da tragédia grega*, Lisboa, Abysmo, 2018, in particularly pp. 52-61 and 153-247; André-Jean Voelke, *L'idée de volonté dans le stoïcisme*, Paris, PUF, 1973; Segurado e Campos, "Ratio e Voluntas no Pensamento de Sêneca", *Classica. Boletim de Pedagogia e Cultura*, 22 1997, pp. 79-92.

Christianity. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, however, these categories were not yet constitutive of the understanding that Man had of himself and of his actions. The difficulty we have today in thinking outside these categories - the vocabulary related to the will completely dominates our language and, as such, our thinking - makes it even more difficult to understand Greek tragedy and the way in which the relationship between Necessity and Freedom is equated there. It is referring to the nebulosity of this moment in the history of thought, in which Man is no longer a total slave of destiny or necessity (of μοῖρα or ἀνάγκη), but is not yet *free* and autonomous to shape and build his horizon – we could say his “history” –, which Jean-Pierre Vernant spoke of as the historic moment of Greek tragedy.<sup>14</sup>

In order to better understand the relationship between thinking and acting, and the original introduction of *uoluntas* in the history of tragedy, let us turn once more to Platonic thought, which presents a solution for this question generically known as intellectualist. For Plato, since everyone wants the good for himself, it is absurd, logically contradictory, for someone to make a mistake intentionally and, as such, all error is caused by ignorance: to act badly is to be ignorant. Plato recognizes that you act badly, but the cause of this “bad behaviour”, of the “bad action”, is in the wrong judgment, in ignorance. In this understanding of the decision and the genesis of the action, between the judgment that deliberates and the act itself, there is an immediate continuity. In other words, between the judgment that evaluates and the action that follows from it, there is no kind of mediation, nor the recourse to any capacity other than understanding. To think well is to act well. It is true that some individuals may think that passions are the way to

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. J.-P. Vernant, “Le moment historique de la tragédie en Grèce: quelques conditions sociales et psychologiques”, in *Mythe et Tragédie en Grèce Ancienne*, Paris, 1982, pp. 13-17. By the same author, see also the older articles, which are still very relevant, “Ebauches de la Volonté dans la Tragédie Grecque”, in *Mythe et Tragédie en Grèce Ancienne*, Paris, 1972, pp. 41-74 and “Tensions et Ambiguïtés dans la Tragédie Grecque”, in *Mythe et Tragédie en Grèce Ancienne*, Paris, 1982, pp. 19-40 (= “Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy”, in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, Baltimore, 1969, pp. 105-121). See also Albin Lesky, “Decision and Responsibility in the Tragedy of Aeschylus”, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. LXXXVI, 1966, pp. 78-85.

happiness, *eudaimonia*, just as Medea supposed that she could not live outside the “possession” of Jason or Agamemnon without realizing all his desire for power and riches.<sup>15</sup> They will be able to judge it, and in so doing they will act according to what they think is best for themselves. Nonetheless, they are wrong, because they do not understand that they place themselves under the power of perishable, precarious and provisional things and, in doing so, they put their soul at the mercy of turmoil and restlessness that will only bring them suffering and unrest. Their unhappiness, which flourishes in action, is the immediate result of misjudgement, ignorance.

The introduction of the category of will, of *uoluntas*, as an autonomous category, profoundly changes the issue, introducing a division within the subject himself. The latter can now *know*, but *act badly*: in the opposite direction to what reason recognizes as just. The relationship between judgment and action does not follow *i-mmediately*, but requires the concurrence of an instance, of an intermediate and autonomous capacity, the will, which between judgment and action serves as mediation. The will, perceived as the first given in human experience, irreducible to reason, makes judgment practical, experiencing it as action. Only the will can make knowledge and action agree. The will, therefore, is autonomous, though not foreign to knowledge and action.

Seneca’s Stoic doctrine, as can also be seen from his dramatic work, thus requires the competition between correct thinking and a strengthening of the *will*. Right thinking is characterized by conformity to the *Logos*, the strengthening of the will is expressed in the effective subordination of appetites and passions to the rational part of the soul. The strengthening of the will can be built, through certain exercises, certain practices, certain techniques. From the doctrinal point of view, the internalization of meditation on death, the *meditatio mortis*, occupies a central place. Meditation on death sets the keen awareness of the brevity of life and the ephemerality of things before us, sending

---

<sup>15</sup> There is a long bibliography on the notion of *eudaimonia* in Plato and Aristotle, but we point to one central work: Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1986.

our gaze in the right direction by attributing fleetingness to fleeting things and thus freeing us from the multiple slavery in which an illusory notion of *possession* or power encloses us. From the point of view of literary construction, all the *tragoediae*, in addition to showing the procession of misfortunes that annihilate men devoured by passions, thus exhorting the spectator to a critical attitude, always include an intervention that illustrates the Stoic doctrine. This intervention, in clear opposition to the course of the drama, serves as an orientation to the reader/spectator and simultaneously reinforces the pedagogical vocation of the dramatic text.

Having considered the generic design of the doctrine and intentionality of tragedies, I believe we are in a position to characterize and illuminate the nature of the *stoic logos* in Seneca and how it is expressed in tragedies. In this case, by *stoic logos* I understand not only the intelligible order that supports the intelligibility of the real, as Seneca understands it, but the discourse and thought that express it, as well as the ethical consequences that derive from it. We have already seen how the core of Seneca's thought is to be found in the radical critique of all passions and the way in which they must be wrested from the soul's life. There are no good passions, nor can anything good come of them. So, for example, if some mistakenly think that mercy is a virtue, they forget that it is not possible to feel pity and at the same time eliminate fear.<sup>16</sup> Passions are the result of false judgments, from faulty evaluations of external things that bind us to them, since these external things escape our control, making us restless and terrified slaves of Fortune. So only in the absence of passions, he said, can Man find serenity, inner balance and happiness; moving away from *vitium*, the tumultuous aggregate of passions, and adopting virtuous conduct. In the footsteps of Plato, and unlike Aristotle, Seneca makes happiness, εὐδαιμονία, depend exclusively on straight thinking and *con-forming* to the intelligible order

---

<sup>16</sup> It is not possible to feel pity and eliminate fear at the same time. "Ad rem pertinet quaerere hoc loco, quid sit misericordia; plerique enim ut virtutem eam laudant et bonum hominem vocant misericordem. Et haec vitium animi est." See Seneca, *De Clementia*, II, 4. 'It is pertinent to ask in this place what mercy is mercy; many praise it as a virtue and call the merciful a good man merciful. And this is a vice of the soul.'

of reality. When he understands that in the midst of perishable things he only lives on borrowed time, and when he attributes fleetingness to the fleeting and immortality to the imperishable order, the wise man frees himself from any dependence on empirical circumstances and rides, untouchable and impassive, on the contingencies of the world. Nothing can touch him; nothing can hurt him; nothing can overthrow him. Any shadow of finitude and death that can rise in the vortex of time or in the twist of Fortune has already perished in the lucid consciousness of the effective inconstancy of sensible things. A wise man's happiness depends only on his judgment and his will.

And it is precisely on the basis of this characterization of the Stoic logos that I would like to express some distrust of Seneca's doctrine and thought. It is true that the virtues immediately emerging from the criticism of the passions appear clothed in a grandeur and dignity that are difficult to contest. Who could question the benefits of controlling anger, rage, thirst for power and even, in many cases, passionate love (I don't say in all because, for example, the myth of Tristan and Isolde would demand a more careful analysis)? Empirical common sense easily leads us to a certain amount of agreement. The point, however, is that Stoic doctrine, and Seneca's thought in particular, is not limited to the proclamation of a poorly defined equilibrium, nor of an ill-defined common sense. In the clarity of their principles, what they point to is something radical: the purging of passions. Now, it seems to me that, although the nature of the virtuous life is well defined and characterized – in general the proclaimed Stoic virtues are generically acceptable and have a strong analogy in various spiritual traditions (constancy, temperance, etc.) –, they do not depend exclusively on the subject. There is a degree of unpredictability and fragility that accompanies the concrete condition of the existence of men and that, to a greater or lesser degree, makes them vulnerable to the winds of Fortune. Firmness of character and strength of will are certainly extraordinarily important elements in the behaviour of the wise man. They distinguish him from the fool but do not, in themselves, ensure happiness, the *beata uita*. Deep down, an unpredictability, an impotence and a fragility mark and ensure the potential wound of the human gesture.

Added to this is the dryness and sterility after the extirpation of passions as Seneca understands them. The hegemony granted to thought brings, I think, an affective and existential dryness that translates into a kind of sterile victory over the world, forgetting the deep aspirations of the heart that, being neither independent nor indifferent to thought, are neither coincident nor entirely determined by reason. It is true that one could argue that this is the statement of a fool, coming from someone trapped in the bonds of feelings, *affectus*. I don't think so, but it is possible. I cannot, however, fail to respond, drawing attention to the aesthetic trap that Stoicism and Seneca's texts can devise. This renunciation of passions, this ideal is so seductive, so apparently beautiful, so magnificently lofty that we are conquered by it, finding the enchantment of passion in the very lap of doctrine and in the very texts that deny it. And this is the greatest of all hoaxes, the most disguised form of inauthenticity. Here, the *Stoic logos* seems to be between the *tragic logos* and the *Christian logos*, perhaps beyond the *tragic logos* but less far than the *Christian logos*.

In the *tragic logos* (the one that emerges from Greek tragedy), Man, recognizing and assuming the fragility that derives from the consciousness of his dependence on the forces that determine him, is between fatality and freedom, knowledge and ignorance, guilt and innocence, immersed in conflicts whose resolution he neither guesses nor apprehends. In the illuminated obscurity of his position, in the helplessness in which he finds himself, however, anything can happen: fall, disgrace or redemption.<sup>17</sup> Tragedy represents a crisis, above all, the results of which are unpredictable. Stoicism, overcoming all possible tragedy – in fact, for *Sapiens* there is no possibility of tragedy – has definitively overcome this *crisis*, and due to that alone I said a moment ago that it is beyond tragedy. In contrast – and in this context, we must use the term *Logos* in a particular sense because it does not only represent the intelligibility of the real. It is also the incarnation of the Son of God, the first and creative Word – the Christian *Logos* responds to a supplication, to a radical lack, to an ontological amputation. In

---

<sup>17</sup> It seems to me that the tragic experience may not be far from the mystical experience, a path of thought that seems fertile to me

the unhealed wound of the Absolute's desire, whose absence is still a form of presence, the Christian *Logos* reveals itself as a You, a Person, who responds to the deepest pains of earthly man: Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; (Psalm 130, King James Version). *Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere*, to use the formula with which Léon Chestov<sup>18</sup> attacks Spinoza (and stoicism), represents the emaciated and anemic consolation of a mental truth. I don't think it's the gateway to the desired fullness. And that is why I said that the *Stoic Logos* went less far than the *Christian Logos*.

---

<sup>18</sup> See Léon Chestov, *Athènes et Jérusalem. Un essai de philosophie religieuse*, Paris, 1967.