

Graceful Giving: The Role of the Female in Seneca's *De Beneficiis*

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Introduction

1. *Sen. Ben, 2.6.2, Sen. Ben, 3.7.3.*
2. *Vultus hilari sunt, quales solent esse, qui dant vel accipiunt beneficia... virgines, quia incorrupta sunt et sincera... in quibus nihil esse adligati decet nec adstricti.* (The Graces have joyful expressions, just as those who give and receive benefits generally do. They are virginal because benefits are unspoiled, pure... Benefits should not be constrained or obligated).¹ *Sen, Ben, 1.3.5.*

Seneca's Ideology of Gift Exchange and the Female

A. Natural (Separate From Legal Sphere):

3. *Plures," inquit, "ingrati erunt, si nulla adversus ingratum datur actio." Immo pauciores ... pudorem enim rei tollet multitudo peccantium, et desinet esse probri loco commune maledictum... Tamdiu istuc [repudio] timebatur, quamdiu rarum erat; quia nulla sine divortio acta sunt, quod saepe audiebant, facere didicerunt... Quemadmodum horum delictorum iam evanuit pudor, postquam res latius evagata est, ita ingratos plures efficies et auctiores, si numerare se coeperint.* (The objection is put: "If there is no right to take legal action against ingrates, there will be more of them." No, there will be fewer ... the great number of malefactors will make the misdeed less shameful, and if ingratitude becomes a matter of universal complaint it will cease to count as wrong. Divorce was feared only as long as it was unusual. But it is in the news all the time now; so they have learned to emulate what they hear about so often. The shame for these misdeeds has long since evaporated as the practice has become more widespread; and in the same way you will produce more ingrates, worse ones too, if they get the chance to count themselves up). *Sen, Ben, 3.16.1-4.*
4. *a. Rationes autem multae mihi occurrunt, propter quas crimen hoc in legem cadere non debeat.... si appello, si ad iudicem voco, incipit non beneficium esse, sed creditum.* (Moreover, many reasons come to mind for why this crime should not be subject to legal sanction.... If I summon him and call him before a judge, then it starts to be a loan rather than a benefit). *Sen, Ben, 3.7.1.*
c. See also: Sen. Ben. 5.21.1, Sen, Ben. 4.17.2.
5. *Quae, quia non licuit, non dedit, illa dedit. Non immerito in numerum peccantium refertur, quae pudicitiam timori praestitit, non sibi. Eodem modo, qui beneficium ut reciperet dedit, non dedit.* (She who didn't give because she couldn't—did give. She deserves to be reckoned among those who stray if she owed her chastity to fear, not to herself. In the same way, a person who has given a benefit in order to receive one back, has not given one). *Sen, Ben, 4.14.1*
6. *a. Sed speravit emolumentum aliquid Non fuit hoc beneficium, cuius proprium est nihil de reditu cogitare.* ("But he hoped for some profit in return." Then it was not a benefit after all, since it is the mark of a benefit not to even think about a return). *Sen, Ben, 2.31.3*
b. See also: Sen. Ben. 1.1.12, Sen, Ben, 1.4.3, Sen, Ben, 2.19.2, Sen, Ben, 3.7.2.
7. *In quibus nihil esse adligati decet nec adstricti; solutis itaque tunicis utuntur.* (Benefits should not be constrained or obligated—that is why the Graces wear loose robes). *Sen, Ben, 1.3.5.*

¹ Translations are from Brad Inwood, and Miriam T. Griffin. *On Benefits. Complete Works of Lucius Annaeus Seneca.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

B: Private

8. *Iuvenes, quia non debet beneficiorum memoria senescere; virgines, quia incorrupta sunt et sincera et omnibus sancta.* (They are youthful because the remembrance of benefits should not grow old. They are virginal because benefits are unspoiled, pure, and revered by all). **Sen, Ben. 1.3.5.**
9. a. *Contentus eris te teste; alioqui non bene facere delectat sed videri bene fecisse.* (You will be satisfied to be your own witness in the matter. Otherwise, the satisfaction doesn't come from granting the benefit but from being seen to have done it). **Sen, Ben, 2.10.3.**
b. See also: Sen, *Ben*, 2.3.2; Sen, *Ben*, 4.21.5
10. *Itaque non, quid fiat aut quid detur, refert, sed qua mente, quia beneficium non in eo, quod fit aut datur, consistit, sed in ipso dantis aut facientis animo.* (And so it matters not what is done or what is given, but with what [mind], since the benefit consists not in what is done or given but rather in the [*animo*] of the giver or agent) (Bracket in translation mine). **Sen, Ben, 1.6.1.**
11. a. *Non potest beneficium manu tangi; res animo geritur.* (A benefit cannot be touched with one's hand; the business is carried out with one's mind). **Sen, Ben, 1.5.2.**
b. See also: Sen, *Ben*, 2.34.1

C: Non-Material and Equal:

12. *Est virtus dare beneficia non utique reditura.* (It is a virtue to give benefits that are not guaranteed to be repaid in the future). **Sen, Ben 1.1.12.**
13. a. *Quodcumque ex duobus constat officium, tantundem ab utroque exigit... sunt aliquae partes mariti, sed non minores uxoris.* (Any reciprocal obligation between two people demands just as much from each side. A husband has certain duties, and his wife's duties are no smaller). **Sen, Ben, 2.18.1.**
b. See also: Sen, *Ben*, 1.5.3.
14. a. *Ergo nemo vinci potest beneficiis... si, quem rebus non potest, animo aequat... quid interest, ab utra parte munuscula plura numerentur?* (Therefore no one can be outdone in benefits... if when he cannot match someone in deeds, he matches him in [*animo*]... what difference does it make on which side the greater number of trinkets is to be counted?). (Bracket in translation mine). **Sen, Ben, 5.4.1.**
b. See also: Sen, *Ben*, 2.31.4

D: Emotion (Joy and Love)

15. *Vultus hilari sunt, quales solent esse, qui dant vel accipiunt beneficia.* (The Graces have joyful expressions, just as those who give and receive benefits generally do). **Sen, Ben, 1.3.5.**
16. a. *Quid est ergo beneficium? Benevola actio tribuens gaudium capiensque tribuendo in id* (So what is a benefit? It is a well-intentioned action that confers joy and in so doing derives joy). **Sen, Ben, 1.6.1.**
b. See also: Sen, *Ben*, 2.22.1; Sen, *Ben*, 2.33.3; Sen, *Ben*, 2.31; Sen, *Ben*, 6.43.3; Sen, *Ben*, 2.31.2.
17. *Quemadmodum meretrix ita inter multos se dividet, ut nemo non aliquod signum familiaris animi ferat, ita, qui beneficia sua amabilia esse vult, excogitet, quomodo et multi obligentur et tamen singuli habeant aliquid, quo se ceteris praeferant.* (It is like a prostitute, who shares herself among many men, but gives each of them some sign of special intimacy: anyone who wants his benefits to evoke affection should figure out how to put many people under obligation and still give each and every one some reason to think that he is preferred to the others). **Sen, Ben, 1.14.4.**
18. a. *Si gratos vis habere... non tantum des oportet beneficia, sed ames.* (If you want people... to be grateful, you must do more than bestow benefits, you must love them). **Sen, Ben, 2.11.6.**
b. See also: Sen, *Ben*, 2.18.7; Sen, *Ben*, 2.18.4.

19. a. Cic, *De Am*, IX.29. See also: *De Am* IX.31; *De Am* XIV. 51.

Women and the Tension Between Ideology and Practice:

20. *Virgines, quia incorrupta sunt et sincera et omnibus sancta... perlucidis autem, quia beneficia conspicunt volunt* (They are virginal because benefits are unspoiled, pure, and revered by all. And the robes are translucent because benefits want to be in full view). **Sen, Ben, 1.3.5.**

21. a. *Quae illi contingere potest utilitas ex adfectu latenti?* (What advantage can come to him from this emotion that he keeps hidden?) **Sen, Ben, 4.21.2.**

b. See also: *Sen, Ben, 2.23.2*

Tensions of the Exchange:

1. Give to Ungrateful vs. Not

22. *Quomodo male filiae suae consulat, qui illam contumelioso et saepe repudiato collocavit... sic pessime beneficia dare dicitur, quicumque ingratos eligit, in quos peritura conferat.* (A father is neglecting his daughter's interests when he marries her to an abusive husband, several times divorced... Just so, a person will be deemed the worst of benefactors if he chooses the ungrateful on whom to confer benefits that are bound to be wasted. **Sen, Ben, 4.27.5.**

23. a. *Is perdet beneficia, qui cito se perdidisse credit; at qui instat et onerat priora sequentibus, etiam ex duro et immemori pectore gratiam extundit* (Someone who jumps to the conclusion that his benefits have been lost will in fact lose them. But someone who perseveres and heaps benefit upon benefit will squeeze gratitude even from a heart that is hard and forgetful). **Sen, Ben, 1.3.1.**

b. See also: *Sen, Ben, 1.2.5; Sen, Ben, 1.1.9.*

2. Equality vs. Surpassing

24. a.... *Nemo itaque beneficiis vincitur.* (Therefore no one is outdone in benefits). **Sen, Ben, 5.4.1**

b. See also: *Sen, Ben, 4.1.3.*

25. *Ad hanc honestissimam contentiorem beneficiis beneficia vincendi sic nos adhortatur Chrysippus..., parum se grate gerere sacrilegium sit et tam bellis puellis fiat iniuria!* (Chrysippus exhorts us to engage in this most honorable competition, outdoing benefits with benefits... we must regard insufficient gratitude as an act of impiety and as an injustice to such beautiful girls). **Sen, Ben, 1.4.4.**

26. a. *Optimi iuvenes! Proposita est inter parentes ac liberos honesta contentio, dederint maiora an receperint.* (Go for it, my fine young men! We have announced an honorable competition between parents and children, to see whether they have given or received greater benefits). **Sen, Ben, 3.36.3.**

b. See also: *Sen, Ben, 1.4.3; Sen, Ben, 4.20.1; Sen, Ben, 3.35.5.*

3. Obligation

27. *Natura prius est, ut quis debeat, deinde, ut gratiam referat; debitor non est sine creditore, non magis quam maritus sine uxore.* (By nature a person owes first and returns the favor after-wards; there is no debtor without a creditor, any more than there can be a husband without a wife). **Sen, Ben, 5.8.1.**

28. *Non fuit hoc beneficium, cuius proprium est nihil de reditu cogitare.* (It was not a benefit after all, since it is the mark of a benefit not to even think about a return). **Sen, Ben, 2.31.3**

29. *“His ingratissimis et repudiantibus beneficia, non quia nolunt, sed ne debeant, similes sunt ex diverso nimis grati, qui aliquid incommodi precari solent iis, quibus obligati sunt, aliquid adversi, in quo adfectum memorem accepti beneficii approbent... quorum animus simillimus est pravo amore flagrantibus, qui*

amicae suae optant exilium, ut desertam fugientemque comitentur optant inopiam.... (There is a resemblance between these people who are un-grateful and refuse benefits, not because they do not want them but to avoid obligation, and those who by contrast are too grateful, who are accustomed to pray for something unfavorable to happen to those to whom they are under obligation, something unfortunate which enables them to demonstrate an attitude mindful of having received a benefit.... Their attitude is very like those aflame with perverse love who wish for their beloved's exile so that they can accompany her when she is isolated and in flight...) **Sen, Ben, 6.25.1-5**

30. a. *...alter laetus, hilaris, occasionem referendae gratiae expectans et ex hoc ipso adfectu gaudium grande percipiens nec quaerens, quomodo decoquat, sed quemadmodum plenius...* (the other is happy, exultant, looking forward to the opportunity to return the favor, and from this very sentiment deriving enormous joy—not looking for a way to default but looking for a way to give back more fully...). **Sen, Ben, 3.17.4.**

b. See also: *Sen, Ben, 6.41.1.*

4. Obligation and Emotion

31. a. *Animum praestare gratum debeo.* (I have an obligation to show myself grateful). **Sen, Ben, 4.40.1**

b. *Qui grate beneficium accipit, primam eius pensionem solvit.* (Receiving a benefit with gratitude is the first installment of its repayment). **Sen, Ben, 2.22.1.**

c. See also: *Sen, Ben, 2.35.3; Sen, Ben, 2.35.5*

32. a. *Multa sunt autem, quae oportet accipere nec debere.* (There are, in fact, many things which it is appropriate to receive, but without being indebted). **Sen, Ben, 1.15.6.**

b. See also: *Sen, Ben, 1.15.2.*

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