

and nature'.⁷⁰ What Seneca writes is subtly different in emphasis. In explaining why he gives precepts such as that one should avoid shedding human blood, help a shipwrecked person in distress, show the way to a lost person, or share food with a starving person, Seneca says:

Why should I state all the services which should be done and avoided, when I can communicate to him [an interlocutor] briefly this maxim (*formula*) for appropriate human behaviour (*humani officii*)?⁷¹ This universe which you see, in which all things human and divine are included, is a unity; we are limbs of a gigantic body. Nature brought us forth as blood-relatives, for she created us from the same elements and in the same element. It is she who gave us reciprocal love and made us social. She established what is fair and just; by her dispensation it is more wretched to harm than to be injured.⁷² Let this verse be on your lips and in your heart: 'I am a man, and think no human matter foreign to me.' Let our possessions be for the general good; we were born for it. Our society is just like a stone archway which would fall down unless it exerted reciprocal pressure on itself and is thereby kept up.

Mitsis takes this as a *decretum* in the sense of an injunction to act. But though the actions enjoined by the *praecepta* follow directly from it, there is very little injunction in what Seneca says—it is (as we would expect from Seneca's introduction of *decreta*) an assertion of Stoic physical principles (holism, rational teleology, a part-whole understanding of the cosmos) and of the natural foundation of human sociability. It is not a universal rule or law of nature *enjoining* these behaviours in all particular cases. Rather, the *praecepta* which enjoin more specific type-actions of mutual respect flow from it.

⁷⁰ 'Seneca on Reason, Rules and Moral Development', 303.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ep.* 103.3. Note too *servilis officii formulam* at *Ben.* 3.21.2. Actions can be appropriate to a person qua human or in virtue of some specific social role. See below on *personae*.

⁷² This might be thought to be a good candidate for an exceptionless general principle with content specific enough to be useful as a rule in Mitsis's sense; indeed, he suggested that in conversation. But in fact the notion of harm used here must be the special, transvalued meaning of harm which accompanies the notion that true benefit is the moral good. And so it brings with it the kind of technical and tautological sense that makes the 'rule' useless to anyone but the already wise agent.

At this point I should add, at least parenthetically, that if one studies Seneca's own usage for 'law of nature', the prescriptive element does not bulk very large. A more thorough study would be necessary, but provisionally I would say that typically *lex naturae* and similar expressions refer to brute facts such as the mortality of human beings and the perishability of the cosmos.⁷³ In this regard much of what Seneca says about laws of nature bears a closer resemblance to *decreta* without overt prescriptive force than to moral injunctions which give commands to act (as *praecepta* do). Seneca's terminology is, to be sure, somewhat fluid here.⁷⁴ But it is typical of Seneca *not* to limit himself by rigid terminological decisions;⁷⁵ the contrast between theories and the precepts grounded by them is the crucial point, and Seneca maintains it despite his deliberately non-professional style.

In order to round out our picture of moral reasoning, let us return to Cicero, and in particular to his own treatment (which follows Stoic principles) of the topic omitted by Panaetius. In book 3 of *De Officiis* the question is restated in terms which respect the basic framework of Stoic axiology: it is allowed that genuine benefit could never conflict with moral value, since they are in fact identical.⁷⁶ But conflict can legitimately occur, in Cicero's view, in cases where there is doubt about the moral quality of the proposed action. 'For often circumstances determine that what is generally considered to be shameful is found

⁷³ See Ch. 8 below. Mortality as the law of nature: *NQ* 6.32.12; *Cons. Helv.* 13.2. Constant material change: *Cons. Helv.* 6.8. Negative inevitabilities of human condition: *Vita Beata* 15.5. Natural inevitability of human sociability (descriptive, not prescriptive): *Ben.* 4.17.3. Natural limits set to pleasure and wealth (Epicurean sense): *Ep.* 4.10, 25.4, 27.9, 45.9, 90.4 (prescriptive as well as descriptive). Large-scale scientific regularities in physics: *NQ* 3.15.3, 3.16.4. Prescriptive uses I have noted include: ideal of kingship (natural king) *Clem.* 1.19.2; natural, rather than political freedom: *NQ* 3 Pref. 16.

⁷⁴ Note also that the relevant maxim here is actually termed a *formula*, not a *decretum*. (Similarly in *Ben.* 7.1–2 we see *praecepta*, *lex*, and *regula* used in a very confusing way. It is evident that more serious work needs to be done on such terminology in Latin philosophy.)

⁷⁵ See my remarks in 'Seneca in his Philosophical Milieu', Ch. 1 above.

⁷⁶ ... cui quidem ita sunt Stoici adsensu, ut et quidquid honestum esset id utile esse censerent, nec utile quicquam quod non honestum (*Off.* 3.11).