

DE BENEFICIIS AND ROMAN SOCIETY*

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The exchange of *beneficia* — gifts and services — was an important feature of Greek and Roman society at all periods. Its prominence was reflected in the number of philosophical works that analysed the phenomenon. From the fourth century B.C. onwards, *eúergesia* and *χάρις* became subjects of moral discourse.¹ Xenophon, particularly in his Socratic works and the *Cyropaideia*, and Aristotle, in his rhetorical and ethical writings, already anticipate much of what the Hellenistic schools were to elaborate.² One of Aristotle's followers gave the first clear formulation we have of the idea that 'the giving and interchange of favours holds together the lives of men'.³ Aristotle's successor Theophrastus wrote the first treatise we know of to deal wholly and specifically with the subject of *χάρις*. His *On Gratitude* (*περι χάριτος*; D.L. 5.48) had a long line of successors, including Epicurus' *On Gifts and Gratitude* (*περι δώρων και χάριτος*; D.L. 10.28) and Chrysippus' Stoic treatments of the subject, both as part of a general work *On Duties* (*περι κατορθωμάτων*) and in a separate work *On Favours* (*περι χαρίτων*) (*SVF* 3.674; 2.1081).⁴

Of all these post-Aristotelian works only two survive, both produced by Roman authors writing in Latin and from a Stoic point of view. Cicero in *De Officiis* followed Panaetius in treating beneficence within the context of duties. Seneca, who may have done the same in his lost *De Officiis*, also wrote a separate work on the subject. In the seven books of *De Beneficiis*, he aimed to provide a *lex vitae*, a rule for life, explaining how to give, receive, and return benefits correctly (1.4.2). Both Cicero and Seneca state explicitly what is implied by the continuous production of works on the subject, that the exchange of gifts and favours was regarded as crucial to the working of ancient society, in Rome as in Greece.⁵ They describe the social practice of exchanging benefits as the chief bond of human society⁶ and the vice of ingratitude as a uniquely disruptive force.⁷

In the last two decades scholars have fully acknowledged the importance of this social practice. Literary, philosophical, and epigraphic texts have been scrutinized from

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¹ In Xenophon *eúergesia* and *χάρις* are normally correlatives, *χάρις* being used predominantly in the concrete sense of a favour returned, or in the abstract sense of gratitude. For these senses, of which the concrete is primary and earlier, see C. Moussy, *Gratia et sa famille* (1966), 412–14.

² Many of the references are collected by B. Inwood, 'Politics and paradox in Seneca's *De Beneficiis*', in A. Laks and M. Schofield (eds), *Justice and Generosity* (1995), 241–65.

³ Pseudo-Aristotle frag. 3 in M. Plezia (ed.), *Aristotelis Epistularum Fragmenta cum Testamento* (1961), 44–5: *χάριτος ἀμοιβή και δόσις συνέχει τοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίους, τῶν μὲν διδόντων, τῶν δὲ λαμβανόντων τῶν δ' αὖ πάλιν ἀνταποδιδόντων.*

⁴ It is common to translate *περι χάριτος* as 'On Gratitude', and the title attested for Dionysius *περι πλούτου και χάριτος και τιμωρίας* (D.L. 7.167) suggests that this is correct: *τιμωρία* would be revenge for an injury parallel to gratitude for a benefit, as in Seneca's *Ep.* 81.7: "Hoc certe", inquis, "iustitiae convenit, suum cuique reddere, beneficio gratiam, iniuriae talionem aut certe malam gratiam" ("But surely", you say, "it is the part of justice to render to each that which is his due — thanks in return for a benefit, and retribution, or at any rate ill-will, in return for an injury"). Moreover, as Moussy, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 412–14, shows, of the abstract meanings of

χάρις, gratitude for benefits is earlier and remains more common than the sense of favour or goodwill leading to their conferral. When used in the plural, the *χάρις* of the title had, not the abstract sense of gratitude, but its original concrete senses of objects or services given and returned, a sense already well-established in Homer.

⁵ The reciprocal aspect of relationships with friends and associates seems to have been of great concern even at the lower social levels, to judge from its prominence in the gnomonic school papyri, T. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (1998), 127.

⁶ Seneca, *Ben.* 1.4.2: 'De beneficiis dicendum est et ordinanda res quae maxime humanam societatem alligat; danda lex vitae . . . docendi sunt libenter dare, libenter accipere, libenter reddere'; Cicero, *Off.* 1.22 fin.: 'In hoc naturam debemus ducem sequi, communes utilitates in medium adferre, mutatione officiorum, dando accipiendo, tum artibus, tum opera, tum facultatibus devincire hominum inter homines societatem.'

⁷ Seneca, *Ben.* 1.10.4: 'Erunt homicidae, tyranni, fures, adulteri, raptores, sacrilegi, proditores; infra omnia ista ingratus est, nisi quod omnia ista ab ingrato sunt, sine quo vix ullum magnum facinus adcrevit'; cf. 1.1.2; Cicero, *Off.* 1.47–8: 'nullum enim officium referenda gratia magis necessarium est . . . nam cum duo genera liberalitatis sint, unum dandi beneficii, alterum reddendi, demus necne in nostra potestate est, non reddere viro bono non licet, modo id facere possit sine iniuria.'

this point of view, as never before, with the lenses of anthropology and sociology added to the scholarly microscope. On the Greek side, the favoured term has been reciprocity; on the Roman side, the preferred term has been patronage.⁸ In these latter discussions Seneca's treatise of seven books, the only extant example of all those ancient works dealing specifically with χάρις, has served as a quarry for anecdotes and epigrams to illustrate scholarly hypotheses. If given a proper hearing, however, *De Beneficiis* can be shown to illuminate features of the social code of the Roman élite that are obscured and misrepresented by these hypotheses.

It is at first glance surprising that *De Beneficiis* has hardly ever been studied as a whole, and that when it has been, the objects of scrutiny have been, for the most part, its sources and its structure, not the practices discussed. An honourable exception is Brad Inwood, who has analysed the overall argumentative strategy of the work.⁹ Yet Seneca's lengthy treatise might be expected to provide a key to social attitudes and practice in imperial Rome. After all, we can pin down its historical context: it was written and published between A.D. 56 and mid-64 in the reign of Nero.¹⁰ We also know quite a lot about the social and political position of the author: he was a senator, a *novus homo*, an *amicus principis*, celebrated in his own day and after for his personal beneficence (Martial 12.36; Juvenal 5.109; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.62). He should know what he is talking about. The reason is not far to seek: *De Beneficiis* frustrates the social historian. It is ostensibly a work of practical ethics: yet it has long disquisitions on divine providence and prolonged treatments of intractable Stoic paradoxes. The treatise concerns the highly practical mechanisms of social relations: yet it handles them in a curiously abstract way, giving, for its length, surprisingly few concrete Roman examples. It seems more abstract, more universal even than Cicero's *De Officiis*. For that work exhibits many Roman examples, descriptions of specific legal cases, and justifications of Cicero's own political career and of his attitude to recent events.¹¹

Then again, Seneca presents us with a high-minded code of beneficence that might seem more suited to the Stoic Wise Man, who indeed often takes centre stage, than to his readers, who are presumably rich men like his equestrian addressee, Aebutius Liberalis.¹² Seneca stresses intention as opposed to performance; he expects the donor to be indifferent to material return; he insists on a human obligation to confer benefits, that goes beyond the ordinary obligations inherent in our social roles. Although Cicero has similarly been accused of giving unrealistic advice in *De Officiis* because, in exhorting his son and, through him, youth in general, he deliberately chose the more uncompromising Stoic morality rather than the perfectly respectable Academic and Peripatetic perspective (3.20), Cicero at least sought to harmonize with the rigorous demands of Stoic ethics the striving for influence and glory that seemed so natural to the Roman political class.¹³ Indeed the central theme of *De Officiis* is precisely how virtuous conduct

⁸ Key examples are: C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite, and R. Seaford (eds), *Reciprocity in Ancient Athens* (1988); R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (1982); idem, 'Status and patronage', *CAH XI²* (2000), ch. 28, 838–51; A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Patronage in Roman society', in A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (1989), 63–85; idem, 'The Imperial Court', *CAH X²* (1996), ch. 7, 282–308.

⁹ Inwood, op. cit. (n. 2). F.-R. Chamartin, *Le De Beneficiis de Sénèque, sa signification philosophique, politique et sociale* (1985) is mainly concerned with identifying Seneca's sources. K. Abel, 'Senecas *lex vitae*', *Pöner Stoische Studien* (1987) = K. Abel, *Die Sinnfrage des Lebens* (1995), 42 ff. provides a valuable analysis of the structure of the work.

¹⁰ Between the death of Caninius Rebilus in A.D. 56 (Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.30.2), who is mentioned by Seneca, clearly posthumously, as *infamis* (*Ben.* 2.21.6), and June of 64, the dramatic date of Seneca's *Ep.* 81 which mentions the treatise at para. 3 (M. Griffin, *Seneca* (2nd edn, 1991), 399, 400).

¹¹ E. Gabba, 'Per un'interpretazione politica del *De*

Officiis di Cicerone', *RAL* ser. 8, 34 (1979), 117–41; M. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (eds), *Cicero On Duties* (1991), xii–xv; A. A. Long, 'Cicero's politics in *De Officiis*', in Laks and Schofield, op. cit. (n. 2), 213–40; A. R. Dyck, *A Commentary on Cicero, De Officiis* (1996), 8–10; 29–36; E. Lefèvre, *Panaitios' und Ciceros Pflichtenlehre. Vom philosophischen Traktat zum politischen Lehrbuch*, *Historia Einzelschriften* 150 (2001).

¹² See Griffin, op. cit. (n. 10), 455–6. Despite his deliciously appropriate name, it is unlikely that he is a fictional character, as Seneca mentions him again as a friend in *Ep.* 91, where he gives him a more concrete identity as a citizen of Lugdunum, inconsolable at the devastation of his *patria* by fire.

¹³ As Cicero indicates at 1.65. Aristotle's μεγαλόψυχος was a more natural ideal for the Roman governing class, as Polybius' account of the younger Scipio shows, a description that stresses reputation and conveys no hint of doing good by stealth, as Seneca recommends (Polybius 31.25.9, 28.4, 28.7, 28.10, cf. *Ben.* 2.9.2–10).

need not conflict with the pursuit of advantage (2.32; 65; 69–71). For Cicero liberality secures the goodwill and support of men, but it is a reputation for virtue, which ultimately cannot be simulated, that provides the most secure and the most lasting influence and support (*Off.* 2.22–3; 43–4; 53).

There are obvious points that can be made, and have been made, to lessen this apparent contrast between *De Beneficiis* and the real world. Seneca does accommodate Roman social expectations to some extent, by distinguishing three types of return: the first fruit of a benefit is the consciousness of having performed a virtuous act; the second is good repute; the third is material reward.¹⁴ More important, Seneca's 'high-minded nonsense', as Ramsay MacMullen called it,¹⁵ is to a large extent created by our failure to understand the style of discourse and the pedagogic technique of hyperbole. Diogenes the Cynic had used the image of the chorus leader who deliberately sets the note a bit high in hopes of getting it just right (D.L. 6.35). Cicero had described the Stoic method in his attack on Cato: 'Those teachers of yours and masters of virtue seem to me to have deliberately extended the bounds of moral duty a little further than nature intended, their purpose being that in our minds we should strive for perfection, and so at least make it to the point we ought to reach'.¹⁶ Seneca himself, towards the end of *De Beneficiis*, after three casuistical books that gradually modify the stark precepts of the early books in the direction of realism, tells us explicitly how to read moral exhortation: 'Certain things we teach in an exaggerated form so that they result in due measure. When we say "He (the donor) ought not to remember (giving a benefit)", we really mean "He ought not to trumpet it, nor to boast, nor to give offence". . . It is to quell excessive and reproachful memory of it that we have told the man who gives to forget and, by way of ordering more than he is able to accomplish, we have urged silence' (7.22.1–2).

In fact, though both Cicero and Seneca are concerned to present an ideal, the negative examples and the descriptions of the way men actually behave in both writers show their awareness of the more sordid realities of life.¹⁷ Seneca is particularly good at providing examples of ungracious language used in giving and receiving favours. 'One man receives a benefit disdainfully, as if to say, "I really do not need it, but since you so much wish it, I will let you prevail over me"; another accepts listlessly, so that he leaves the benefactor uncertain about his being conscious of the favour; still another has scarcely opened his mouth and has shown himself more ungrateful than if he had kept silent' (*Ben.* 2.24.2–3, cf. 2.13.3). Then again, Seneca gives examples of the beneficence practised by the élite extending over a range similar to that treated by Cicero and reflecting the real and substantial continuity in this respect between the late Republic and the Principate.¹⁸ Like Cicero, he mentions members of the Roman governing class rescuing friends from pirates (*Off.* 2.55; 2.63; *Ben.* 1.5.4; 7.15.1); defending men on capital charges (*Off.* 2.66; *Ben.* 3.9.2; 4.12); helping their peers with the expenses of advancement (*Off.* 2.62; *Ben.* 2.21.5 (giving *ludi*)) or helping to pay off debts (*Off.* 2.55; *Ben.* 3.8.2); exercising influence with regard to magistracies, priesthoods, and provinces (*Off.* 2.67; *Ben.* 1.11.5, cf. 1.5.1; 4.31.3, 5). The new factor in Seneca's world also makes an appearance, sometimes by name. Augustus exercised the requisite judgement in conferring favours, whereas Claudius was too indiscriminate, and Tiberius so censorious in helping impoverished senators that Seneca is moved to write: 'To say in passing what I think about this, it is not really proper even for a princeps to give in order to humiliate' (*Ben.* 1.15.5–6; 2.7–8). As for Caligula, he is the supreme example of the way to give a benefit so arrogantly that it will earn, not gratitude, but ill-will (2.12–13).

¹⁴ But, of course, the last two are just extras, additions to the principal reward, which is having performed the virtuous act (*Ben.* 2.33.3).

¹⁵ R. MacMullen, 'Personal power in the Roman Empire', *AJPh* 107 (1986), 512–24, at 521.

¹⁶ *Mur.* 65: 'Etenim isti ipsi mihi videntur vestri praeceptores et virtutis magistri finis officiorum paulo longius quam natura vellet protulisse ut, cum ad

ultimum animo contendissemus, ibi tamen ubi oporteret consistere.

¹⁷ Examples are: *Off.* 1.43–4; 2.54–5; *Ben.* 4.20.3; 5.17.4; 6.38.2–4.

¹⁸ This is the main thesis, and the most convincing, of the important book by R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (1982).

THE CHARACTER OF SENECA'S THEORY

Writing somewhat later than *De Beneficiis*, in one of the *Letters to Lucilius*, Seneca says that philosophy teaches us 'above all else, to owe and to repay benefits well'.¹⁹ His account, as we have just seen, is clearly related to the concerns of a contemporary Roman audience. How should we characterize the theory he presents?

For W. H. Alexander, who approached the work primarily as a textual critic, *De Beneficiis* was, in the eyes of a modern reader, about 'friendship', more precisely about the Roman concept of *amicitia* which he said laid greater stress than our 'friendship' on practical acts and less on emotion.²⁰ He likened the treatise to a course in business administration, in this case the formal exposition of the practical acts or *beneficia* in which *amicitia* manifests itself. The idea has good Aristotelian credentials, given the part εὐεργεσία or beneficence plays in Aristotle's discussion of φιλία (a wider term than 'friendship', embracing as it does kinship).²¹ Moreover, Aristotle attributed to φιλία the function συνέχειν πόλεις (*NE* 8.1.1155a23), a notion of social cohesion similar to the function Cicero and Seneca ascribe to the exchange of benefits.

Alexander's view that what is discussed in *De Beneficiis* is best characterized in modern parlance by the term 'friendship' is not, however, the one taken in more recent and more sophisticated studies of Roman social relations. 'Patronage, defined as a voluntary, continuing exchange-relationship between men of unequal power or status, remained fundamental in Roman society: in the view of the Romans themselves exchange relationships were the glue that held society together.' Richard Saller's statement in the *Cambridge Ancient History XI*², equipped with a footnote adducing *De Beneficiis* 1.4.2, fairly represents the way the subject matter of Seneca's treatise is generally regarded by Roman historians.²² In his important study *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, Saller had worked out a definition of 'patronage' based on the work of anthropologists and sociologists. He gave as the distinguishing characteristics of the patronage relationship: (1) that it involves the *reciprocal* exchange of goods and services; (2) that it is a personal relationship of some duration; (3) that it is asymmetrical, in the sense that the two parties are of unequal status and offer different kinds of goods and services in the exchange. To this he was subsequently persuaded to add that it is a 'voluntary' relationship.²³

Saller is well aware that the word *patronus* itself is not used by any of the major prose writers of the late Republic or post-Augustan Principate, including Seneca, in the general sense of an influential protector, and that the correlative *cliens* was only used occasionally and then with reference to humble men.²⁴ That in itself does not rule out the idea that the modern concept of 'patronage', as he defines it, is the key to the phenomenon Seneca is analysing in his account of Roman social mores. For he argues, 'It is clear that *amicus*, *beneficium*, *officium*, *meritum* and *gratia* can be used as signs of reciprocal exchange relationships which, if the additional qualification of inequality of

¹⁹ *Ep.* 73.9: 'hoc docet philosophia praecipue, bene debere beneficia, bene solvere . . .'

²⁰ W. H. Alexander, 'Lucius Annaeus Seneca de Beneficiis Libri VII, the text emended and explained', *University of California Publications* 14 (1950-2), 3. This is a reprint of two articles which appeared in *Classical Quarterly* 1934 and 1937.

²¹ The conferring of benefits occurs within each of the three types in which φιλία is divided, relationships based on virtue, those based on pleasure, and those based on utility (*NE* 8.13.1162a34-1163a23). φιλία provides a necessary outlet for beneficence by the prosperous (*NE* 8.1.1155a6-10).

²² Saller in *CAH XI*² (2000), 838. Wallace-Hadrill, *op. cit.* (n. 8, 1989), 71 ff. admits that explaining the politics of the Late Republic in terms of 'patronage'

and 'clientela' is dead but still thinks that 'patronage' viewed as moral responsibilities and social relationships was crucial to the working of Roman society, serving as a technique of integration and social control. E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (pbk edn, 1994), Preface pp. viii-ix, argues for the importance of patronage socially, if not politically. The abandonment of patronage as the key to Republican politics results from the devastating attack of P. A. Brunt, '*Clientela*', *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (1988), 382-442.

²³ Saller in *CAH XI*², 838, a modification adumbrated in Wallace-Hadrill's introduction to *Patronage in Ancient Society*, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 3.

²⁴ *CAH XI*², 838.

status is met, can be used as evidence of patronage',²⁵ and his whole treatment shows how often he thinks that additional qualification can be met. He describes the Romans as 'living in a patronal society in which no pretense was made about equality'.²⁶ Saller has become aware of difficulties when it comes to exchanges within the aristocracy and prefers to speak of the patron-protégé relationships of young aristocrats dependent on their seniors for advancement, but he still preserves the emphasis on a vertical society.²⁷ Wallace-Hadrill too had spoken of 'the multifarious links which involved men of all social levels, rising to virtual social parity with the patron' and concluded, 'Of course there is a contrast between the friendship of social equals and the dependent relationship of unequals, but what justifies describing the network as a whole as a patronage network is that it involves exchanges between those closer to the centre of power and those more distant from it and has the effect of mediating state resources through personal relationships'.²⁸

Chaumartin in fact tried to interpret *De Beneficiis* as an exposé of the contemporary abuses current in the relations of patrons and clients and hence in the practice of beneficence, especially among favourites of emperors like Nero whose conduct set a bad example.²⁹ Yet patronage theory, whatever its merits, will not help us to understand the *theoretical* treatment of the exchange of *beneficia* by Seneca and by Cicero before him. In discussing liberality, Seneca, like Cicero, hardly mentions relationships *de haut en bas*, not even the clearest example of 'patronage' in Roman linguistic usage: the relationship between freedmen and their patrons.³⁰ Catalogues of those to whom we have special obligations, when given by Seneca, as by Cicero and Horace before him, ignore the hierarchal relationships of *patroni* and *clientes* while mentioning *amici*, even *hospites*.³¹ Their exceedingly rare references to *clientes* concern a relationship created between people because of the size of the *beneficium* given, a relationship that runs counter to the usual social position of the recipient: they may not be able to repay such a *beneficium* and hence will be regarded, to their shame, as clients. Cicero writes, 'Those who think they are wealthy, honoured, and blessed, do not want even to be under obligation for a favour. For they think that they have conferred a favour themselves simply by accepting something, even if it is large; they suspect something will be demanded or expected of them in return, and they consider that accepting patronage or being labelled as a client is tantamount to death'.³² As Seneca puts it, they refuse to acknowledge their debt of *vita aut dignitas*, fearing that their success will be attributed to another's help rather than their own merit, and in dreading the reputation of being a client, they incur the more serious one of being an ingrate.³³ These are clearly people who are used to being on the giving end. Seneca, in fact, says that his addressee, characterized as a generous and considerate benefactor (5.1.3–5), regards the saying that

²⁵ 'Because patronage by definition involved the exchange of goods and services, the vocabulary describing those goods and services — *beneficium*, *officium*, *meritum* — are perhaps the best pointers to patronal relationships' is the formulation in *CAH XI*², 839.

²⁶ Saller, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 126.

²⁷ *CAH XI*², 846–50. On these, see below, pp. 107, 109.

²⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *op. cit.* (n. 8, 1989), 77. As regards the latter part of the statement, it is hard to see how the kind of financial assistance that Atticus gave his senatorial friends fits into this model.

²⁹ Chaumartin, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 290–310; 'Les désillusions de Sénèque devant l'évolution de la politique néronienne et l'aspiration à la retraite: le "De vita beata" et le "De beneficiis"', *ANRW* 2.36.3, 1718–19. He lays particular stress on imperial freedmen.

³⁰ Saller, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 9 points out that the word *patronus* in the literature of the early Empire is restricted to legal advocates, patrons of communities, and ex-masters of freedmen.

³¹ Brunt, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 416 adducing *Off.* 1.53–8;

Ars Poetica 312 ff.; Seneca, *Ep.* 95.37 quotes a standard type of moral precept: 'Hoc patri praestare debes, hoc liberis, hoc amicis, hoc hospitibus' and adds 'uxor' in his discussion.

³² *Off.* 2.69: 'qui se locupletes honoratos beatos putant, ii ne obligari quidem beneficio volunt; quin etiam beneficium se dedisse arbitrantur cum ipsi quamvis magnum aliquod acceperint, atque etiam a se aut postulari aut expectari aliquid suspicantur, patrocínio vero se usos aut clientes appellari mortis instar putant.' As Dyck, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 458 points out, Cicero here manages to present the feelings of the *locupletes, honorati, beati*, to whom most people prefer to give benefits, 'in a crescendo of suspicion and indignation'. He compares Caes., *BC* 3.18.4 where Pompey says that life and citizenship would not be worth having if he owed it to a *beneficium Caesaris*.

³³ *Ben.* 2.23.2–3: 'Verentur palam ferre, ut sua potius virtute quam alieno adiutorio consecuti dicantur; rariores in eorum officiis sunt quibus vitam aut dignitatem debent, et dum opinionem clientium timent, graviorem subeunt ingratorum.' Contrast the Republican aristocrat in *V.M.* 5.2.7 who gratefully calls such a benefactor 'patronus'.

it is shameful to be outdone in benefits as a glorious utterance (5.2.1) and suffers from a related anxiety about not returning a benefit immediately (6.42), which Seneca views as wanting to be free of the obligation the benefit creates (6.35.3; 4.40.4).³⁴ In the words of Peter White, 'An exchange that was badly balanced over time might also work to clientize a friend'.³⁵ There is no question of an initial and enduring relationship of inferiority.

The usual way of meeting these objections is to emphasize the use in Roman social relations of polite language which represents as a horizontal relationship of equality (usually *amicitia*) what is really a vertical relationship of inequality (being a *cliens* or, even worse, a *scurra* to a *rex*, *maior*, *princeps*, in Horatian language). There is no doubt that such euphemisms were employed and that in some cases the *inops*, *probus et modestus* on whom Cicero recommends that we focus our beneficence was in fact a hereditary client (*Off.* 2.70).³⁶ Even writers giving moral instruction on these matters occasionally reveal the ordinary non-egalitarian assumptions that they too accept. Thus Horace in *Epistle* 1.18, giving advice on how to behave like an *amicus* rather than a *scurra* towards the 'dives amicus', nonetheless marks the latter's superior social standing by also referring to him as 'potens amicus' (44; 86) and 'venerandus amicus' (73). Again, as Saller points out,³⁷ Pliny disapproved of grading *amici* whom one invited to dinner and offering them food and wine of different quality (*Ep.* 2.6.2), but elsewhere he speaks casually of 'amicitiae tam superiores quam minores' (7.3.2). Seneca himself in *De Beneficiis* distinguishes between true friends and the *amici* who are ranked at *salutationes* according to the ease of access accorded to them by great men (*Ben.* 6.33.3–34),³⁸ and in *Ep.* 19, the *salutantes*, among whom the great man expects to find true *amici* (11), are clearly those earlier called *clientes* (4).

However, there is more to be explained here than a contrast between polite language and harsh reality. Except for the occasional glimpse of that social reality, Cicero and Seneca, when they are expounding moral philosophy and giving moral instruction, speak in terms of equality. Specific relationships *de haut en bas* are mentioned, like master-slave, parent-child, but they are marginal, and indeed problematic, rather than central to the analysis. *Horizontal* relationships are their prime concern. They constitute what they see as the essence of the social system they describe, like the circular dance of the three Graces giving, receiving, and returning benefits in the allegory taken over by Seneca from Chrysippus (*Ben.* 1.3). In these general philosophical discussions this cannot be explained in terms of politeness to individuals.³⁹

An even more important objection to regarding ancient theories about exchanges of benefit as focused on the phenomenon of 'patronage' is the fact that it means inverting cause and effect, as these philosophical authors see it. For them, acts of beneficence are presented as *creating* a relationship of *amicitia*, rather than being generated by the obligations inherent in such relationships. The idea is already explicit in Xenophon, and it is taken for granted by authors from Thucydides to Seneca's younger contemporary

³⁴ These attitudes had received their classic formulation in Aristotle's description of the *μεγαλόψυχος* (*NE* 4.3.1124b9–14).

³⁵ P. White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (1993), 31.

³⁶ Indeed in his letters Cicero speaks in terms of *amicitia* to and of a man, who modestly describes himself as a *cliens* and Cicero as his *patronus*: with *Fam.* 6.6.2; 6.9.1, compare 6.7.4; 7.29.2.

³⁷ Saller, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 12.

³⁸ A. Winterling, *Aula Caesaris: Studien zur Institutionalisierung des römischen Kaiserhofes in der Zeit von Augustus bis Commodus (31 v. Chr.–192 n. Chr.)* (1999), 121 argues plausibly that Seneca does not refer to an overt classification and designation at the *salutatio* but a *de facto* system of admission, possibly involving

admission to different rooms which the master of the house visited in sequence. The point Seneca is making at 6.33.4 is, however, misconstrued: he does not mean that hierarchizing destroys true friendship, but that the courtesy term *amici*, used of the large numbers (illustrated by the ranking) at the *salutatio* does not designate true *amici*, in the sense of people who speak frankly and are bound to one by true affection.

³⁹ A. Yakobson, *Elections and Electioneering in Rome*, *Historia Einzelschriften* 128 (1999), 71, sees that explanations in terms of not needing to mention what is familiar or of consideration for the feelings of individuals 'would seem to apply to texts describing specific instances of social intercourse rather than to Cicero's general discussion of social norms and ties in *De Officiis*'.

Pliny.⁴⁰ Cicero regards conferring a *beneficium* as 'in our power', i.e. a free act not dictated by obligation, whereas we are *bound* to return one (*Off.* 1.48). The Elder Seneca ascribes to the declaimer and senator L. Junius Gallio the distinction, 'It is no *beneficium* but an *officium* to do what you ought to do'.⁴¹ Seneca cites, and seems to accept, the view that a *beneficium* differs from an *officium* or *ministerium* in being given by someone (an *alienus*) 'who could have done nothing without incurring censure', and not by someone fulfilling the duties of an existing relationship.⁴² Seneca goes on to explain that to confer a *beneficium* is to go beyond the duties prescribed by any social role, such as parent-child, teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, master-slave (3.21–22.1; 29.1). It does not matter that the terminological distinction between *beneficium* and *officium* is not always observed in common usage or even adhered to consistently by philosophers like Seneca who subscribe to it in an effort to make language more systematic.⁴³ What matters here is the conception of beneficence as creative of relationships.

Given the first difficulty, Alexander's suggestion that 'friendship', along with the formal acts in which it manifests itself, was the phenomenon being treated by Seneca, might seem more promising than patronage. For one thing, 'friendship', like the Roman *amicitia*, avoids the hierarchical conception inherent in patronage: indeed the description by Latin authors of their own relationships of *amicitia*, often involving the exchange of gifts, has proved very elusive to scholars trying to pinpoint cases of patronage.⁴⁴ Aristotle had in fact insisted that egalitarian friendship is primary, a point picked up by Cicero and Seneca.⁴⁵ Then again, *amicitia* is a more fluid relationship than the ones that Seneca regards as generating fixed duties. Finally, *amicitia* and *amici* figure copiously in ancient discussions of *beneficia*.⁴⁶

But there is still the difficulty that, for Seneca, *amicitia* is more often viewed as the result than as the cause of an exchange of benefits,⁴⁷ and Seneca expressly regards the same benefit as more valuable when given to a stranger (who thus becomes a friend) than to an existing friend.⁴⁸ Moreover, he treated the subject of friendship elsewhere,

⁴⁰ *Mem.* 1.2.7; 2.9.8; 3.11.11. Thucydides writes οὐ γὰρ πάσχοντες ἐν, ἀλλὰ δρῶντες κτώμεθα τοὺς φίλους (2.40.4); Cicero, *Mur.* 24 of the use of oratory (clearly in defending cases in the courts) as creating 'plurimas gratias, firmissimas amicitias, maxima studia'; Pliny 'nulla cum provincia necessitudo nisi ex beneficio tuo et hoc recenti' (*Ep.* 7.33.5).

⁴¹ *Contr.* 2.5.13: 'Non est beneficium sed officium facere quod debeat: sic filius patri se dicat beneficium dare' ('It is no benefit but a duty to do what you ought to do. On this basis, a son might say he conferred a benefit on a father'). The question raised by the final point is treated at length in Seneca, *Ben.* 3.29 ff.

⁴² *Ben.* 3.18.1: 'beneficium esse, quod alienus det (alienus est, qui potuit sine reprehensione cessare); officium esse filii, uxoris, earum personarum, quas necessitudo suscitavit et ferre opem iubet'. Saller, op. cit. (n. 18), 18 assumes without warrant that the view is Hecato's and states incorrectly that Seneca disapproves of this view. That he accepts it is shown by 3.21.1: 'quam diu praestatur, quod a servo exigi solet, ministerium est; ubi plus, quam quod servo necesse est, beneficium est . . . est aliquid, quod dominus praestare servo debeat, ut cibaria, ut vestiarium; nemo hoc dixit beneficium. At indulsit, liberalius educavit, artes, quibus erudiuntur ingenui, tradidit; beneficium est.' Here Seneca clearly accepts that a *ministerium* is the ordinary duty of a slave vs. a *beneficium* which goes beyond that duty and that a parallel distinction holds for the *dominus*: the parallel is clearly *officium* vs. *beneficium*.

⁴³ Saller, op. cit. (n. 18), 17–20 notes that the distinction between *officium* and *beneficium* did not govern common Latin usage. At *Ep.* 81.6 in the phrase 'officii meminisse' Seneca uses *officium* for what he has been calling, and will continue to call, *beneficium*, while Cicero in *Off.* 1.48, 'si in eos quos speramus nobis profuturos non dubitamus officia conferre',

contradicts his own notion in the next sentence that the initiatory gesture is a *beneficium*. Sometimes it is the desire to refer elegantly and concisely to the two reciprocal actions by using the same Latin word, as in 'mutuis officiis', 'beneficiorum commercio' (*Ben.* 4.18.1), that leads to the imprecision.

⁴⁴ White, op. cit. (n. 35), 13; 27–8; 31–2; A. L. Spisak, 'Gift-giving in Martial', 243–55 and M. Kleijwegt, 'Extra fortunam est quidquid donatur amicis', 256–77, both in F. Grewing (ed.), *Toto Notus in Orbe, Perspektiven der Martial Interpretation* (1998).

⁴⁵ Aristotle in fact raises the question what degree of inequality is still compatible with φιλία (*NE* 8.5.1157b35–1158a1; 8.7.1158b28–1159b6 ff.; 8.13.1162a34–1162b5). The point is even clearer in the *Eudemian Ethics* 7.4.1239a1–6 where Aristotle says that only when parties are equal, can they be friends, on which see M. Schofield, 'Political friendship and reciprocity', *Saving the City* (1999), ch. 5, 88. Cic., *Amic.* 69–71; Sen., *Ben.* 2.15.1.

⁴⁶ On friendship and exchange in Martial, see Spisak, op. cit. (n. 44), 243–55. S. Dixon, 'Gift and debt in the Roman elite', *ECM* 12 (1993), 451, 456 stresses that exchange within the upper echelons of society based in the city of Rome 'is expressed by the participants in terms of friendship rather than the frankly unequal language of patronage characteristic of favours from the wealthy to the clearly subordinate'.

⁴⁷ *Ben.* 2.18.5: 'debeo enim, cum reddidi, rursus incipere, manetque amicitia; et ut in amicitiam non reciperem indignum, sic ne in beneficium quidem sacratissimum ius, ex quo amicitia oritur', cf. 2.21.2, *Clem.* 1.9.11.

⁴⁸ *Ben.* 3.12.1: 'quaedam amicis data sunt, quaedam ignotis; plus est, quamvis idem detur, si ei datur, quem nosse a beneficio tuo incipis.'

and to judge from the fragments of his treatise *Quomodo amicitia continenda sit, beneficia* were there, as in his *Letters*, only a small part of what he considered.⁴⁹ Similarly, Cicero in the *Laelius: de amicitia* says little about *liberalitas*,⁵⁰ and in *De Officiis* he stresses the other aspects of the friendships based on virtue, i.e. affection and shared activities (*Off.* 1.55–6). Recent scholarship has rightly accepted that, as Roman writers indicate, sentiment and the sharing of interests and activities were as inherent in Roman friendship as the exchange of favours.⁵¹

There are two problems to be solved here. One is to identify the social phenomenon that Seneca is analysing and to characterize his theory of benefits in a way that does justice to its horizontal and creative aspects. The second is to see just how relevant his teaching really was to the Roman society of his time: how close are his ideas to attitudes current in the early Empire? How far do his exhortations reflect the concerns of his readers?

GIFT EXCHANGE: SENECA AND SOCIOLOGY

The first is not difficult. Seneca provides the clue in his efforts to distinguish the exchange of *beneficia* from other social activities which it resembles. The most common contrast he makes is between two reciprocal processes: one is giving a *beneficium* and owing *gratia*; the other is making a loan and incurring a debt. Though Seneca often discusses the exchange of benefits in metaphorical terms drawn from credit and debt (*Ben.* 1.1.1; 1.4.6, cf. Cic., *Off.* 2.69; 71), he is concerned throughout his treatise to distinguish sharply between the two kinds of exchange: indeed, in the later Letter 81 on the subject of *beneficia*, he makes a strong plea for avoiding language appropriate to debt when discussing benefits.⁵² Unlike an ordinary creditor, the benefactor should only receive back what is voluntarily returned (1.1.3; 3.15.1); unlike an investor, he should not think of repayment when he makes the gift (1.1.9; 3.15.4; 4.3.3) nor keep a record of it and demand repayment at a set time (1.2.3; 3.15.2–3; 7.14.5); he should be satisfied with gratitude and the wish to return the benefit (7.14.4–5); he should be willing to give anonymously without witnesses (2.10.2). A recipient should be more careful in choosing benefactors than creditors because a permanent relationship is created by the acceptance (2.18.5, cf. 2.21.2); the recipient should not repay too soon, like someone wanting to be clear of a debt (4.40.5; 6.35.3–4; 6.40); unlike a debt, it is enough to have sought to repay a benefit (1.1.3; 7.14.5), for the transaction is in our minds (2.34.1).⁵³

Seneca also alludes to a contrast between giving and returning benefits as against buying and selling for profit, when he says that our own profit is sought when selling goods or services, hence invalidating the status of the exchange as a benefit to others

⁴⁹ Frag. 94 Haase; 19.5; Trillitzsch 59 §6 Vottero: 'sic solebat beneficia libenter dare, patienter perdere; sic properabat benignitas eius'. This is adduced as one example of the friend's virtues which should be rehearsed in order to keep his memory fresh. A. Fürst, *Streit unter Freunden* (1996), 187–93 discusses the treatise and shows its importance for the healing of rifts. Cf. *Ep.* 9.8, 10.

⁵⁰ H. Kloft, *Liberalitas Principis: Herkunft und Bedeutung. Studien zur Prinzipatsideologie* (1970) only lists ch. 11 (about Scipio) and ch. 31, which is a comparison of friendship and liberality: 'ut enim benefici liberalesque sumus, non ut exigamus gratiam (neque enim beneficium faeneramur, sed natura propensi ad liberalitatem sumus), sic amicitiam non spe mercedis adducti', a negative allusion to Aristotle's category of utilitarian friendship. *Amic.* 71 and 73 treat the question of benefits appropriate to the recipient.

⁵¹ The classic paper of P. Brunt, 'Amicitia in the Late Republic', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philolo-*

gical Society 11 (1965), 1–20, revised in his *The Fall of the Roman Republic* (1988), 350–81 makes the point for the Republic; White, op. cit. (n. 35), 14–19; 28; 31, for the Augustan poets; Spisak, op. cit. (n. 44), 243–55, for Martial in particular.

⁵² *Ep.* 81.9 where he explains why common usage prefers 'gratiam referre', which means to repay voluntarily, to 'gratiam reddere' which means to repay on demand. Moussy, op. cit. (n. 1), 253, 267–9 points out that Seneca himself does not always observe this distinction (at *Ben.* 3.2.2; 5.16.4 he uses 'gratiam reddere', as indeed he just has at *Ep.* 81.7), but that he is right to say that the first expression is more common than the second. The distinction is observed in the proverb as quoted by Cicero in *Off.* 2.69: 'pecuniam qui habeat, non reddidisse, qui reddiderit, non habere, gratiam autem et qui rettulerit habere et qui habeat rettulisse.'

⁵³ The contrast with debt was already a common one. Cicero, rejecting self-interested liberality, says 'neque enim beneficium faeneramur' (*Amic.* 31).

(4.13.3).⁵⁴ As opposed to the legal sanctions that protect loans and leases (3.7.1) and also buying and selling (3.15.1), he urges that *fides*, not legal enforcement, should remain the sanction for liberality.⁵⁵

The fact that it is economic exchange that the ancient theorists feel must be carefully distinguished and marked off from the giving and returning of benefits points to an affinity with modern sociological theories of gift-exchange or reciprocity. Though the use of these modern theories has become perhaps too fashionable in classical studies of late, the *beneficiorum commercium* does seem an area that invites such analysis. It is here, rather than in the patronage theories that are usually adduced, that we find the same concern as we find in Seneca with such matters as variability of return, the creation of bonds between the partners to the transaction, and social disapproval as the sanction.⁵⁶

Theorists commonly place the social phenomenon of gift-exchange on a continuum of exchange relationships between primitive forms of exchange and economic exchange.⁵⁷ In the former relationship, made famous as total 'prestation' by the work of M. Mauss,⁵⁸ groups are locked into rigid ceremonial forms of obligatory giving and receiving, there is a permanent amical relationship between donors and recipients, and disgrace follows the failure to make sufficient repayment, though no amount is stipulated in advance. At the opposite extreme is market exchange between individuals, where the terms of return are stipulated, requital is immediate, requital is not voluntary but legally enforced, and the exchange is impersonal and involves no enduring relationship of any kind. Just above market exchange on the continuum comes the 'balanced reciprocity' of loans, where there are again stipulated and legally enforceable returns, but they are made not immediately but within a finite period. Again, no permanent relationship is forged.

Gift-exchange lies in between these two extremes of the continuum. It is like economic exchange in that it normally involves individuals, not groups, and there is no obligation to give, only to return. It is unlike economic exchange in that the type of reciprocation is generalized: it is unspecified; indefinite as to time, quantity, and quality; and depends not so much on what gift the donor originally gave, but on what the original donor needs and when he needs it, and also on what the original recipient can afford to give and when. It is also unlike economic exchange in that at least a pretence of disinterested generosity is maintained and a bond of solidarity is created between the partners. Finally, it is unlike economic exchange in that there is no legal sanction to enforce return. Trust is needed between the partners because the only sanction is the social approval given to the recognition of past favours and the social disgrace conferred on failure to show sufficient gratitude.

Paul Veyne writes of post-Aristotelian philosophical writers, 'When they discuss the virtues of generosity or *beneficia*, these texts unconsciously depict for us a society in which voluntary relations of giving and benefaction fill the place held in our society by the market and by regulations (where these are protective and charitable)'. Therefore

⁵⁴ He attributes this contrast of 'beneficium' and 'negotiatio' to Cleanthes at 6.12.2, but the contrast made there is not between the pure benefit to the recipient and the incidental benefit to the buyer in certain exchanges between seller and buyer, but between the pure benefit to the recipient and the incidental benefit to the animals and men sold when the seller looks after them as a means of achieving more profit.

⁵⁵ Similarly, Aristotle had contrasted 'legal utilitarian friendship' (νομική φιλία κατὰ τὸ χρήσιμον), i.e. market exchange or even more long-term contracts of credit (which involve trust and hence are more φιλικόν) enforced by law, with 'moral utilitarian friendship' (ἠθική φιλία κατὰ τὸ χρήσιμον), in which the gift or service is not made on specified terms enforceable by law, though an equivalent or greater return is expected (NE 8.13.1162 b 22 ff.). Seneca is making a similar contrast, though he sets a higher standard for the moral type in specifying that no

return should be expected by the giver. In Aristotelian terms, his view amounts to ignoring the moral (non-legal) friendship based on utility and concentrating on the friendship based on virtue where the value of the benefit depends on the donor's intention (NE 8.13.1163a 23-4).

⁵⁶ C. Gill, 'Altruism or reciprocity in Greek philosophy', in Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, op. cit. (n. 8), 303-28, traces this concept in Greek ethical thought, noting that the social ideal of shared life or reciprocity underlies the practical discussions of the ideal by Cicero and Seneca (326).

⁵⁷ A. Heath, *Rational Choice and Social Exchange* (1976), esp. 50-60, provides a good survey and critique of such theories.

⁵⁸ M. Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1954, rev. 1966) = translation by I. Cunnison of 'Essai sur le don, forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', *Année Sociologique* n.s. 1 (1925), 30-186.

the fact that Seneca is so keen to distinguish the exchange of *beneficia* from transactions enforced by law helps to confirm that what he is discussing is the phenomenon of gift-exchange.⁵⁹ We have already pointed to the fact that the involvement of the law is one of the contrasts he himself draws with buying and selling, with lending and borrowing, and with renting and leasing (3.7.1). Most important is his discussion of whether or not ingratitude should be made punishable by law (3.6–17). Admitting that parents have such protection,⁶⁰ he goes on to reject the idea that such sanctions should exist on three counts: that they would prove impractical, as the cases would be too numerous and calculations of equivalent value too difficult; that both the benefit and the return of gratitude would suffer a loss of moral standing; and that the acceptance of benefits would be discouraged, leading to a reduction in the giving of benefits and in the discrimination we exercise in giving (3.14). Seneca points out that social disapproval and fear of the gods (3.17) already provide a powerful sanction.

Sociologists suggest various ways in which gift-exchange contributes to the functioning of a society as a whole.⁶¹ For example, it is suggested that in pre-state societies gift-exchange is a vital force for social cohesion and helps to keep the peace where there is no centralized power to do so, by overcoming suspicion and hostility between individuals or groups.⁶² Seneca too, as we have seen, thinks that the exchange of benefits reinforces social cohesion. Though he believes that giving benefits and returning gratitude properly are intrinsically valuable as are all virtuous acts,⁶³ this does not create a conflict with his socially instrumental view of morality. For what the arguments for intrinsic value are meant to rule out is the motivation and justification of acts of beneficence in terms of the narrow *self*-interest of the individual concerned, e.g. giving in the hope of return, or out of a desire for security (4.22.3), or, on the other hand, showing gratitude because of fear (4.18.4). The interests of the social system as a whole, or the public good as Seneca calls it (7.16.2), are different from the self-interest of individuals. In any case, the public good need not provide the motivation of individuals in order to be advanced by their actions.

Sometimes Seneca sees the instrumental nature of morality as affecting particular social groups. Thus it is in the interests of parents for there to be a general belief that children can confer benefits on parents beyond what they have received, because children then have no excuse for not showing devotion to them: they repay their benefits with the hope of surpassing them (3.36.1–2). But usually it is the public good (7.16.2) that is adduced: the co-operation of men serves to compensate for the physical weakness of the human animal (4.17–18; 7.27.3). To this end divine providence has instilled in us the desire at least to appear beneficent and grateful and to preserve social cohesion (4.17.1–2; 4.17.4; 4.18.2–3).⁶⁴

Seneca's approach is like that of the sociologists in that he treats the phenomenon of exchange on two levels: that of individual motivation or 'rational choice', and that of social function — corresponding to microsociology and macrosociology. But whereas the sociologist claims to *describe* social processes and to explain them in terms of their social functions, Seneca aims not only to describe, but to *improve*, the practice of exchange. To ancient philosophers, of course, this distinction between the description of human conduct and moral exhortation does not appear as clear as it does to us, because they regard themselves as urging men to behave in accordance with what is in fact their nature. For the Stoics in particular, it is divine providence that has devised

⁵⁹ P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses* (1990), an abridgement and translation of *Le pain et le cirque* (1976), 7. Similar ideas are found in A. R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (1968), 32–3; Saller, op. cit. (n. 18), 13–15; Seaford's introduction (3–4) and H. van Wees, 'Reciprocity in anthropological theory', 47 in Gill, Postlethwaite and Seaford, op. cit. (n. 8). This approach, which goes back to Mauss, op. cit. (n. 58), 45, is branded as 'anthropological elementarism' by D. Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (1988), who prefers to see gift transmission as having an emotional function in cementing relationships, rather than an economic or political one.

⁶⁰ This was true in Athens (Xen., *Mem.* 2.2.3). Seneca may have been thinking of the *patria potestas*.

⁶¹ Heath, op. cit. (n. 57), 181–4 summarizes two approaches of macrosociology — functionalism and conflict theory. It is functionalism that is relevant to *De Beneficiis*.

⁶² van Wees, op. cit. (n. 59), 25 ff.

⁶³ This theme receives particular emphasis in Book 4. See also *Ep.* 81.19–24.

⁶⁴ For the metaphysical basis, see further, M. Griffin, 'Seneca and Pliny', *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (2000), 545–8.

human nature with its instinct towards social cohesion: we have only to live up to its design and not allow it to be corrupted.

In his efforts to improve individual conduct in order that the social process may fulfill its function of promoting social cohesion more effectively, Seneca often uses the image of a game of ball and players taken over from Chrysippus (2.17.3–5; 2.32; 7.18.1). The maintenance of the game (*lusus*) requires both skill and co-operative spirit on the part of the players. The good player will adjust the way he throws to the position and skills of his partner, thereby maximizing the chances that the partner will be able to catch the ball and return it. If the return fails, the game, he admits, is damaged, even though the players are not necessarily at fault when this happens. Seneca's moral code is designed to protect the general process and the chances of other such games succeeding. By teaching us how to choose the recipient, and how and what to give him, and by teaching us how to receive and return benefits, it maximizes the chance of the individual game succeeding. The code also aims to ensure that donors do not fail to give just because they have experienced on occasion no return or even ingratitude, while recipients are not afraid to receive just because they cannot make a material return (2.35.2–5). To this end Seneca insists that the value of the benefit to the donor does not consist in the return (1.10.4–5; 7.16), while the recipient can repay by showing gratitude if he is unable to do more, though he remains under obligation to help his benefactor should the need arise.⁶⁵

DE BENEFICIIS AND HIGH SOCIETY

Does this code correspond to anything in Roman social reality? It is not difficult to show that Seneca, like Cicero, makes contact with that reality at the level of ideals current in the society and voiced by less theoretical Roman writers. Cornelius Nepos, a younger contemporary of Cicero and strongly resistant to philosophy, wrote an apologetic biography of Atticus in which he describes the liberality of his friend as being 'neither time-serving nor calculating', directed not at the flourishing but at the poor: Atticus was also more concerned to remember the *beneficia* he had received than those he had bestowed.⁶⁶ Terence had provided the *sententia*: 'your recounting your favour looks like a reproach to me for forgetting your favour'.⁶⁷ The late Republican mime writer Publilius Syrus, as popular in the first century A.D. as when he was alive,⁶⁸ shows us the proverbial wisdom of his day about liberality: 'he who has given to a worthy man has received a benefit in giving' (68); 'when you give a benefit to worthy men, you lay everyone under obligation' (91); 'he gives a benefit to a poor man twice over, who gives it quickly' (274).⁶⁹ All of these *sententiae* contain the sort of lessons that Seneca inculcates. And, as Pierre Bourdieu points out, 'official representations', in which he includes customary rules, sayings, proverbs, and other verbalizations, produce and reinforce the dispositions expressed in them. This 'official definition of reality is part of a full definition of social reality'.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Inwood, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 259–60, 263–4 discusses the image of the game and shows how Seneca's highminded advice actually has the practical aim of encouraging the process of exchange. For a fuller discussion of the sophistication of Seneca's theory in sociological terms, see M. Griffin, 'Seneca as a sociologist', P. Fedeli and G. Cipriani (eds), *Proceedings of Convegno Senecano of 1999* (2003), 15–17.

⁶⁶ *Att.* 11.3–5: 'illud unum intellegi volumus, illius liberalitatem neque temporariam neque callidam fuisse. id ex ipsis rebus ac temporibus iudicari potest, quod non florentibus se venditavit, sed afflictis semper succurrit. . . idem immortalis memoria percepta retinebat beneficia; quae autem ipse tribuerat, tam diu meminerat, quoad ille gratus erat, qui acceperat.'

⁶⁷ *Andria* 44–5: 'istaec commemoratio quasi exprobatios immemori beneficii.'

⁶⁸ He is in fact one of the authors who supplies Seneca with the maxims he uses to end his early *Letters to Lucilius* and whose value in teaching he commends in *Ep.* 8.8–9, cf. 94.28; 108.9.

⁶⁹ Publilius Syrus 68: 'beneficium dando accipit, qui digno dedit'; 91: 'beneficium dignis ubi des, omnes obliges'; 274: 'inopi beneficium bis dat qui dat celeriter'. The lines are cited according to J. W. and A. M. Duff (eds), *Minor Latin Poets* (1968). Cf. Ennius: 'dum quidquid des, des celere' (*Non.* p. 510.10).

⁷⁰ P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (2000), 108, cf. 110. This is an English translation by R. Nice of *Le sens pratique* (1980).

De Beneficiis, like *De Officiis*, is particularly revealing about the social mores of the Roman élite. The treatise is, as Brad Inwood has stressed, 'aimed primarily at the givers of benefits and favours, Seneca's social equals — and betters'. It is because Seneca is also primarily interested in this, his own, class, that the emphasis in *De Beneficiis* is on the donor, and that the 'major message of the treatise' is indeed, as Inwood says, that 'man's ingratitude should never incite (and cannot justify) the abandonment of giving'.⁷¹ Thus the treatise begins and ends with an account of the faults of donors and the advice on how to remedy them, it being made clear that their failings are principally responsible for ingratitude. Similarly, in *De Officiis*, Cicero was concerned only with those who were (at least in theory) his social equals. Though he says that liberality has two aspects, granting a benefit and returning it, both obligatory for a *vir bonus* (1.48), it is the donor's obligations on which he concentrates. Indeed, he is largely thinking of exchanges within the rich élite, for he says that we should enrich the person who needs it, but that people generally do the opposite (1.49). Even Seneca's legacy hunters are high-ranking senators (*Ben.* 6.38.4). Veyne regards this type of gift-giving as an important part of social practice in the Roman Republic. 'The rich circulated wealth among themselves', he writes, 'giving all the more lavishly because they were giving to the already rich'.⁷²

The extent to which Seneca's ideas are in tune with the social norms of his class is revealed most clearly, as Guillemin realized, by Pliny's *Letters*.⁷³ Robert Parker thinks the letters convey 'the professed ideals of a member of the governing élite in the age of Trajan'.⁷⁴ It was perhaps because he was setting an example for his actual, theoretical, or (in the case of younger *senatorii*) potential peers, of how to conduct themselves within the upper reaches of society that Pliny does not publish correspondence with his patently social inferiors.⁷⁵ Pliny, also a senator and *novus homo* from an equestrian background, is himself a teacher, but in a different vein from the philosophical discourses of Seneca. He is careful to distinguish his letters from *scholasticas et umbraticas litteras* (*Ep.* 9.2.3), like the letters of Epicurus or, what he must have had in mind, the letters of Seneca to Lucilius. Although sometimes his own letters are straightforwardly didactic, he usually teaches by example, as he claimed to do in his own person (*Epp.* 8.23.2–4; 6.6.5–6). He claims to be more realistic and humane than the philosophers in his standards of behaviour for himself and others (*Epp.* 5.1.13; 5.16.9–10; 8.16.3–4). Pliny's letters have been described by Veyne as 'a handbook for the perfect Roman senator. They are not only autobiographical testimony, but are also intended to be didactic, exemplary'.⁷⁶

How confidently can we use Pliny's *Letters* as an indication of shared ideals against which we can measure Seneca's? W. V. Harris has drawn attention to the problem of distinguishing texts that assert an accepted societal norm from texts that improve on the conventional rules. He tends to take Pliny's published letters as showing 'what was aspired to, in his circle at least' or advertising attitudes that were correct, 'but still needed to be asserted'.⁷⁷ Many of the letters Pliny published (Books 1–9) recount his gifts and favours or are letters of recommendation. They are clearly intended to exhibit the high standards he observed in discharging the 'duties to friends' which he mentions as a special area of obligation, between official duties and those of private life (*Epp.* 3.5.19; 7.15.1; 9.37.1). That Pliny expresses ideals which his readers shared is apparent, not only from his obvious desire for approval and his determination to project an ideal image of himself,⁷⁸ but from the fact that he even published letters which failed to secure

⁷¹ Inwood, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 263.

⁷² Veyne, *op. cit.* (n. 59), 6.

⁷³ A.-M. Guillemin, *Pline et la vie littéraire de son temps* (1929), 8, n. 1: 'Le *De beneficiis* est à la fois un manuel des vertus sociales et un code de la civilité. Ses nombreuses coïncidences avec les lettres de Pline fournissent des points de repère pour la détermination des usages mondains de l'époque impériale.'

⁷⁴ R. Parker, 'The values of Pliny', *Omnibus* 15 (1988), 6.

⁷⁵ 'No letter to a doctor, a philosopher, a freedman', as R. Syme, 'Correspondents of Pliny', *Historia* 34 (1985), 343 = *Roman Papers* 5 (1988), 460, remarks.

Pliny must, of course, have written such letters, but as Brunt, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 389 says, Pliny concerns himself with the 'duties of men of high station'.

⁷⁶ Veyne, *op. cit.* (n. 59), 9. One may be less disposed to agree with the end of the sentence, 'which falsely makes their author seem highly pleased with himself'.

⁷⁷ W. V. Harris, *Restraining Rage* (2001), 18, 312, 314.

⁷⁸ A. Riggsby, 'Self and community in the Younger Pliny', *Arethusa* 31 (1998), 75–97 stresses his construction of an image that would win community approval.

the requests made on behalf of his friends. His purpose here was clearly to celebrate his intentions and methods, not his material benefactions.⁷⁹ Book 10 comprising his correspondence with Trajan, which he probably did not intend to publish,⁸⁰ contains letters requesting favours on behalf of himself and others and letters of gratitude. Clearly Pliny is here not aiming for general approval; nor does he simply want the Emperor to approve his attitude. He has the more practical aim of succeeding in his requests and building up credit for future ones. Therefore he must be following the accepted etiquette punctiliously. Both the letters Pliny published and those he did not then show us the social code of approved practice, even if we may doubt whether it was as consistently observed as Pliny represents it, even in his own case.⁸¹

In *Letter* 1.8, Pliny spells out the rationale of his benefactions (*munificentiae ratio* (8)), in an example of teaching 'vel praeceptis vel exemplis' (*Ep.* 4.24.7). Pliny is here considering whether or not to publish the speech he had delivered to the local senate when he dedicated the library he built at Comum, a speech in which he had promised the further benefaction of an alimentary scheme for financial help with the rearing of children. The speech showed that his generosity sprang, not from impulse, but from the rational application of moral principles, and Pliny says that working over the speech helped him to avoid the regret that can follow impulsive generosity (8–9), as Seneca had pointed out (*Ben.* 4.10.2–3). Moreover it reinforced the freedom from avarice that goes with the love of generosity (cf. *Ben.* 4.14.4). Pliny next (10) discusses the excellence of what he chooses to give, thereby, he hopes, setting an *exemplum* (11–13, 17) — not games and gladiatorial contests, but something less popular yet in the public interest, i.e. incentives to rear children (12). Cicero in *De Officiis* 2.56 had spoken against giving games as a form of liberality, and, in Pliny's own time, Plutarch (*Mor.* 821F) and Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 66.8–9) condemned such entertainments. But Pliny also touches on the general theme of giving necessary, useful, and enduring things, rather than agreeable things that offer pleasure (1.8.10), with which we can compare Seneca's extended treatment in *De Beneficiis* 1.11–12.1–2. Finally, we find (14) a theme that concerns him also in *Letter* 5.1, that glory should follow, not be the motive for generosity. Here he adds that, if it does not follow, the deed is nonetheless a noble one. Cicero had stressed that liberality motivated by glory is more apparent than real (*Off.* 1.44) and that enduring repute follows only just conduct (2.71). It is one of Seneca's main themes in *De Beneficiis* that to confer *beneficia* is an *officium* for human beings and that one should give as an act of virtue, not to secure gain (4.11). Pliny closes his letter (15) with the reflection that one can be blamed for broadcasting one's own *beneficium*, or, as Seneca put it, 'Let the giver of a benefit hold his tongue' (*Ben.* 2.11.2).

Sometimes, as in *Letter* 1.19, Pliny not only explains the rationale behind his own actions but indicates what is expected of the other party in the transaction, the admonition being part of the etiquette of conferring the benefaction.⁸²

In *Letter* 9.30 Pliny is even more overtly didactic and sets out in general some of his criteria for true *liberalitas*. Everything he says can be easily paralleled in *De Officiis* or

⁷⁹ R. Syme, 'Pliny's less successful friends', *Historia* 9 (1960), 362–79 = *Roman Papers* 2 (1979), 477–95.

⁸⁰ The view that Pliny published Book 10 himself, advanced by G. Woolf ('Becoming Roman, staying Greek', *PCPhS* 40 (1995), 139), presents difficulties, of which the principal ones are: (i) that the letters finish abruptly during the term of his governorship, (ii) that *Ep.* 1.1 suggests that he only intended to publish letters by himself, a practice observed except in Book 10, and (iii) that *Ep.* 1.10.9 shows that he regarded letters written as part of professional duties as 'inlitteratissimas', whereas the letters Pliny published were 'paulo curatius scriptae'.

⁸¹ Bourdieu, op. cit. (n. 70), 110 says of what he calls 'official truth' that it 'has a practical efficacy, for even

if it were belied by the practice of everyone, like a grammatical rule to which every case proved an exception, it would still remain a true description of such practices as are intended to be acceptable. The ethic of honour bears down on each agent with the weight of all the other agents.'

⁸² 'Ego ne illud quidem admonere, quod admonere deberem, nisi scirem sponte facturum, ut dignitate a me data quam modestissime ut a me data utare.' J. Henderson, 'Finding homegrown talent – Pliny *Letters* 1.19', *Greece & Rome* 49 (2002), 223, in approving Guillemin's point, adds that such an admonition is paraded for our instruction: 'this is how such things are best done'.

De Beneficiis or both.⁸³ Liberality should be shown to one's country, one's relatives, one's connections, and one's friends. Pliny's order here matches Cicero's in *De Officiis* 1.58. Pliny then urges that liberality be directed at poor friends, not used as hooks in fishing for those who can give us most in return. This is also the advice of Cicero (*Off.* 1.49; 2.61; 69–71), and Seneca, who even uses the same image (*Ben.* 4.20.3, cf. 4.3.1; 4.10.5). The idea that one should fit one's generosity to one's resources (cf. *Ep.* 2.4.3) and not find the means of helping one person by taking from another is also strenuously argued by Cicero (*Off.* 1.42–3; 2.54–5) and mentioned by Seneca (*Ben.* 2.15.3). The aim of all this, Pliny says, is, by helping those in need, to move in an 'unbroken circle of *socialitas*' — 'friendly relationships' or 'fellowship'. Like Cicero and Seneca, Pliny associates liberality with social bonding.

The letter presents us with three levels of conduct: that of the general run of men, said to be governed by greed; that of the friend who practises liberality but not perhaps to the highest standard; and that of Pliny's moral demands. Pliny clearly represents himself as advocating an elevated ideal on the level of the philosophers, but he presents it as a mere refinement of the presumed 'imperfecta liberalitas' praised by his correspondent with Pliny's endorsement ('quae cuncta si facit iste, usquequaque laudandus est; si unum aliquid, minus quidem, laudandus autem'). Pliny thus maintains his rapport with his readers, represented by his correspondent, even while exhorting them to greater heights.

That Pliny is expounding the code professed by his readership shows too in the fact that he regularly parts company with the philosophers just where one would expect Roman values to do so, namely, over the question of glory. In *Letter* 5.1.13 he confesses that he is not 'tam sapiens' (not enough of a philosophical Wise Man) to be indifferent to the recognition he has received for his generosity. This is also where his expectation of his readers' approval is most apparent, for they can hardly be expected to miss the point that the publication of the *Letters* performed just that self-praise before a wider audience that Pliny struggles, throughout *Letter* 1.8, to eschew.⁸⁴

Given what we have said about the reception Pliny expects from his readers, the fact that the ideal he presents closely resembles Seneca's must suggest that the code Seneca advocates is not remote from that widely accepted at Rome in the class conferring benefactions. Pliny teaches by example an ideal of social relationships that closely resembles Seneca's. What Seneca supplies, and what is totally lacking in Pliny, is the systematic analysis of the code and its grounding in a general theory about the nature of the universe and the nature of man.

What may seem to be lacking in both Cicero and Seneca, and even in Pliny, is the perspective of those who feel that they are not involved in horizontal relationships, but are permanently at a disadvantage; the view that we are given by the Augustan and Flavian poets, or, particularly as regards relations with the emperor, by Epictetus.⁸⁵ This does not mean that the theory presented in *De Beneficiis* should be construed as a mode of euphemization in Bourdieu's terms, in which an objective reality of inequality, based on self-interested, economically-based transactions and relationships, is being deliberately disguised as a set of disinterested moral transactions and relationships between equals, with the purpose of maintaining the inequality in the interests of those who benefit from it.⁸⁶ As we have seen (pp. 96–7), Seneca does not disguise the fact that recipients of beneficence often feel in the power of their benefactors and struggle to free

⁸³ H.-P. Büttler, *Die geistige Welt des jüngeren Plinius* (1970), 127 notes parallels with Cicero and Seneca; C. E. Manning, 'Liberalitas — the decline and rehabilitation of a virtue', *Greece & Rome* 32 (1985), 74–5 concentrates on the parallels in this and other Pliny letters with Cicero's arguments which 'had become part of the intellectual furniture of Rome's ruling classes'.

⁸⁴ E. W. Leach, 'Politics of self-representation in Pliny's *Letters* and Roman portrait sculpture', *CA* 9 (1990), 14–39, shrewdly comments at 28, 'We may suspect that he has no clear program for improving the speech in mind. Rather he raises the question of

publication as an excuse to supplement the content of the speech by an exterior clarification of his intentions'. Cf. S. E. Hoffer, *The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger* (1999), 101, 109–10.

⁸⁵ F. Millar, 'Epictetus and the imperial Court', *JRS* 55 (1965), 147 points out that Epictetus is a good counterfoil to Pliny in being critical of the values and aspirations of Roman society.

⁸⁶ So Bourdieu, op. cit. (n. 70), 105–7, 126–9, in post-Marxist vein, likes to represent the verbalizations of its own practice within a society: 'the official norm and the native theory reinforce the repression of the objective truth' (107).

themselves of the burden (*Ben.* 2.23–4; 4.40; 5.20.2; 6.35.2–4; 6.40.2; 7.26.3; cf. 2.17.6). Moreover, he had his own idea of the underlying social function served by gift-exchange (above, p. 101). Finally, such a view fails to do justice to the elaboration and subtlety of what is clearly designed as a serious guide to practice. Seneca is not setting out to misdescribe reality: he is urging his readers to realize an ideal they share. It is at the level of practice that euphemism may be necessary, but the etiquette of personal interaction, as we shall see, is more subtle than Bourdieu suggests, requiring in fact a complex combination of egalitarianism and deference.

THE ARISTOCRATIC CODE AND THE PRINCEPS

Seneca's treatise, as we noted (p. 94), bears the marks of the significant social changes that accompanied the change from the Republic to the new political system. Epictetus puts it neatly in his picture of the rich successful man at Rome: 'What could anyone imagine you to need? You are rich, you have children, possibly also a wife and many slaves. Caesar knows you, you have many friends, you perform the duties appropriate to you, you know how to reward benefits and return injuries' (2.14.18). In the last sentence, the other elements are familiar from the Republic; the first, 'Caesar knows you' sets us in a new world. Seneca writes with the ruler and the ruled in mind. 'He has given me this [office] but gave more to him and gave sooner to that man', he says of the *cursus honorum* (*Ben.* 2.28.1). Most of the Roman examples of generosity concern the emperors, who are shown giving money to individual senators (1.15.6; 2.8.1; 2.27.1–2) or conferring magistracies (1.5.1; 2.27.4–28.2; 4.28.2 (nominally about a *rex*)) or pardoning individuals (2.12.1; 3.27). Moreover, whereas Cicero's harsh criticism of the euergetism of his day shows how important a role it played in the political competition of the Late Republic, communal benefits, when Seneca mentions them at all, emanate from the emperors, who are shown giving *congiaria* (4.28.2) or making grants of citizenship and immunity to whole peoples (6.19.2–5). For, under the Principate, political stability, as well as the supremacy of the Princesps, required that such ostentation *in Rome itself* had to be suppressed or rigidly controlled. Whereas Cicero's treatise reflects the fact that his peers were motivated by political ambition to adorn Rome with buildings, Seneca names only Agrippa as having contributed public buildings in the city (*Off.* 2.60; *Ben.* 3.32.4). For when senators outside the imperial house lost the right to celebrate triumphs under Augustus, they also lost the ability to erect new public buildings in the capital.⁸⁷ Again, whereas Cicero's treatise reflects the fact that his peers competed in popularity by the giving of lavish games, Seneca mentions only the refusal by L. Julius Graecinus of contributions to his *ludi* from immoral individuals (*Ben.* 2.21.5–6). For the Princesps' games now outclassed anything the magistrates could provide.⁸⁸ Large public dinners seem to be the only form of large-scale relatively impersonal entertainment envisaged by Seneca as being given by men in public life (*Ben.* 1.14.1; 4.28.6): Seneca was to urge his friend Lucilius, a procurator, to retire from public life and from his involvement in such activities (*Ep.* 19.11).

How was the aristocratic code of beneficence to assimilate this new phenomenon of the Princesps? It is notable that Seneca is often vague in his description of benefits. Of the examples given earlier, those concerning magistracies are not explicitly attributed to the Princesps, though the parallel passage in *Ira* 3.31.2 makes it difficult to contest. For Seneca does not merely reflect the realities of the new situation: he wants to make it clear that, in general, the advice he offers on conferring benefactions applies to the

⁸⁷ W. Eck, 'Senatorial self-representation: developments in the Augustan period', in F. Millar and E. Segal (eds), *Caesar Augustus* (1984), 129–67.

⁸⁸ In Nero's reign indeed, one of his favourites, the praetor Fabricius Veiento, registered his protest at Nero's putting beyond the reach of magistrates the provision of chariot races, by training dogs for racing

rather than horses (Dio Cassius 61.6; Suet., *Nero* 22). Nero responded by contributing prizes, and other generous emperors provided help, but in such a way as to produce uniformity and reduce competition within the élite, so that the Senate enjoyed a corporate eminence well below his own.

Princes. This is made unambiguous by the treatment of one of his principal themes, i.e. that a *beneficium*, to be a virtuous act, must be rational: though only the Wise Man can judge with infallible correctness when, where, why, how, and to whom benefits should be given (*Ep.* 81.10), all others should use their reason to the best of their ability (2.16.1; 4.9.3).⁸⁹ Augustus and Claudius are juxtaposed as good and bad examples, the senator Passienus Crispus being quoted for the telling comparison, 'From the deified Augustus I would rather have the judgement, from Claudius the benefit' (1.15.3-6).⁹⁰ Seneca and the other imperial writers in fact expect the emperor to exercise judgement and to use the same criteria as they and their peers used when conferring benefactions or securing them as intermediaries from each other.⁹¹

Seneca is, as usual, raising to the level of theory the concepts and standards of Roman society in his own time. Modern scholars, however, impressed by the lack of institutionalized systems of promotion in Rome, have often been tempted to conclude that the Princes and his 'brokers' dispensed patronage in return for loyalty and in response to influence and did not judge potential beneficiaries according to desert. In Saller's words, 'No attempt was made to transcend the particularistic criterion of patronage by the introduction of the universalistic and rational criteria of seniority and merit (in the modern sense)', or as Hannah Cotton has put it 'gifts were not deserved but magnanimously bestowed'.⁹² But recently Werner Eck has suggested that the needs of the imperial administration would require rational if flexible promotion procedures, rather than arbitrary ones, and that the Emperor would have to take into account, not only loyalty, social and political status, and influential support, but experience and competence: the experience would be general, but suited to the demands of the particular post.⁹³ Indeed the ancient evidence suggests that imperial patronage was exercised on the basis of qualities according to which men *can* be rationally assessed and compared, but the merits considered were not specific skills or experience, but industry, honesty, literacy, and general good character.⁹⁴

Pliny's *Letters* provide a parallel. He confirms Seneca's idea that the Princes, like other benefactors, is expected to exercise *iudicium*.⁹⁵ He had praised Trajan in the *Panegyricus* for liberality that showed *iudicium*, and for encouraging industry, integrity, and thrift by giving good men priesthoods and provinces and by showing that they enjoyed his friendship and his approbation (44.7-8). Just as Pliny, in noting the support he received from the senior senator Verginius Rufus, says that priests 'nominate men they judge highly worthy of priesthoods' (*Ep.* 2.1.8), so Pliny, in asking the Princes for a priesthood, starts his request, 'Since I know, *domine*, that to be honoured by the judgement of such a good Princes lends approbation to my good character' (10.13). Later, he writes to a well-wisher, 'You rightly congratulate me, first because it is glorious to win a mark of approbation (*iudicium* again) from so noble a Princes' (*Ep.* 4.8.1). And again, just as Pliny persuaded a provincial governor that Suetonius *deserved* a military tribunate (3.8.3), so, in the case of a young man for whom he had secured the *latus clavus* and the quaestorship from Trajan, he is anxious that the judgement of the whole Senate should confirm the opinion that he himself had induced the Princes to have of him, and he goes on to list the candidate's virtues (2.9.2-3). And just as he recommends

⁸⁹ Cicero had also stressed the need for rational discrimination in *Off.* 1.49, and we find it in Polybius' portrait of the younger Scipio (31.28.10-11).

⁹⁰ See above: Tiberius is used to illustrate the point that discrimination should not mean censure.

⁹¹ *Ann.* 1.75.3-4; 2.48.3, and *Hist.* 1.52 where Vitellius' generosity is criticized as 'sine modo, sine iudicio'. Fronto, *Ad M. Caes.* 5.52; Dio Cass. 71.19, cf. 52.15.3, 19.1-2; *SHA Hadr.* 10.3-6.

⁹² Saller, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 110; H. Cotton, 'The concept of *indulgentia* under Trajan', *Chiron* 14 (1984), 265.

⁹³ W. Eck, 'Spezialisierung in der staatlichen Administration des römischen Reiches in der hohen Kaiserzeit', in L. de Blois (ed.), *Administration, Prosopography and Appointment Policies in the Roman Empire* (2001), 1-23; idem, 'Imperial administration

and epigraphy', in A. Bowman, H. Cotton, M. Goodman and S. Price (eds), *Representations of Empire*, Proceedings of the British Academy 114 (2002), 131-52. He is principally concerned to establish the operation of rules, socio-political norms, in the promotion of officials at all levels.

⁹⁴ Marcus Aurelius' letter of appointment to Domitius Marsianus as equestrian procurator (*AE* 1962, 183a) notes that continued imperial favour will require continued *innocentia, diligentia, experientia*.

⁹⁵ Guillemin, *op. cit.* (n. 73), 5-6; 10 shows that letters of recommendation must enumerate the virtues of the person recommended to show he is worthy of the favour. In Pliny's published letters, acquiring glory for the person praised with a wider public and with posterity is an additional motive.

Voconius Romanus to the governor of Lower Germany, giving reasons for his request in terms of his friend's 'studia, mores, omnem denique vitam' (2.13,10-11), so Pliny mentions in the same letter that he had secured Romanus the *ius trium liberorum* from the Princeps who bestows these privileges 'parce et cum delectu' (2.13.8). Moreover, in requesting promotion for his friends, whether from provincial governors or from the Princeps, Pliny often casts his requests in such vague terms that we have to guess what precisely is being requested (e.g. *Epp.* 2.13; 3.2; 10.26, 85-7). Pliny means to stress that the judgement implicit in a benefaction is more valuable than the benefit. As he says, after listing the good qualities of Voconius Romanus, 'Though you grant him the highest office in our power, you could give him nothing better than your friendship. It was in order to convince you that he is worthy of it and even of your closest intimacy that I have thus briefly sketched for you his interests, his character, in fact his whole life' (2.13.10).⁹⁶

The code being applied is not a new one. The Republican code of benefactions among members of that class continued under the Principate and was now applied to the Princeps: he was to be judged by the same standards as they.⁹⁷ That was natural, since, in theory, the Princeps was one among equals and it was in the interests of all parties concerned that the theory be respected. Thus, on this same subject of discrimination in giving, Cicero's letters attest the same expectations for the Republic. The letters prove that, when he insisted in *De Officiis* 1.49 that judgement be exercised in conferring benefits, that was not just an unrealistic ideal. In *Ad Familiares* 13, he speaks of the enumeration of virtues as an intrinsic part of letters of recommendation (*Fam.* 13.10.3), and in many of these letters there is at least as much emphasis on the worthiness of the recipient and the judgement of the potential benefactor as there is on the weight of Cicero's advocacy and relationship with the benefactor, e.g. *Fam.* 13.51; 13.6 (especially para. 4); 13.78 — letters in which this emphasis is all the clearer because, as in some of Pliny's letters, what is actually being requested is itself left vague.

THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF CIVILITAS

More important was the question of the etiquette that was to govern relations *between* the Princeps and his nominal peers. It is the importance of this theme that probably explains why Seneca concentrated on generosity to individuals of similar status and largely omitted the treatment of mass benefactions. If it were just a matter of making clear that, as a donor, the Princeps can be held to the same standards as his nominal peers, Seneca could have applied to imperial euergetism in Rome the same standards that had once applied to that practised by the governing class in the Republic, and that still applied to civic munificence under the Empire. This transfer of corporate munificence by the Roman upper orders is well documented in the *Letters* of the Younger Pliny and in the massive evidence of inscriptions, which show that the phenomenon is continuous from the Late Republic but gains momentum under the Principate. Senators and equestrians often maintained close ties with their own home towns, and, though senators enjoyed exemption from certain burdens in their

⁹⁶ 'Nihil licet tribuas ei quantum amplissimum potes, nihil tamen amplius potes amicitia tua; cuius esse eum usque ad intimam familiaritatem capacem quo magis scires, breviter tibi studia mores omnem denique vitam eius expressi.' See H. Cotton, 'Military tribunes and the exercise of patronage', *Chiron* 11 (1981), 237-8. Eck, *op. cit.* (n. 93, 2002), 142 connects the vagueness with the existence of norms of promotion

which guided expectations: both parties to the recommendation knew what was appropriate.

⁹⁷ Kloft, *op. cit.* (n. 50), 162, cf. 149 stresses that the ideal of liberality applied to the Princeps rested on the values of the Roman *nobiles* and on those contained in Hellenistic monarchical ideals, which were themselves based on Greek aristocratic culture.

home towns, many willingly assumed burdensome office there and conferred benefactions.⁹⁸ Emperors encouraged the practice, and senators hoped to gain advancement by complying.⁹⁹ The way Pliny treats Trajan's *congiaria* and alimentary schemes in the *Panegyricus* (25–8), when compared to the way he describes his own generosity to his home town of Comum in Letter 1.8, shows how similar standards could have been applied by Seneca to the Princeps and others, including some of the qualities that Seneca demands in individual giving, such as not basing generosity on wealth gained in dubious ways, and giving only truly useful gifts.¹⁰⁰ But Seneca prefers to concentrate on the area where the Princeps and his nominal peers were involved in exchanges with each other. The extension of the Republican code of liberality to the Princeps meant that relations between members of the upper orders and the Princeps were to follow the same etiquette as obtained among themselves. Since the Romans saw these individual gift exchanges as part of a horizontal web, to include the Princeps in that network and the code of behaviour that governed it, was to hold him to the exercise of *comitas*, the social side of *civilitas*.

Seneca in fact sketches the proper demeanour of the Princeps as benefactor, using Caligula as counter-example: 'The gifts that please are those that are bestowed with a look of humanity, or at any rate of gentleness and kindness, by one who, although my superior when he gave them, did not exalt himself above me, but with all the generosity he could muster, put himself on terms of equality with me and banished all display from his giving' (*Ben.* 2.12–13.3). Seneca here touches on something of crucial importance. Pliny points out that Trajan, in contrast with his predecessor, acknowledges obligations and confers benefits, 'seeing himself not as a mighty Princeps but as a not ungrateful friend'.¹⁰¹ *Amicitia* is a fundamentally equal relationship, and the use of the word *amicus* here points to the way in which the etiquette that had been developed in the Republic could be used to mask the realities of power and to reinforce the requirements of imperial *civilitas*. For that etiquette was still in use in the Principate. Thus Pliny tell us that the senior consular Corellius Rufus, who helped him in the early stages of his career, treated him even when he was a mere *adulescentulus* 'ut aequalis' and mentioned him on his deathbed as his particular 'amicus' (*Ep.* 4.17.6, 9). Pliny continued to use *amicus* of his own inferiors in rank or age when recommending them.¹⁰²

The Romans knew that they had a hierarchical society, and defended it, but in social relations between individuals of the upper classes, notably senators and equites, a pretence of equality was supposed to be maintained by the superior party, whatever deference was actually shown, and indeed expected, from the inferior. Cicero had made Laelius explain (*Amic.* 69–71) that in friendship superior and inferior should stand on terms of equality, that the superior in intellect, fortune, or position (*dignitas*) should make himself equal to the inferior and seek to raise him to his own level by his aid and support. Pliny may advise the provincial governor Calestrius Tiro to respect the 'distinctions of class and rank' in his province (*Ep.* 9.5.3), but he counsels the young Junius Avitus (*Ep.* 2.6) not to insult people he invites to dinner by serving different food to *amici*, *minores amici*, and *liberti*. D'Arms has pointed to the ideals of the Roman *convivium* — equality, friendship-making, relaxation of social barriers — and shown

⁹⁸ W. Eck, T. Drew-Bear, and P. Herrmann, 'Sacrae Litterae', *Chiron* 7 (1977), 355–83; W. Eck, 'Die Präsenz senatorischer Familien in den Städten des Imperium Romanum bis zum späten 3. Jahrhundert', in W. Eck, H. Galsterer and H. Wolff (eds), *Studien zur antiken Sozialgeschichte* (1980), 283–322: many examples of benefactions in Italy by senators in the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods are listed on pp. 295–6.

⁹⁹ Pliny, *Ep.* 10.8.1. See Leach, op. cit. (n. 84), 29; Hoffer, op. cit. (n. 84), 94–7. In the period from Augustus to Trajan senators adopted formally as *patroni* of communities — an honour usually conferred in recognition of benefactions, or in hopes of them, or both — were not natives of the towns, so their benefactions were spread even more widely than those

of the *equites* (J. Nicols, 'Pliny and the patronage of communities', *Hermes* 108 (1980), 365–85). This important activity meant that the governing élite of Rome was not confined to the 'court' and limited to passing on favours from the emperor to others.

¹⁰⁰ Though Seneca was aware that discrimination between recipients on grounds of merit was not to be applied here: 'A king gives offices to the worthy, but a *congiarium* even to the unworthy' (*Ben.* 4.28.2, cf. 6).

¹⁰¹ *Pan.* 60.6: 'non tibi magnus princeps, sed non ingratus amicus videris.'

¹⁰² Of equestrians like Voconius Romanus (*Ep.* 2.13.2, 5); Arrianus Maturus (3.2.1); Suetonius (3.8.3); the elder Nymphidius Lupus (10.87.1); or young *senatorii* like Junius Naso (6.6.5).

how the literature of the Republic and early Principate celebrates them, while providing evidence, as Pliny does here, for the harsher realities.¹⁰³ The etiquette of equality within the upper orders may have served in the Republic to strengthen the cohesiveness of the ruling oligarchy. With the advent of the Principate, it acquired a new importance.

The complex efforts to mask with politeness inequalities that had long existed in Roman society undoubtedly made it easier for the Princeps to maintain the mask of his position. As Wallace-Hadrill has noted, the kiss with which the Princeps greeted senators was a mark of equality already current in Cicero's day. Pliny praises Trajan for dining on terms of equality with the guests, unlike his unnamed predecessor (*Pan.* 49.4–8). But even Domitian's flatterers had stressed his inclusion of all *ordines* and his personal participation (Martial 8.50; Statius, *Silvae* 1.6.43–50).¹⁰⁴ The Emperor's *amici*, while enjoying his *beneficia* (*Pan.* 85.8), could, if they chose, believe in the flattering implication of equality, just as Pliny's equestrian friends Atilius Crescens and Romatius Firmus could boast of their *amicitia* with Pliny (*Ep.* 6.8.2; 1.19). Augustus' letters to Horace show him scrupulously maintaining a pose of friendship and equality: 'Assume that you have some rights with me, as if you were sharing my table. Such behaviour would be right and proper . . .' One can compare the similarly encouraging remarks that Seneca recommends to the givers of large benefits: 'Next time you will claim in your own right whatever you need; this once I pardon your bashfulness.'¹⁰⁵

The reverse of this assumed equality is the courtesy of exaggerated deference, which also characterized relationships within the élite. Seneca, discussing the right manner in which to accept benefits, lays down that we should not display indifference and reluctance in taking the gift, nor, at the other extreme, be submissive and humble (*Ben.* 2.24.2), and later on in Book 3, Seneca shows why it is so important to find just the right level. Petitioners may say, 'The memory of your benefit will live always in my heart' or 'I will be yours to command and serve', but later they think these compliments degrading and unworthy of a free man, banish the benefit from their memory, and become ungrateful (*Ben.* 3.5.2). Yet even the examples of the language Seneca recommends may strike us as rather fulsome: 'you do not know what it is that you have bestowed on me, but you ought to know how much more it is than you think'; 'I shall never be able to return gratitude for this, but at any rate I shall not cease to declare everywhere that I cannot return it'; 'the only injury that I have ever received from you is this — you have forced me to live and die an ingrate' (*Ben.* 2.24.4–2.5.1).¹⁰⁶

The frequent use of the term *indulgentia* in Pliny's letters to Trajan has been studied by Hannah Cotton, who concludes that the word emphasizes a relation between unequals, such as father and son: 'The likening of the emperor to a father and the insistence on his *indulgentia* conflicts with the image of a *princeps civilis*, the *princeps* as a fellow-citizen, a fellow-senator, an equal, a friend — *amicus*.'¹⁰⁷ It is certainly true that the primary use of *indulgentia* in the Republic to characterize the filial relationship still obtained in the early Empire (Cicero, *De Orat.* 2.168, cf. the *SC de Pisone patre* 1.59) and that the noun and its adjectival and verbal forms are often used of the Princeps.¹⁰⁸ However, Pliny uses the verb in requests to others. In *Ep.* 9.24.1 he is pleased that a friend has 'indulged his prayers' on behalf of his freedman, and in *Ep.* 4.15 he asks Minicius Fundanus, the consul designate, 'indulge precibus meis' (11) since the Senate will show indulgence to his support ('cuius et suffragio senatus libentissime

¹⁰³ J. H. D'Arms, 'The Roman *convivium* and the idea of equality', in O. Murray (ed.), *Symptotica: A Symposium on the Symposium* (1990), 308–19.

¹⁰⁴ 'The kiss: The imperial court', *CAH X²* (1996), 291. On the reality under Domitian: D'Arms, op. cit. (n. 103), 309 and P. Zanker, 'Domitian's palace on the Palatine and the imperial image', in Bowman, Cotton, Goodman and Price, op. cit. (n. 93), 105–30.

¹⁰⁵ Suet., *Vit. Hor.*: 'Sume tibi aliquid *iuris* apud me, tamquam si convictor mihi fueris. Recte enim et non temere feceris . . .'; Sen., *Ben.* 2.3.2: 'postea,

quidquid desiderabis, tuo *iure* exiges; semel rusticitati tuae ignoscetur.'

¹⁰⁶ Though the last of these is addressed to Augustus Caesar, the way Seneca presents his suggestions up to that point indicates that his advice is general.

¹⁰⁷ Cotton, op. cit. (n. 92), 266.

¹⁰⁸ Pliny, *Epp.* 2.13.8; 10.2.2; 10.3A; 10.4.1, 5; 10.5.1; 10.6.2; 10.8.4, 6; 10.10.2; 10.11.1, 2; 10.12.1, 2; 10.13; 10.21.1; 10.23.1; 10.24; 10.26.2; 10.51.2; 10.86B; 10.87.3; 10.92; 10.94.3; 10.104; 10.106; 10.112.1; 10.120.2.

indulgeat'(13)).¹⁰⁹ In the *Senatusconsultum de Pisone patre*, the inscribed senatorial decree giving the official version of the trial of Cn. Calpurnius Piso, the Princeps himself is the object of the Senate's indulgence. By pardoning Piso's wife Plancina in accordance with the request of the Princeps' mother Livia, supported by Tiberius, the Senate is represented as supporting and indulging Livia and the Princeps' devotion to his mother: 'the Senate thinks that to Iulia Augusta . . . and to the supreme piety of our Princeps towards his mother, support and indulgence should be accorded' (lines 115-19).¹¹⁰

In Pliny's correspondence, *indulgentia* is used by Pliny of Trajan, not by Trajan of himself, except in *Ep.* 10.24 where Trajan says that he and Pliny together can indulge the desire of the people of Prusa to have a new bath ('possumus desiderio eorum indulgere'). Titus uses it of himself about generosity to a city; Nerva of willingness to confirm in general past benefits to all.¹¹¹ But it would be heavy-handed if used to an individual.

The use of the concept *indulgentia* shows up, not the explicit ascendancy of the Emperor, but the attempt by good emperors and their ostensible peers to use the same language of liberality, the same elaborate mixture of egalitarianism and deference, as characterized their social relations in general. It is worth noting that 'domine', Pliny's usual way of addressing Trajan in his letters to the Emperor was a relatively informal, subliterate term commonly used in Roman social relations where respect, courtesy, or, at most, polite deference was being shown.¹¹² The author of the *Laus Pisonis* in Seneca's own time gives a picture of noblesse oblige that shows the mixture clearly: he shows *indulgentia* to poor *cultores*, but he loves them *ex aequo*, having regard not to their fortune or birth, but their character. Unlike those who subject a *tenuis amicus* or *cliens* to humiliations, in Piso's home 'a uniform tenor of friendship encompasses highest and lowest': by including them among his *aequales amicos*, he teaches them *obsequium* and acquires affection by showing affection (109-31).

THE PRINCEPS AND RECIPROCATION

In Pliny's praise of Trajan already mentioned, he speaks of him as 'a not ungrateful friend' (*Pan.* 60.6). This touches on the key problem of reciprocity. If the Princeps is to fit into the aristocratic pattern of *beneficia* and *gratia*, there must be the possibility of repayment. Though Seneca speaks of '*principes* or *reges* whom fortune has placed in positions where they can give many gifts but can receive very few, and those very unequal to what has been given', he then goes on to say, 'Nevertheless, it is possible for us to tender assistance, as their pre-eminent power rests upon the consent and service of their inferiors (*minores*)' (*Ben.* 5.4.2-3). Then later on, 'I will show you what those at the summit of power are in need of, what the man who possesses everything lacks — someone, in fact, who will tell him the truth, who will deliver him from the constant cant and falsehood that so bewilder him with lies that the very habit of listening to flatteries instead of facts has brought him to the point of not knowing what the truth really is' (*Ben.* 6.30.3). It is particularly important for the Princeps to assume the possibility of real reciprocity by others. Nerva, expressing his desire to confirm benefits conceded by his predecessors, speaks of people otherwise *owing* them to him — a kind of financial language often used, as we have seen, in these exchanges. In reporting

¹⁰⁹ An imperial procurator under Hadrian received a dedication in Mauretania from a fellow-citizen of his native town of Saldæ 'to his most indulgent friend for benefits which he had bestowed on himself' ('amico indulgentissimo ob beneficia quae in se contulit', *CIL* 8.20684).

¹¹⁰ W. Eck, A. Caballos and F. Fernández, *Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* (1996), 39-50, lines 115-18. The whole passage runs: 'senatum arbitrari et Iuliae Aug(ustae), optume de r(e) p(ublica) merita non partu tantum modo principis nostri, sed

etiam multis magnisq(ue) erga cuiusq(ue) ordinis homines beneficis, quae, cum iure meritoq(ue) plurimum posse <t> in eo, quod a senatu petere deberet, parcissime uteretur eo, et principis nostri summa <e> erga matrem suam pietati suffragandum indulgendumq(ue) esse remittiq(ue) poenam Plancinae placere.'

¹¹¹ *AE* 1962, no. 288; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.58.8.

¹¹² E. Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address* (2002), 96-104.

the blanket extension by Trajan of an exemption from inheritance tax, Pliny speaks of 'giving up so many occasions for conferring benefits and so many opportunities for claiming credit and putting people in his debt' (Plin., *Ep.* 10.58.9; *Pan.* 39.3).¹¹³ The Princeps must also show gratitude. Seneca contrasts Julius Caesar who, when prompted, showed gratitude to a soldier who had saved his life in the civil war, with Tiberius who, even when prompted, refused to remember services received before he came to power (*Ben.* 5.25.1-2). But not only service received before accession needed to be requited. As Pliny says of Trajan, 'Everyone is made to feel that he has given as much as he has received from you. Your generosity leaves me with nothing to ask, except that you will always create these mutual obligations, and so leave your citizens in doubt whether they do better as your debtors or your creditors' (*Pan.* 60.7).

The pretence has to be preserved from the other side as well. Thus Pliny, writing to Trajan, speaks of 'not venturing to respond with equivalent gratitude, however much it may be in my power to do so', thus preserving the theory of reciprocation while flatteringly avowing his inability to match Trajan's liberality on this particular occasion (*Ep.* 10.51). More striking is the language used in the senatorial decree mentioned above (see n. 110). The Senate represents the senatorial pardon of Plancina, not as their response to an exercise of power by Livia (and the Princeps), but as an act of reciprocation, a favour earned by Livia 'who had served the commonwealth superlatively, not only in giving birth to our *princeps* but also through her many great *beneficia* towards men of every rank, and who rightly and deservedly could have supreme influence in what she asked from the Senate, but used that influence sparingly' (lines 115-19).

The best way to establish a convincing appearance of equality is to be able on occasion to reciprocate in kind, rather than always offering in return the marks of an unequal friendship. Though Seneca does not envisage 'kings and rulers' as the only persons of power needing frank advice (*Ep.* 123.9), it is hard to maintain a pretence of equality in this role. Indeed Aristotle had made it a mark of unequal friendship that, when exchanges of benefits take place, they are different in kind: material advantage on one side; honour and service on the other (*NE* 8.14.1163b1-5; 1163b13-16). For Saller, this is a characteristic of a patronage relationship.¹¹⁴ Seneca in fact insists that not only loyalty and frank advice but more ordinary gifts can be given to the Princeps himself, as to kings, in reciprocation: 'a house, a slave, money' (*Ben.* 7.4.2, cf. 3.18.3). Like many others, Seneca no doubt left a considerable amount of money to the Emperor in his will.¹¹⁵ Augustus' behaviour showed full recognition of the significance of testamentary gifts and the proper etiquette to be observed with regard to them. According to Suetonius, he made it clear that he desired a return of good will (*benevolentia mutua*) from his *amici*, when they were alive and also when they were dead. He attached great importance to the wills of his friends and openly expressed pleasure or displeasure at what they wrote about him and the amount they left him. His attitude was made all the clearer because he would not take under the wills of men unknown to him. Being involved in such horizontal exchanges enabled the Princeps to demonstrate his adherence to the aristocratic code in receiving benefactions, not just in giving them. The fact that his friends were reciprocating in kind was confirmed, as they no doubt anticipated, by his own will. For he was similarly generous, naming many friends, along with relatives, as heirs in the third degree, besides leaving legacies to many of his friends.

¹¹³ Even less generous emperors who, as Saller, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 69 says, 'manipulate *beneficia* in order to put people in their debt' are subscribing to the theory that reciprocation is possible.

¹¹⁴ Saller, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 1.

¹¹⁵ Griffin, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 294, n. 1.

CONCLUSION

De Beneficiis is a work of moral philosophy in which Seneca explores the proper way to give, receive, and return gifts and favours. To the modern eye it has close affinities with the kind of analysis of social conduct, here gift-exchange, which is the province of sociologists or social anthropologists. Though more systematic and self-conscious in his thinking than most of his contemporaries, Seneca was not challenging and unmasking the morality that policed the activity of gift exchange in the upper orders. Rather he was reinforcing the code at its most demanding level, grounding it in a metaphysical theory of man and the universe, and bringing out its contribution to social cohesion. The network of horizontal relationships created by favours that we see in *De Beneficiis* is not a purely philosophical ideal, but a shared social ideal. For it is apparent from the testimony of less theoretical writers that Seneca reflects the language and social etiquette characteristic of relations within the upper orders in the early Principate. This code was continuous with the Republic, and Seneca reflects and supports the adaptation of that traditional aristocratic code to the existence of the new phenomenon of the Princeps. By making it clear that the Princeps was expected to practise beneficence according to that code and relate to his peers as they did to each other, he was strengthening the social side of *civilitas*.

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