

word *regula* is as close as we get to the term 'rule' in Stoic moral reasoning, and here it probably corresponds to the Greek *kanōn*, the word used by Chrysippus to describe 'law' in the exordium to his treatise *On Law*. Yet here, at any rate, the function of a *regula* seems to be epistemological and justificatory, not prescriptive.⁶⁴ Genuine stability of moral action can only come if there is a clear way to connect the point of the action to the goal of life, to which all actions are to be referred (95.45); this consists in a set of beliefs, known with certainty, which deals with life as a whole (*persuasio ad totam pertinens vitam* (95.44)). That is what counts as a principle, and no *praeceptum* is enough unless it can make that connection between the particular circumstances and the overall point of life. Hence the first example of such a principle which Seneca offers is a statement of the *telos* or goal of life (95.45–6).⁶⁵

Seneca goes on to give other examples of the kinds of general principles he has in mind. One deals with the gods (95.47–50). A distinct issue follows (*altera quaestio*), our relations with other humans (95.51–3); the crux of the matter is a maxim (*formula*)⁶⁶ similar to one which we will meet shortly in Cicero, *De Officiis* 3: it makes no more sense, Seneca says, to harm each other than it does for one body part to attack another. The third example is the set of principles dealing with the value of things—that is, the basic axiology as discussed above (95.54). Fourth is the theory of virtues in their relationship to action (95.55–9), a topic also dealt with in Cicero's *De Officiis*.⁶⁷ A careful reading of our evidence from Seneca and the *De Officiis* will confirm that the

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ep.* 13.7; also *Ben.* 4.12.1, where, according to J. M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé (*Seneca: Moral and Political Essays* (Cambridge 1995), 283) *regula* is the translation for the Greek *kanōn*. They suggest that Seneca is there quoting the opening phrases of Chrysippus' *On Law*. If so, it is particularly important that Seneca here says that a law, qua rule (*regula*), is not something to be chosen for its own sake. I take it that this means that a substantive law can be no more than a rule of thumb in Schauer's sense.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ep.* 71.2.

⁶⁶ This is not the only use for the term *formula* in Seneca. In *Ep.* 124.14 he offers a *formula* or practical criterion as an aid to self-assessment rather than moral choice.

⁶⁷ These general principles can be helpfully compared to those attributed to the Cynic Demetrius at *Ben.* 7.1 ff. and to those alluded to by Epictetus (e.g. *Diss.* 2.14.9–13).

principles at issue here, the *dogmata*, are by and large general theses in Stoic physics and ethics and not (as Mitsis has suggested)⁶⁸ substantive rules.⁶⁹ This is evident from what Seneca says about *decreta* in the practical arts (especially the *liberales artes*) at 95.9: most of these arts have *decreta* as well as *praecepta*; in fact Seneca suggests that the difference between different schools of medicine lies primarily in the principles rather than in the actual precepts and procedures which guide practice. These precepts, Seneca implies, may be shared despite the difference in *decreta* which underlie the differences between the schools of Hippocrates, Asclepiades, and Themison.

Consider too Seneca's explanation of what a *decretum* is at 95.10: he says that it translates the Greek *dogmata* and that *placita* and *scita* are other acceptable translations. He specifically notes that you find *decreta* also in geometry and astronomy. (These are noted as theoretical sciences, not practical, but the point of comparison remains: ethical *decreta* are normally theories with ethical import, not rules.)

It is easy to slip into treating *decreta* primarily as rules. For the term 'principles', like the Latin *scita*, can be ambiguous; moreover, the general principles are in fact cited to justify injunctions to act. To illustrate this, we can glance back at *Ep.* 95.52–3, which Mitsis paraphrases thus: 'a *decretum* enjoining that we respect other persons as mutually related parts of God

⁶⁸ 'Moral Rules and the Aims of Stoic Ethics', 557; repeated in 'Seneca on Reason, Rules and Moral Development', 290 n.15. At pp. 299 ff. a more subtle account is given of *decreta*, but the evidence of Cicero and *Ben.* is not taken into account. Hence his difficulties confessed on p. 302. It is clear that the disagreement between Mitsis and myself turns largely on terminological confusion: the rules which I think the sage can break are mere *praecepta* and not injunctions to act morally. The burden of Mitsis's objection to my claims in 'Goal and Target' rests on the belief that I think that such injunctions can be violated. The kind of rule discussed here and exemplified in a *praeceptum*, in the *regula* of Seneca, or the *formula* of Cicero is, however, breakable *salva moralitate*. What I aim to do in this discussion is to show the moral function of rules which do not apply universally and exceptionlessly even for fools, let alone for wise men.

⁶⁹ Although 94.31 complicates the issue by claiming that the difference between *decreta* and *praecepta* is merely one of generality. Cf. 95.12 where the difference is compared to that between *elementa* and *membra*: *haec ex illis dependent, illa et horum causae sunt et omnium*.