

forgotten (94.21, 25-6); they can make the relevant facts of a particular case perspicuous in a way that the vagueness of a more general principle cannot (94.21). The very generality of the principles can militate against their utility in the practical and specific tasks of the moral life (94.31); both give instructions in their own way, but the specific character of *praecepta* makes the instructions more useful to the moral agent.

Though *praecepta* themselves do not *prove* anything and do not demonstrate the goodness of a particular course of action, they still aid the agent in deciding what to do. The authority of an advisor is of some weight, if the advisor is well chosen (94.27);⁶¹ certain moral principles seem to lie dormant in our minds, but when even an unargued precept is uttered, it can serve to wake up our moral intuition and so get us started on the road to moral improvement (94.28-9, 31).

More interesting for present purposes, the connections between moral principles which we may in fact have might easily escape our notice until a *praeceptum* jars us into making the juxtaposition (94.29-30):

Moreover, some considerations may well be in our minds, but yet not sufficiently accessible; we begin to get at them only when they are spoken aloud. And other things are there, but scattered in widely separated [mental] locations, and the untrained mind cannot bring them together. So we have to bring together and juxtapose such considerations, so that they can have more impact and do more good to our character.

This is a crucial function in the economy of moral reasoning, the synthesis of previously unconnected guidelines in a way which bears on the specific needs of the immediate situation.

⁶¹ Significantly for our comparison to the law, Seneca compares the authority of an adviser to that of a juriconsult, whose considered opinions have weight even if a *ratio* is not given; as a legal adviser might give an opinion before working out the supporting reasoning, so too in moral reasoning. This is one of the more important ways in which case-by-case individual assessments interact with the application of general principles. Clearly it is not a case of deduction from the justifying general principle, nor is the particular judgement the basis for deriving the principle. The distinctively legal style of reasoning is equally applicable in moral deliberation. See Hadot, *Seneca*, 174. Cf. *Ben.* 5.25.5-6 on encouraging one's friends to remind us of our *officium*.

Seneca also notes that *praecepta* play a role in character formation. As in Aristotle, just doing the right thing in itself helps to form a better moral character; and following *praecepta* enables us to do the right thing before our characters become well formed (94.33-4, 42-51). Closely related to this is the favourable impact on our characters of the company of the good men who are our moral advisers (94.40-1),⁶² of other sorts of moral suasion (94.39), and of the examples of good and bad lives which are used to inculcate and reinforce *praecepta* (94.59 ff.).

In *Letter* 95 Seneca turns to the fortification of Cleanthes' claim that *praecepta* alone will not *suffice* for moral progress. From the beginning of his discussion (95.4) his argument is based on the fact that right action (*kathorthōma*) is needed if the moral life is to attain its goal, and that right actions do require a full grasp of the general moral principles which form the general theory. This leads him to give an explanation of what is meant by 'covering all the aspects' in the contrast between appropriate actions and right actions. 'Unless formed and shaped from the beginning with a complete rationality, a person cannot carry out all the aspects so that he knows "when" and "how much" and "with whom" and "how" and "why" he ought [to do something]. He cannot strive for what is morally fine with his whole heart, let alone steadfastly and gladly, but will look back and hesitate' (95.5). The theory must be fully internalized for this kind of comprehensive and therefore stable morality to be part of one's actions (cf. 95.12).⁶³ A life lived according to *praecepta* alone will therefore be incomplete, not achieve its goal; it will be pointless to give people *praecepta* unless the obstacles which might bar their good effect are eliminated (95.38). If one acts well without knowing why, the rightness of the act will be unstable; the agent who is to act well consistently must have a standard (*regula*) to apply which will certify the rightness of actions (95.39); interestingly, this

⁶² Cf. *Ep.* 71.1, 22.1-2 and M. Graver, 'Therapeutic Reading and Seneca's Moral Epistles', *Diss.* (Brown University, 1996), 60-2, 74.

⁶³ Compare this to Chrysippus in *SVF* iii.510.