

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)POPULAR MORALITY IN THE EARLY
ROMAN EMPIRE

Morality is one of the fundamental structures of any society, enabling complex groups to form, negotiate their internal differences and persist through time. In the first book-length study of Roman popular morality, Dr Morgan argues that we can recover much of the moral thinking of people up and down the Empire. Her study draws on proverbs, fables, exemplary stories and gnomic quotations to explore how morality worked as a system for Roman society as a whole and in individual lives. It analyses the content of sayings and stories to show which ideas and practices were central to Roman morality, which peripheral, which widely accepted or contested. It explores the wide range of authorities (natural and socially constructed, absolute and negotiable) which were invoked in support of moral ideas and actions, and shows how different ethics appealed to different authorities. It traces the relationship between popular morality, high philosophy, and the ethical vocabulary of documents and inscriptions. The Roman Empire incorporated numerous overlapping groups, whose ideas varied according to social status, geography, gender and many other factors. Nevertheless it could and did hold together as an ethical community, which was a significant factor in its socio-political success.

TERESA MORGAN is University Lecturer in Ancient History at Oxford and a Fellow of Oriel College. She is the author of *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (1998).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

POPULAR MORALITY IN
THE EARLY ROMAN
EMPIRE

TERESA MORGAN



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.orgInformation on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521875530

© Teresa Morgan 2007

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2007

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library**Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data*

Morgan, Teresa, 1968–

Popular morality in the early Roman Empire / Teresa Morgan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-521-87553-0 (hardback: alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-521-87553-6 (hardback: alk. paper)

1. Ethics—Rome. 2. Rome—Moral conditions. 3. Philosophy, Ancient.

4. Rome—History—Empire, 30 B.C.–284 A.D. I. Title.

BJ221.M67 2007

170.937—dc22 2007003518

ISBN 978-0-521-87553-0 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

In Memoriam

Madge Jones (1909–2004)

Florence Kendall (1912–1990)

Harry Kendall (1912–1986)

Kathleen Morgan (1915–1997)

Donald Watson (1910–2005)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>List of illustrations</i>	xiii
<i>List of tables</i>	xiii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiv
1 Introduction	I
The popularity of morality	3
Proverbs, fables, gnomai and exempla	5
Classics, philosophy and anthropology	9
Outline of chapters	13
On interpretation	15
PART ONE	23
2 Proverbs	23
Map of the ethical landscape	31
1 Gods, the metaphysical and humanity	31
2 Bad social relations: strife	35
3 Faults of the powerful and powerless, untrustworthiness, carping, inappropriateness and cowardice	37
4 Good social relations: friendship	39
5 Justice, honesty, helpfulness and bravery	40
6 Intelligence and foolishness	43
7 Wealth	47
8 Speech, truth and lies	48
9 Doing well	49
10 Women, family and love	50
11 <i>Varia</i>	51
Conclusion	53
3 Fables	57
Map of the ethical landscape	63
1 Social relations: the strong and the weak	63
2 Friends and enemies	68

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contents

3	Intelligence and foolishness	70
4	Overambition and failure	73
5	Truth, honesty, lies and deceit	74
6	Gods, the metaphysical and humanity	75
7	What goes around	78
8	Women, family and love	78
	Phaedrus' ethical landscape: distinctive features	79
	Ethical anomalies? the <i>bon mot</i> fables	80
	Conclusion	82
4	Gnomai	84
	Map of the ethical landscape	90
1	Wealth	90
2	Good social relations: the more and less powerful	95
3	Friendship	98
4	Intelligence and foolishness	102
5	Speech and lies	105
6	Women, family and love	106
7	Justice and the law	109
8	Gods, the metaphysical and humanity	111
9	<i>Varia</i>	116
	Conclusion	118
5	Exempla	122
	Map of the ethical landscape	129
1	Gods, the metaphysical and religion	131
2	Good social relations: justice and <i>fides</i>	135
3	Courage and endurance	137
4	Military and civil discipline	138
5	Self-confidence, conviction, unconventionality and severity	140
6	Friendship, generosity, humanity, mercy and gratitude	141
7	<i>Pietas</i> , family affection and chastity	143
8	Self-control	145
9	Intelligence	147
10	Speech	148
11	The message of the past	148
12	Bad social relations: the vices	149
13	Law, work and leisure	151
	The landscape of ethics in other authors	153
	Conclusion	157
6	Patterns	160
	Being good: the shape of a system	161
	Strife	163
	Against strife: social virtues and individualistic virtues	166
	Justice, law and cultural capital	169

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

ix

Qualities variously evaluated	171
Genre and social self-positioning	175
Significant absences	177
Phase rules, situational ethics and executive ethics	179
Core, periphery and gravity	183
Morality and the individual	185
PART TWO	191
7 The language of morality	191
Statements and commandments	200
The interior world of the moral agent	204
8 Moral authorities	207
The gods	207
Nature	211
The social group and its institutions	213
Myth, history and geography	216
Poets, philosophers and other heroes	222
The authority of fables: a problematic case	225
Consequences	228
What lies within	230
Metaphor as a moral authority	230
Conclusion	231
9 Time and morality	235
Still world with moving figures	236
Time past and time future	243
The right time	248
Conclusion	252
Coda: beginnings and ends	253
PART THREE	257
10 The importance of being miscellaneous	257
The reading of ethical miscellanies	258
Conclusion	272
11 Popular morality and high philosophy	274
Philosophers and philosophy in popular wisdom	277
High philosophy and popular morality in literary texts	285
Seneca: <i>To Marcia, on Consolation</i>	286
Plutarch: <i>On Tranquillity of Mind</i>	290
Maximus of Tyre: Oration 32	294
Epictetus: <i>Against Vicious and Aggressive People</i>	296
Conclusion	297

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Contents

12	Morality <i>inter alia</i>	300
	The language of morality at Ephesus	301
	Virtues in public life and death	304
	The worship of virtues	311
	Moral vocabulary in papyri and individual inscriptions	313
	Conclusion	321
	Conclusion	324
	<i>Appendix 1 The political and literary connections of Babrius</i>	326
	<i>Appendix 2 The definition of a miscellany</i>	331
	<i>Appendix 3 Popular morality and philosophical doctrine</i>	333
	<i>List of papyri</i>	341
	<i>Bibliography</i>	345
	<i>Index</i>	377

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

Early versions of some of the material in this book were delivered as papers in Cambridge, Charlottesville, Helsinki, Jerusalem, Oxford, Princeton, Salamanca and Yale, and published in volumes edited by Leofranc Holford-Strevens and Amiel Vardi, José-Antonio Fernández Delgado and Antonio Stramaglia. Warmest thanks are due to the participants in all those seminars and conferences for their lively discussion of ideas and helpful suggestions.

Various chapters were kindly read in draft by David Charles, Anna Clark, Alison Cooley, Miriam Griffin, Robert Kaster, Geoffrey Lloyd, Katerina Oikonomopoulou and Malcolm Schofield. Between them they suggested numerous improvements and saved me from many mistakes. Malcolm Schofield transformed my understanding of what it meant to be a philosopher in the early Roman Empire, for which I am especially grateful.

Many Oxford colleagues have contributed to the project in informal conversations, and it is a continuing pleasure to work among so many stimulating colleagues. Among those with whom, internationally, it is a pleasure to share an interest in ethics are Catalina Balmaceda and the economist Vivien Foster, who over the years has made me think harder and more constructively about more topics than anyone else.

Wishing the book to be accessible to those without Greek and Latin, I have translated primary sources throughout. Unfortunately, to include the many thousands of texts cited in the original as well would have made the text hopelessly bulky, so with considerable regret, they are omitted. I hope that readers will accept my apologies as they pursue the sources to their diverse original publications.

I was fortunate enough to be brought up in a family where what it means to live well – to live rightly – was a subject of constant and passionate debate. This book remembers Harry Kendall, a man of radiant loving kindness and integrity, who taught us to garden, maintain a bicycle and fill in a tax return, and used to say that ‘life is not a highway strewn with flowers’. It honours the exemplary lives of Madge Jones and Kathleen Morgan, who nursed

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

Preface

patients in hospital and their relatives at home, and Florence Kendall, who preserved her family through bad and good times into prosperity and taught us to cook and clean. It remembers Donald Watson, pioneering vegan (he coined the word in the 1940s) and anti-nuclear campaigner, who in old age made a collection of several hundred English proverbs which he thought people should take more seriously. Millions of ordinary Greeks and Romans like them must have used the sayings and stories that make up this study, and are forgotten.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Illustrations

1	Distribution of main topics in proverbs	<i>page</i> 54
2	Distribution of main topics in fables	83
3	Distribution of main topics in gnomai	121
4	Distribution of main topics in exempla	159
5	Number of exempla from different historical periods	233

Table

Number and distribution of stories about or sayings of philosophers in wisdom texts (with distribution of references in Aelian's <i>VH</i>)	277
--	-----

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87553-0 - Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire

Teresa Morgan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Abbreviations*

In addition to the standard abbreviations for ancient and modern works, the following abbreviations are used:

B	Babrius, <i>Fables</i>
BS	O. Bouquiaux-Simon (1989) 'Additamenta pour une anthologie mutilée (<i>P. Berol. inv. 21312 + P. Schubart 27</i>)', <i>Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Papyrology</i> (2 vols.). Cairo: 461–79
D	Ps.-Diogenianus, <i>Popular Proverbs</i>
LDAB	Leuven Database of Ancient Books
P	Ps.-Plutarch, <i>Proverbs of the Alexandrians</i>
Perotti	<i>Perotti's Appendix of Fables</i>
Ph	Phaedrus, <i>Fables</i>
PS	Publilius Syrus, <i>Sententiae</i>
VM	Valerius Maximus, <i>Memorable Words and Deeds</i>
Z	Zenobius, <i>Epitome of Zenobius' Proverbs</i>