The Princely Republic[*]

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Seneca's theory of monarchy in De clementia. *It focuses in particular on Seneca's appropriation and redefinition of some key terms within Roman political thought in order to present his theory as an account of the restitution of liberty to the* res publica *under the government of the virtuous* princeps. *By relocating the Roman body politic to a Stoic moral universe, Seneca is able to draw upon parts of his philosophical inheritance in order to substantiate his claim in some depth.*

Keywords: Seneca; Stoicism; Roman political thought; Roman imperial ideology; Roman monarchy; *clementia*; *libertas*; *res publica*

At a precise moment in the historical formation of Roman imperial ideology, a concerted attempt was made to give its foundational claim — that the Augustan revolution had brought about the restoration, and not the elimination, of the *res publica* and its *libertas* after the civil wars — some philosophical content. This event has been somewhat overlooked in the historiography of recent centuries, and the purpose of this article is to draw attention to it.[1] It occurs in Seneca's *De clementia*, written between A.D. 55 and 56 in the earliest years of Nero's reign.[2] *De clementia* is the earliest surviving example of a Latin text explicitly designed as a *speculum principis* and the only surviving attempt to theorize the Roman monarchy to any significantly systematic degree.[3] My argument is that Seneca's treatise can be seen as an extended act of conceptual redefinition in which he subjects some major terms of Roman political discourse — *virtus*, *res publica*, and *libertas* — to fairly radical redescription in order to render a vocabulary conventionally hostile to the idea of monarchy better disposed towards it. Seneca wants to explain the

[1] Diderot was probably the last European thinker to consider Seneca a political philosopher of significant public importance. See Andrew 2004: 292–8. Detailed recent discussions of various aspects of *De clementia* include: Griffin 1976: 129–71; 2000; Bellincioni 1984a; 1984b; Nussbaum 1994: 402–38, 481–2, 496–7; Roller 2001: 182–8, 239–47; Inwood 2005: 201–23; Stacey 2007: 23–72. Fuller bibliographies are found in two recent editions of the text: Seneca 2001: 413–54; Seneca 2009: 438–43. I cite Braund's edition of *De clementia* (Seneca 2009) and frequently use the excellent translation of Cooper and Procopé (Seneca 1995: 128–64) as the basis of my own.

[2] For the question of its date, see Braund's discussion in Seneca 2009: 16–17.

[3] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.1: 'Scribere de clementia, Nero Caesar, institui, ut quodam modo speculi vice fungerer.' For a cultural history of the imagery, see Bartsch 2006. For the centrality of the text to the post-classical *speculum principis* genre, see Stacey 2007.

necessity and the desirability of the dramatically different state of affairs engendered by the institution of a *princeps* at the head of the Roman *res publica*.

This ambition lies behind two movements of thought in his treatise: his systematic reworking of the image of the body politic which had been configured in a particular way within the ideology of the Republic; and his elaboration of a moral identity for its ruler. These manoeuvres are interrelated; they enable Seneca to insinuate into the heart of Roman political discourse a distinctively Stoic conception of liberty in order to redefine a free person as one subject to natural, rather than civil, law; and that conception furnishes the basis of Seneca's new design of the *corpus rei publicae*.[4] Seneca's strategy, *in nuce*, is to draw upon his Stoic philosophical inheritance in order to argue that under a truly virtuous monarch, a condition which had been conventionally understood as a state of servitude is actually one of liberty for the body politic. It is, I think, largely true that *De clementia* represents what Wirszubski described as the 'final collapse' of the Roman republican idea of liberty.[5] Seneca's text buries it under a different concept of freedom altogether.

In Section I, I revisit the essential features of the account of the free republic which Seneca inherits. In Section II, I turn to the theory of the *De clementia*. Here I contend that Seneca's work is partly shaped by a Stoic theory of moral personality which lends definition to his conception of the prince. The elaboration of this princely *persona* is pivotal to his redefinition of the Roman *res publica* and its *libertas*, which is the focus of my analysis in Section III.

I

The Ideological Context

The biographical and political circumstances in which Seneca composed *De clementia* are well observed and need only brief reiteration.[6] Born in Cordoba and educated at Rome, the Stoic philosopher had been banished to Corsica early in his political career by the emperor Claudius for suspected adultery with Julia Livilla, the sister of Caligula. His exile was revoked in A.D. 49, however, after the intervention of Claudius' new wife, Agrippina, and Seneca was appointed *praeceptor* to her son, the young Nero, charged with educating the royal prince in the traditional aristocratic syllabus of the *studia liberalia*. After Nero's accession, as *De clementia* powerfully illustrates, the emperor remained under the informal political tutelage of Seneca, who, together with Burrus, the prefect of the praetorian guard, exercised an extraordinary degree of influence at court until the latter's death in A.D. 62 and Seneca's subsequent fall from grace and eventual suicide in A.D. 65.

Considerable political optimism surrounded Nero's early years. The dominant image conveyed in the accession literature to which Seneca's treatise belongs, as Susanna Braund has underlined, is 'of a new era of peace, security and justice' after the maladministration and civil unrest of the previous reign. One charge traditionally levelled against the moral seriousness of *De clementia* is that its praise of Nero's *innocentia* and his bloodless reign to date rings particularly hollow since it was almost certainly composed after the murder in early A.D. 55 of Britannicus (the son of Claudius and a rival claimant to the imperial throne). But we do not know whether Nero was responsible for his death; if he was — or was believed to be — then Seneca's

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[4] For the phrase, see, for example, Cic., *Off.* 1.85.
[5] Wirszubski 1950: 151.
[6] See especially the indispensable account in Griffin 1976: 129–7; and Braund's introduction in Seneca 2009: 2–17.

formulation of a policy of imperial clemency arguably looks more, rather than less, apt. Moreover, and more importantly, the accusations of adulation become harder to sustain once we obtain a firmer grasp of the rhetorical codes in which Seneca's theory is couched. Its readers — not only Nero but also those other members of the political élite trained in the *ars rhetorica* — will have identified a fairly sophisticated strategy of praise at work in the shape of Seneca's argument, which, as we shall see, lends its approving tones a sharper edge than is customarily observed in the historiography.

Seneca moves into place the terminology with which he will pursue the Principate's pivotal contention about its restoration of liberty to the republic in the first chapter of *De clementia*, congratulating his prince on the fact that 'everything entrusted to your guardianship (*fidem tutelamque*) is kept safe … nothing has been taken from the *res publica* by violence or secret fraud on your part'.[7] Here Seneca broaches some central ideas — of trust and tutelage — which he will subsequently develop to defend his repeated description of the Roman *civitas* under monarchical government as a *res publica*. At the same time, his proem advances an additional point: the Roman *res publica* is a body now enjoying not only *felicitas* but also *libertas*. As he puts it, the Roman populace now looks upon 'the happiest form of *res publica* … lacking nothing for supreme liberty (*summam libertatem*) save the licence to ruin itself'.[8]

Although Seneca uses the word *libertas* only once when referring to the state of the monarchical *res publica*, his point in the prologue is no mere aside. Seneca substantiates his claim in detail, using a vocabulary and set of arguments which were conventional in discussions of *libertas*, its antonym, and the condition of the *res publica*. The claim itself can be plotted on an arc of ideological assertion which stretches from Augustus' boast in the *Res Gestae* that, 'at the age of nineteen … I raised an army, with which I successfully championed the liberty of the republic when it was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction', to the repeated acclamations of the restoration of liberty under Trajan in Pliny's *Panegyricus*.[9] In fact, the essential outline of Seneca's case for the monarchical republic can already be observed in the *Res Gestae*, where the proclamation of the *princeps* as *vindex libertatis* presented Augustus in juridical language as the liberator of a person held in a servile condition contrary to the law.[10] The thrust of this argument is relatively clear: the Roman people should think of the transformation of its *res publica* at the hands of Augustus as the passage of a body from an unlawful state of servitude under the domination of a partisan faction to a condition of liberty, now rightfully restored by a single person. In *De clementia* Seneca presents a more sophisticated version of this story about the liberation of the Roman body politic — formerly torn apart by internal division but now unified under the rule of a perfectly rational princely *mens* — by relocating the narrative to a firmly Stoic moral universe. Within this setting, Seneca can apply some philosophical rigour to the concepts which he has appropriated, his argument buttressed by those crucial features of the Stoic system, determinism and providentialism, without which, as Anthony Long has pointed out, 'any attempt to elucidate Stoic ethics' was bound to be 'broken-backed'.[11]

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[7] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.5: 'omnia, quae in fidem tutelamque tuam venerunt tuta haberi, nihil per te neque vi neque clam adimi rei publicae.'

[8] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.8: 'obversatur oculis laetissima forma rei publicae, cui ad summam libertatem nihil deest nisi pereundi licentia.'

[9] *RG.* 1.1: 'annos undeviginti natus exercitum privato consilio et privata impensa comparavi, per quem rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi'; for *libertas* and the relevant *loci* in Pliny's *Panegyricus*, see the recent discussion in Connolly 2009. Connolly counts (at p. 268) seventeen uses of the word from *Pan.* 2.5 onwards.

[10] For an insightful discussion, see Roller 2001: 214–15.

[11] Long 2001: 201.

The Republican Inheritance

To some extent, then, *De clementia* supplies further evidence of Seneca's tendency, identified by Matthew Roller, to deploy elements of his Stoicism to 'ground or critique' conventional Roman moral values.[12] But one questionable strand of interpretation runs through Roller's illuminating work, which surfaces in the view, expressed elsewhere in the recent literature, that when the terms *libertas*, *servitus* and the lexical set associated with the institution of slavery are deployed in the political domain, they are no longer to be understood literally, but as 'conceptual categories associated with slavery … deployed metaphorically to structure the power relations found in the derived domain of politics'.[13] We are said to be looking, in short, at a 'conceptual metaphor'.[14]

Metaphors clearly abound in both the republican and the imperial political literature, Seneca's treatise included. The very idea of the *res publica* as a body in Roman political thought — prone to the disease of corruption, capable of grotesque deformation in times of civil conflict, and so on — exemplifies the phenomenon of which Roller speaks. But even here one might recall that republics are taken to consist, *inter alia*, of bodies in a straightforwardly physical sense; and the extent to which a wholesale metaphorical shift can be assumed to have necessarily occurred to the language of slavery and freedom when it comes to be applied to the body corporate is less clear. If we want to understand the political importance of *libertas* to Roman republican thought, we arguably need to interpret its double-jointed claim — that, properly constructed, the *res publica* offers a constitutional structure which keeps citizens free from domination, and that to live under a monarch is almost certainly to be reduced to a condition of unfreedom which reduces the subject to a servile status — much more literally. Seneca sees the force of this claim extremely clearly. In fact, he is ready to concede the point entirely. As he sees it, the emperor's subjects are indeed entirely dependent upon his arbitrary will, which is one reason why he repeatedly, and rather scandalously, discusses acts of cruelty and clemency within master-slave relations as *exempla* to be considered by the prince when thinking about his conduct towards his subjects.[15] But this is only because he is simultaneously engaged in redefining the terms of the debate, moving away from formal and juridical definitions in order to argue that to be a slave *really* means something altogether different. If anyone is engaged in engineering shifts in the meaning of *libertas* from the literal to the metaphorical in the political realm, it is Seneca rather than his republican predecessors whose thinking about freedom he is subverting.

Notwithstanding the degree of ideological conflict over what a *civitas libera* looked like and how best to secure it, especially in the late Republic, the analysis of the concept itself remained deeply indebted to a juridical understanding of freedom and servitude which was later codified in Roman law.[16] As the *Digest* puts it, the difference between free and unfree persons consists in the fact that 'some persons are in their own power, some are subject to the law of another'.[17] Slaves are persons in the power of their masters. As such, they are said to be 'subject to the jurisdiction of someone else'.[18] As Quentin Skinner summarizes it in his work on the early modern, neo-Roman account of the free state, 'it likewise follows that what it means for someone to lack the status of a free subject must be for that person not to be *sui iuris* but instead to be *sub potestate*, under the power or

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[12] Roller 2001: 65.
[13] Roller 2001: 223.
[14] Roller 2001: 218.
[15] Roller 2001: 239–47 for discussion of these passages.
[16] For an extremely thorough clarification of this point and a discussion of its importance in the historiography of recent decades, see Arena 2012: especially 14–44.
[17] *Dig.* 1.6.1: 'Quaedam personae sui iuris sunt, quaedam alieno iuri subiectae sunt … in potestate sunt servi dominorum.'
[18] See n. 17.

subject to the will of someone else'.[19] Roman law classifies slaves as items of property: they are defined as persons but also as things which legally belong to their master.

This Roman concept of *libertas* thus continued to enshrine the fundamental contention of pre-Platonic Greek classical thinking, in which, as Bernard Williams remarked, 'being free stands opposed above all, to being in someone's power … to lack freedom is paradigmatically ... to be subject to the will of another'.[20] In Roman political thought, this understanding of free and unfree persons provides the basis of a theory of civil liberty in which the state of freedom is conceptualized in two distinctive ways. First, Roman citizens are thought to be unlike slaves in that they do not live *in potestate domini*; on the contrary, they live in a state of non-domination, to use Philip Pettit's term.[21] The term is appropriate: in *De re publica*, Cicero reports the view that 'a people ruled by a king lacks many things, most importantly *libertas*, which consists not in having a just master, but in having no master'.[22] This statement encapsulates the distinctive character of the Roman conception of *libertas*. The essence of freedom is not held to consist simply in the actual absence of interference in the pursuit of one's chosen goals. Good masters can grant us that much. As Skinner points out, a great deal of Plautine comedy plays upon the fact that Roman slaves often experience the absence of interference in their lives — Tranio's master in *Mostellaria* has been in Egypt for three years — but no matter how much space and licence they enjoy on such occasions, they remain assuredly slaves, 'subject or liable to death or violence at any time'.[23] On the Roman understanding, to be free from any acts of arbitrary interference by another agent upon the exercise of our powers is not a sufficient condition of *libertas*. We must also be free from the potential threat of any such acts occurring. In other words, we must enjoy an enduring condition of immunity from arbitrary intervention. For it is eminently possible for another agent who has the power to intervene at will in someone else's life not, in fact, to do so, but for this state of affairs still to obstruct the enjoyment of one's freedom because non-intervention in such cases is simply forbearance: that agent retains the power of intervening according to their arbitrary judgement. In that state of affairs, we remain in the power of — indeed, at the mercy of — someone else. The mere threat of the deployment of another's discretionary powers is thought not to curtail one's liberty by inhibiting freedom of action and expression but to negate it.

The second characteristic of this idea of civil liberty is that it is conceptualized as a kind of status, a position protected from arbitrary interference. Freedom was said to be available to citizens only within a specific type of civil association capable of structurally guaranteeing the absence of masters in their lives. Romans identified the constitutional arrangements of their *res publica* as just such a structure, enshrining the *iura*, or rights, of its members and guaranteeing them against the possibility of their arbitrary subjection to the jurisdictional power of another.[24] Those arrangements

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[19] Skinner 2002a: 313.

[20] Williams 2008: 154.

[21] The fullest exploration of this idea is in Pettit 1997.

[22] Cic., *Rep.* 2.43: 'desunt omnino ei populo multa qui sub rege est, in primisque libertas, quae non in eo est ut iusto utamur domino, sed ut nullo …' (discussed in Roller 2001: 222). The point is underlined in Arena 2011: 466: for Cicero, 'liberty signifies a status of non-domination. According to this view, a person is free when not in a status of dependence on the arbitrary will of another person or group of persons. As Cicero argues in the *De re publica* and *De legibus*, the preservation of this status will entirely depend on the constitutional arrangements of the commonwealth and the related civic status of the individual. As Scipio argues in the *De re publica*, only the mixed and balanced constitution, embodied by early Rome, is the best suited to preserving Roman liberty'.

[23] Skinner 1998: 40–1.

[24] Some recent commentators characterize this constitutional line of thinking as if it flowed from a more 'positive' conception of liberty, to be contrasted with a sparser, 'negative' idea of non-domination also at work in Roman political thinking (see, for instance, Morstein-Marx 2004: 220–1). Although the sense of the contrast is clear, the terminology of the distinction is misleading: the classificatory scheme established by Isaiah Berlin holds that

envisaged numerous forms of interference — in the shape of laws, most obviously — upon the agency of the citizens which were considered non-arbitrary and essential for the maintenance of liberty. Indeed, those laws were regarded as virtually synonymous with liberty itself, so fundamental were they held to be to the conservation of *iura*, and therefore civic freedom.

If governmental interference in the lives of citizens was to count as non-arbitrary, it needed in theory to be guided by reference to the *arbitrium*, or decision-making power, of them all. The degree of civic participation in the popular assemblies afforded by the constitution was thought, in conservative quarters, to ensure the inclusion of the citizen body to a sufficient degree to sustain the claim that each and every one of them lived *sui iuris*, and that *libertas* could consequently be predicated of the entire *corpus rei publicae*, as Cicero calls it.[25] Populist demands for greater political equality, meanwhile, stipulated additional constitutional safeguards — the tribunate and the right of *provocatio* above all — as a further condition of *libertas*. But the basic consensus was that the body politic remained free by ensuring that citizens retained at least two crucial powers: 'the right to elect officeholders directly and to vote on legislation'.[26] By these mechanisms, they consented to the laws governing them; and no individual person or group of persons could be said to be imposing their particular will upon the wider body politic. In theory, then, that body could be held to be free in the same way as an individual free person: governed according to its own *arbitrium*.

The Ciceronian res publica

Even Cicero's most conservative inflections of this account of the *res publica* always include 'a fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty', as Schofield underlines.[27] In *Pro Sestio*, for example, Cicero claims that the guiding wisdom of the constitution had been to 'set the *consilium* of the Senate to preside over the *res publica* for ever', while maintaining that its architects had nevertheless wanted 'to have them [sc. the senators] chosen for that *consilium* by the whole people, and to make admission to that highest order open to the industry and virtue of the citizens', especially in view of their rôle 'to protect and increase the liberty and advantages of the common people'.[28] Furthermore, if a free people delegates the power of *consilium* within the *res publica* to an elected aristocracy, the transfer takes the form of a trust, an idea which Cicero develops in his *De officiis* (as Schofield further notes) when delineating the duties of magistrates: 'as with a guardianship, the administration of the res publica should be conducted in the interests

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'negative' views of liberty analyse the concept solely in terms of the absence of constraint upon an agent, while 'positive' theories are pivoted upon some definition of human essences or substantive accounts of human flourishing (or the 'true goal of man' as Berlin put it). Some of the latter types, from Plato to Hegel, have clear constitutional implications; but the concept of non-domination — a species of negative liberty — is also accompanied by a constitutional set of requirements in Roman political thought which is not decisively pivoted upon any such philosophical conception of the self. In Roman political writing, we are often looking at conflicts in how to interpret the constitutional specifications necessary to ensure liberty (i.e. a life without masters) rather than disagreements about how to define liberty itself. For a discussion of the inadequacies of Berlin's apparatus in accommodating the Roman idea, see Skinner 2002b: 237–68.

25 Cic., *Off*. 1.85.
26 Millar 2002: 179.
27 Schofield 1995: 77.
28 Cic., *Sest*. 137: 'Cum regum potestatem non tulissent, ita magistratus annuos creaverunt, ut consilium senatus rei publicae praeponerent sempiternum, deligerentur autem in id consilium ab universo populo aditusque in illum summum ordinem civium industriae ac virtuti pateret. Senatum rei publicae custodem, praesidem, propugnatorem conlocaverunt; huius ordinis auctoritate uti magistratus et quasi ministros gravissimi consilii esse voluerunt; senatum autem ipsum proximorum ordinum confirmari, plebis libertatem et commode tueri atque augere voluerunt.'

of those who are entrusted to one's care, not in the interests of those to whom they have been entrusted'.[29]

The impact of the Ciceronian inheritance upon Seneca's reconstrual of the *res publica* as a monarchical entity in *De clementia* is discernible in two main ways. In the first place, *De officiis* had been a concerted attempt to think philosophically about some central elements of Roman republican ideology in an explicitly Stoic genre to which Seneca himself also contributed (although his own *De officiis* is lost).[30] But it had implicated Stoic ethics in a robust attack on the idea of monarchy itself; and that association Seneca, as successor to the most distinguished philosophical writer of the republican period and as the architect of a new ideology, is intent upon breaking.

Although parts of *De clementia* appear to be quite self-consciously engaging with questions raised in *De officiis*, it is perhaps best not to regard the relationship between the two texts in terms of a duelling match: those debates may have been structured around conventional topics discussed more widely than is evident today. The connection lies at a deeper conceptual level: both are indebted to the same Stoic theory of moral personality. In Cicero's hands, that theory explicitly structures his account of the duties and decorum of the republican magistrate. In Seneca's argument, the terms of the same theory are manipulated differently in order to focus on the *persona* of the princely judge now presiding over the *res publica*. But Seneca also wants to retain parts of Cicero's apparatus within his design of the *res publica*, especially the notion of trust, in order to counter the accusation that no form of *fides* can be said to exist in a monarchical polity.[31]

In *De officiis*, the discussion of trust addressed the question of how to ensure that individuals in government did not act out of their particular concerns but instead aligned them with those of their fellow citizens. Cicero's response to this problem was to make the cultivation of a set of civic virtues, especially justice and the maintenance of *fides*, central to his account in order to ensure that magistrates became servants of the common good. This solution is accompanied by a basic idea of representation. In a famous passage, Roman citizens are asked to lay aside their partisan interests as they enter government, and to adopt instead a rôle as political actors by assuming the *persona civitatis* as a whole:

> It is, then, the particular function of the magistrate to understand that he assumes the rôle of the city (*persona civitatis*), and that he should uphold its standing and its seemliness, preserve the laws, administer justice, and be mindful of the things entrusted to him.[32]

Here, as Neal Wood points out, Cicero treats the *civitas* 'as one person, whose likeness can be simulated by a single mask'.[33] Although in *De officiis* Cicero gives us no account of the political ontology involved in the representation, his vision seemingly presupposes an underlying image of unity in the group whose *persona* the magistrate assumes.

To predicate *libertas* of a collective group in the form of a *populus*, a *civitas* or a *res publica*, then, underlined a fact about its constitutional organization that secured its citizens against the assertion of the *ius* and *potestas* of any individual or faction over the body politic which would reduce it to a servile status. And to be a slave *in*

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[29] Cic., *Rep.* 1.51; *Off.* 1.85: 'ut enim tutela, sic procuratio rei publicae ad eorum utilitatem qui commissi sunt, non ad eorum quibus commissa est, gerenda est.'

[30] For a fresh discussion of the philosophical relationship between Cicero's and Seneca's political and social thought, see Griffin 2013: 7–29. For a recent reconstruction of Seneca's philosophical 'milieu', see also Inwood 2005: 7–22.

[31] Cic., *Off.* 1.26: 'Quod enim est apud Ennium: nulla sancta societas/ Nec fides regni est, id latius patet.'

[32] Cic., *Off.* 1.124: 'Est igitur proprium munus magistratus intellegere se gerere personam civitatis debereque eius dignitatibus et decus sustinere, servare leges iura describere, ei fidei sua commissa meminisse.'

[33] Wood 1988: 135–6.

potestate domini meant becoming an item of property. Of all the things that the words 'res publica' could be stretched to designate in Roman politics — from the most material kinds of objects to more abstract notions of the common good — they were not easily applicable to items that had passed into private ownership. In *De republica*, Cicero describes the *res publica* as *res populi*; here, Schofield suggests, 'the idea is presumably not that res publica is literally speaking property, but rather that the affairs and interests of the people may be conceived metaphorically as its property'.[34] To construe this line of argument purely metaphorically, however, risks eclipsing an important fact about the *res publica*, namely that it also consisted in very material objects like bodies, buildings and land.[35] That these things, as well as less tangible matters, might become the property of someone other than the citizens themselves was a real concern, and Seneca needed to attend to it.

Cicero's attack on Caesar in *De officiis* draws deeply upon the entrenched view that monarchy was rarely more than an arbitrary form of domination tantamount to slavery. The dictator had been 'a man who longed to be king of the Roman people and master of every nation'.[36] His desire was irrational and unjust: 'anyone who says that such a desire is honourable is out of their mind: for they are approving the death of laws and liberty; and taking their own oppression — a foul, detestable thing — to be something glorious.'[37] Caesar had been 'a king who oppressed the Roman people themselves with the Roman people's army, and forced a city that was not just free, but even the ruler of nations, to be his slave …'.[38] In more reflective mode, Cicero had conceded in *De re publica* that monarchy may be a valid form of republic, but even there *libertas* was not said to be one of its characteristics. The *populus liber* emerges after the expulsion of the kings, which is described as an act of liberation from the yoke of slavery.[39] One finds the same equiparation between monarchy and unfreedom in Livy and Sallust in their accounts of the *civitas libera*. As Livy puts it, 'the rule of the kings at Rome, from its foundation to its liberation, lasted two hundred and forty-four years'.[40] In Book 2, his theme is 'the new liberty enjoyed by the Roman people, their achievements in peace and war, annual magistracies, and laws superior in authority to men'.[41] Sallust similarly comments in the *Catiline* that the abolition of the monarchy marked a new era in which 'the *civitas*, once liberty was won, grew incredibly strong and great in remarkably short time'.[42]

II

Clemency, Conscience and the Roman civitas *in Seneca's* speculum

Seneca presents much of his case for monarchy in a relatively conventional idiom. The crucial virtue of *clementia* had been the quality for which Cicero had praised Caesar in

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[34] Cic., *Rep.* 1.39; Schofield 1995: 75.
[35] This point is underlined in the chapter entitled 'Res publica' in Geuss 2001: 34–54.
[36] Cic., *Off.* 3.83: '[Ecce …] qui rex populi Romani dominusque omnium gentium esse concupiverit.'
[37] Cic., *Off.* 3.83: 'Hanc cupiditatem si honestam quis esse dicit, amens est; probat enim legum et libertatis interitum earumque oppressionem taetram et detestabilem gloriosam putat.'
[38] Cic., *Off.* 3.84: '[Nam quanto pluris ei regi putas,] qui exercitu populi Romani populum ipsum Romanum oppressisset civitatemque non modo liberam, sed etiam gentibus imperantem servire sibi coegisset?'
[39] In the text, liberty 'is treated simply as one of the key elements in the republican system' (Schofield 1995: 80).
[40] Liv. 1.60.3: 'Regnatum Romae ab condita urbe ad liberatam annos ducentos quadraginta quattuor.'
[41] Liv. 2.1.1: 'Liberi iam hinc populi Romani res pace belloque gestas, annuos magistratus, imperiaque legum potentiora quam hominum peragam.'
[42] Sall., *Cat.* 7.4: 'Sed civitas incredibile memoratu est adepta libertate quantum brevi creverit.'

Pro Marcello and *Pro Ligario*, where some basic features of the concept in Seneca's work can already be discerned; and it had been pressed into the service of Roman imperial ideology by Augustus.[43] Nevertheless, Seneca is extraordinarily prepared to acknowledge the depth of the changes to the structure of Roman politics which the imposition of monarchical government had caused. This feature of his argument in *De clementia* is more frequently observed than fully explained. For John Cooper and John Procopé, 'what is striking about Seneca's account of monarchy is its frankness and absolutism'; similarly for Miriam Griffin, *De clementia* combines a 'frank acceptance of the Principate on historical grounds with advocacy of a new ideology instead of pretending that an approximation of the old Republic still survived'.[44] From the opening, breathtakingly explicit declaration of the powers of the Roman *princeps* — characterized by Susanna Braund as 'chilling' — *De clementia* breaks entirely with the prevailing pattern of Roman imperial ideology which had worked to mask the shift towards autocracy within Roman political life since the Augustan ascendancy.[45] That task had been pursued by preserving a degree of ambivalence about the monarch's status, often representing him as a 'civilis princeps'.[46] Seneca's depiction of the prince continues to incorporate several discursive elements associated with this construction — gestures of *recusatio*, the emperor's unguarded passage through a loving *civitas*, and so on.[47] But these commonplaces are deployed within a reconfigured theoretical landscape in which there is absolutely no concession to considerations, so pivotal to the general thrust of the ideology of the Principate, of 'sustaining the illusion of the supremacy' of the 'traditional organs of government, the senate and the people constituted in various assemblies'.[48] Seneca's prince is said to be many things to the Roman people — father, doctor, teacher — but his status is never dissembled, in the language of *civilitas* or any other, to suggest that he is 'still a citizen in a society of citizens'.[49] On the contrary, that particular mask is stripped away in Seneca's opening sentences as another takes its place in the rhetorics of the text. Even the detested language of royalty floods back into the picture as Seneca mounts a powerful justification of monarchical absolutism.[50]

Seneca's decision to break with the dominant theatrics of the day is connected to his introduction of a quite new *persona* onto the Roman political stage. Although he wants to continue to talk about the republic and its liberty, Seneca recognizes that those terms need applying to a radically reconceptualized political body in order to offer a sufficiently convincing framework within which to think about events on the ground. He wants to show which features of the contemporary political landscape can — and which cannot — be adequately explained and defended at a moral level. Indeed, his argument only offers a defence of the arrangements he describes if the Roman *princeps* does, in fact, embody the moral personality which Seneca depicts in the mirror. Seneca earns himself that well-observed degree of unnerving frankness when itemizing the prince's powers by sinking this condition deep into the structure of the text. He relies on one figure of thought in particular in order to carve out the space for his philosophical work.

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[43] Cic., *Marcell.* 8–9, 17–20, 31; *Lig.* 6–8, 10, 13–16. For further discussion, see Griffin 2000: 540; and Braund's comments in Seneca 2009: 30–45.
[44] Seneca 1995: 123; Griffin 2000: 542–3.
[45] Seneca 2009: 55.
[46] Wallace-Hadrill 1982.
[47] See Sen., *Clem.* 2.1.2–3; 1.19.6.
[48] Wallace-Hadrill 1982: 37.
[49] Wallace-Hadrill 1982: 42. This point is raised in Procopé 1988: 31.
[50] See Griffin 2000: 542.

Consider his opening:

> I have undertaken to write on mercy, Nero Caesar, in order to act as a kind of mirror, showing you to yourself on the point as you are of attaining the greatest of pleasures. For although the true satisfaction from good deeds is to have done them — and there is no reward worthy of virtue apart from virtue itself — it is nevertheless enjoyable to inspect and to go through the good state of one's conscience, and then to cast one's eyes on this immense multitude — quarrelsome, factious, uncontrolled, as likely to run riot for its own as for another's downfall, if it breaks this yoke now on it — and say to oneself:
>
> 'Have I, of all mortals, found favour with the gods and been chosen to act on earth in their stead? I am the judge with the power of life and death over nations, and the fate and condition of everyone rests in my hands. All dispensations of fortune to mortals are made through pronouncements from my lips. My verdict is what gives people and cities cause to rejoice. No region anywhere flourishes but by my will and favour. These swords in their countless thousands, sheathed through the peace that I bring, will be drawn at my nod. The extermination or relocation of nations, the granting or loss of their liberty, the enslavement of kings or their coronation, the destruction or rise of cities — all this falls under my jurisdiction. Such is the extent of my power … This very day, should the gods demand it, I am ready to render account for the whole of humankind.'[51]

The image of Nero — engaged in the process of conscientious self-examination whose benefits Seneca had extolled in *De ira* — is animated by an act of impersonation.[52] The *persona* of Nero embodies the main precepts of Seneca's text; he is an ingenious rhetorical device summarizing Seneca's case in the proem. Nero already is as he should be, which explains why Seneca says in Book 1 that 'no one seeks an example for you to imitate — except for yourself'; and why in Book 2, his stated aim is 'that you be as familiar as possible with your good deeds and words so that what is now a matter of natural impulse in you may become a matter of settled judgement'.[53] Seneca's apparent task is not to make Nero different but to keep him as he is.

Yet Nero is shown what he is through an impersonation, then praised for being the conscientious figure with whom Seneca brings him face to face. Everything hinges upon this act of recognition. The absolute judicial, legislative and military power which Seneca attributes to the prince is only Nero's if he can incorporate the supremely rational *persona* in the mirror. Seneca dramatizes this struggle brilliantly, making the fictive Nero baulk at the task: 'But this is slavery, not *imperium*!'[54] Seneca's reply reprises the doctrine of princely servitude adumbrated in *De consolatione ad Polybium*:

Sen., *Clem*: 1.1.1–4: 'Scribere de clementia, Nero Caesar, institui, ut quodam modo speculi vice fungerer et te tibi ostenderem perventurum ad voluptatem maximam omnium. Quamvis enim recte factorum verus fructus sit fecisse nec ullum virtutum pretium dignum illis extra ipsas sit, iuvat inspicere et circumire bonam conscientiam, tum immittere oculos in hanc immensam multitudinem discordem, seditiosam, impotentem, in perniciem alienam suamque pariter exultaturam, si hoc iugum fregerit, et ita loqui secum:
    "Egone ex omnibus mortalibus placui electusque sum, qui in terris deorum vice fungerer? Ego vitae necisque gentibus arbiter; qualem quisque sortem statumque habeat, in mea manu positum est; quid cuique mortalium Fortuna datum velit, meo ore pronuntiat; ex nostro responso laetitiae causas populi urbesque concipiunt; nulla pars usquam nisi volente propitioque me floret; haec tot milia gladiorum, quae pax mea comprimit, ad nutum meum stringentur; quas nationes funditus excidi, quas transportari, quibus libertatem dari, quibus eripi, quos reges mancipia fieri quorumque capiti regium circumdari decus oporteat, quae ruant urbes, quae oriantur, mea iuris dictio est… Hodie dis immortalibus, si a me rationem repetant, adnumerare genus humanum paratus sum.".'

[52] For the figure, see Quint., *Inst.* 9.2.29 ('fictiones personarum'); for further discussion, see Stacey 2007: 39–45.

[53] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.6: 'nemo iam divum Augustum nec Ti. Caesaris prima tempora loquitur nec, quod te imitari velit, exemplar extra te quaerit'; 2.2.2: 'quod bene factis dictisque tuis quam familiarissimum esse te cupio, ut, quod nunc natura et impetus est, fiat iudicium.'

[54] Sen., *Clem.* 1.8.1: '"Ista", inquis, "servitus est, non imperium …".'

'What? Are you not aware that this means a noble slavery for you …You cannot escape your lot. It besieges you; wherever you descend, it follows you with great pomp and ceremony. The slavery of such supreme greatness lies in the impossibility of ever becoming anything less.'[55] Seneca is unsparing:

> But the burden which you have taken upon yourself is huge. No one now speaks of the Divine Augustus or the early years of Tiberius Caesar; no one seeks an example for you to imitate — apart from yourself … this would be hard were that goodness of yours not natural but merely put on for the moment. No one can wear a mask (*persona*) for long; fictions (*ficta*) quickly lapse back into their own true nature.[56]

Two observations about this passage help reveal the extent to which Seneca's theory is self-consciously articulated as an account of a moral *persona*. In the first place, it is strongly reminiscent of Cicero's warning to his republican magistrate in the *De officiis* to avoid pretences: 'as Socrates used to say so admirably … the nearest path to glory … is to behave in such a way that one is what one wishes to be thought. For men who think they can secure for themselves unshakeable glory by pretence and empty show, by feigning their speech and countenance, are utterly mistaken.'[57] Concerned about the implications of the dramatic metaphor involved in his injunction that magistrates embody the 'persona civitatis', Cicero insists that their conduct must issue from a genuinely moral personality.[58] Seneca's warning that 'no one can wear a *persona* for long' makes the same point about political agency to a different kind of political actor, and in richly ironic terms: the aspiring thespian Nero is urged to lay aside acting in order to assume the moral rôle which Seneca is impressing upon him through the fiction of impersonation.

The second observation requires more context. From Chrysippus onwards, Stoic ethics were conceptualized within a cosmic *polis* comprised of humans and gods, bound by their shared capacity to comprehend and embody the providential, immanent rationality which governs the universe and which Seneca calls variously in his writings 'nature', 'providence', 'fate', 'fortune', 'god', 'the gods', and 'Zeus'. This capacity to reason is said to provide humans and gods with the basis of a community by supplying them with a notion of justice and law. That law is the law of nature, which, for the Stoics, is another way of talking about reason. In *De ira*, Seneca rehearses this doctrine, informing his readers that they inhabit both a 'greater city' and a local one; and in *De otio*, he also mentions the existence of two republics:

> Let us embrace with our minds two *res publicae*: one great and truly public — in which gods and men are contained, in which we look not to this or that corner, but measure the bounds of our *civitas* with the sun; the other to which the particular circumstances of birth have assigned us …[59]

[55] Sen., *Cons. Polyb.* 6.5–7.3: 'Magna servitus est magna fortuna … Caesari quoque ipsi, cum omnia licent, propter hoc ipsum multa non licent …'; *Clem.* 1.8.1–3: 'Quid? Tu non experiris istud nobilem esse tibi servitutem … aberrare a fortuna tua non potes; obsidet te et, quocumque descendis, magno apparatu sequitur. Est haec summae magnitudinis servitus non posse fieri minorem.'

[56] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.6: 'Sed ingens tibi onus imposuisti; nemo iam divum Augustum nec Ti. Caesaris prima tempora loquitur nec, quod te imitari velit, exemplar extra te quaerit; principatus tuus ad gustum exigitur. Difficile hoc fuisset, si non naturalis tibi ista bonitas esset, sed ad tempus sumpta. Nemo enim potest personam diu ferre, ficta cito in naturam suam recidunt.'

[57] Cic., *Off.* 2.43: 'Quamquam praeclare Socrates hanc viam ad gloriam proximam … dicebat esse, si quis id ageret, ut, qualis haberi vellet, talis esset. Quodsi qui simulatione et inani ostentatione et ficto non modo sermone, sed etiam voltu stabilem se gloriam consequi posse rentur, vehementer errant.'

[58] Cicero's conception of moral personality here is discussed in Section II.

[59] Sen., *Ot. Sap.*: 4.1: 'Duas res publicas animo complectamur, alteram magnam et vere publicam, qua dii atque homines continentur, in qua non ad hunc angulum respicimus aut ad illum, sed terminos civitatis nostrae cum sole metimur; alteram, cui nos adscripsit condicio nascendi.' For this idea in Seneca, see also *De ira* 2.31.7. For a seminal discussion of the Stoic theory of the cosmic *civitas*, see Schofield 1991 (this passage is highlighted at p. 93).

The Stoics used this framework to elaborate a body of social theory about how to conduct oneself in whatever political community one inhabited. But the rôle of the cosmic *civitas* in Stoic political theory, for which the evidence is 'indirect, fragmentary and inconsistent', is harder to specify.[60] The cosmic community has real claims upon our allegiance. They transcend those of any existing political community into which we are born and they resemble the kinds of demands traditionally associated with political authority. Still, the Stoic city is plainly not an entity with written laws, and its authority resides in no terrestrial institution, only in reason itself. Was a work like Chrysippus' *On the Republic* an account of an ideal constitution of the sort discussed by Plato and Aristotle, consisting in a set of doctrines deduced from the cosmic city and aimed at providing a normative yardstick for an actually existing political community? Or was it an attempt to incorporate features of the Stoic city within a more practicable political theory designed for a less exorbitantly conceived community?[61] Seneca's theory in *De clementia* appears to alternate uneasily between both these approaches, in part because it blurs the conceptual boundaries between the two cities, as we shall see.

The Stoic Theory of personae

Notwithstanding its debts to Hellenistic treatises on kingship, some characteristics of *De clementia* suggest that it is conceived as a contribution to a more local genre of Roman political writing insofar as it furnishes *praecepta* which articulate the duties of a specific kind of *persona* within a Stoic apparatus dating back to Panaetius: a theory, in fact, of *personae*.[62]

As Cicero relays it in *De officiis*, this theory posits a basic distinction:

> We should realize that we are clothed by nature, as it were, with two *personae*. One is communal, and derives from the fact that we all participate in reason and in that superiority by which we excel over animals. From this is derived all good and proper conduct, and from it is found the method for finding out our duty. The other *persona* is that assigned to individuals as their own (*proprie*) … everyone, however, must hold firmly onto what is their own, so long as it is not vicious but special (*proprie*) to them, so that that proper conduct that we are seeking may more easily be secured. For we must act in such a way that we attempt nothing contrary to universal nature, but, with that safeguarded, let us follow our own (*proprie*) nature … reflecting on such matters, each person ought to weigh up their own characteristics and regulate them, and not want to try out those which suit others. For what suits each person best is what is most their own.[63]

The point of the division in the theory is to introduce a degree of specificity into Stoic moral reasoning by attending to what Inwood calls 'situational variability'.[64] The Stoics say that

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[60] Seneca 2009: 64.

[61] For the evidence that Chrysippus' *On Lives* developed a view of what political participation should look like in societies as they are now, see Appendix D of Schofield 1999: 119–27.

[62] For a reconstruction of the theory, see Gill 1988; 2006; Sorajbi 2006: 157–71. I follow Gill in thinking that the theory, while only discussed in the *decorum* section of *De officiis*, structures Cicero's discussion of moral personality more generally in the text (cf. the reference to 'Cicero's project' in Gill 1988: 181). But this interpretation is contestable. My thanks to Malcolm Schofield for raising this point.

[63] Cic., *Off.* 1.107–13: 'Intellegendum etiam est duabus quasi nos a natura indutos esse personis; quarum una communis est ex eo, quod omnes participes sumus rationis praestantiaeque eius, qua antecellimus bestiis, a qua omne honestum decorumque trahitur et ex qua ratio inveniendi officii exquiritur, altera autem quae proprie singulis est tributa … admodum autem tenenda sunt sua cuique non vitiosa, sed tamen propria, quo facilius decorum illud, quod quaerimus, retineatur. Sic enim est faciendum, ut contra universam naturam nihil contendamus, ea tamen conservata propriam nostrum sequamur … quae contemplantes expendere oportebit, quid quisque habeat sui, eaque moderari nec velle experiri, quam se aliena deceant; id enim maxime quemque decet, quod est cuiusque maxime suum.'

[64] Inwood 2005: 96.

we must first of all cultivate our rational nature — our first *persona* — as members of the universal city which obliges us to observe some exceptionless principles enjoined by natural law. In his extensive discussion of Stoic axiology in letters 94 and 95, which is initially broached in terms of *personae*, Seneca calls these principles *decreta*.[65] They bolt together to give Stoic ethics an overarching deontology. They relay that humans are social creatures born for the common good and bound by reciprocal love, and they are often presented tersely — follow nature, cleave to reason as the sole good, and so on. Seneca, for example, reminds us in *De clementia*, that 'man should be seen as a social animal born for the common good'.[66] But while *decreta* underline the basic Chrysippean point to obey natural law, they give little substantive guidance on what to do in life. A body of more specific instructions is needed to help negotiate local contexts.

These *praecepta* help shape a second *persona*, another layer of moral identity adapted to the particular abilities of each human and the socio-political circumstances in which they live. Cicero discusses these considerations of context and character in terms of nature and fortune: 'the greatest influence on this reasoning is carried by nature, the next greatest by fortune' and 'we must certainly take account of both in choosing a way of life'.[67] Cicero complicates matters by further partitioning: a third *persona* is said to be the product of chance and contingency determining our social position; a fourth coalesces around the occupation we decide to follow. But the crux of the theory is the division between the first and second *personae*, which gives structure to the fundamental Stoic preoccupation to supply moral advice to an agent obliged to inhabit both the cosmic and the local *civitas*. Unless they qualify as a supremely rational *sapiens* who alone performs morally correct actions termed *katorthōmata*, these agents need *praecepta* as well as *decreta*. Hence the emergence of a literature on *kathēkonta*, or *officia* — appropriate actions informed by an incomplete grasp of the moral situation in question which nevertheless correspond to the right thing to do if a reasonable justification can be provided in their defence — of which Cicero's text, based in part on Panaetius' *On Appropriate Actions*, is the most famous example.[68]

The Princely persona *in* De clementia

Seneca's analysis of the princely *persona* in *De clementia* is punctuated by the terms of this theory of *personae*. His precepts single out forms of moral conduct as peculiarly fitting for the prince, and he repeatedly articulates that concern in a language of *officium* and *decorum*.[69] These concepts shape his philosophical work, enabling him to segregate specifically princely moral obligations from those which his protagonist shares with the rest of humanity on account of their shared, rational nature. So, for instance, Seneca reminds us that the cultivation of clemency is necessary to all human beings. 'Of all virtues', he says, 'none befits a human being more, since none is more humane.'[70] Since we all err, it sometimes makes sense for everyone to adopt an attitude of leniency when wronged if we want a modicum of fluidity in social life. But, he adds, while 'mercy, as I said, is natural to all human beings, yet it most becomes emperors finding when among

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[65] I refer to Seneca's well-known phrase at *Ep.* 94.1: 'Eam partem philosophiae, quae dat propria cuique personae praecepta nec in universae componit hominem …' My analysis is particularly indebted to the recent discussion of Stoic axiology and of the literature on the subject in Inwood 2005: 95–131.

[66] Sen., *Clem.* 1.3.2: '[necesse est non solum inter nos,] qui hominem sociale animal communi bono genitum videri volumus …'

[67] Cic., *Off.* 1.120: 'Ad hanc autem rationem quoniam maximam vim natura habet, fortuna proximam, utriusque omnino habenda ratio est in deligendo genere vitae.'

[68] See Gill 1988: 184.

[69] In other words, Seneca's account of princely decorum is not just an amalgam of stipulations about fitting behaviour, but part of a theory of moral personality — as it had been for Cicero. For this last point, see the recent discussion (to which I am much indebted) in Schofield 2012.

[70] Sen., *Clem.* 1.3.2: 'nullam ex omnibus virtutibus homini magis convenire, cum sit nulla humanior, constet…'

them more to save and greater scope'.[71] For 'no one could conceive of anything more becoming to a king or prince than mercy'.[72] Seneca picks out the virtue of magnanimity in the same way: 'greatness of mind befits any mortal, even the lowliest — for is anything greater or braver than to beat back the force of ill fortune? But this greatness of mind has more ample scope in good fortune and is shown to better effect upon the magistrate's bench than down on the floor.'[73] *Moderatio* is similarly treated: all humans need this quality — even bees are capable of it, after all — but 'the human mind needs a greater moderation to match its power to do greater violence and harm'.[74] And the greater the capacity of the human to inflict damage, the greater the need for the virtue.

Furthermore, when Seneca exemplifies the content of princely policy, he resorts to the vocabulary of *officium* to characterize the responsibilities of the merciful prince: 'What, then', he asks, 'is his duty? That of good parents …'[75] Seneca's procedure thus generates a typology of virtues held to be specifically fitting for the sovereign *persona*, given his providentially allotted *fortuna* as the bearer of *imperium*.[76] But the prince's *natura* must also anchor the Senecan *persona*. Seneca's prince occupies the heights of power because of his natural capacity for moral excellence. This condition lies behind Seneca's comment that Nero would find the weight of expectation on his shoulders 'hard were that goodness of yours not natural (*naturalis bonitas*) but put on for the moment'.[77] It also underpins Seneca's claim to Nero to be recalling his 'good deeds and words so that what is now a matter of natural impulse in you may become a matter of settled judgement'.[78] In sum, Seneca's text illustrates a generic concern to capture and analyse circumstantial factors in order to recommend appropriate action for moral agents in the Roman world. But its originality lies in its more specific concern to provide a philosophical account of a new kind of *persona* in Roman political life.

<div align="center">III</div>

Seneca and the Free Body Politic

In Seneca's theory, the *civitas* over which the *princeps* rules is worldwide in extent. His prince rules 'in place of the gods' over 'all mortals'; he has been chosen by them to wield the 'power of life and death over peoples', and to hold the 'state of everyone' in his hands; and he is entrusted with the duty of accounting — 'should the gods demand it' — for 'the whole human race'.[79] As vicegerent of the gods on earth, the *princeps*

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[71] Sen., *Clem.* 1.5.2: 'Est ergo, ut dicebam, clementia omnibus quidem hominibus secundum naturam, maxime tamen decora imperatoribus, quanto plus habet apud illos, quod servet, quantoque in maiore materia apparet.'
[72] Sen., *Clem.* 1.3.2: 'Nullum tamen clementia ex omnibus magis quam regem aut principem decet.'
[73] Sen., *Clem.* 1.5.3: 'Decet magnanimitas quemlibet mortalem, etiam illum infra quem nihil est; quid enim maius aut fortius quam malam fortunam retundere? Haec tamen magnanimitas in bona fortuna laxiorem locum habet meliusque in tribunali quam in plano conspicitur.'
[74] Sen., *Clem.* 1.19.4: 'cum tanto hominum moderatior esse animus debeat, quanto vehementius nocet.' For the emphasis on *moderatio* in the theory, see also: 1.2.2; 1.11.1; 1.18.1; 1.19.4; 1.21.4; 2.3.2.
[75] Sen., *Clem.* 1.14.1: 'Quod ergo officium eius est? Quod bonorum parentium …'
[76] The catalogue expands to include the following qualities which, although not underlined as specifically princely, are held collectively to ensure that the prince's penal policy is characterized by a mitigating attitude fundamental to Seneca's definitions of *clementia*: *mitis* (1.7.2; 1.11.1; 1.13.4; 1.22.3; 1.25.1); *temperantia* (1.7.4; 1.11.2; 1.12.4; 1.14.2; 1.20.2; 2.3.1; 2.4.2); *mansuetudo* (1.7.3; 1.8.6; 1.11.1; 1.16.1; 2.2.1; 2.5.1); *lenitas* (2.1.1; 2.2.3; 2.3.1; 2.5.3); *humanitas* (1.2.2; 1.3.2); *patientia* (1.14.1; 1.22.3).
[77] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.6: 'Difficile hoc fuisset, si non naturalis tibi ista bonitas esset, sed ad tempus sumpta.'
[78] Sen., *Clem.* 2.2.2: 'quod bene factis dictisque tuis quam familiarissimum esse te cupio, ut, quod nunc natura et impetus est, fiat iudicium.'
[79] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.1–5: 'Egone ex omnibus mortalibus … electusque sum, qui in terris deorum vice fungerer? Ego vitae necisque gentibus arbiter … qualem quisque sortem statumque habeat in mea manu positum est … dis immortalibus, si a me rationem repetant, adnumerare genus humanum paratus sum.'

wields the power of life and death over his subjects: their *status* has been placed in his hands. As *imperator*, the *princeps* retains supreme command of the military: their weapons are drawn at his nod. The *princeps* exercises full jurisdictional power: the laws spring from his mouth.[80] Seneca unpacks the image of the body politic systematically. He tells his prince that 'you are the mind of the *res publica*, and it is your body', and informs him that that body's well-being depends upon the mental qualities of its princely head: 'the gentleness of your mind will be transmitted to others … it will be diffused over the whole body of the empire. All will be formed in your likeness. Health springs from the head.'[81] The relationship between the political body and its princely mind is picked out in the language of slavery. Just as 'the body is entirely at the service of the mind … hands, feet and eyes do its business, the skin that we see protects it', so, says Seneca, 'in the same way this vast multitude of men surrounds one man as though he were its mind, ruled by his spirit, guided by his reason; it would crush and shatter itself by its own strength without the support of his *consilium*'.[82] Catastrophic consequences await the political body if its ruler's psyche becomes emotionally disordered: at the mind's command, 'we lie still … or else we run restlessly about when it has given the order. If it is a greedy master, we scour the sea for profit; if an ambitious one, it has long since led us to thrust our right hand into the flame …'.[83] The extent of the body's dependency upon the prince is total: he is the 'bond which holds the *res publica* together, the breath of life … the mind of the empire'.[84] Seneca underlies the longevity of this relationship, observing that 'long ago Caesar so deeply invested himself in the *res publica*, that neither could be separated without the ruin of the other. He needs the strength and the *res publica* needs a head'.[85]

Seneca's account of the *status* of those living within the princely body politic commences with the monarch loftily looking down on 'an immense multitude, quarrelsome, factious, uncontrolled', whose unruly disposition is checked only by 'the yoke now upon it'.[86] A little later, the prince is described as a *vinculum* binding the riotous multitude together into a coherent *res publica*.[87] The Roman citizens are unambiguously subject to the *ius* and *potestas* of the prince. The *sors* and *status* of everyone is entirely in his hands and at his mercy. As the arbiter of life and death, he wields the *ius gladii* over them. The clement prince's boast that 'my sword has been sheathed, indeed hung away altogether' only renders it more visible. The fact that Seneca's theory of government is also an extended piece of penology speaks volumes about the status of the princely subject. Seneca later recharacterizes this *vitae necisque potestas* as *patria potestas*, asserting that the relation between the clement ruler and his subjects is a paternal one in which the power to punish by death (legally enjoyed by Roman fathers over their children as well

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[80] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.2: 'in mea manu positum est … meo ore pronuntiat …, tot milia gladiorum ad nutum meum stringentur…'

[81] Sen., *Clem.* 1.5.1: 'tu animus rei publicae tuae es, illa corpus tuum'; 2.2.1: 'Tradetur ista animi tui mansuetudo diffundeturque paulatim per omne imperii corpus, et cuncta in similitudinem tuam formabuntur. A capite bona valetudo …'

[82] Sen., *Clem.* 1.3.5: 'Quemadmodum totum corpus animo deseruit et, cum hoc tanto maius tantoque speciosius sit, ille in occulto maneat tenuis et in qua sede latitet incertus, tamen manus, pedes, oculi negotium illi gerunt, illum haec cutis munit … sic haec immensa multitudo unius animae circumdata illius spiritu regitur, illius ratione flectitur pressura se ac fractura viribus suis, nisi consilio sustineretur.'

[83] Sen., *Clem.* 1.3.5: 'illius [sc. animi principis] iussu iacemus aut inquieti discurrimus, cum ille imperavit, sive avarus dominus est, mare lucri causa scrutamur, sive ambitiosus, iam dudum dextram flammis obiecimus …'

[84] Sen., *Clem.* 1.4.1: 'Ille est enim vinculum per quod res publica cohaeret, ille spiritus vitalis … mens illa imperii…'

[85] Sen., *Clem.* 1.4.3: 'Olim enim ita se induit rei publicae Caesar ut seduci alterum non posset sine utriusque pernicie; nam et illi viribus opus est et huic capite.'

[86] Sen., *Clem.*1.1.1–2: 'in hanc immensam multitudinem discordem, seditiosam, impotentem, in perniciem alienam suamque partier exultaturam si hoc iugum fregerit …'

[87] Sen., *Clem.* 1.4.1: 'Ille est enim vinculum, per quod res publica cohaeret …'

as by masters over slaves) is always exercised benevolently. But he is already conceding ground.[88] Under any conventional interpretation, the relation between prince and subject which he describes is the same as that of master over slave, as Seneca himself clarifies later in the *De beneficiis*:

> If a favour cannot be done to his master by a slave, neither can it be done by anyone to his king, nor by a soldier to his commander. If you are under absolute rule (*imperio, si summo*), what difference does it make what sort it is? … Their titles are different; their power over you is the same.[89]

The massive shift which Seneca's argument in *De clementia* is designed to engender is pivoted upon this same point of recognition. What Seneca wants to make central to our evaluation of princely rule is not the formal elements of the relation of power which subsists between ruler and ruled, but the moral qualities of the person who exercises that power. If the prince shoulders his moral obligations as Seneca delineates them, then his political rôle is to be appraised differently as one of a father rather than a master.

In redescribing the relation between prince and subject in such terms, Seneca insists that he is not merely differentiating between good and bad masters. His claim is that this relation does not necessarily constitute a form of slavery at all — any more than the social institution of slavery necessarily imposes servitude, properly understood, upon the slave. Seneca's conception of freedom and slavery is entirely different from the conventional Roman understanding of those terms. Suzanne Bobzien reminds us that 'freedom was an indispensable philosophical concept in early Stoic ethics', before becoming 'central in the moral philosophy of the Roman Stoa'.[90] Seneca's philosophy is no exception, as Inwood demonstrates.[91] That questions about freedom surface in the monarchical theory of *De clementia* is not hugely surprising. Politics was a part of ethics for the Stoics, and Seneca's treatise is anatomizing a moral as much as a political value.[92]

For Seneca and the Stoics, if one's rational powers were developed to the point of having eliminated the passions and aligned oneself with the dictates of providence one could maintain one's freedom in the face of tyranny, imprisonment and even torture. In a notorious passage, again in *De beneficiis*, Seneca asserts:

> It is a mistake to think that slavery goes all the way down to the core of somebody. The better part of them is exempt. The body belongs to the master and is subject to him, but the soul is autonomous (*sui iuris*), and is so free that it cannot be held by any prison … It is the body that *Fortuna* has given over to the master; this he buys and sells; that interior part cannot be handed over as property.[93]

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[88] Sen., *Clem.* 1.14.2: 'Hoc quod parenti etiam principi faciendum est, quem appellavimus patrem patriae non adulatione vana adducti … patrem quidem patriae appellavimus ut sciret datam sibi potestatem patriam, quae est temperantissima liberis consulens suaque post illos reponens.'

[89] Sen., *Ben.* 3.18.3: 'Si non dat beneficium servus domino, nec regi quisquam suo nec duci suo miles; quid enim interest, quali quis teneatur imperio, si summo tenetur? … sub dispari titulo paria in illos licent.' This passage is highlighted in Griffin 2000: 537, n. 20.

[90] Bobzien 1998: 330. Her bibliography (at pp. 413–24) itemizes the extensive twentieth-century literature on this subject (my understanding has also been shaped by the treatment in Long 1996). See also, more recently, Zöller 2003; Sharples 2005; Inwood 2005: 302–21. I am grateful to Aldo Setaioli for his guidance on this issue.

[91] Inwood 2005: 302–21.

[92] For the problems of categorizing Seneca's social and political theory separately from his ethics, see Inwood 2005: 71–3.

[93] Sen., *Ben.* 3.20.1–2: 'Errat, si quis existimat servitutem in totum hominem descendere. Pars melior eius excepta est. Corpora obnoxia sunt et adscripta dominis; mens quidem sui iuris, quae adeo libera et vaga est, ut ne ab hoc quidem carcere, cui inclusa est, teneri queat … corpus itaque est, quod domino fortuna tradidit; hoc emit, hoc vendit; interior illa pars mancipio dari non potest.' Williams called the passage 'repulsive' (Williams 2008: 116). For a recent discussion, see Inwood 2005: 254–8.

Seneca's vision of human liberty here has a revealing local inflection: it is framed in terms of the Roman civil account of a free person as one who is *sui iuris*; but it substitutes a civil conception of *ius* for a metaphysical one. This adjustment is crucial to Seneca's argument about *libertas* and the *res publica* in *De clementia*, in which there is a systematic attempt to supplant one idea of law with another. In particular, we see it in Seneca's argument that 'though you have the right to do anything to a slave, yet there are things which the law common to all living creatures forbids you to do to a human being'.[94] But more generally in his reconstruction of the *res publica*, we witness the steady displacement, at a normative level, of the positive laws of the Roman *civitas* with the law of reason as the basis of its political government within a providential universe.

The grounds for this manoeuvre are prepared by Seneca's initial extension of the boundaries of the Roman *civitas* to include the entire human race, which is said to involve the prince in a relationship with the gods grounded in reason: he has received his authority from them to rule in their stead over men, and he is obliged to render *ratio* to them for the terms of this trust. The prince's political relation with the gods reveals a degree of interpenetration between the cosmic and terrestrial cities. The gods, figuratively at least, are the source of his *imperium* and of his political obligations.

These claims about the prince's accountability as a trustee attest to the degree of attentiveness with which Seneca restructures the traditional picture of the *res publica*, carefully itemizing the duties of its new governor in a language derived from republican ideology. Note, too, the idea of election: the prince has been chosen ('electus sum') by the gods to wield *imperium* over the global *res publica* as the administrator of an estate. Seneca congratulates the figure of Nero because 'everything entrusted to your guardianship is kept safe … nothing has been taken from the *res publica* by violence or secret fraud'.[95] The prince, then, is not the *dominus* of a *res publica*, now reduced to the status of a piece of private property, nor are the citizens slaves; he is steward, tutor and custodian, entrusted with power over them as the vicegerent of the gods — indeed, as their trustee — and he must administer his estate rationally. The 'free, free-born, and well-born' citizens are not chattels; Seneca reminds his prince that they have been 'entrusted to you not as slaves but as wards'.[96]

Absolutism, Reason and the lex naturae

Setting up the theory in this way gives Seneca the tools with which to legitimate monarchical absolutism. Given his decision to individuate *clementia* as the defining princely virtue, his theory obviously involves him in considerations of the prince's relation to civil law. But Seneca's argument about the moral basis of monarchical rule is pervaded by a legal vocabulary and imagery elaborated around another notion of law entirely. As a Stoic, Seneca thinks that to be virtuous means living in accordance with providential reason, and that reason is the *lex naturae* which governs the cosmos:

> No one could conceive of anything more becoming to a ruler than mercy, whatever the manner of his accession to power over others and whatever its legal basis. We may, of course,

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[94] Sen., *Clem.* 1.18.2: 'cum in servum omnia liceant, est aliquid quod in homine licere commune ius animantium vetet.'

[95] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.5: '[Potes hoc…praedicare] omnia, quae in fidem tutelamque tuam venerunt tuta haberi, nihil per te neque vi neque clam adimi rei publicae.'

[96] Sen., *Clem.* 1.18.1: 'Quanto iustius iubet hominibus liberis, ingenuis, honestis non ut mancipiis abuti sed ut iis quos gradu antecedes quorumque tibi non servitus traditus sit sed tutela.' Note, however, that *tutela* is legal guardianship of persons incapable of administering their own affairs; here, as elsewhere, Seneca is chipping away at the sense of the Roman *populus* as competent adults capable of self-government. See my discussion below. I need to thank one of *JRS*'s anonymous readers of this article for underlining this point.

acknowledge it to be the more beautiful and magnificent, the greater the power behind it — a power which ought not to be malign, if disposed in accordance with the law of nature.[97]

If the *princeps* can be shown to embody reason in his rule of the Roman *populus*, he can not only be held to be supremely virtuous; he can also be said to govern according to *lex naturalis*, and hence rightly, justly, legitimately. His exercise of clemency demonstrates this capacity. For 'clemency has a freedom of decision: it judges not by legal formula but by what is equitable and good'.[98] Clemency is a supra-legal quality, a 'moderation that remits something of a deserved and due punishment', and 'something which stops short of what could deservedly be imposed'.[99] In the interests of equitable solutions, mercy remits punishment when justice, strictly interpreted as conformity to existing law, might demand it. Indeed, clemency is true justice duly observed. The gently paradoxical reasoning running through the theory is that acts of clemency, in which the exercise of the prince's power beyond positive law is at its most manifest, clearly illustrate his subservience to the law that matters most in the cosmos.

Having made a Stoic conception of *ratio* the normative basis of the *civitas*, Seneca can now claim that his reassembled picture of the Roman *res publica* exhibits all the elective, representative, and lawful characteristics that a rational person in pursuit of their freedom could ask of it. Seneca's argument that the Roman *populus* enjoys 'supreme *libertas*', lacking nothing but the licence to ruin itself, rests on two distinctive components in his account of the body politic: his description of the princely *persona* as the epitome of rationality; and his corresponding denigration of the capacities of the Roman people to govern themselves without tutelage. Seneca works hard throughout the text to erase the idea that the *populus* without the prince might be considered a coherent, unified body with any capacity for rational agency. In *De republica*, the *populus* at the heart of Cicero's definition of *res publica* was not just 'any and every collection of human beings' haphazardly bundled together, but 'a collection of a multitude which forms a society by virtue of agreement with respect to justice and sharing in advantage'.[100] The image of any such underlying unity to the Roman *populus* is evacuated from Seneca's picture. Instead, we encounter repeated descriptions of the Roman citizens as a mere *multitudo* which 'surrounds one man as though he were its mind, ruled by his spirit, guided by his reason; it would crush and shatter itself by its own strength without the support of his discernment'.[101] And Seneca cites the *Georgics*, in which the monarch of the bees is compared to an earthly ruler: 'when their king is safe, they act with one mind./When he is gone, they break their pact (*fidem*).'[102] These views have some pedigree: Varro and Livy had expressed anxieties, heightened by civil conflict, about the deficiencies and deformities of the Roman body politic.[103] Seneca's vision of the

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[97] Sen., *Clem.* 1.19.1: 'Excogitare nemo quicquam poterit, quod magis decorum regenti sit quam clementia, quocumque modo is et quocumque iure praepositus ceteris erit. Eo scilicet formosius id esse magnificentiusque fatebimur quo in maiore praestabitur potestate, quam non oportet noxiam esse si ad naturae legem componitur.'

[98] Sen., *Clem.* 2.7.3: '(clementia liberum arbitrium habet; non sub formula, sed ex aequo et bono iudicat.' For further discussion of this passage, see Bellincioni 1984.

[99] Sen., *Clem.* 2.3.1–2: '(clementia est) temperantia animi in potestate ulciscendi'; 'lenitas superioris adversus inferiorem in constituendis poenis'; 'inclinatio animi ad lenitatem in poena exigenda'; 'moderationem aliquid ex merita ac debita poena remittentem'; 'quae se flectit citra id, quod merito constitui posset.'

[100] Cic., *Rep.* 1.39: 'populus autem non omnis hominum coetus quoquo modo congregatus, sed coetus multitudinis iuris consensus et utilitatis communione sociatus.'

[101] Sen., *Clem.* 1.3.5: 'Quemadmodum totum corpus animo deservit et, cum hoc tanto maius tantoque speciosius sit, ille in occulto maneat tenuis et in qua sede latitet incertus, tamen manus, pedes, oculi negotium illi gerunt, illum haec cutis munit … sic haec immensa multitudo unius animae circumdata illius spiritu regitur, illius ratione flectitur pressura se ac fractura viribus suis, nisi consilio sustineretur.'

[102] Sen., *Clem.* 1.4.1: 'Rege incolumi mens omnibus una; amisso rupere fidem' (citing Virgil, *Georgics*, 4.212–13; I cite Braund's translation in Seneca 2009: 101).

[103] Varr., fr. 114 Riposati = Nonius 728 Lindsay (for the *biceps civitas*); Liv. 2.32.8–12 (for Menenius Agrippa's

Roman people without the prince diagnoses similar problems: an amalgam of divisive, self-destructive elements becomes a viable political body only upon the acquisition of a princely head. The yoke and chain on the multitude are thus the restraints of reason, imposing upon it the providential rationality of the cosmos which produced the Principate amid civil division and restored the *res publica* to health.[104]

Reason, Representation and Self-mastery

For his argument about the free republic to work, Seneca must contend that the princely *persona* is the embodiment of Stoic rationality. One way of doing so is to present him as the representative of those who have elected him: the gods. Seneca tells us that his exercise of mercy aligns his government of the *civitas* with that of the cosmos:

> If the gods, neither implacable nor unreasonable, are not given to pursuing the crimes of the powerful immediately with their thunderbolts, how much more reasonable is it for a man set in authority over men to exercise his command in a gentle spirit and to reflect: when is the world's state more pleasing to the eye and more beautiful? On a day serene and bright? Or when everything is shaken by frequent thunderbolts and lightning flashes from every quarter? And yet the look of a calm, well-ordered empire is like that of the sky serene and shining.[105]

There is more than a trace of a mimetic idea at work in this analogy: the *imperium* of the divine vicegerent over his subjects should resemble the *imperium* of the cosmos. Elsewhere Seneca writes the principle of monarchy into his metaphysics. In *De beata vita*, he declares that 'we are born in a kingdom; to obey god is freedom'.[106] And in *De clementia*, the 'king' bee is held to exemplify the naturalness of monarchy.[107]

But the proper exercise of *imperium* also demands a mastery of the moral reasoning which meshes *praecepta* with *decreta* in a manner characteristic of the true *sapiens*. That specification becomes explicit in Book 2 as Seneca steadily replaces the figure of the *princeps* with that of the *sapiens* as his protagonist:

> The wise man will spare people, take thought for them and reform them … In one case, he may simply administer a verbal admonition without any punishment, seeing the person to be at an age capable of correction. In another, where the person is clearly labouring under an invidious accusation, he will order them to go scot-free, since they were misled or lapsed under the influence of alcohol. Enemies he will release unharmed, sometimes even commended, if an honourable reason — loyalty, a treaty, their freedom — has incited them to war. All these are works of mercy, not pardon. Mercy has a freedom of decision.[108]

This kind of equitable assessment of time, place, circumstance and character in different types of cases — the essence of clemency — is exactly what the prince claims in the

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famous account of the Roman polity's body parts and *intestina corporis seditio* in the early days of the Republic). I must thank Brian Walters for his guidance on these points. See also Cic., *Off.* 3.21–2 for the dangers of dysfunction in the social body caused by the pursuit of individual benefit alone.

[104] For the relevant passages see n. 84 and n. 86 above.

[105] Sen., *Clem.* 1.7.2: 'Quod si di placabiles et aequi delicta potentium non statim fulminibus persequuntur, quanto aequius est hominem hominibus praepositum miti animo exercere imperium et cogitare, uter mundi status gratior oculis pulchriorque sit, sereno et puro die, an cum fragoribus crebris omnia quatiuntur et ignes hinc atque illinc micant! Atqui non alia facies est quieti moratique imperii quam sereni caeli et nitentis.'

[106] Sen., *Vit. Beat.* 15.7: 'In regno natis sumus; deo parere libertas est.'

[107] Sen., *Clem.* 1.19.2–4.

[108] Sen., *Clem.* 2.7.1–3: 'parcet enim sapiens, consulet et corriget … Aliquem verbis tantum admonebit, poena non adficiet aetatem eius emendabilem intuens; aliquem invidia criminis manifeste laborantem iubebit incolumem esse, quia deceptus est, quia per vinum lapsus; hostes dimittet salvos, aliquando etiam laudatos, si honestis causis pro fide, pro foedere, pro libertate in bellum acciti sunt. Haec omnia non veniae, sed clementiae opera sunt. Clementia liberum arbitrium habet.'

prologue to have already understood, declaring that 'I have been touched by the first flush of one person's youthfulness, by another's extreme old age. I have granted pardon to one man because of his high position, to another because of his low estate …'.[109] Seneca's argument also makes an heroic degree of self-mastery the prerequisite of supreme power. The only guarantor of the rule of reason — and therefore law — is the prince himself. His *persona* is shown in Seneca's mirror to be deeply self-reflexive, his rational capacities sharpened by the practice of conscience.[110] The sovereign prince talks to himself ('loqui secum'), watches over himself ('me custodio'), and even spares himself ('mihi peperci') in the act of self-inspection: conscientiousness is a condition of absolutism. Seneca urges the sovereign to 'respond to damage openly inflicted upon himself by keeping his mind under control (*animum in potestate*), by remitting the punishment if he can safely do so'.[111] The prince must establish *potestas* over his own mind in order to exercise *potestas* correctly over others. Seneca turns the princely psyche into a realm over which reason maintains its *imperium* by eliminating every emotional perturbation, especially anger. That work done, the prince can claim to be equipped to emancipate, in turn, the political body from its unruly tendencies and align its government with the providential direction of the universe, thus restoring it to true *libertas*.

Conclusion

On first inspection, Seneca's case for liberty under princely rule appears a pretty unsatisfying and hollow argument, locking a group of relentlessly irrationalized persons into a relationship of dependency upon one implausibly wise individual in power. Seneca's use of his Chrysippean intellectual inheritance seems to exemplify the Stoic tendency to empty 'words like city and law' of 'anything conventionally recognizable as political content …' to such an extent that 'political vocabulary becomes depoliticized'.[112] His manipulation of constitutional language flows from his fundamental commitment to making Stoic reason, rather than positive law, the criterion of legitimacy in his *res publica*. The same logic governs his argument about the liberty of the republic. No one should expect Seneca to be interested in providing a theory of civil liberty — any more than he is interested in abolishing slavery, in fact — but has he provided any substantial insight into how to connect concerns about human freedom to politics? A Stoic account of freedom would demand — at the very least — a series of internal psychological conditions to be met by each person of whom it is predicated. On the terms of Seneca's theory, it is unclear how anyone except the prince approaches such a state. At best, it looks as if princely subjects are left merely following a rule, a law or an exemplary pattern of life represented by their imperturbable, introspective ruler. Their best hope of even beginning to internalize the reasons for so acting — and therefore having a claim to call themselves free — seems to reside principally in their realizing that they need to knuckle down to the providentially determined conditions of autocracy in which they find themselves and to which they should rationally assent.

That said, Seneca's claim about the liberty of the republic is carefully framed as an observation not about each person within the *res publica* but about the *res publica*

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[109] Sen., *Clem.* 1.1.4: 'Alterius aetate prima motus sum, alterius ultima; alium dignitati donavi, alium humilitati.'
[110] For the term, see Molenaar 1969; Hijmans Jr. 1970. For conscience as a courtroom, see Veyne 2003: 54–5; Inwood 2005: 210–11; Stacey 2007: 42. For discussions of the rôle of self-reflection and the conscientious self in Seneca's work in the wake of Michel Foucault's influential treatment of the subject (for which, see especially Foucault 1986: 39–68; Foucault 2005), see Edwards 1997: 23–38; Bartsch 2006: 183–8; Inwood 2009 (and for Foucault's use of *De ira*, see Inwood's comments at pp. 54–5, n. 2); Ker 2009.
[111] Sen., *Clem.* 1.20.2: 'nunc illum hortamur, ut manifeste laesus animum in potestate habeat et poenam, si tuto poterit, donet …'
[112] Schofield 1999: 768.

itself. It is an image held up to the gaze of the people for their contemplation: a *laetissima forma reipublicae* which becomes visible to the audience of *De clementia* after they see the princely *persona* of the proem, a version of the *vir sapiens* tailored for global *imperium*. The image of the free *corpus rei publicae* in Seneca's political theory is that of a single body moving through a Stoic universe, extended to its audience for inspection and edification as a model of rational political organization. There is perhaps more to be said about the act of fusion which Seneca assumes in the generation of that totalizing body. But if Seneca's idea is that the rationality of the subjects might eventually mature as a consequence of their belonging to such a political entity and develop their freedom within its protective embrace, then he is obviously not the only person in the history of political theory to have entertained this belief.

The phrase 'laetissima forma reipublicae' is a Ciceronian one, first used in an argument about the *res publica* which is to some extent haunted by the Platonic invention of *Kallipolis* and the rule of the wise.[113] Seneca's apparatus, however, is a piece of imaginative political thinking which works in a deeply unPlatonic way. It quietly recognizes just how far the new configuration of Roman politics has slipped from the conceptual reach of its existing vocabulary, sets to work on redefining some of its key terminology in order to make better sense of it in Stoic terms, and thereby constructs a means of measuring the moral legitimacy of the form of government in place — autocratic, absolutist and probably still bewilderingly different. If Seneca's investigation has generated a preposterously ambitious account of a moral *persona* in order to make sense of those arrangements, that result hardly makes the experiment less insightful, regardless of whether we take that *persona* to serve as an exhortatory model or as the symptom of an intractable problem in trying to place Roman government on an acceptable footing. Whatever conjectures we make about Stoic political theory, it is probably safe to say that it must have always aimed to maximize the degree of rationality possessed by agents in government, placing their actions in some cosmic context. As such, it must always have aimed to bring the people under that government a little closer to freedom than they had been before. Seneca's contribution is arguably of this sort.

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[113] Cic., *Rep.* 2.22.

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