

The Philosophy of Epictetus. Edited by Theodore Scaltsas and Andrew S. Mason. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. viii + 181. \$59.95 (cloth). ISBN 9780199233076.

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This slender volume is a collection of essays presented at a conference held at and sponsored by the Municipality of Larnaca (ancient Citium), Cyprus, in 2001. It contains a very brief preface thanking the hosts and contributors by Dory Scaltsas, an eight page introduction summarizing the essays by Andrew Mason, ten essays, a substantial bibliography, and a disappointingly skimpy index.

The question John Cooper seeks to answer in his essay is: What is the relevance, for Epictetus, of moral theory to moral improvement? Cooper argues that, in contrast to Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, 'full knowledge of Stoic moral theory, derived from the study of the Stoic authorities, retains for Epictetus the central place in morality and moral improvement that it had for Chrysippus himself' (15). Cooper examines Epictetus' innovative distinction of three main *topoi*—'themes' or 'stages', Cooper insists on translating this term, rather than 'fields of study'—in the *askēsis* one must undergo to become fully good. Since the goal of the third *topos* is to learn how to determine our assent to impressions correctly and to implant in ourselves this ability deeply and firmly, we must improve our understanding of reasoning itself by mastering Stoic logical theory. Yet since Epictetus' students are teenage boys who have yet to accomplish the first two stages of moral progress (training in desires and aversions, impulses and appropriate actions), he often scolds them for their excessive fascination with logical studies, the third stage. Logic is necessary, but his students are not yet ready for that *topos*. But are not Epictetus' discourses as full of rhetorical appeals as the writings of Seneca and Marcus? Cooper reminds us that the *Discourses* as we have them are nonetheless ancillary discussions addressed to his pupils, who are studying Chrysippus and other classic Stoic texts with Epictetus (in sessions of formal instruction not sampled in the extant *Discourses*) in order to deepen their understanding of the truths of Stoic theory and strengthen their rational abilities *thereby* to become better men.

In the second essay Paolo Crivelli investigates Epictetus' attitude to logic in greater detail. Crivelli argues that Epictetus 'reserves for logic an ancillary role in life' (24). Epictetus holds that logic provides certainty in two ways. First, it makes the wise man's true beliefs about the first two *topoi* unassailable. Second, logic provides the proofs of ethical propositions and the means of articulating and confirming those proofs. Logic also enables the logician to take part in dialectical debate, thereby empowering the logician to perform well in a particular type of social situation. Crivelli concludes that 'Epictetus' attribution of an ancillary role to logic was well within the tradition of official Stoicism' (28).

Keimpe Algra addresses the question of the extent to which Epictetus' theistic

language constitutes a substantial departure from mainstream Stoic theology. His excellent, subtle overview of the relevant texts shows that early Stoicism was not as exclusively pantheistic as scholars often suppose, that Epictetus' brand of personalistic theism does not appear to have been all that radical or unheard of, and so his theology marks no significant departure from Stoic orthodoxy.

Katerina Ierodiakonou examines Epictetus' account of the philosopher as God's messenger. Ierodiakonou excerpts many long quotations from the *Discourses* while offering generally thin exegesis of them. What is worse, one of her claims flies directly in the face of Algra's essay when she agrees with 'modern scholars' who hold that 'Epictetus goes beyond standard Stoic orthodoxy' in so far as his theology 'is clearly characterized by a warm personalistic tone which has no parallel in the writings of early Stoic philosophers' (60). Since Algra deftly discredits this contention in the previous chapter, the value of Ierodiakonou's essay is thereby diminished. Nevertheless, she makes a credible case that, despite clear dogmatic and stylistic differences between Dio of Prusa, Apollonius of Tyana, Maximus of Tyre, and Epictetus, a common motif among these Imperial thinkers can be discerned of presenting the true philosopher as someone sent by God to carry out a divine mission (67). For Epictetus, she concludes, to follow God is to attend to the God in us, namely, to listen to our own reason in determining how we are to live in accordance with nature (70).

Malcolm Schofield provides a fine, cogent paper on Epictetus on Cynicism. In a probing reading of *Discourses* iii 21.19-23 Schofield argues that the schematic separation of roles at iii 21.19 between Socrates' *elenchus*, Diogenes' kingship and castigation, and Zeno's teaching and formulating of doctrine, captures something real (74). On Schofield's view, 'kingship and castigation' is a hendiadys in so far as the Cynic's job *does* consist simply in the protreptic, delivered with the authority of a king, with which his words and his life—including his fit, radiant body—challenge us to a radical reorientation of our priorities. But at a deeper level it is *not* a hendiadys in so far as the Cynic's protreptic activity is only the means by which he exercises the supervision of human affairs befitting kingship. Schofield thinks that Epictetus succeeds in supplying us with something modern scholars have largely failed to produce: 'a deeply pondered interpretation of Cynicism which makes sense of Diogenes' philosophical project as philosophy, and which deserves serious consideration as a historically viable account of what he saw himself as doing'—though there is nothing about masturbation and the belly in Epictetus' selective picture (84).

Richard Sorabji discusses Epictetus' view that one is one's *prohairesis*. He sees two problems with this view. First, there is more than one *prohairesis*—a perverted *prohairesis* that locates the 'I' in one's flesh or externals, on the one hand, and a pure *prohairesis* that is free, not compelled by anything else, and trained to make good choices. Second, there is more than one self, since 'a person is an entity with many aspects' (90). For some purposes, when we say 'you' we wish to pick out the total entity. For other purposes, we want to pick out one aspect, for example, the *prohairesis*—whether pure or perverted, presumably.

Sorabji illustrates various differences between Epictetus' concept of *prohairesis* and Aristotle's. He concludes his essay by glossing six different terms in Epictetus and the Stoics for self-awareness: (1) *epistrophē* ('reflection'); (2) *prosokhē* ('attention'); (3) *paratērēsis* ('watchfulness'); (4) *parakolouthēsis* ('tracking of appearances'); (5) *suneidēsis* ('conscience'); (6) *sunaisthēsis* ('awareness of self' or 'awareness of self and another'). Sorabji notes that these terms were of central importance for the Neoplatonists, who borrowed them from the Stoics and above all from Epictetus. While the content of Sorabji's essay is quite useful, its sections do not hang together as neatly as well as one could wish, perhaps because several of them are developed in separate publications.

Michael Erler argues that Epictetus' reference to Socrates' warning in the *Phaedo* not to let the child within man be frightened by 'bugbears' like death shows how Epictetus tries to explain how Socrates accepted something as terrifying as death as confidently and calmly as one would expect from a Stoic and for reasons a Stoic could accept (99-100). Erler asserts that in the *Phaedo*, Plato presents Socrates as the prototype of a philosopher who is confident about death because Socrates is convinced that the soul is immortal (107). Indeed, Erler makes the stronger claim that *only* if Socrates can prove the immortality of the soul can it be shown that death is a bugbear which is not to be feared (105). Erler writes: 'For if one were afraid that the soul might perish when separated from the body there would be no good reason to be confident while facing death' (107).

Serious problems afflict this interpretation of Epictetus' understanding of Socrates' confidence regarding death. First, Erler ignores entirely Socrates' constructive dilemma at *Apology* 40c-41c. There Socrates argues that death is one of *two* things: Either the dead are nothing and have no perception of anything or death is a relocation of the soul from here to another place. Socrates reasons that if death is a complete lack of perception, then it would be like a dreamless sleep, and so a pleasant advantage. This is the reasoning that Epicurus modified to become the 'death is nothing to us' argument. While it is true that Socrates argues that the second horn of the constructive dilemma yields an equally welcome consequence or 'extraordinary happiness'—philosophizing and doing the *elenchus* with the demi-god judges and heroes who reside there—Erler disregards the confidence the Socrates of *Apology* 40c-d draws from the possibility that the soul perishes when the body dies. Erler interprets *Disc.* ii 1.17, where Epictetus says '[t]he paltry body must be separated from the bit of spirit [τοῦ πνευματίου] either now or later, just as it existed apart from it before', as evidence that Epictetus has embraced the arguments for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* and adapted Socrates' 'true defense' in that dialogue to the Stoic system (109). Erler cites the remark of Sedley 1993, 326 that 'the Stoics' pneumatic soul is capable of very much the same discarnate survival as Plato had defended in the *Phaedo*' to support his contention that Epictetus held that the soul survives the death of the body. But does the textual evidence in the *Discourses* support this interpretation?

I contend that *Disc.* ii 1.17 does not imply that Epictetus holds that the human

soul is immortal. Rather, there he is merely claiming that (1) the pneumatic substance that composes the soul of a human being, and the somatic material that composes that human being's body, both existed prior to their union as a psychosomatic whole constituting a living human being, and (2) upon death that psychosomatic union is dissolved. There is no suggestion here that the mind or consciousness of the human being continues to exist eternally after the separation of his soul and body. Indeed, Epictetus appears to believe that the identity of the human being is that *union* of that body and that soul together. This reading is supported by a number of texts in the *Discourses*. Epictetus says that if his ship sinks and he must drown, he should drown without shrieking or cursing god but simply recognizing that what is born must also perish (ii 5.12; cf. iv 7.27). Epictetus explicitly says that he is *not* eternal (αἰών), but a human being, and a part of the whole, as an hour is part of a day, and like the hour he must come and pass away (ii 5.13). Might Epictetus mean that it is only his *body* that passes away? No. He is explicit that a human being is a mortal (θνητόν) creature (ii 9.1-2, iv 1.104). We ought to enjoy the festival of life for its finite duration until it is over (iv 1.105-110). Death is inevitable (ἀναγκαῖον, i 27.7) and cannot be avoided indefinitely (i 27.9). Far from arguing that it would be a good thing for human beings to have immortal souls, Epictetus actually argues that just as it would be a curse for heads of grain to grow ripe, become dry, and *not* be harvested, so too it would be a curse for human beings never to die (ii 6.11-14). Epictetus *embraces* human mortality rather than resenting that we must be 'harvested'. The death of human beings is as natural a cosmic process, and therefore as little to be feared, as the harvesting of ears of grain, the falling of leaves, a fresh fig turning into a dried fig, and a bunch of grapes becoming raisins (iii 24.91). All of these processes are natural changes, Epictetus insists, necessitated by the good, ordered management of the cosmos, which recycles all of the materials of its organisms. The individual human being will cease to be upon his death, but something different will come to be from the deceased's material components (iii 24.94). When Zeus recalls the living to return to their origin, this is a return to nothing terrible (δεινόν), but to what is friendly and akin to you (τὰ φίλα καὶ συγγενῆ), to the elements (τὰ στοιχεῖα, iii 13.14). Whatever in you was of fire returns to fire, whatever was of earth returns to earth, whatever was of *pneuma* returns to *pneuma*, whatever was of water returns to water. There is no Hades, nor Acheron, nor Cocytus, nor Pyriphlegethon, but everything is full of gods and *daimones* (iii 13.15). *This* is the belief that Epictetus holds is comforting and ought to banish our fear of death, not any sort of belief in personal reincarnation or immortality of the soul. Erler's interpretation of the reason for confidence in the face of death that Epictetus admires in Socrates is therefore untenable.

In the longest essay of the volume (28 pages) Myrto Dragona-Monachou surveys Epictetus' use of the word *eleutheria*. She argues that Epictetan freedom in some respects anticipates certain modern versions of positive freedom, namely, that of Gibbs 1976 and selected reflections of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, *Notebooks*, and *Culture and Value*. After a discussion of the philosophical debate

over the ‘free-will problem’, Dragona-Monachou rambles through a sketch of Epictetus’ many scattered remarks on freedom in the *Discourses*. She describes her account as complementary to Bobzien 1997, 1998b, yet her plodding report of discourse 4.1 offers virtually no analysis and yields little insight. When she finally turns to the parallels between Epictetus and Wittgenstein, the texts she cites from the latter pertain almost entirely to the will rather than to freedom as such. Having explicitly chosen to focus the bulk of her essay on Epictetus’ use of *eleutheria* and not on that of *eph’ hēmin* and *prohairesis* (121), she has failed to present evidence to warrant her desire to ‘see Wittgenstein’s will as analogous to the Epictetan *prohairesis*’ (136). Dragona-Monachou ‘fully endorses’ A.A. Long’s view on Epictetus’ concept of a free will (2002, 221), and she concludes with a hefty quotation from that book. It is disappointing that, despite its length, this essay contributes little to our understanding of these issues.

Julia Annas’ essay is a gem. She examines the apparent clash between two perspectives Epictetus urges us to bear in mind. From one perspective, I must remember that I am a human being, a rational being, and so share in universal reason as a citizen of the universe. From another perspective, I must consider that I am a particular individual embedded in various social contexts that carry with them multiple roles and relationships (son, brother, town councilor), and so multiple obligations and duties. The problem is that it would seem that these many specific social roles and obligations potentially conflict with the universal community of reason. Annas emphasizes that resolution of this conflict must proceed from the consideration that Stoic ethical theory must be livable by the agent as she directly applies her practical reasoning in her daily life. Annas argues that when one starts thinking as a Stoic, one does one’s best to live as a Stoic in one’s various roles as a son, brother, councilor, and so on. ‘Stoicism is marked by *internal aspiration*: you aspire to be virtuous in the way you live your everyday life, not in trying to forget about your everyday life and its mundane duties’ (148). The Stoic takes her job, family, and all her social relationships as the material on which she exercises the expertise of her virtue. Annas trenchantly observes that one of Epictetus’ important lessons is that Stoicism teaches us a sense of our own limitations and the limitations our circumstances impose on our ability to change things. Our aspiration to virtue develops within the social roles that we have and must accept as ours. Consequently, there is no conflict between the two perspectives, since universal reason is an ideal that one aspires to live up to in every social role and relationship one occupies.

In the final essay the late Michael Frede seeks to ‘shed some light on how we came to think of human beings as persons’ (168). He argues that from the third century BCE onwards the Greek word ‘*prosōpon*’ and later its Latin equivalent ‘*persona*’ come to be used in the sense of ‘sort of person’. Frede identifies ten different sorts of person mentioned by Epictetus: a Roman senator (e.g., Helvidius Priscus), an athlete who had won in the Olympic games, a philosopher, a son, a brother, a city-councilor, a young man, an old man, a father, a beggar. Frede makes a strong case that the way the notion of a person seems to enter philosophy

is as the normative notion of the sort of person one is by playing a certain role in life. This notion makes worthiness of human beings independent of the role or roles they play in life. One is judged not by one's role, but by how well one lives up to the demands of that role. Since many social roles are relational, you are not going to treat a friend, parent, or spouse the same way you treat everybody else; nor are you going to want to be treated the same way by your wife, by other married women, and by other women in general. Frede explains how in Panaetius' four personae theory in Cicero, *De Officiis* i 107 ff. the first type of role is being a human being guided by reason and not a beast, and so what makes an act good and fitting is that it is the right thing to do and it is done for the right reasons. The remaining three roles spell out more concretely the action-guiding roles for each human being.

While Frede's essay is certainly an excellent piece of scholarship, it is curious that his is the only one in the volume that contains not a single citation of another scholar's work. Frede mentions in passing F. de Zulueta's commentary on Gaius' *Institutiones* (159) without any citation of it appearing in the essay itself, the bibliography, or the index. For that reason it is troubling that Frede asserts that 'it is an obvious fact, but one little attention has been paid to', that neither Plato nor Aristotle nor any other Greek author prior to the end of the fourth century BCE talks of human beings as 'persons' in any sense of the word (157). Frede states that Boethius in *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, ch. 3 is the first to use 'person' in what he calls the absolute, reflective sense of the word, and that he doubts that Boethius' definition of a person as 'an individual substance of such a nature as to be rational' is Boethius' invention (158). Yet Frede is certainly not the first scholar to doubt that Boethius' definition is an innovation (see, e.g., Engberg-Pedersen 1990). Perhaps Frede's untimely death prevented him from incorporating the fruits of recent scholarship in his essay, for example, Stephens 2006, ix-xiv.

One nuisance with the choice of type-setting of the volume is that all of the Greek is transliterated rather than printed in Greek. As a consequence, the extended passages of Greek in several of the essays are particularly cumbersome to read due to the inelegant transliteration. There is also some inconsistency in transliteration of terms (102). Nonetheless, the range of topics in Epictetus covered by the essays is usefully wide, and most of the essays are quite good. Consequently, the volume as a whole is welcome and sure to be a lasting contribution to our understanding of Epictetus.

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