Seneca and Pliny

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A century after Cicero’s death, another Roman senator, also a gifted orator, again demonstrated the power of philosophical writing in Latin,¹ but in a different vein and a different style.² Like Cicero Seneca regarded the moralis pars philosophiae, which traditionally included political theory, as the most important branch of philosophy,³ but unlike Cicero, who used a leisureed periodic style suited to the balanced tone of a sceptical Academic, Seneca expounded ethics in a nervous epigrammatic style suited to the passionate tone of a committed Stoic. And whereas Cicero had been inspired by the example of Plato and the Peripatetics to compose a de Re Publica and to embark on a de Legibus, Seneca did not write about the relative merits of different constitutions and showed little confidence in what could be achieved by legislation.⁴ Indeed it is often said that Seneca showed no interest in political theory and restricted the moralis pars philosophiae to individual ethics.⁵

Similar points have been made about Hellenistic philosophy itself, including Stoicism, and Seneca’s de Clementia, his most explicit work of political theory, is clearly indebted to lost Hellenistic works on kingship, of which there were many Stoic examples.⁶ Moreover, between Cicero’s time and Seneca’s there had been important political developments with the advent of the Principate. Cicero had placed his faith in the Roman Republican constitution which, he believed, had once realized the Greek ideal of the mixed constitution, equitable and durable. The divisive trends he perceived, however, led to protracted civil wars and Caesar’s dictatorship, which shattered the dream of constitutional

¹ Quint. Inst. x.1.123–4 could find few other philosophical writers worthy of mention. Seneca’s contemporaries Musonius Rufus and Epictetus discoursed in Greek.
² For recent bibliography and survey articles on Seneca see Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt ii.36.3 (1989): 1545–2012.
³ Ep. 89.18. Even in his Natural Questions moral concerns are paramount.
⁴ Clem. 1.23, Ben. 111.16.1; cf. Tac. Ann. xvi.27.
⁶ Persaeus (D.L.vii.36); Cleanthes (D.L. vii.173); Sphaerus (D.L. vii.178).
The new political system designed by Augustus, while claiming constitutional continuity with the old, was actually an unavowed autocracy with a royal family and an imperial court.

The career of Seneca himself illustrates how things had changed. Born in Corduba in Spain of Italian immigrant stock, Seneca had his senatorial career interrupted by an eight year period of exile because of a liaison with one of the emperor’s sisters and was recalled in AD 49 through the intervention of another of Caligula’s sisters, now married to the emperor Claudius. Agrippina wanted him to tutor her son Nero in rhetoric. However much his attainment of the consulship from non-senatorial beginnings might seem to parallel the career of Cicero, in the pages of Tacitus Seneca ascribes his rise to power to Nero: ‘You have heaped on me enormous influence and immeasurable wealth so that I often think to myself, “Am I, sprung from equestrian and provincial origin, counted among the leaders of state?”’ (Ann. xiv.53). Indeed Seneca could exercise far more political influence as adviser to Nero than as a senior senator. The new system, relying, as it did, on a disjunction between constitutional forms and the practical workings of government, did not suggest that analysis of the constitutional forms was the key to understanding and reforming government and society.

That does not mean that Seneca’s writings are only concerned with individual ethics. Indeed, no reader of Seneca can fail to see how much his practical interest in public life and political events was reflected in what he wrote. Not only does he explicitly claim in de Clementia that Stoic doctrine was an appropriate source of advice for principes (Clem. ii.5.2), but he elsewhere speaks candidly of the difficulties faced by imperial amici in trying to tell the Princeps the truth (Ben. vi.32). The numerous examples he draws from recent Roman history reveal a clear conception of how a Princeps should treat senators and equites, conspirators and sycophants. Moreover, his works, like Cicero’s, are largely addressed to men engaged in public affairs, to senators and equestrian officials. In fact, Seneca frequently subjects to ethical scrutiny areas of conduct that are more social than individual, more public than private: the exercise of free speech at the imperial court; the spirit in which to exercise jurisdiction; the need for tact in which to exercise jurisdiction; the need

7 Note the sour remark of Tacitus in Ann. iv.33.1 (quoted by Wiedemann, in ch. 25 p. 520 n.7 above) in comparison to the belief of Polybius in the relative durability of the mixed constitution (vi.10.11–14, 18) and the even greater optimism of Cicero (Rep. 1.69).
8 Dio Cassius Lx. 8.5, Tac. Ann. xii.8.2, xiv.55.3. For his attempt to secure recall earlier by writing the Consolatio ad Polybium, see p. 544 below.
9 See below, p. 545. The ad Polybium is addressed to a freedman serving the emperor in an official capacity.
for discrimination in supporting candidates for office or in receiving, when in office, financial contributions towards official games; the political circumstances in which it is right to enter or withdraw from public life, or indeed from life altogether.

Only if political thought and, indeed, political theory are not conceived in too narrow a sense, can Seneca's contribution be understood. For it is a substantial contribution and continuous with Cicero's, but its affinities are less with Cicero's earlier works of formal political philosophy and more with the pro Marcello and with de Officiis. In de Clementia, addressed to Nero as Princeps, Seneca went further than the pro Marcello, addressed to Caesar the Dictator, in exploiting the potential of political eulogy for theoretical exposition, and in de Beneficiis, as doubtless in his lost de Officiis, Seneca provided a code of social morality for the members of the Roman governing class like Cicero's but added to it, through paradox and hyperbole, a certain hortatory thrust.

Seneca's political thinking also resembles Cicero's in being heavily indebted to Roman political concepts and ideals. It is well to remember that even in de Re Publica Cicero had rated abstract Platonic conceptions below the traditional Roman distrust of institutionalized education and the traditional Roman faith in the historical evolution of their political institutions, while in de Legibus he was trying to adjust existing Roman institutions to meet an ideal standard of natural law. Similarly, Seneca's de Beneficiis, though ultimately based on Stoic ideas about universal nature and human nature, also raises to the level of theory the concepts and standards of Roman society. To such an extent is this the case that the scale and depth of Seneca's achievement can only be appreciated when set alongside less theoretical Roman thinkers of the period. Of these the Roman historians and jurists receive separate treatment in this volume, but the younger Pliny will be treated here. His Panegyricus exhibits interesting points of comparison with de Clementia, while his Letters make contact with Seneca's treatment, in de Beneficiis and elsewhere, of upper class social morality.

The allusions throughout Seneca's works to the basic tenets of Stoic philosophy leave no room for doubt about his grasp of the whole Stoic system of interlocking doctrines. Of these the logical branch is not represented in his surviving works and fragments, but he wrote a number of works on physics (and metaphysics) and his output in ethics is

11 For paradox in de Beneficiis, see Inwood 1995.
voluminous. The rhetorical teacher and writer Quintilian, a younger contemporary from a different part of Spain, although severely critical of his style, had to admit that Seneca knew a lot and worked hard. When Quintilian adds, ‘in philosophy he did not take enough trouble, but he was nonetheless an outstanding castigator of vice’ (Inst. x.1.129), 13 he probably means that Seneca, unlike his hero Cicero, never composed a systematic account of the three branches of philosophy. Instead he either treated selected topics in great detail, exploring all their ramifications, or he moved from one topic to another in a leisurely fashion, as in the Natural Questions, or with great rapidity, as in the Moral Letters. Thus it is not surprising that the area of ethics that dealt with law and the organization of human society is touched on piecemeal in the letters and in various other works as part of a discussion on anger, or on peace of mind, or on benefits, or on the apolitical life. 14 The nearest Seneca came to devoting a complete work to a central political topic is de dementia, and even this work, although it starts by describing the obligations and duties of a virtuous ruler, is concerned for over half its length with the analysis and inculcation of the one virtue from which it takes its title.

1 De Clementia

Seneca never explicitly describes how the particular topics he treats relate to the fundamental doctrines of Stoicism, nor does he clearly locate them within that logically structured system. Nonetheless, the basic tenets which underpin them often emerge. In de Clementia and de Beneficiis the two fundamental and interrelated ideas are divine providence and the social nature of man – inter-related because, as Seneca makes clear, providence provides security for its favourite creation, the human animal, by encouraging him to live with others in an organized and harmonious society. 15

Book 1 of de Clementia treats many themes that had featured in the

13 Quint. Inst. x.1.125–31: ‘plurimum studii, multa rerum cognitio’ (128); ‘in philosophia parum diligens, egregius tamen vitiorum insector fuit (129)’. Aulus Gellius (xii.2.1) writing half a century later, says that some thought his learning common and plebeian, others that he was not without learning and a knowledge of his subject.

14 The works involved are de Ira, de Tranquillitate Animi, de Otio, de Beneficiis, and the Epistulae Morales. The authors of the volume on Seneca in the series Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought chose to include de Ira, de Otio, selections from de Beneficiis, and de Clementia (Cooper and Procopé 1995: xxv).

15 Ben. iv.18.2–4, iv.17.1–4, vi.23.3–4; cf. Clem. ii.5.2. The link is perhaps implied in Cic. Fin. iii.68. On the two ultimately linked Stoic approaches to justice via metaphysics and via human nature, see Schofield 1995b: 191–212.
Hellenistic works On Kingship about the virtuous ruler. ‘Have I of all mortals found favour and been chosen to serve on earth in place of the gods?’, Nero is made to say (1.1.2). Even if this vague expression is meant to indicate selection by the gods, there is no question of unrestricted rule by divine right. Though the ruler has power comparable to the gods over individuals and nations (1.1.2, 5.7), his position also imposes obligations. He must imitate their justice, beneficence and clemency in using it (1.5.7, 7, 26.5); he must be to his citizens as he would wish the gods to be to him (1.7.1). In addition, he must suffer constraints on his conduct and his speech so as to behave in a way appropriate to his position. This is the ‘noble servitude’ of supreme rule, a traditional formula attributed to one of the Macedonian kings. If he rules well the ruler is entitled, not only to the support and protection of his subjects, but to veneration and worship like the gods (1.19.8). He is not, however, a god: he takes second place to them in this veneration (1.19.9) and is a ‘man set over men’ (1.7.2). The ruler is not himself divine, and there is therefore no real connection between this idea and the imperial cult, though the idea of earning veneration by meritorious conduct is also implicit in the Roman custom of deifying a worthy emperor after his death. Rather, Seneca’s ideas have their roots in the Stoic paradox ‘Only the wise man is king’, for the wise man through his virtue is on a par with the gods except for his more limited time and means for the exercise of virtue. It is for his virtue, and on condition of that virtue, that Seneca’s ruler deserves veneration even while alive.

What of the terrestrial means by which god’s deputy is chosen? In de Clementia, as elsewhere, Seneca views hereditary succession with equanimity, but he is in fact indifferent to the way in which the ideal ruler achieves power: ‘No one could imagine anything more becoming to a ruler than mercy’, he says, ‘whatever the manner and whatever the legal basis of his accession to power over other men’ (1.19.1). Nor is legitimacy a concern for the ruler once in power, for there are no legal restraints on what he can do. The gods have given him their own power to give and to

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16 The vagueness of the expression is deliberate according to Adam 1970: 49–50. Griffin 1976 (1992): 148 n.2 supports the idea that selection by the gods is implied, comparing Plin. Pan. 80.4, which is, however, more explicit. Clem. 1.21.2 ‘the great gift of granting and taking away life, which the gods have given him’ supports the idea.

17 Clem. 1.8.1; Aelian Ver. Hist. II.20.


19 1.11.4, cf. Ben. iv.31–2. Pliny was to combine the idea of selection by the gods (Pan. 3.26, 80.4–5) with the methods of adoption and hereditary succession in his Panegyricus 5, 8, 94.
take away life (1.21.2). Nero is made to boast, ‘I watch over myself as though the laws, which I have summoned from decay and darkness into the light, will call me to account’ (1.1.4). It is his own choice to observe them, and he can, and should, use his power to save lives in defiance of the law (1.5.4). His power is compared not only to that of the gods, but to that of a father (and the Roman patria potestas legally conferred the power of life and death over children (1.15.1)) and to that of a slave-owner.20 This is clearly the ‘irresponsible rule which none but the wise man can sustain’, as Chrysippus characterized kingship (D.L. vii.122).

The metaphor of the mind and the body, which the Stoics applied to the relation between divine reason (logos) or providence and the world, Seneca applies to the relation of ruler to the commonwealth (res publica).21 It clearly rules out any idea that the ruler might share power or even exercise the same type of power as any of his subjects.22 The metaphor, however, carried no presumption that the form of government should be monarchy. Indeed Cicero had said that ‘kings, military commanders, magistrates, senators and popular assemblies govern citizens and foreign subjects as the mind governs the body’ (Rep. iii.38). Seneca, it is true, in a problematic passage of de Beneficiis criticized Brutus for killing Julius Caesar ‘contrary to Stoic teaching, because he feared the name of king, when the best form of government is under a just king’ (11.20), but there is little evidence elsewhere for such a clear Stoic preference.23 In de Clementia, Seneca merely says that natural law lays down that a king should, like the ‘king’ of the bees, have no sting.24 The point being made is not that kingship is the form of government decreed by nature, but that nature decrees what the correct character and behaviour of the king (once he exists) should be. Indeed Seneca shows a deliberate indifference to the title of his ruler. Not only is Nero offered advice suitable to ‘principes or kings’ (11.5.2), not only does Seneca alternate the words rex and princeps in

20 Cf. Ben. iii.11.3 where the power of kings, generals and slave-owners is described as equivalent, and absolute over their subordinates.
21 Clem. i.5.4; cf. Cic. Rep. 111.38 vs. Arist. Pol. 1254b5. Note that the analogy had also been applied in the Republic by Cicero to the relations between the laws and the state (Ch. 146) which suggests that, when applied to the ruler, it approximates to the strong sense of the ruler as the incarnation of law (ὑπὸ τιμία ἐγγεγραμμένης: see Griffin 1976 (1992): 138 n.5.
22 Cf. Tac. Ann. 1.12.3: ‘he had not asked the question so that there should be a division of what could not be separated, but so that he [the Princeps] should admit that the res publica has one body and must be ruled by one mind’.
23 Moreover, Brutus was in fact not a Stoic but a follower of Antiochus of Ascalon’s Old Academy. For an attempted explanation of the passage, Griffin 1976 (1992): 203–6. Cf. also Sedley 1997.
24 Arist. HA. v.553b denies this feature and Plin. Nat. xi.52 says it is controversial. D.Chr. Or. iv.62–3 has Seneca’s comparison, and at iii.50 he infers from the organization of cattle and bees that the rule of one strong man over his inferiors is natural for man.
the course of his discussion (1.7.1, 13, 16.1), but he uses the formula ‘principes and kings and whatever other title guardians of the public order may bear’ (1.4.3).

Constitutional form is also irrelevant to another idea central to Seneca’s conception of the ideal ruler. That is the traditional contrast between the king and the tyrant (1.11.4–13). Seneca does not draw the contrast along Platonic lines of rule according to law or not according to law (Politicus 301–2), but of virtuous or vicious behaviour, and clemency versus cruelty in particular. Seneca in fact states explicitly that a tyrant and a king (the good ruler) are the same in power, but the king exercises control over himself for the public good (1.11.4). Thus Sulla, whatever his respect for the constitution, could be called a tyrant, while the tyrant Dionysius I of Syracuse was better than most kings (1.12.1–3).

Though there is no external constraint of law or constitution on the ideal ruler, his position imposes specific duties (1.14.1), as do all the roles that individuals assume in society.25 Among them is that of encouraging virtue in his subjects by example (11.1.3–4): ‘from the head comes the health of the body’ (11.2.1). The ruler must try to cure vice and to restore the health of his citizens by gentle treatment, giving an example of kindness even when chastisement proves necessary (1.16.1–17, 22). The virtue which the ruler inculcates was traditionally thought of as virtue in general, and Seneca contains a hint of that idea (11.1.4), but his theme demands that he emphasize clemency in particular.

Seneca’s decision to stress the virtue of clemency stems in large measure, as will appear, from the contemporary political situation, for this quality was bound to assume prominence in the mind of an adviser to Nero. But he makes plain its relevance to the function of human society in general, as the Stoics saw it: ‘no school is kinder, more lenient, more philanthropic, or more concerned for the common good, so that it is its avowed object to be of use and help and to regard not merely self-interest, but the interest of each and all’ (11.5.2). The concept of clementia has no exact equivalent in Greek, but one aspect of it is covered by the Greek term philanthropia (love of humanity). The ruler by encouraging this virtue then works with divine providence to strengthen the bonds of human society, for man is a social creature born for the common good (1.3.2). Indeed even on Epicurean premises, Seneca argues, clemency is the virtue most appropriate to man (1.3.2). But it is the man in power who has the

25 Sen. Ep. 94.1, 3, 11, 14–15; cf. Marcus Aurelius 111.5. Seneca likens the imperial role via the Princeps’ title pater patriae to that of a father (1.14.2) and distinguishes it from that of a slave-owner, however kind (1.18.1).
most opportunities to employ it – in overlooking injuries to himself, in 
sparing the enemy in foreign or civil war (1.20–1) and in punishing wrongs 
done to others (1.22–4).26

Seneca had already touched on these themes in the three books On 
Anger addressed to his brother Annaeus Novatus, a senator like himself 
who later, under his adoptive name of L. Junius Gallio Annaeanus, was to 
encounter St Paul while governor of the province of Achaea. Seneca 
stressed how this vice, deplorable in a private individual, became in an 
absolute ruler destructive to others and dangerous to himself (III.16.2).27

He had shown how the habit of anger drives out clemency and leads to 
cruelty (II.5), and presented his reader with grisly examples of foreign 
kings, Roman generals and governors, and the emperor Caligula 
(1.18.3–6; 1.19.3; III.16.3–19). Seneca’s skill in exploring tyranny in 
general is demonstrated by his tragedies, but in the treatise he could, 
more particularly, stress how cruelty could damage the loyalty of Rome’s 
foreign subjects (II.34.4) and lead to imperial assassination (1.20.8–9). 
Starting from the natural basis of human society in philanthropia, he had 
argued that anger should not accompany even deserved and necessary 
punishment, which a ruler should use to reform offenders, deter wrong-
doers and protect society (1.5–6; 1.19.2, 19.7).

The very overlapping of themes with a treatise devoted to one vice 
brings out the originality of de Clementia. For the work combines the 
study of a particular virtue with themes traditional in writings on king-
ship. The fact that the virtue, though akin to the social virtue of justice, is 
not identical with it, underlines the message that the most important 
things in securing good government are not the form of constitution and 
the provision of legal restraints, but the right education to ensure good 
character in the ruler and the right advice to encourage him in the best use 
of his power. Seneca had been personally committed for some time to pro-
viding both of these for the young ruler, and one of the purposes of de 
Clementia was to give a practical demonstration of the way in which he 
was using praise combined with admonishment to keep Nero on course. 
Seneca had prepared himself well for his task. On Anger had specifically 
addressed the education of children of the privileged class. ‘We must 
work neither to encourage anger in them nor to blunt their native gifts . . .
It [the spirit] rises when praised and given confidence in itself; but these

26 Cf. the connections made by Cicero, in his exposition of Stoicism doctrine, between 
φιλανθρωπία, the protection of the weak, and the duties of men who have the resources to 
protect others (Fin. 111.66).

27 Acts 18.11–17. Cicero had made the point in writing to his brother Quintus when he was govern-
ing Asia (Q.Fr. 1.1.37).
very factors engender arrogance and irritability. We must guide the child between the two extremes, using now the curb, now the spur. . . . At any victory or praiseworthy action, we should allow him to hold himself high but not to swagger, for joy leads to exultation, and exultation to conceit and an exaggerated opinion of oneself' (11.21.1-5).  

The relevance of *de Clementia* to its contemporary Roman context explains other original features: the paramount importance which Seneca attributes to the role of clemency in criminal jurisdiction, and the precision with which he defines its relation to the determination of penalties in particular. The explanation is to be sought in the political circumstances of Nero’s early years of rule when the work was composed. *Clementia* is a virtue exercised towards those inferior in power (1.5.6, 11.3.1). In Republican Rome it was a recognized virtue of members of the governing class, displayed mainly towards foreign enemies, but it sprang into prominence with the propaganda efforts of Julius Caesar to win over his Roman opponents during the civil war. Under the dictatorship Cicero instinctively saw the appropriateness of Hellenistic works on kingship and used them in speeches like the *pro Marcello* and the *pro Ligario* to celebrate the Greek virtues that approximate to the Roman *clementia: epieikeia* (forbearance), *praoetés* (mildness), and *philanthropia*. Despite Caesar’s end, *clementia* found a place among the four virtues attributed to Augustus on an honorific shield, and it featured in honours to later emperors. Claudius included it in his accession promises, but became in fact notorious for his cruelty and contempt for proper judicial procedure. His judicial abuses were conspicuously ridiculed in Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*, a satire on Claudius’ death in AD 54, in which the dead emperor is held up as a counter-example of the qualities heralded in the new ruler. They were among the abuses specifically renounced by Nero shortly after the accession speech written for him by Seneca.  

The incomplete second book, unlike the first, is characterized by a concern with definition and terminological exactitude. It carefully distinguishes clemency from related concepts like pity (*misericordia*), forgive-

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28 Tacitus may well have had this passage in mind when he described how Burrus with his severity and Seneca with his dignified tactfulness controlled the perilous adolescence of the Princeps by directing his deviations from virtue into licensed indulgence (*Ann. xiii.1.2*).

29 E.g. *Cic. Off. 1.88*. Wirszubski 1950: 150–3 shows its application in the conduct of *principes viri* to other citizens, notably in jurisdiction.  
30 *Marc. 9, 12, 18; Lig. 29–30.*

31 *Res Gestae divi Augusti* 34.2; *Josephus Antiquitates xix.246 (Epieikeia).*

32 *Apol. 7.5, 12.1, 12ff., 10.4, 14.2; Tac *Ann. xiii.4.2; Dio Cass. lixi.3.1.*

33 The only real evidence is *Clem. 1.9* where Nero, who was born 15 December 37, is said to have completed his eighteenth year.
ness (ignoscere) and pardon (venia): clementia differs from the first in being an exercise of reason, not an emotional response; from the second and third in that it does not fail to punish what it judges should be punished and does not remit the penalty it believes to be due. Seneca’s final definition of clemency is ‘moderation which stops short of what could deservedly be imposed’ (11.3.2), that is, it involves the choice of the mildest of a range of penalties that could justly be imposed. This definition seems designed to suit the flexible system of cognitio which was the procedure used in trials before the Princeps as well as in trials before the Senate, provincial governors and the Prefects in Rome, all of whom would have ample opportunity to follow the emperor’s example should he decide to act on Seneca’s advice. These courts were not bound to impose penalties laid down by statute, as were the jury courts which dominated the judicial scene in the late Republic, but could take into consideration mitigating factors such as the age of the defendant, as well as the issues of deterrence, reform and security, each case being examined in the light of the basic principles of punishment.

The political context of de Clementia is then the key to its original features, the particular combination of themes chosen and the particular aspects of clement behaviour which are emphasized. It is therefore tempting to see some political message to his reading public in the picture Seneca gives of the blessings acknowledged by Nero’s citizens: ‘a security deep and abundant, law dominating every type of violation . . . the happiest form of commonwealth which lacks no element of supreme liberty except the licence to ruin itself’ (1.1.8). His allusions to the possibility of self-destruction, should the governed lose or refuse the discipline of rule (1.1.1; 1.3.5; 1.4.2), have historical overtones, for the Principate was designed to avert a repetition of the civil wars in which the Republic had perished. Seneca’s development of the metaphor of the ruler as the soul of the commonwealth has in fact a particular relevance to Rome, for he moves from a general metaphysical justification of the ruler’s indispensability within a monarchical system to a specific historical justification for the Principate:

if the great mind of the empire should be withdrawn, such a disaster would be the end of the Roman peace, bringing the fortunes of our great people to ruin. That people will only escape the danger for so long as it can endure the reins. Should it ever snap them or not allow them to be

34 The newly published senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre singles out on II. 90 ff. the virtues of clementia and magnitude animi along with iustitia in the context of the penalties imposed in a criminal trial (Griffin 1997:256).
replaced when shaken loose accidentally, the unit and structure of this mightiest of empires will shatter into many parts, and this city's dominance will come to an end with its obedience . . . For long ago Caesar so imbedded himself in the commonwealth that neither could be withdrawn without the destruction of both. For he needs strength and the commonwealth needs a head. (1.4.1-3)

Neither the organic view of the position of the Princeps in the *res publica* nor the prudential acceptance of the Principate on historical grounds would have shocked his readers.35 Indeed one of Seneca's aims was to reassure the Roman upper classes that the beneficent character of the new government would be maintained, despite the rumour that Nero had murdered Claudius' son Britannicus and despite the popular notion that the advice of a Stoic adviser would be unrealistically high-minded (11.5.2). Nonetheless, some further aim is suggested by the difference between the message of *de Clementia* and the 'form of the future Principate' sketched before the Senate by Nero in the accession speech which Seneca had composed. There the new regime was said to be based on the authority of the Senate and the consent of the soldiers, with power shared between the Princeps and the Senate which would recover its ancient functions.36 Though this formula was no more constitutionally precise than the organic metaphor of *de Clementia* and both were ideological statements, they were entirely opposite in spirit.

A clue to this further aim is to be found in the terminological peculiarity of *de Clementia*, whereby Seneca combines the titles *rex* with others including *princeps* in giving his advice (above, pp. 537-8). Though Nero is never explicitly called *rex*, he is called that by implication: 'You think it hard for freedom of speech to be taken from kings' (1.8.1). Yet, after the tyranny of their last king, the Romans hated the title of king (Cic. *Rep.*.11.52), and Augustus is said to have taken the name Augustus when he realized that to take the name of Romulus would suggest monarchical ambitions (Dio Cassius *LIII*.16.7). Seneca must be deliberately urging his reading public – a wider educated group, presumably, than the senatorial audience of the accession speech – to concentrate on the reality of the Principate, not the euphemistic title. He tries to combine frank acceptance of the Principate on historical grounds with advocacy of a new ideology: instead of pretending that an approximation of the old Republic

35 Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.12.2 (quoted at p. 537 n.22 above) for a senator using the organic metaphor of mind and body.

36 Tac. *Ann.* xiii.4. The stress on abuses of jurisdiction is, however, common to both works.
still survived and trying to hold the Princeps to that model of conduct, let us accept that we have a monarch and set before the Princeps the qualities of ideal kingship. *De Clementia* itself is a contribution towards that end, teaching the Princeps that if he exercises his absolute power virtuously, he will be rewarded with praise, support and safety. Not surprisingly, his enemies explicitly held Seneca responsible when, in the event, Nero seemed to grasp what his mentor said about his merits and about the absolute extent of his power, but not what Seneca taught about the need for self-discipline: they labelled him a 'tyrant-trainer' (*turannodidaskalos*).

2 Seneca’s eulogies and Pliny’s *Panegyricus*

A more conventional eulogy of the Princeps is to be found half a century later in Pliny’s panegyric on the emperor Trajan. After Nero had been declared a public enemy by the Senate and driven to commit suicide, Rome again suffered the horrors of civil war until Vespasian won a conclusive victory in AD 69, thereby establishing the Flavian dynasty. Pliny pursued a successful senatorial career under Vespasian’s sons and, after Domitian’s murder, under Nerva and Trajan. The published speech is an expanded version of Pliny’s actual speech of thanks to the Princeps for his consulship, delivered before the Senate in AD 100. The fact that such a custom was already established under Augustus, and by a decree of the Senate (*Pan. 1.2, 4.1–2*), shows the political realities, for formally Pliny had been elected by the Senate and People. Moreover, in urging on Trajan, often through the counter-example of the tyrant Domitian, the senatorial ideal of a Princeps, Pliny advocates the voluntary adoption of a style of rule that masks the reality of his power: this is *civilitas*, behaving like a citizen among other citizens or, as a later Greek writer put it, ‘as if under a Republic’.* Whereas Seneca was moved by the counter-example of Claudius to concentrate on jurisdiction, Pliny was inspired by detestation of Domitian to preach accessibility and appreciation of talent, discouragement of flattery, refusal of excessive honours.

Like Seneca Pliny instructs through praise: ‘I must obey the decree of the Senate which has declared that, under the form of a vote of thanks delivered by the voice of the consul, good rulers should recognize their own deeds and bad ones learn what theirs should be’ (4.1). Trajan is praised for his simple style of life, for showing respect for the Senate and

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37 For its character, see Radice 1968 and Fedeli 1989.  
38 Ovid *Ex Ponto iv.4.35* (AD 8).  
senators, for going through the lengthy formal procedures of election to the consulship. The content of the praise is more personal and concrete than Seneca’s. Trajan’s actual career is briefly traversed (9). Pliny is more explicit than Seneca in saying that Trajan was selected by the gods (1.3-5), and he applauds the particular procedure by which the divine will took effect, namely adoption by his immediate predecessor Nerva (94.4) – which does not prevent him from praying at the end that Trajan should be succeeded by a son of his own, with adoption under Jupiter’s guidance as a second best (94). Like Seneca Pliny invokes the title of pater patriae in describing the Princeps’ benevolent style of rule. Pliny’s emperor too is said to be pre-eminent in virtue, but Pliny emphasizes that Trajan is regarded and regards himself as one among equals (21.4). His moral example is expressly contrasted with the oppressive moral legislation of Domitian (45.6), and the contrast between tyranny and kingship appears as the replacement of dominatio by principatus (45.3). Most indicative of the difference between the two works, however, is Pliny’s comparison of Trajan to those who expelled the Tarquins: as they rid Rome of reges, so Trajan rid her of regnum (55.7).

Pliny’s speech is therefore less theoretical and less original than Seneca’s treatise. There is no grounding in conceptions of nature and no novelty in ideology. Though Pliny probably used de Clementia, his speech is closer in spirit to Cicero’s pro Marcello. In fact, Seneca himself had written a piece more in this vein over a decade before de Clementia. His Consolatio ad Polybiun, addressed to one of Claudius’ powerful freedmen secretaries, contains indirect eulogy of the emperor (7, 13) who, Seneca hoped, would show him clemency and restore him from exile.40 It anticipates many of the themes of the later treatise – the absoluteness of Caesar’s rule, his enslavement to duty, his moral example, his clemency – but the theoretical underpinnings are missing, and there is more concrete detail: about Claudius’ odious predecessor Caligula, about Claudius’ conquests, about his scholarship, and about his son and heir.

After the ad Polybiun and de Clementia, Seneca never again wrote so specifically about government, and his incidental allusions to it are neither as positive nor as constructive. He dwells on the way hereditary succession elevates a bloodthirsty Caligula or a ludicrous Claudius.41 He harps on the loss of freedom that accompanied the end of the Republic, the precise

40 13.2 fixes its composition to shortly before Claudius’ British triumph of ad 44 (Dio Cass. LX.23.1).
41 Ben. iv.31.2, 32.3: the point is to illustrate the way providence shows gratitude towards the ancestors and descendants of the virtuous.
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The moment being marked by the death of Cato, who now becomes more of a hero to him than Augustus was in the Apocolocyntosis and de Clementia. The Principate is now as irredeemable as it was inevitable, and he blames Brutus for killing Caesar in the vain hope 'that liberty could exist where the rewards both of supreme power and of servitude were so great, or that the state could be restored to its former constitution when its ancient ways had been abandoned, and that equality of civic rights and the supremacy of the law could be maintained when he had seen thousands of men at war to decide not whether but to which of two masters they would be slaves' (Ben.11.20.2). These views are the conventional ones of the Roman governing class for which the Principate was a necessary evil, all too prone to turn into tyranny on the despised Oriental model.

3 De Beneficiis

Seneca’s most creative thinking went into working out principles of conduct for individuals of the higher social classes. His addressees were either senators like himself, or more often equites, the class from which Seneca originally came and in which his younger brother Annaeus Mela elected to stay. But most of these too had public careers, for one of the important developments of the imperial system was to employ equites in public positions, as financial agents of the Princeps like Lucilius, procurator of Sicily, as administrators like Seneca’s father-in-law Pompeius Paulinus, Prefect of the Corn Supply, or as commanders of troops in Rome like Annaeus Serenus, Prefect of the Fire Brigade.

Among Seneca’s extant works, the one that is closest in spirit to Cicero’s de Officiis is de Beneficiis, composed between 56 and 64. The metaphysical foundations of this work are similar to Cicero’s and to those of de Clementia: divine providence and the social nature of man. However, Cicero and Seneca exhibit differences of emphasis. Both speak sometimes in terms of nature and sometimes in terms of god or gods in treating the origins of man’s innate social instincts. But whereas Cicero speaks more

42 Ep. 95.70, Prov.11.10, Const. Sap. 2.3, Tranq. An. 16.1, Ep.24.7, Ben. vi.32.4, 111.27. De Providentia is undatable, see Griffin 1976: 400-1. For the dates of the others, see below pp. 545, 558.
43 At all periods, however, Seneca described Caligula’s tendency to Oriental despotism (Brev. Vit. 18.5, Ben. 11.12.1-2), and at Clem.1.10.2 he already describes the advent of the Principate in terms of subjection.
44 His older brother (above, p. 539) was the addressee of de Ira and de Vita Beata.
45 To him de Providentia, Quaestiones Naturales and the Epistulae Morales are addressed.
46 Addressee of de Brevitatis Vitae.
47 To him de Constantia Sapientis, de Tranquillitate Animi, and De Otio are addressed.
48 For the date, see Griffin 1976 (1992): 399.