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### SENECA ON THE MORAL SELF-EDUCATION OF A MENTOR

*The article discusses Seneca's views on the path of self-improvement of the mentor's personality. The pedagogical experience of the philosopher-mentor, presented in his philosophical writings, is analyzed. In these sources, considered in the article, Seneca develops important ideas, among which is the idea of constant moral self-improvement of the teacher through introspection and reflection. At the same time, the philosopher points out the need to set feasible tasks on the way to self-improvement.*

*Keywords: moral education, personality, moral qualities, self-improvement, philosophy, mentor, student.*

#### **Introduction**

Research into Seneca's ideas about self-education, and in particular the self-education of a mentor, has again begun to attract the attention of researchers in recent decades. This process dates back to the 80s of the last century; it was laid down by the French scientist Pierre Grimal. He discovered certain contradictions in the educational system practiced by Seneca. The French scholar found that the philosopher was often inconsistent in promoting moral education. An attempt to resolve these contradictions was carried out by a number of scientists, such as M. Roller, S. Maso, and M. Griffin. If Roller focused on resolving the issue of the discrepancy between Seneca's ideas and his pedagogical practice, then for Maso the central problem was the study of the assumptions that Seneca makes in order to reduce the level of demands primarily on students. Griffin tried to describe Seneca's pedagogical strategies as a whole, nevertheless paying primary attention to the topic of moral education. Thus, in our opinion, further development of the topic is required, which is far from being fully disclosed.

The purpose of this article is to find in Seneca an indication of the internal resources that should underlie the self-improvement of a mentor as the central figure of Seneca's educational concept.

#### **Methodology and methods of research**

As the methodological basis of the study, we used the method of textual analysis of the philosopher's works. In this case, a historical-philological approach is used, which is the most adequate for conducting research in the field of the history of pedagogical thought, expressed in philosophical works. This approach has been tested on the basis of the works of a number of modern researchers, but primarily by Pierre Grimal, whose works served as a model for us.

Being the author of philosophical letters to Lucilius, Seneca speaks about himself in this spirit that he will remain an example for future generations: "I shall find favor with posterity, and I can bring others' names along with me so that they will endure as well" (Ep. XXI. 5) [1, p. 76]. To those who come for him Seneca says: "One who thinks only of his contemporaries is born for but a few. There are many thousands of years to come, many thousands of people: look to them. Even if all those who live with you are silent because of jealousy, others will come who will judge your merits with neither malice nor favoritism" (Ep. LXXIX. 17) [1, p. 260].

When we refer to modern documents and voices, we find that although his name is remembered, it is not gratefully remembered and worthy of learning; some hold him in high esteem, some call him worthless, some worship him, and some belittle him. For his affirmation, more is the writing style, rhetoric and superb eloquence and theory of virtue advocacy and pursuit. What's more interesting is that many of the accusations against him are his friends, not his enemies. In his monograph about "happy life", he defends himself against all the grievances of his detractors, which boil down to his life's radical departure from the principles he professes. He admits that he is very rich, but he also seeks to increase his wealth; he liked comfort, he served expensive wine at dinner parties, he had hordes of slaves, even an

expert, but it all spoke to himself. Seneca's self-portrait is so frank, so clear about a man with all the human frailties (De vita beata XVII.1) [2, p. 99] that it is hard to understand why for generations of researchers he has been an insoluble enigma. Yet, the revelations with which this ancient Roman fascinates us can in no way be seen as demonstrative cynicism. Drawing his own portrait so inconsistent with the image of a real philosopher, he challenged future generations to explore his personality who had to struggle with real human weaknesses. Try to reflect on your human frailty as an experiment. Therefore, it is meaningless to tell that Seneca's philosophical ideas are inconsistent and that there is no need for study and research. In fact, we have no reason to think that Seneca was always faithful to the moral principles he proclaimed [3, p. 68]. Seneca contradicts himself. He reproached himself harshly, and lamented over the slow progress he had made and the difficulties he had encountered. Reading Seneca's letters to Lucilius, the first feeling is that they are very personal and vivid, that they are first and foremost a dialogue with himself: "Listen to me as if I were talking to myself. I am letting you into my private room and giving myself instructions while you are standing by" (Ep. XXXIII. 1) [1, p. 94]. Seneca's reflections are sometimes self-mocking, he talks about the problems he faced on the way to self-education: "I am not such a hypocrite as to offer cures while I am sick myself. No, I am lying in the same ward, as it were..." (Ep. XXVII. 1) [1, p. 94]; "...for I am far from being even a tolerable human being, let alone a perfect one" (Ep. LVII. 3) [1, p. 163]; "...if I ever want to be amused by a fool, I do not have to look far – I laugh at myself." (Ep. L. 2) [1, p. 145]. From time to time, Seneca's remarks on this matter are full of doubts and sincere feelings: "No, don't praise me. Don't say, 'What a great man! He has despised all things – has condemned the madness of human life and made his escape!' I have condemned nothing except myself. Nor will you derive any benefit by coming to me for instruction. If you expect to find help here, you are mistaken. An invalid lives here, not a doctor" (Ep. LXVIII. 8) [1, p. 205]. In Seneca's work, first of all in his letters, what he shows is the expression of feelings of a human being. He answered his critics and his admirers alike: "I am not a sage and (I am even ready to feed your ill will with my confession) I never will be. That is why I do not aim at achieving total perfection but only to be better than bad people" (De vita beata XVIII. 1) [2, p. 100]. This self-evaluation is important and worthy of being seen. Throughout history, philosophers have presented themselves to people with their merits, a state of example or a demonstration of virtue for others to learn from rather than a three-dimensional, multifaceted state of life as Seneca did.

Seneca inherited the understanding of philosophy of most Romans believing that their excellent thoughts must be put into practice and acted on rather than simply using theoretical guidance to show authority on paper. For Seneca, positive experience of life is more important than thoughts about life. If knowledge is not embodied in right actions, then what good can this wisdom and virtue be? The existence of wise men is meaningless (Ep. VI. 4) [1, p. 34]. Unlike a modern researcher Matthew Roller, Seneca is skeptical about using historical examples to develop his ideas about moral education [4, Roller, p. 88]. We see that for Seneca such examples are an important resource for the education of the individual. Seneca calls for a creative and action oriented reception of all that has been mastered by the thinkers of ancient Greece: "I will use the old road, but if I find another, shorter and smoother, I will pave it myself" (Ep. XXXIII. 7, 10) [1, p. 109, 110]. He saw the meaning and purpose of his quest as one that having discovered the shortest path to the good life would point it out to people [5, p. 19]. Seneca was aware of his gift for a profession that attracted him most of all. With what confidence he announces to his friend: "I will teach you..." (Ep. LIX. 14) [1, p. 176]. And rejoicing at his success he declares: "I am drawn to thee: thou art my creature" (Ep. XXXI. 10; XXXIV. 2) [1, p. 106, 112]. Seneca is overwhelmed by pride and delight in knowing that he has the souls of men under his control that he can "mould" or "shape" (*ingere*) virtuous people with his own hands.

In asserting the high mission of the mentor in society, Seneca saw his task as correcting vices, which were nothing more than illnesses of the soul (Ep. LXXV. 11) [1, p. 238]. In Seneca's day, these kinds of questions often appeared in Seneca's books, although the same ideas were also expressed by other writers of the early Roman Empire. However, Seneca's account of "moral depravity" has a very precise point. Seneca believed that the morality of society was like the ebb and flow of the sea, as a natural phenomenon that always remained unchanged, with the wisdom of the ancient people of China, and that any wrong question was meant to make a better one. For him, therefore, bad morality is not a hindrance and a setback, but a stimulus and a fluctuation on the way forward, he said confidently: "...Yet I do not despair even when they are ingrained. Sustained, concentrated effort can overcome any resistance" (Ep. L. 5–6) [1, p. 145].

We can claim that Seneca felt that his greatest contribution to his contemporaries and future generations lay in showing them that the ultimate standard to be pursued as a human being in society and

the path to happiness was through constant practice, in which both right and wrong encountered were experiences. Seneca admits this very carefully in his dialogues, especially in his letters to Lucilius, which are the culmination of the philosopher's wisdom [6, p. 89]. In modern terms, Seneca used an educational method of self-education and macro-dialectical philosophy. In education, the constant trial and error, with the body trial and error, face the temptation of spirit and real soul training.

In education and teaching, Seneca still puts the education of the soul in the first place. This is probably the only aspect of his practical and theoretical activity where he was never in disagreement with himself and where he was categorical that only philosophy can be an instrument of educating the soul (Ep. LXIV. 8–9; LXXI. 7; LXXXVIII. 28) [1, p. 184, 216, 311]. But to be able to grasp moral and philosophical truths, one has to be properly educated. Seneca believes that the traditional so-called “free arts” (geometry, music, astronomy, grammar) are useful, but because education is phased and deepening, in the initial stage, there should be no delay and confusion, because this knowledge needs a long time to be acquired, and will not be as concrete as other disciplines. This will lead to an empty and confused stagnation. This is why they are only good if they prepare the mind without letting it linger too long. The Roman philosopher's attitude to much knowledge was utterly negative: in his view, the excessive “subtlety” of scientific reasoning was full of evil and “the enemy of truth” (Ep. LXXXVIII. 43) [1, p. 318]. In Seneca's view, the data is clear, overly subtle and not precise enough. Seneca's attitude towards casuistry is equally negative because it has “no use for life” and is only a way of arguing, but it does not affect development and life, and has no practical effect when he “feels like loitering” (Ep. CXI. 2, 4–5) [1, p. 442–443].

The philosopher recognized the education of the personality as the primary task for a person committed to self-improvement. That is why he placed reflection on morality at the center of his methodology, and he has always advocated self-improvement through life practice. By careful observation of himself and his surroundings, Seneca reveals the nature of a man, namely his virtues and shortcomings, and the weaknesses that make it difficult for him to advance towards the best (Ep. LII. 12) [1, p. 152]. He then classified people according to their ability to strive for perfection. The first type is those who can improve themselves. The second one is those who need help including himself and his friend Lucilius. The third group consists of people who can be forced to strive for perfection (Ep. LII) [1, p. 149–152]. Seneca was not interested in the first group, because they could evolve on their own, without the help of external forces and mentors, and without the reference mechanisms of social evolution with the help of human participants. He focused all his attention on the second and third groups of people who needed help and compulsion, the mentors. The philosopher considers that the latter cannot be ignored, on the contrary, they “deserve the greatest respect, because their merits are greater, because they have overcome the greatest difficulties” of perfecting themselves. Therefore, the first step in the education and teaching process must be a dialogue with the student to discover his or her natural tendencies and the presence of an impulse to improve the inner dialogue with himself, deep introspection: “Do what you can to get into yourself” (Ep. VII. 8) [1, p. 35]. The mentor decides on a strategy to communicate with the student in order to break through his soul: “For some it is enough to point out the remedy, for others it must be imposed” (Ep. XXVII. 9) [1, p. 95]. So Seneca stipulated that everyone must be treated individually, which is consistent with our modern idea of individualized teaching, individual analysis of each individual student, case-by-case analysis. His mental fitness and age must be taken into account. It is easy “to mold” a young man (*de tenerafingitur*), but with a student of considerable age whose personality is already mature and set, we should be careful “not to let him despair of himself” (Ep. XXV. 1) [1, p. 90]. Seneca advocated a gentle, benevolent persistence that encouraged learning by praising every tiny improvement, and, above all, by not being too demanding of beginners: “But they will indeed slip backward if they do not persevere in their struggle and their progress: if they relax their efforts, their faithful determination, they must necessarily lose ground” (Ep. LXXI. 35) [1, p. 221]. And in another place: “At this point the fault is ours, for demanding the same from one who is making progress as from the sage” (Ep. LXXI. 30) [1, p. 220]. Seneca applied this principle to all situations, regardless of age, encouraging education primarily and reducing oppression to see the disciples' advantages and stimulate their interest and initiative in learning. He considers himself one of those who are still moving toward wisdom but have not yet reached wisdom, and there is no difference, so he needs constant encouragement and learning. In assessing Lucilius and his own success in educating the soul, on the one hand, he says it is a great achievement, but on the other hand, he says it is a very modest one: both are not “among the great” and the “praise of the men” is already praise worthy (Ep. LXXV. 15) [1, p. 238]. Praise and exhortation are thus indispensable parts of Seneca's educational strategy [5, p. 12].

Speaking to those who need help, and thus also to himself, Seneca speaks of the need to have before him at all times a model to look up to (Ep. XI. 10) [1, p. 47]. Every admonition must be accompanied by a vivid and moving example: "The quick and effective way is to learn by example" (Ep. VI. 5) [1, p. 34]. In the vivid and compelling examples of his ancestors and contemporaries, in the books of great thinkers, Seneca finds for his own use and advises others to seek "a helping hand" (Ep. II; VI. 5; XXX. 13; XXXIX. 1–2; LII. 8; LXXXIV. 5) [1, p. 26, 33, 104, 119, 151, 285]. Seneca talks about the benefits of reading, but he says it is necessary to warn against reading too many books at random, which he says is "like a vagabond" (Ep. II. 2) [1, p. 26]. One has to read only those books that are helpful in shaping the right attitude and high moral standards. Thus, the mentor must orient his student towards outstanding authors and the wise thoughts contained in their books (Ep. VI. 5) [1, p. 33].

According to Seneca, the best and direct help can only come from a harmonious, loving and direct relationship between the student and the teacher. Seneca was, therefore, convinced that only through direct contact with him could a disciple rise to the level of a teacher (Ep. XXII. 1–3) [1, p. 79].

The philosopher writes on the necessity of close contact between the educator and the educated in order to be able to observe every slight change, perfection, and movement of the soul. At the same time, Seneca stressed that both sides should be actively involved in the education process. "The effect is reciprocal, for people learn while teaching" (Ep. VII. 8) [1, p. 36]. According to Seneca, education and self-education also in some sense influence and contribute to each other. Because the student must have a constant internal dialogue, scrutinize what he has already achieved, and, most importantly, he himself needs to go further: "Retreat into yourself, then, as much as you can" (Ep. VII. 8) [1, p. 36; 6, p. 91].

Seneca believes that the personality of the teacher, the image of the teacher in terms of the external way the teacher behaves, the form of communication with the students, and the spiritual virtues carefully prescribed by Seneca, become extremely important. It is significant that Seneca warns the mentor against excessive rigor towards the ward (Ep. V. 2) [1, p. 31]. As we know, Seneca was not only an outstanding philosopher and mentor, but also a master of words. Yet, crucially, he warns against excessive teacher eloquence: "What I say is what I feel" (Ep. LII. 9; LXXV. 2; LXXXVI. 40; De benef. I. 4. 6) [1, p. 151, 236, 299; 7, p. 23].

The philosopher attaches great importance to the formation of the educational environment and advises to avoid frequent contact with the crowd. Seneca demonstrates the harmful influence of the crowd even on those who are sophisticated in virtue, and even more on those who have just embarked on it by his own example. In his letter to a friend, the philosopher writes about himself that when he talked with the mob, people from the crowded Roman forum, he noticed that he had become "...more power-hungry, more self-indulgent? Worse than that! I become more cruel and inhumane..." (Ep. VII. 3) [1, p. 35]. The above quote shows that for Seneca an adequate environment is the most important condition for ensuring education.

### Conclusion

Seneca attached particular importance to pedagogical activity as corresponding to the purpose of a true philosopher (Ep. LXXXIX. 13) [1, p. 321].

Seneca's vision of the conditions under which a student's perception of the teacher's ideas is possible was connected with pedagogical communication organized in a certain way. First of all, it should be the motivation of both the student and the teacher. The desire of both for self-improvement is the main condition. The personality of the mentor is in the center of the thinker's special attention. Seneca also attaches great importance to ways of self-improvement. He places especially strict demands on the mentor. The latter should be as self-critical as possible. And, in any case, the teacher should not stop there in his self-improvement. At the same time, the philosopher warns against excessive self-confidence of the teacher. Analyzing the writings of the philosopher, we see that the most important means of self-improvement of this mentor is the correlation of his own personality with the personality of the student. When we analyze the works of the philosopher, we see that the most important means of self-improvement of this mentor is the comparison of teacher personality with the personality of the student. We see in Seneca's writings that his method and his views presuppose the teacher's conscious placement of himself in the place of his student, thereby penetrating into the soul of the student. The important idea of Seneca is the requirement of attentiveness to the student even to the point of concessions on the part of the teacher. The ability of a mentor to put himself in the student's place is the result of his strict work on himself. Here, Seneca points out the need for the feasibility of educational tasks set on the path of moral education of the mentor and student. The idea of the feasibility and achievability of demands in such a context seems modern and still relevant, which makes Seneca's pedagogical views still in demand today.

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#### СЕНЕКА О ПРАВСТВЕННОМ САМОВОСПИТАНИИ НАСТАВНИКА

В статье рассматриваются воззрения Сенеки на пути самосовершенствования личности наставника. Анализируется педагогический опыт философа-наставника, представленный в его философских сочинениях. В данных источниках, рассматриваемых в статье, Сенека развивает важные идеи, среди которых – идея постоянного нравственного самосовершенствования учителя посредством самоанализа и рефлексии. При этом философ указывает на необходимость постановки посильных задач на пути к самосовершенствованию.

Ключевые слова: нравственное воспитание, личность, моральные качества, самосовершенствование, философия, наставник, ученик.