

<<塞涅卡道德和政治论文集>>

图书基本信息

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内容概要

The writings of Lucius Annaeus Seneca , tutor and political advisor to the young emperor Nero , are among our most important sources for Stoic philosophy. This volume offers , in clear and forceful contemporary translations , four of Seneca's most interesting 'Moral Essays' : On Anger , On Mercy , On the Private Life and the first four books of On Favours. They provide an attractive insight into the social and moral outlook of a Stoic thinker at the centre of power in the Roman empire of the mid first century AD. A General Introduction on Seneca's life and work explains the fundamental ideas in the philosophy that informs the essays. Individual introductions place the works in their specific historical and intellectual contexts. Biographical Notes , based on up-to-date scholarship , provide the information necessary for a full understanding of the texts. To assist the student further , section headings have been inserted into the translations to mark the principal transitions in the argument and reveal the organization of these writings.

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He needs must many fear whom many fear. Nature has decreed that whatever is great through another's dread shall not be without its own. How the lion's heart shudders at the slightest of sounds! The fiercest animal starts up at a shadow, a sound, a scent that is unfamiliar. Whatever strikes terror must also tremble. There is no reason, therefore, why the wise man should desire to be feared or think that anger is something great because it scares; the most contemptible things - poisons, infectious bones, ZO bites - are also feared. No wonder that huge herds of wild beasts are held in and driven into traps by a line hung with feathers - called the 'scare' after the feeling which it inspires in them. Silly creatures are terrified of silly things. The movement of a chariot and the look of its turning wheels drive the lion back into its cage; the squeal of a pig strikes terror into an elephant. So anger is a source of fear, in just the same way as a shadow is to children or a red feather to animals. In itself, there is nothing firm or strong about it; it simply impresses little minds. Can you be rid of anger completely? You must first rid the world of wickedness, if you would be rid of anger. But neither can be done.' In the first place, it is possible not to feel cold even in winter and not to feel heat even in the hot months. One can find a favourable spot for protection against the inclemency of the season; or sheer physical endurance can master the feeling of heat or cold, (Then again, consider the reverse of this: you must rid the mind of virtue before you take on bad temper, since virtue and vice cannot coexist. A good man simultaneously in a bad temper is no more possible than a healthy invalid.) It is impossible for the mind to be rid completely of anger. Human nature will not endure it.' But nothing is so hard or uphill that it cannot be overcome by the human mind and reduced by constant application to easy familiarity. No affections are so fierce and self-willed that they cannot be tamed by training.

Anything that the mind commands itself it can do. Some people have managed never to smile; some have kept off wine, others off sex, some off liquid of any kind. Another, making do with little sleep, stretches out his waking hours without any sign of tiredness. ZZ People have learned to run along thin, sloping ropes, to carry huge, almost superhuman loads, to plunge to a vast depth and endure the water without any pause for breath. There are a thousand other cases where dogged determination has overcome every obstacle and shown that nothing is difficult if the mind itself has resolved to endure it. In the examples which I have just given, the reward for such determination was nil or trifling. Training oneself to walk on a tight-rope or to put a huge load on one's shoulders, to keep one's eyes from closing in sleep or to reach the bottom of the sea, is hardly a splendid achievement. Yet the task, however slight the remuneration for it, came to completion through sheer effort. Are we, then, not to summon up endurance, seeing what a prize awaits us - the unshaken calm of a happy mind? Think what it means to escape the greatest of evils, anger, and with it frenzy, savagery, cruelty, fury and the other affections that accompany it!

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