

The Consolation of Not-philosophy in Lucilius and Juvenal

This paper traces a model for Juvenal's 13th *Satire*, a mock-*consolatio*, in a series of fragments from Lucilius' 27th book of *Satires*. Via a tentative reconstruction of the original Lucilian poem, I argue that Juvenal took inspiration from the republican satirist's "chat" with a man about his recent bad fortune, in which mundane wisdom is deemed superior to philosophy in a crisis. The potential for satire that Juvenal saw in the philosophical *consolatio* may have been discovered two centuries earlier by Lucilius as he mingled with men who possessed both learning and wealth.

Juvenal *Satire* 13 is addressed to a man who is upset at having been cheated by a debtor. Chiding this "Calvinus" for his distress, Juvenal schools him on the unpleasant ways of the modern world. His address has been analyzed (Pryor 1962) as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the *consolatio* genre, "perhaps the paradigmatic instance of the therapeutic mode of philosophizing" (Wilson 1997: 48). Juvenal also crosses the line into malicious aggravation (Braund 1997): he belittles Calvinus' loss (e.g., 7), mocks the addressee as naïve (e.g., 16–17), and insists that the human race is irredeemably criminal. Along the way, claiming to speak from a place of wisdom and experience, the satirist dismisses formal philosophy as unnecessary for Calvinus' present needs. Philosophy may be "great indeed," but one can be happy "with life as [one's] teacher" (19–22), and wise without reading philosophy books (120–123).

Glimpses of the same themes can be seen in a group of fragments from Lucilius' 27th book, clustered together in Marx's edition as 690–710, and assigned—with a few others—to a single poem by Warmington (769–790). Consulting both Latin texts, I survey the clearest parallels with Juvenal and interpret them as evidence of a Lucilian "*consolatio*." One speaker urges another to investigate a subject with him and follow his advice (769–770W). There is mention

of the ephemerality of earthly goods and the variability of human fortune (777, 779, 784–785W). Someone resolves to “bear...whatever it is...bravely, as if it did not exist” (781W). One fragment poses the question “where are the Socratic pages now?” (789W)—suggesting that the participants in the dialogue are considering the worth of philosophy in the present situation.

I then propose interpreting some of the more ambiguous fragments as traces of a conversation that went in the same satiric and harsh direction as Juvenal’s address to Calvinus. Fragment 776W speaks of people lured by “their own eyes” and “hope”—they might be greedy like Calvinus’ nemesis, or naïve like Calvinus himself. In 772–773W someone insists “now at last let your order admit the crimes it has committed”; perhaps “Lucilius” is directing his unhappy interlocutor’s attention not just to the suffering of others, but to the misdeeds of his own peers—tingeing consolation with shaming. In 778W (at least in the reading favored by Warmington) someone declares “now, in the age I live in, I take *chrēsis* [“utility”] to myself.” I am tempted to see here a model for Juvenal’s “life as teacher” statements.

In other fragments come hints that Lucilius indulged in colorful descriptions of moral transgression and folly, pursuing satiric rather than consolatory aims. For example, the curious 780W describes something moving “now up, now back down, like the neck of a stooping man [or a tumbler?]”—could this simile be a comic representation of variable human fortune or feeling? 790W offers only the tantalizing “with no honor, no weeping of an heir, no funeral,” but we might be reminded of the last section of Juvenal’s satiric *consolatio*, which surprisingly indulges Calvinus with a detailed vision of his enemy’s future punishment (192–249). These and other fragments to be discussed hint that the Lucilian “consoler” may have shifted, like Juvenal, between sober didacticism, toughlove, mockery, and *Schadenfreude*.

To be sure, a “straight” *consolatio* can itself be a discomfiting read (see, e.g., Wilson 1997 on Sen. *Ep.* 99). For this reason I suspect that “satiric” takes on the genre are exploiting inherent qualities of the rhetoric of consolation. Still, I propose that Lucilius created a particular model of the satiric *consolatio* that Juvenal found worth emulating—a fitting gesture for one who was moving into Lucilius’ place as satire’s grand old man.

Bibliography

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