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Ancient precepts on the tranquillity of mind

Abstract

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The paper concerns Seneca's and Plutarch's teaching on tranquillity. These Ancient philosophers' letters, later on called equally "On Tranquillity of Mind", expose several issues connected with tranquil states of mind, such as reasoning and argumentations against passions, moderation between hyperactivity and apathy, the application of *premeditatio malorum*, making the right use of conditions, accepting the events cheerfully, avoiding lamentation, or having good companions, etc. The two sages see in philosophy a doctor helping cure the soul and share with us moral precepts on how to gain peace in mind.

Keywords

tranquillity; peace of mind, Seneca; Plutarch

Introduction

Tranquillity of mind has been a focus of enquiries by numerous thinkers, researchers, spiritualists, psychologists, and philosophers. In the history of mankind, it was mainly Eastern philosophies and Eastern practices that concentrated on mental balance, as in Buddhism, Zen philosophy, Mindfulness or Ayurveda. However, Western Civilization has also had an interest in the topic, which can be proved by indicating such Ancient Greek terms as *ataraxia*, *athambia*, *apatheia*, *autarkeia*, *euthymia* alongside *mindfulness*, *nirvana* or *antaḥkaranaśuddhi*. Consequently, it is easy to find praise of calmness and moderation in various European cultures, in such lifestyle's mottos as the Swedish *lagom*, Montenegrin or Balkan *samo polaco*,

and the slogan “Keep calm”. For thinkers rooted in the Western tradition, the first step towards peace of mind was usually simply silence, as Iamblichus testifies about Pythagoreans: “In the first place, therefore, Pythagoras in making trial [of the aptitude of those that came to him] considered whether they could *echemuthein*, i.e. whether they were able to refrain from speaking (for this was the word which he used), and surveyed whether they could conceal in silence and preserve what they had learnt and heard” (Iamblichus, 1818, p. 51). This kind of speech discipline is, however, only the introduction for us to attain what is called tranquillity.

Within the Ancient moral theories, there are two texts called *On tranquillity of mind*. One is written by Lucius Annaeus Seneca minor, and the other by Plutarch – two thinkers living more or less in the 1st century CE. Both works concern letters addressed to the authors’ friends in need of peaceful mind. Though Seneca and Plutarch appeared on the philosophical stage long after Epicurus, who started to cherish the tranquillity as a part of eudaimonism (Gillham, 2021, p. 144), or after Democritus, who introduced the term *euthymia* (Striker, 1974, p. 183), their collected recommendations on how to gain peace in the mind-heart (lat. *tranquillitate*) are something of a *résumé* of teachings on tranquillity of Ancient West Sages.

Not going deep into terminological subtleties, what Rome and Greek philosophers write about in their letters is what is described in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as *tranquility*, and “is etymologically related to the word translated ‘trouble’, and more literally means ‘lack of trouble’” (Morison, 2019). As Mazur would smoothly introduce us, “Stoicism concerns special inner harmony, which finds its expression in a particular emotional state” (Mazur, 2010, p. 249). Many Greek words focus on well-being – *athambia*, *euthymia*, *eustatheia*, *adiaphora*, *atarkeia* – and most often they are connected with the term *ataraxia*. Further terms include “*Ataraksija* (Greek: *ataraxia*), mental peace, a psychological state in which logos has subordinated everything to itself, the rational overcoming of emotionality; *ataraksija* is the goal and ideal of Hellenistic philosophy”, as Branko Bošnjak defines it (1982, p. 172), and in this paper *ataraxy* will be a more suitable concept than apathy when discussing tranquillity, as “Apathy (Greek: *apatheia*, meaning insensibility) generally refers to indifference, insensitivity, a psychological state characterized by calmness, complete peace, and lack of interest. In the philosophy of the Stoics and Skeptics, apathy also signifies freedom from passions and therefore, the greatest good, because it is a state in which we refrain from all judgment (Skeptics) or a state that makes us indifferent to all sensory pleasures and pains (Stoics)”, citing Danko Grlić (1967, p. 17), or aphasia, even with Lévy’s awareness, who understands it in two ways: either as an absence of definite, ultimate assertions, or as true, absolute silence (Lévy, 1997, p. 21).

Nonetheless, the concept of tranquillity alone falls into the framework of a eudaimonical way of conducting ethics, understood this way: “It is significant that synonyms for *eudaimonia* are living well and doing well. These phrases imply certain activities associated with human living” (Parry & Thorsrud, 2021). Eudaimonism aims at having the soul in good shape (lat. *bono esse animo*) and having a good life. This paper concerns tranquillity within eudaimonism, and is a part of ethical studies, ethics seen as practical science immersed in the everyday experience of life, as Ewa Podrez clears up: “Since the times of Aristotle’s methodological analysis, ethics has been properly linked with the practical side of life, that is, with axiologically relative, untransparent and evolving ordinary experience” (Podrez, 1996, p. 190), and is a part of the humanistic movement and tradition (Hulan & Dzuriaková, 2017). As Seneca assures his friend, “Here are the rules, my dearest Serenus, by which you may preserve tranquillity, by which you may restore it, by which you may resist the vices that steal upon it unawares” (Seneca, 1965, p. 285).

Seneca’s *De tranquilitate animi*

Seneca’s letter to a friend seeks to advise us how to become tranquil: “What we are seeking, therefore, is how the mind may always pursue a steady and favorable course, may be well-disposed towards itself, and may view its condition with joy, but may abide in a peaceful state, being never uplifted nor ever cast down. This will be tranquillity” (Seneca, 1965, p. 215). The aim, then, is to have the mind in the state of optimal, joyful and unshaken condition at every moment of life. In the original Latin it takes the following form: “Ergo quaerimus quomodo animus semper aequali secundoque cursu eat propitiusque sibi sit et sua laetus aspiciat et hoc gaudium non interrupcat, sed placido statu maneat, nec attollens se umquam nec deprimens. Id tranquillitas erit” (Seneca, 1965, p. 214). Seneca also clarifies what he calls *tranquilitate*: “The abiding stability of mind the Greeks call *euthymia*, “well-being of the soul” (Seneca, 1965, p. 213). As we can see, the aim is not only to be calm and peaceful, but also be in a good and stable condition. This is the case, since Serenus in his letter to Seneca complains about his states of mind. He confesses that: “I have neither been honestly set free from the things I hated and feared, nor, on the other hand, am I in bondage to them” (Seneca, 1965, p. 203). Serenus, being an adept of Stoic teaching, admits that though he does not experience any strong addiction to bad habits, neither does he feel totally happy and free. Nevertheless, he also adds: “I know that these mental disturbances of mine are not dangerous and give no promise of a storm; to express what I complain of in apt

metaphor, I am distressed, not by a tempest, but by sea-sickness" (Seneca, 1965, pp. 211–212).

Answering Serenus, Seneca first indicates that he should not feel alone in his complaint because "All of us are chained to Fortune [...]. Some are chained by public office, others by wealth; some carry the burden of high birth, some of low birth; some bow beneath another's empire, some beneath their own; some are kept in one place by exile, others by priesthoods. All life is a servitude" (Seneca, 1965, p. 251). Nevertheless, one should try not to complain about one's fortune: "And so a man must become reconciled to his lot, must complain of it as little as possible, and must lay hold of whatever good it may have; no state is so bitter that a calm mind cannot find in it some consolation" (Seneca, 1965, p. 251). Moreover, we also need to be accustomed with well-being, because "It is not, Serenus, that these are not quite well in body, but that they are not quite used to being well" (Seneca, 1965, p. 213), and remember that "The mind must be given relaxation; it will arise better and keener after resting" (Seneca, 1965, p. 281). Seneca creates some kind of mind cultivation toward tranquillity, or at least he tries to focus our attention on the well-being of mind. Our mind needs to be given care, since "The characteristics of malady are countless in number, but it has only one effect – dissatisfied with oneself" (Seneca, 1965, p. 215). Seneca compares the mind to the sea on which we sail and to the field we need to cultivate. He advises activities such as taking a walk outdoors, going on a journey, festive company, generous drinking (at times we even ought to reach the point of intoxication). His reasoning is that "We must be indulgent to the mind and from time to time must grant it the leisure that serves as its food and strength" (Seneca, 1965, p. 283). However, what is the exact advice Seneca gives regarding mind-care? Let's scrutinize his responses.

Firstly, Seneca notes the stability of life. He claims that people who have not achieved a stable life are at risk of changing the styles and forms of existence till the end of their life: "By repeatedly altering the condition of their life they are at last left in that in which, not the dislike of making a change, but old age, that shrinks from novelty, has caught them" (Seneca, 1965, p. 215). In a similar manner, he is against travel: "Hence men undertake wide-ranging travel, and wander over remote shores, and their fickleness, always discontent with the present, gives proof of itself now on land and now on sea" (Seneca, 1965, p. 221). Travelling is not a cure of discontent, and travellers: "They undertake one journey after another and change spectacle for spectacle" (Seneca, 1965, p. 221), having themselves as a "burdensome companion". Seneca claims that travelling is an unfortunate attempt to escape from oneself, and the miserable state of mind is "not fault of the place, but fault of ourselves" (Seneca, 1965, p. 221). For the same reason,

he argues against people who change their jobs and occupations, saying: “They wander without any plan, looking for employment, and they do, not what they have determined to do, but whatever they have stumbled upon” (Seneca, 1965, p. 263). As he sums up: “Their course is aimless and idle” (Seneca, 1965, p. 263). According to Seneca, change is rooted in inner dissatisfaction, and results in “enduring nothing very long and using changes as remedies” (Seneca, 1965, p. 221). However, those “remedies” are not that remedial in fact, since “This springs from a lack of mental poise and from timid or unfulfilled desires, when men either do not dare, or do not attain, as much as they desire, and become entirely dependent upon hope; such men are always unstable and changeable, as must necessarily be the fate of those who live in suspense” (Seneca, 1965, p. 217). Seneca compares such attempts to lead a calm life to somebody trying to get to sleep by changing their body position. In accord with Seneca’s thinking, a change in condition, place or occupation would not rid us of inner discontent. The first step towards attaining tranquillity is to differentiate external and internal conditions which influence our state of mind. As Seneca notes, inner dissatisfaction is not easily dissolved by simply changing external conditions; he opts for training in surviving the inconveniences appearing in our lives: “when there is a need of endurance, we are weak, and we cannot bear toil or pleasure or ourselves or anything very long” (Seneca, 1965, p. 221). Seneca tells us that a calm mind should endure the external storms, and putting ourselves in external calm conditions would not necessarily lead us into a calm state of mind. Ultimately, he states: “Both are foes to tranquillity – both the inability to change and the inability to endure” (Seneca, 1965, p. 267). What are other things which would be of help in gaining *tranquilitate*?

Seneca indicates having a good friend as a help in getting well-being: “Nothing, however, gives the mind so much pleasure as fond and faithful friendship” (Seneca, 1965, p. 237). Seneca underlines the importance of avoiding bad company in letter to Lucillum: “YOU ask me to say what you should consider it particularly important to avoid. My answer is this: a mass crowd” (Seneca, 1969, p. II). Seneca advises us to remain on our own in the face of choices between bad companions and solitude, as he writes to his friend in the same letter: “Restlessness of that sort is symptomatic of a sick mind. Nothing, to my way of thinking, is a better proof of a well ordered mind than a man’s ability to stop just where he is and pass some time in his own company” (Seneca, 1969, p. II). However, having good companions around is also essential, because “intercourse with those of dissimilar natures disturbs our settled calm, and rouses the passion anew, and aggravates any weakness in the mind that has not been thoroughly healed” (Seneca, 1965, p. 279).

One of Seneca's simplest pieces of advice is to always look on the bright side of life, and laugh about miseries, as "It is more human to laugh at life than to lament over it" (Seneca, 1965, p. 273). Seneca not only rejects self-pity but excessive grief for others, and he counsels against empathy in other people's suffering, "for it is unending misery to be worried by the misfortunes of others" (Seneca, 1965, p. 275).

Other advice is to be engaged in reading: "let just as many books be acquired as are enough, but not for mere show" (Seneca, 1965, p. 249). Similarly, he teaches about studying thus: "Even for studies, where expenditure is most honorable, it is justifiable only so long as it is kept within bounds" (Seneca, 1965, p. 247). Generally, Seneca adopts the position of *aurea mediocritas*, since "excess in anything becomes a fault" (Seneca, 1965, p. 249). Overthinking and exaggeration of mind processes, in particular, are not advisable, because "continuous mental toil breeds in the mind a certain dullness and languor" (Seneca, 1965, p. 281). Seneca notices a bad side of, as one calls it, workaholism, since "constant labour will break the vigor of the mind, but if it is released and relaxed a little while, it will recover its powers" (Seneca, 1965, p. 281). However, he also sees source of a troublesome mind in futile work: "Our next concern will be not to labor either for useless ends or uselessly, that is, not to desire either what we are not able to accomplish, or what, if attained, will cause us to understand too late and after much shame the emptiness of our desires" (Seneca, 1965, p. 263). Our job needs to bring fruits and be useful: "neither should our labor be in vain and without result, nor the result unworthy of our labor" (Seneca, 1965, p. 263).

Another obstacle on our way to tranquillity is being unauthentic, as "those who live under the mask cannot be happy and without anxiety" (Seneca, 1965, p. 279). This is the case because "we are never free from concern if we think that every time anyone look at us he is taking our measure" (Seneca, 1965, p. 279).

Crème de la crème of Seneca's cake of tranquillity is to stay rational in case of "exposure to the injuries of Fortune": "Yet nothing can free us from these mental wavering so effectively as always to establish some limit to advancement and not leave the Fortune the decision of when it shall end, but half of our own accord far short of the limit that the examples of others urge. In this way there will be some desires to prick on the mind, and yet, because bounds have been set to them, they will not lead it to that which is unlimited and uncertain" (Seneca, 1965, p. 253). A person can be tired of mind not because of some excessive activity and engagement in too much affairs, but because of a misconception borne in mind: "Apply reason to difficulties; it is possible to soften what is hard, to widen what is narrow, and burdens will press less heavily upon those who bear them skilfully" (Seneca,

1965, p. 251). When we are in trouble, Seneca recommends us to follow reason, and apply it to not-too-distant problems, as “we must not send our desires upon a distant quest, but we should permit them to have access to what is near” (Seneca, 1965, p. 251). He believes the following: “It is not activity that makes men restless, but false conceptions of things render them mad” (Seneca, 1965, p. 265). Nonetheless, the posited question is: “And what hope can anyone then have for himself when he sees that the best men suffer the worst fate?” The general direction in which Seneca leads us is to rise above it all, for he admits that “These remarks of mine apply, not to the wise man, but to those who are not yet perfect, to the mediocre, and to the unsound. The wise man does not need to walk timidly and cautiously; for so great is his confidence in himself that he does not hesitate to go against Fortune, and will never retreat before her” (Seneca, 1965, p. 253). “The difference here between the Epicurean and our own school is this: our wise man feels his troubles but overcomes them, while their wise man does not even feel them” (Seneca, 1969, p. II). As we can read, a similar idea is to be found in Plutarch letter: “But with circumstances, though it is not in our power to throw what we please, yet it is our task, if we are wise, to accept in a suitable manner whatever accrues from Fortune and to assign to each event a place in which both what suits us shall help us most and what is unwanted shall do least harm” (Plutarch, 1939, p. 7).

Plutarch's Περὶ εὐθυμίας

Plutarch's letter to his friend Paccius, later published and titled *On tranquility of mind*, opens with an explanation of why the work was written. Plutarch explains thus: “I gathered together from my notebooks those observations on tranquillity of mind which I happened to have made for my own use, believing that you on your part requested this discourse, not for the sake of hearing a work which would aim at elegance of style, but for the practical use in living it might afford” (Plutarch, 1939, p. 3). The moral precepts Plutarch collects aim at helping the author and the reader to attain a tranquil state of mind in practice. This was done for personal use and its purpose was to introduce tranquillity to the mind.

According to the author of *Moralia*, the main foe of tranquillity is passion, and passions, when they appear, are hard to ease: “For as savage dogs become excited at every strange cry and are soothed by the familiar voice only, so also the passions of the soul, when they are raging wild, are not easily allayed, unless customary and familiar arguments are at hand to curb the excited passions” (Plutarch, 1939, p. 3). He also opts for argumentation as a way of overcoming the evolution of wild, pas-

sionate parts of the soul. Moreover, the arguments we use to cease passions need to be known, we must be already accustomed to running argumentations. That is why Plutarch is also a believer in a negative visualization (lat. *praemeditatio malorum*): "so also with such reasonings as give help in controlling the passions: wise men should give heed to them before the passions arise in order that, being prepared far in advance, their help may be more efficacious" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 3). He advises us to be prepared for the worst, and to keep on controlling the growth of passion. The cure is then a trained mind and reason, which is a remedial measure against uncontrolled and unfulfilled passions: "And how else can this be achieved except through reason, which has been carefully trained quickly to hold back the passionate and irrational part of the soul when it breaks bounds, as it often does, and not to allow it to flow away and be swept downstream because it does not have what it wants?" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 3).

Though the most natural way of being tranquil is being calm, Plutarch does not see in inactivity the solution for achieving the peace of mind. He points out that physical inactivity is not right in case of storms in the mind: "And yet it is true that a state of bodily stupor is a bad remedy for insanity" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 4), since: "for some persons, even inactivity itself often leads to discontent" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 4). These days, it is more than obvious that a mad mind can reside in a very weak and calm body and mad mind resides, what occurs very often in cases of psychiatrically defined illnesses such as depression, paranoia or apathy. Plutarch noticed that ages ago: "it is also false that those who are not occupied with many things are tranquil in mind" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 4). He gives us a clear example: "women ought to be more tranquil than men, since for the most part they keep at home [...] yet more pain and excitement and despondency than one could enumerate, caused by jealousy and superstition and ambition and vain imaginings, seep into the women's quarter" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 4).

As it is not advisable to stay home, we need to act, the essential question to posit is as follows: What kind of actions are to be taken in order not to lose tranquillity? Plutarch offers a multi-faceted answer.

On the one hand, he argues, as a decent, well-bearded philosopher, that many things which people normally treat as sources of happiness are of no full use in the sight of trouble, and opt for a moral character as being of better use: "And so it is that no costly house nor abundance of gold nor pride of race nor pomp of office, no grace of language, no eloquence, impart so much calm and serenity to life as does a soul free from evil acts and purposes and possessing an imperturbable and undefiled character as the source of its life, a source whence flow fair actions¹³⁵ which have both an inspired and joyous activity joined with a lofty pride therein,

and a memory sweeter and more stable than that hope of Pindar's 136 which sustains old age" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 23). Plutarch believes that a calm and serene life can be led only by a moral agent, and a mind rush is a consequence of immorality. At the same time, Plutarch expresses contempt for earthly pleasure: "an aristocratic shoe does not rid us of the gout, nor an expensive ring of a hangnail, nor a diadem of a headache. For what power is there in money or fame or influence at court to help us to gain ease of soul or an untroubled life, if it is not true that the use of them is pleasant to us when we have them and that we never miss them when we have them not?" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 3).

In spite of those clear moral precepts in the spirit of rather ascetic life, Plutarch notices also that non-involvement in public and private affairs is not advisable either: "For this reason not even Epicurus believes that men who are eager for honour and glory should lead an inactive life, but that they should fulfil their natures by engaging in politics and entering public life, on the ground that, because of their natural dispositions, they are more likely to be disturbed and harmed by inactivity if they do not obtain what they desire" (Plutarch, 1939, pp. 4–5). As we are to be engaged in affairs, the meaningful question to ask Plutarch is what exact matters we should be engaged in. Plutarch does leave us an answer and tells us that "tranquillity and discontent should be determined, not by the multitude or the fewness of one's occupations, but by their excellence or baseness" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 5). Moderation in occupations is relatively easily fulfilled and accessible, as Golden Rule tells us. None the less, how can we know what is our "baseness and excellence"? Plutarch sees the root of our discontent in ancient Greek ignorance of our true capacities: "another matter which greatly interferes with tranquillity of mind is that we do not manage our impulses, as sailors do their sails, to correspond to our capacity; in our expectations we aim at things too great; then, when we fail, we blame our destiny and our fortune instead of our own folly" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 14). Plutarch's vision of humanity is weighty—he burdens individuals with responsibility for their own fate, and indicates that folly is the root of this misfortune and misery in their existence, the density of divergence in our actions and of our fate. In his advice, Plutarch is not original and contends that the key to happiness is to *scire te ipsum*: "Therefore not all pursuits are for everyone, but one must, obeying the Pythian85 inscription, «know one's self», and then use one's self for that one thing for which Nature has fitted one and not do violence to nature by dragging one's self towards the emulation of now one sort of life, now another" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 15).

Plutarch believes that "every man has within himself the store-rooms of tranquillity and discontent" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 17). This probably implies that we can either store tranquillity and discontent during our lifetime, or that we can exist

either in the room of peace, or in stormy room of our minds. These are quite different two interpretations. The first would go in accordance with a standpoint that individuals, by their wise or foolish decisions, collects in themselves good memories or bad memories, which then gives the ability to be tranquil or unhappy. This interpretation is also connected with our wisdom and stupidity: "For the foolish overlook and neglect good things even when they are present, because their thoughts are ever intent upon the future" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 17).

Plutarch believes that unhappiness and the absence of tranquillity lies within us: he advocates the viewpoint that "the exchange of one mode of life for another does not relieve the soul of those things which cause it grief and distress" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 5). Grief touches everybody, and is independent of the wealth, social position, gained honours, marriage—all can be inflicted by bad states of mind: "These are the defects which, like a storm at sea, torment rich and poor alike, that afflict the married as well as the unmarried; because of these men avoid public life, then find their life of quiet unbearable; because of these men seek advancement at court, by which, when they have gained it, they are immediately bored" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 5). According to Plutarch, change in the forms of life, like richness, love life, social powers etc., do not influence the tranquillity. He notes the following: "But like people at sea who are cowardly and seasick and think that they would get through this voyage more comfortably if they should transfer from their little boat to a ship, and then again from the ship to a man-of-war; but they accomplish nothing by the changes, since they carry their nausea and cowardice along with them; so the exchange of one mode of life for another does not relieve the soul of those things which cause it grief and distress" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 5).

The second interpretation would be independent of what we decide on or what happens to us: rather, tranquillity and happiness would denote an ability to switch the happy state of mind on or off, and "speedily restore again to quiet the madness and disturbance of their mind" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 18). While one should remember one's past, "This, then, is a matter disturbing to tranquillity of mind; and another, even more disturbing, arises when, like flies which slip off the smooth surfaces of mirrors, but stick to places which are rough or scratched, men drift away from joyous and agreeable matters and become entangled in the remembrance of unpleasant things" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 18).

As shown above, on the one hand, Plutarch places agency in life in our own hands, but on the other, he believes also in fate. He is ambiguous as to whether what happens to us depends on us or not; nonetheless, he gives room for blameless Job's suffering: "Fortune, in fact, can encompass us with sickness, take away our possessions, slander us to people or despot"; he continues thus: "but she cannot

make the good and valiant and high-souled man base or cowardly, mean, ignoble, or envious, nor can she deprive us of that disposition, the constant presence of which is of more help in facing life than is a pilot in facing the sea" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 19). Plutarch believes that humans are capable of being unaffected by *bessa* and save face despite all adversities: "But the disposition of the wise man yields the highest degree of calm to his bodily affections, destroying by means of self-control, temperate diet, and moderate exertion the conditions leading to disease" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 19).

Plutarch does not value lamentation, claiming that it moves us away from the joy of life. He asks: "Why do you scrutinize too keenly your own trouble, my good sir, and continue to make it ever vivid and fresh in your mind, but do not direct your thoughts to those good things which you have?" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 10). The idea is to control the stream of thoughts and to stop lamenting mind processes, and start to be content with your own fate: "And yet it is also highly conducive to tranquillity of mind to examine, if possible, oneself and one's fortunes, but if that is not possible, to observe persons of inferior fortune, and not, as most people do, compare oneself with those who are superior" (Plutarch, 1939, pp. 11–12), since "through being always conscious that they lack things which are beyond them, they are never grateful for what befits their station" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 12).

Conclusions

As tranquillity is something much deeper than being muted, and in order to be tranquil, it is not enough to be silent. This is one of the reasons why Seneca takes the stance of *aurea mediocritas*. For the Stoic, neither constant silencing nor over-thinking and exaggeration of mind and speech processes are advisable, because "continuous mental toil breeds in the mind a certain dullness and languor" (Seneca, 1965, p. 281). It sometimes even happens that we talk a great deal, but remain silent about important quests, as Hugo Strandberg shows in "*On the Difficulty of Speaking*" (Strandberg, 2022). He points out that sometimes we do not speak about some things which are truly important for us, even if we remain very talkative. When analysing the dialogue from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film 'Martha' (1974), Strandberg writes: "One way of describing Martha's struggle in these conversations is that she wants to say something without saying anything, so to speak. In other words, she wants to say something without its meaning anything to anyone, including herself, without its having any consequences. At the same time, this is why she, however unwillingly, feels the need to talk in the first place, other-

wise she could just change the topic and the painful conversation would be over" (Strandberg, 2022, pp. 83–84). Also, Jozef Tischner, inspired by Martin Heidegger, focuses on this aspect of speech by emphasizing the opposition between *Gerede* (gossiping, idle chatter, talkativeness), and *Rede* as an authentic, deep speech that is a way of authentic existence (Tischner, 2012, p. 197). It should be noted that there would not be my paper here if Serenus had not directed an authentic question to his friend Seneca, and Seneca had not answered him honestly. Similarly, Plutarch's letter is addressed to his friend Paccius. Those letters are very personal, human-faced and concerned what makes the two thinkers 'great-grandfathers of the philosophy of the encounter', a philosophical school which evolved in the 20th century, especially in Martin Buber's philosophy. We might say that those letters are examples of the philosophy of the encounter, though they take place in an "ancient virtual environment". An encounter of people can be either in person, or through words only, therefore in something of a virtual world, as presented and analysed in Barbara Ćuk's paper *Filozofija i susret između realnosti i virtualnosti – s osvrtom na misao Martina Bubera* [Engl. *Philosophy and encounter between reality and virtuality – with reference to the thought of Martin Buber*] (Ćuk, 2023). For Seneca, encounters with people and how they act are of the great importance, "yet the companion who is always upset and bemoans everything is a foe to tranquillity" (Seneca, 1965, p. 241), a point also emphasised by Plutarch: "by spending the greater part of life in lamentation and heaviness of heart and carking cares men shame the festivals with which the god supply us and in which he initiates us" (Plutarch, 1939, p. 24). Similarly, the sociologist Wyleżałek underlines the meaning of proper social soft-relations in building a healthy society based on a culture of social trust, as she claims that without good, healthy personal relations, no healthy, peaceful society can be built (Wyleżałek, 2023, pp. 27–37).

Seneca's and Plutarch's letters, both called *On Tranquillity of Mind*, expose several other issues connected with tranquil states of mind, such as reasoning and argumentation against passions, moderation between hyperactivity and apathy, application of *premeditatio malorum*, making the right use of conditions, or accepting the events cheerfully. However, avoiding lamentation, or having good companions seems of the highest significance. Those two ancient sages perceive in philosophy a doctor helping the soul to be cured, which these days, within the contemporary way of doing philosophy, seems an almost lunatic idea. Nowadays, philosophers would probably be the last to whom anybody would turn for advice on peace and tranquillity of mind.

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