Stoicism in Lucan

**Thesis:** Lucan utilizes Stoic concepts, such as Stoic cosmology, and employs heroic characters, such as Pompey and Cato, endowed with Stoic principles, to subvert Augustan teleology, in order to instruct the reader how to carry out a Stoic lifestyle.

I. **Lucan and Stoic Cosmology**

- According to Stoic cosmology, the cosmic πνεῦμα creates an internal tension that holds the universe together and keeps the cosmos stable (Lapidge 1979: 347).
- Periodically, the universe releases this tension in a cosmic conflagration, in which the structure of the universe collapses on itself into chaos and is consumed by fire (Lapidge 1979: 347).
- Lucan utilizes the concept of cosmic conflagration to describe the civil war:

  i.  
  *sic, cum conpage solute*
  saeacula tot mundi suprema coegerit hora
  antiquum repetens iterum chaos, [omnia mixtis
  sidera sideribus concurrent,] ignea pontum
  astra petent, tellus extendere litora nolet
  excutietque fretum, fratri contraria Phoebe
  ibit et obliquum bigas agitare per orbem
  indignata diem poscet sibi, totaque discors
  machina diuolsi turbabit foedera mundi.
  in se magna ruunt: (1.72-81)

- Lucan’s comparison of the civil war to a cosmic conflagration is problematic because a conflagration is supposed to bring about renewal of the cosmic order, which is not the case in Lucan’s civil war.

  i.  
  *Et cum tempus aduenerit, quo se mundus renouaturus extinguat, uiribus
  ista se suis caedent et sidera sideribus incurrent et omni flagrante materia
  uno igni quicquid nunc ex disposito lucet ardebit.* (Sen. Dial. 6.26.6)

  And when the time has arrived, that the world, about to be renewed, destroys itself, those things will kill themselves with their own force and
stars will run into stars and whatever now shines from having been set in order will burn in one fire with all matter burning.

ii. *Bella per Emathios plus quam ciuilia campos iusque datum sceleri canimus, populumque potentem in sua uictrici conuersum uiscera dextra cognatasque acies, et rupto foedere regni certatum totis concussi uiribus orbis in commune nefas* (1.1-6).

- Roche (2005: 67) argues that Lucan intends for this to be problematic because he wants the reader to recognize something is wrong.

II. **Pompey and Cato**

- Behr (2007: 11) argues that much of Lucan’s impassioned narration and denial of Virgil’s civilizing providence can be attributed to his Stoic principles that value individual moral responsibility and the value of good intentions, as reflected by his depiction of Pompey and Cato as Stoic heroes.

- Pompey is certainly a flawed individual, but he fights to preserve the republic and maintains a Stoic demeanor in death, thereby making him a figure worthy of emulation.

i. ‘*olim uera fides Sulla Marioque receptis libertatis obit: Pompeio rebus adempto nunc et ficta perit. non iam regnare pudebit, nec color imperii nec frons erit ulla senatus. o felix, cui summa dies fuit obuia uicto et cui quae sundos Pharium scelus obtulit enses. forsitan in soceri potuisses uiuere regno. scire mori sors prima uiris, set proxima cogi. et mihi, si fatis aliena in iura uenimus, fac talem, Fortuna, Iubam; non deprecor hosti seruari, dum me seruet ceruice recisa.*’ (9.204-14).
• Lucan, through Cato and Pompey, shows a Stoic hero is not defined by success, and often is not victorious or rewarded for their virtue. Virtue nevertheless ought to be deemed its own reward for a Stoic (Behr 2007: 12).

• Behr (2007: 143) argues that while the Stoic is called upon to endure hardships, “[i]n a hostile environment the sage becomes the aemulator deorum.”

\[\text{i. sive nos inexorabili lege fata constringunt, sive arbiter deus universi cuncta disposuit, sive casus res humanas sine ordine impellit et iactat, philosophia nos tueri debet. Haec adhortabitur ut deo libenter pareamus, ut fortunae contumaciter; haec docebit ut deum sequaris, feras casum. (Sen. Ep. 16.5).} \]

Whether fate binds us by an inexorable law, or a god the judge of the universe, has arranged all things, or chance drives and tosses about human matters without order, philosophy ought to be guarding us. She will encourage us to obey a god freely, but fortune insolently; she will teach you to follow God, but endure chance.

\[\text{ii. victrix causa deis placuit sed victa Catoni (1.128)} \]

• Cato’s refusal to consult the oracle reflects the Stoic belief that the Stoic individual is capable of their own ability to determine the right course of action, based upon their own knowledge of virtue.

\[\text{i. Summum bonum extrinsecus instrumenta non quaerit; domi colitur, ex se totum est; incipit fortunae esse subiectum si quam partem sui foris quaerit (Sen. Ep. 9.15).} \]

The highest good does not seek assistance from outside. It is cultivated at home and is completely from itself; It begins to be subject to Fortune if it seeks any part of itself externally.

\[\text{ii. quid quaeri, Labiene, iubes? an liber in armis occubuisse uelim potius quam regna uidere? an sit uita nihil sed longa an differat aetas? an noceat uis nulla bona fortunae perdat opposita uirtute minas, laudandaque uelle sit satis et numquam successu crescat honestum? scimus, et hoc nobis non altius inseret Hammon (566-72).} \]
What do you bid me to ask, Labienus? Whether I would rather have died free in arms than to see tyranny? Whether life is nothing but long or age makes a difference? Whether no force is harmful to the good and Fortune wastes her threats when Virtue has opposed, and whether it is enough to want praise and whether honor never grows with success? We know these things already, and Ammon will not implant this deeper in us.

**Conclusion:** Through the use of a Stoic framework, Lucan is able to subvert the Augustan teleology by his ironic use of Stoic cosmology. Through his treatment of Pompey and Cato, he depicts the nature of a true hero, namely one who is not necessarily victorious, but chooses the right course of action and struggles for a virtuous cause if not a victorious one.


