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Parum diligens in philosophia? The Use of Tranquillitas in Seneca

Seneca freely employs *tranquillitas* in a variety of philosophical contexts, particularly those passages concerning the ideal psychological state of the *sapiens*. While those few who have dealt with Seneca's use of the term have rightly pointed to the powerful nautical image the word evokes (Rohde, *RE* 6.2 [1937] 2138-9); Hadot [1969], Grimal [1992] and Armisen-Marchetti [1996]), they do not treat the term extensively outside of brief comment on his translation of the Democritean concept of *euthumia* in his *De Tranquillitate Animi*. This paper argues that the wide use of *tranquillitas* to represent Hellenistic philosophical terms in Roman dress is due not to carelessness (a criticism reaching as far back as Quintilian's *parum diligens in philosophia*) but to the strong position the Latin word held in the Roman conception of psychological health.

When more technical Greek philosophical systems were introduced into Latin, various technical terms for spiritual health had to be translated into a language known for its linguistic poverty. The attention devoted to Latin's deficiency in this regard has been excessive, and the fact remains that any writer translating a technical word into another language will resort to the most natural and accurate choice within his own lexicon before taking more extreme measures such as inventing a new calque. Accordingly, Cicero and Seneca both use *tranquillitas* for a variety of Greek philosophical *termini*, since they all represent an ideal that is current and strong in the Romans' conception of psychological health; the context informs how to decode the term. So, Cicero long before Seneca employs *tranquillitas* variously to denote Epicurean (e.g. *ataraxia*), Cynic-Stoic (*apatheia*) and Democritean (*euthumia*) terms for spiritual peace. But Seneca for his part is even less keen than Cicero on retaining the context of original Greek philosophical discussion. Thus, Seneca employs *tranquillitas* in numerous contexts concerning the health of the soul, but appears somewhat indiscriminate in its use, employing it in four distinct philosophical fields: 1) for Democritus' *euthumia* (the peaceful, joyful state of mind); 2) for the *consequens summum bonum* (the product of the highest good); 3) for the Stoic-Cynic *apatheia* (freedom from emotions stimulated from outside, the *animus invulnerabilis* [Ep. 9.2]); and 4) for the *vita beata* (Greek *eudaimonia*) itself.

By retracing the history of the word (from, among others, Plautus, *Mercator* 876-80 and *Epidicus* 560-2; Cicero's discussion at *Tusc.* 3.8-9 [see Graver *ad loc.*]), I argue that the apparent nonchalance on the part of Seneca (and Cicero) in his application of *tranquillitas* to a number of distinct philosophical fields is due to the centrality of the Latin word in its own linguistic construct and not to the negligence of Seneca *qua* translator or transmitter of Greek ideas. All of this is in accord with his words at *De Tranquillitate Animi* 2.3 [*nomen*] *quod appellationis Graecae vim debet habere, non faciem*. And if this blurs the precision of the Greek system, so be it; after all, the Romans saw psychology, at least, in black (*insanitas*) and white (*sanitas*).