

William O. Stephens
Professor of Philosophy and of Classical and Near Eastern Studies
Creighton University
Omaha, Nebraska 68178 USA

The Providential Tourist: Epictetus on How a Stoic Travels

Macon Leary is the title character of Anne Tyler's 1985 novel *The Accidental Tourist*.¹ Macon writes guidebooks for people forced to travel for business. The irony of his vocation is that, like his readers, Macon hates to travel. So in contrast to the deliberate tourism of those eager to explore the distinctive flavors, smells, sights, sounds, and geography of exotic cities and foreign countries, and equally eager to meet the unfamiliar people of those places, Macon's tourism is accidental. His goal is to insulate himself as much as he can from the unusual and alien facets of the places he is forced to visit. The concern Macon and his readers share is how to pretend they had never left home.² By methodically packing only essential items³ and seeking out only familiar food, beverages, amenities, and surroundings amidst foreign cities, Macon determines to spin himself inside a solitary cocoon of sameness. The logo on the cover of his guidebooks is a winged armchair.⁴ The accidental tourist travels clinging to the comforting illusion of never leaving his living room.⁵ Macon's upbringing greatly influenced his adult attitude toward travel. He and his three siblings were moved around a great deal as children, so they never acquired a fixed point of reference. As a result, they all suffered from geographic dyslexia; they "wandered forever in a fog—adrift upon the planet, helpless, praying that just by luck [they] might stumble across [their] destination."⁶

In the ancient world of the first century C.E. land and sea travel each carried risks. Sea voyages in the winter were considered exceptional and dangerous.⁷ Even in the summer seafarers were subject to storms that blew them off course, violent winds that stalled progress, and shipwreck.⁸ Piracy flourished in distant seas, but also occurred occasionally in the Mediterranean.⁹ On land, brigands raided caravans in mountainous or remote areas¹⁰ and sometimes assaulted or murdered the hapless. All such accidents, it

¹ Tyler, Anne. *The Accidental Tourist*. New York: Random House, 1985.

² Tyler, 10.

³ One medium gray suit for all occasions and to hide dirt, a minimum of clothing, travel-size packets of spot remover, deodorant, shoe polish, detergent (so as to avoid falling into the hands of foreign laundries), a book to read (so as to avoid conversation with others), all fitting into a single carry-on bag (since checking luggage is asking for trouble) (Tyler, 21).

⁴ Tyler, 9.

⁵ Macon approves of the experience of planes, for example, because you couldn't tell you were moving and so you could pretend you were sitting safe at home (Tyler, 26).

⁶ Tyler, 106.

⁷ Skeel, Caroline A. J. *Travel in the first century after Christ, with special reference to Asia Minor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901: 93; Casson, Lionel. *Travel in the Ancient World*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994: 149–150.

⁸ Skeel, 94.

⁹ Skeel, 97–99.

¹⁰ Skeel, 71 and Casson, 149. In *Discourses* 3.13.9 Epictetus comments on the safety provided by Caesar, where there is no large scale brigandage (*lēistēria megala*) or piracy, thus allowing travel by land at any hour and sailing from dawn to dusk. In 3.24.28–29, by contrast, he remarks that it is routine for someone to be waylaid by a brigand or for journeys by land or sea to involve winds and all kinds of dangers.

seems plausible to think, gave ancient travelers cause to feel as anxious and defenseless as Tyler's fictional character Macon Leary.

Interestingly, two features of Macon Leary's philosophy of travel resemble the ancient philosophy of Stoicism. First, Macon's goal is to attain and preserve *calmness*. Second, he focuses his concern on those aspects of his travel that he thinks he can *control*. But the aspects Macon expends so much energy on are all features of his external environment.¹ The calmness that Macon strives to protect by preserving the familiar elements of his daily routine while traveling is doomed to crumble, however, since his environment is ultimately and necessarily beyond his control. Thus travelers like Macon are only pseudo-Stoics because they are in reality "anxious and defenseless"² afloat upon the sea of contingencies and uncertainties of the external world they traverse. The accidental tourist³ has not learned that the only reliable serenity comes entirely from within, derived from one's own mental discipline, virtue of character, and wisdom. Wisdom about what is truly up to us and what is not, about what is good, what is evil, and what is indifferent, about the happy life and the life of misery, is the special possession of the providential tourist. The providential tourist is the Stoic traveler.

Is anxiety about the uncertainties and hazards of travel inevitable? Can anxiety about travel be overcome? What judgments guide decisions to travel or not to travel? Is tourism justified? How does travel fit into the good life? My task in this essay is to sketch answers to these questions by reconstructing a philosophy of travel from the first century C.E. lectures of the masterful Stoic teacher Epictetus.

Religious festivals and athletic competitions attracted pilgrims and tourists in the ancient world.⁴ In discourse 1.6 Epictetus addresses a student who is eager to see the famous gold and ivory statue of Zeus at Olympia fashioned by the artist Pheidias.

[23] But you travel to Olympia to behold the work of Pheidias, and you each regard it as a misfortune to die without seeing such sights. [24] But when there is no need to travel at all, and where you are already, and Zeus is present in his works—will you not desire to contemplate *these* things and understand them? [25] Will you never perceive either who you are, or for what you have been born, or the purpose for which this vision has been given to you?⁵

From the Stoic's perspective, the entire natural world is a spectacle worthy of study and admiration. The earth, the sky, and all of nature's wonders in between provide those who are circumspect with plenty to see and appreciate. Epictetus urges the fellow who is dying to travel far to eye glitzy statuary to recognize that he was not born and given vision for the purpose of being entertained at a remote tourist destination. Even the most impressive man-made artifacts of gold and ivory pale in comparison with natural

¹ "Life was so full of things you couldn't do anything about; you had to avert what you could" (Tyler, 15).

² Tyler, 83.

³ Montiglio, Silvia. *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005: 198 interestingly describes the wanderer Dio Chrysostom as an "accidental philosopher" because others, not knowing what to make of him, took him to be a philosopher. Moreover, like Macon Leary, Dio is no Stoic.

⁴ Casson, 147 identifies six basic motives for Romans to travel: (1) business, either one's own or the government's, (2) health, (3) pilgrimage to an oracle or shrine, (4) to attend well-known festivals, (5) holiday vacation (for the wealthy) from town to the shore or the mountains and back, and (6) in a very few cases, to see the world.

⁵ Translations, sometimes modified, are from C. Gill (ed.). *The Discourses of Epictetus*, tr. rev. by Robin Hard. London: J.M. Dent, 1995.

wonders imbued with divine craftsmanship. Epictetus' interlocutor replies with the complaint that some unpleasant and difficult things happen in life. Epictetus responds:

[26] And don't they happen in Olympia? Don't you grow hot? Aren't you crowded? Don't you bathe poorly? Don't you get soaked when it rains? Don't you have your fill of noise and shouting, and other discomforts? [27] But I imagine that, setting all this beside the value of the spectacle, you endure and put up with it.

So if the determined sightseer does travel all the way to Olympia, then he ought to appreciate the spectacle of the artwork and tolerate the discomforts of the tourist destination. If the trip is judged to be worth the trouble, then the Stoic takes the hassles in stride, preserving his equanimity without complaint.

A vacation can be defined as an escape from the daily grind of one's workplace or home to pursue pleasure, either in the form of entertainment, relaxation, or both. The Stoic does not *need* a vacation because he is content with the sights all around him. As such he needs no escape from his daily routine. He perceives in the sights before him orderliness and good management, and he understands that his power of vision is to be used for the very purpose of *detecting* this providential governance. Contemplating the natural marvels within his immediate ambit is entirely up to him. The Stoic does not yearn to glimpse what lies beyond the horizon of his *prohairesis* (volition). Non-Stoics, in contrast, desire many things that are *not* solely up to them to get and keep.

Remember that it is not only a desire for riches and power that makes you abject and subservient to others, but also a desire for quiet and leisure, and travel and learning. For the value you place on an external object, whatever it may be, makes you subservient to another. (4.4.1)

By desiring to possess external objects (e.g. riches, power) or to control circumstances beyond his control (e.g. quiet, leisure) the non-Stoic enslaves himself to those who have power over those externals. In contrast, by focusing on matters completely within his power—having certain kinds of desires—the Stoic enjoys mental freedom and self-sufficiency.

Which desires secure the Stoic a free and peaceful mind? Just as the Stoic does not desire sightseeing tours, neither does he resist traveling when it is required. Where one is, after all, is not completely within one's power. In discourse 4.4 Epictetus cites with approval the willingness of Socrates to be sent on campaign and leave Athens. Socrates was too wise to set his heart on leisurely conversations with young men in Athens when military service required him to leave his *polis*. He was content to follow the will of god. Thus Epictetus invokes the saying of Cleanthes:

[34] 'Lead me, Zeus; and thou, O Destiny.' Is it your will that I should go to Rome? Off to Rome. To Gyara? Off to Gyara. To Athens? Off to Athens. To prison? Off to prison. [35] If you once say, 'When can one get to Athens?', you are undone. This desire, if it be unfulfilled, must necessarily render you disappointed, and if fulfilled, vain about something that should not elate you: then again, if you are hindered, you incur misfortune, by falling into something that you do not wish. ... [45] Mindful of this, rejoice in what you have, and be contented with what the moment brings. ... [48] If you are brought up to reason in such a way, how can you enquire any longer as to where you will be happy, and where you will please god? Are men not equally far from god wherever they are? And wherever they are, do they not equally behold what comes to pass?

The Stoic message is that wherever one travels in the cosmos, one can be happy and please god. The Stoic does not make himself anxious by anticipating what his destination will be. Nor does he fret about when he will get there. Confidence that Zeus determines his destination and the time of his arrival allows the Stoic to rejoice in what each moment brings on each step of his journey. Zeus pilots the Stoic on his trip.

In discourse 2.7 Epictetus repeats the visual simile to explicate the importance of making good use of the impressions (*phantasiai*) that come our way rather than wishing to see some things rather than others. He cautions approaching diviners with either desire for or aversion to a particular outcome.

[10] What should we do, then? We should come to them without desire or aversion, just as a traveler asks somebody he meets which of two roads to take, without having any particular desire to travel on the right-hand road rather than the left; for he does not wish to travel on one of them in particular, but on the one that will lead him where he wants to go. [11] It is in this way also that we should approach god as a guide, just as we make use of our eyes, not calling on them to show us things of one kind rather than another, but accepting the impressions of whatever they display to us.

The Stoic traveler is as indifferent to the route he takes as he is to his destination and time of arrival. Understanding this is ingredient to approaching god as a guide. Yet here a problem arises. If the Stoic is content to go wherever Zeus leads him, and he is indifferent to the route, the destination, and the time of arrival, then how and when does he set out? He wishes only to go wherever it pleases Zeus. But how does the Stoic figure out when and where Zeus wills him to travel?

The beginning of an answer to this question is found in discourse 3.24. This discourse requires extensive exegesis. Its principal aim is for Epictetus to show that his students should not allow what is contrary to nature for someone else to become their own evil. His interlocutor has parted from somebody who is upset by the departure. Judging such a departure to be upsetting is contrary to nature. Epictetus asks his interlocutor:

[4] And why did he consider what was not his own to be his own? Why did he not reflect, while he was pleased at seeing you, that you are mortal, that you are liable to go on a journey? Thus he is simply paying the penalty for his own foolishness. [5] But to what purpose or for what cause are you yourself lamenting? Have you too failed to study these things? But, like women of no worth, did you rejoice in all the things you delighted in, the places, the persons, the conversations, as if they were to last for ever? And now you sit crying because you do not see the same people, nor live in the same place.

The stern reminder is that the grieving friend is suffering from his own foolish judgment. His grief is therefore self-imposed. Epictetus' interlocutor repeats his friend's foolishness by judging another's (self-inflicted) grief to be his own evil. Epictetus can tell that his interlocutor is just as upset by being parted from his friend as the friend is. So why does Epictetus seem harder on his student than on the other fellow? His student has heard Epictetus many times teach the importance of distinguishing between what is one's own and what is not, and not making the mistake of wanting the latter. The student of Stoicism ought to know better than to duplicate the foolish judgment of another. That is why Epictetus is tough on his student for having failed to remember this vital lesson. His student foolishly believed his enjoyment of certain people and places would not end.

The berating of the foolish student continues. Since the foolish judgment is entirely of his own making, the student bears full responsibility for his resulting misery.

[6] Indeed, you deserve to be so affected, and thus to become more wretched than ravens or crows, which, without groaning or longing for their former home, can fly where they will, build their nests in another place, and cross the seas. [7] ‘Yes, but they react in that way because of their want of reason.’ Was reason then given us by the gods to bring us unhappiness and misery, to make us live our lives in wretchedness and lamentation?

Epictetus insists that the power of reason enables human beings to be at least as happy as ravens and crows, who are never homesick and relocate without distress. Notice that it is not wings that make such birds capable of traveling and establishing new homes without misery. They can do so even lacking the degree of reason human beings possess. It is their nature as animals that migrate freely and without anguish.¹ Nature has similarly made human beings animals that locomote.

[8] Or should everyone be undying, and never leave their homes but remain rooted to a spot like plants? And, if any one of our friends should leave his home, should we sit and cry, and when he comes back, should we dance and clap our hands like children? [9] Shall we never wean ourselves, and remember what we have heard from the philosophers [10] (unless we listened to them simply as weavers of tales): that the world is one great city, and the substance out of which it is formed is single, and there must necessarily be a cycle of change, in which one thing gives way to another, and some things are destroyed and others come into being, and some things remain where they were and others are moved.

Women of no worth (*ta gunaia ta oudenos axia*) wrongly believe their enjoyment of people and places will last forever (3.24.5). Children get overly excited when reunited with friends (3.24.8). The sensible adult, in contrast to such women and children, has taken to heart the teaching of the Stoic philosophers that we all inhabit a single cosmopolis. Changes within this one cosmopolis include day and night, four seasons, coming to be, passing away, and *movement*. From the perspective of this Heraclitean cosmology, travel is never worrisome, because wherever one ventures, one remains at home within the cosmos. The Stoic traveler cannot be alienated from the cosmic city that embraces all earthly locales. The Stoic *cosmopolitēs* can never become *lost*.² Cosmopolitanism also explains why exile is no evil for the Stoic. Banishment from a particular earthly municipality in no way unsettles his residence in the cosmic city.³

Not only does the idea of the cosmopolis provide geographical comfort to the Stoic traveler, it also provides solidarity among its residents. Discourse 3.24 continues:

¹ Montiglio, 212 thinks that in 3.24.6 Epictetus represents migratory birds as the ideal of freedom, since they can choose to fly (wander) wherever they want but we have no such freedom. This misunderstands Epictetus’ conception of real freedom, which is the *internal* mental disposition of desiring only what is in one’s power always to achieve, not the physical ability to move about in space unhindered.

² For a discussion of what “getting lost” means in the relationship between wandering and knowledge for Odysseus and Dio Chrysostom, see Montiglio, 202 and ch. 3.

³ See *Disc.* 2.6.20–25. The same holds for prison.

[11] And the world is full of friends, first the gods,¹ then also human beings, who are by nature made akin (*ōikeiōmenōn*) to each other; and some must remain with one another and others depart, and we should rejoice in those who are with us, and not be grieved at those who depart. [12] Humankind, besides possessing a natural greatness of mind and contempt for things outside the sphere of choice, is formed not to be rooted or attached to the earth, but to go at different times to different places, sometimes on urgent business, and sometimes for the sake of the spectacle.

The gods are the kind of friends that can accompany the Stoic traveler everywhere. So the rhetorical query in 4.4.48 about human beings being equally *far* from god wherever they are can, in light of 3.24.11, be reconceived as the invitation to the Stoic *cosmopolitēs* to keep the gods equally *close* wherever he goes. The gods are the *only* friends whose companionship can be ubiquitous and at all times within one's reach. But this is not the only reason why Epictetus judges the gods to constitute the primary circle of friends.

Consider the following passage from the longest of all the extant discourses. Its topic is freedom. Epictetus has argued that to be free is to live as one wills, without restraint, without hindrance, without frustration of one's desires, and without falling into one's aversions. Consequently, those who are unhappy, miserable, or grieving are not free. They lack the knowledge that would free them from being captive to the desires that cause their misery. This is the knowledge of what is up to us and what is not. Diligently limiting one's concern to what is up to oneself, one's assent and decisions, secures freedom.

[4.1.91] This is also the way the more cautious of travelers act. One of them has heard that the road is beset with robbers; he does not venture to set out alone, but waits for the retinue of an ambassador or quaestor or proconsul, and, attaching himself to their company, goes along in safety. [92] Likewise in this world does the wise man (*ho phronimos*) act. Many are the gangs of robbers, and tyrants, storms, tribulations, and occasions to lose the things we most value. [93] Where can someone flee for refuge? (he asks himself) How can he escape unrobbed? What retinue shall he wait for to make his way through safely? To whom shall he attach himself? [94] To some rich man or proconsul? And what good does that do me? He himself is stripped, groans, laments. And what if my fellow-traveler himself should turn against me and rob me? What shall I do? ... [97] Is it impossible to find a fellow-traveler who is safe, trustworthy, strong, and incapable of treachery? [98] He thinks things over in this way and realizes that, if he attaches himself to god, he will journey along safely. [99] – ‘How do you mean, attach himself?’ So that whatever god wills, he wills too, and what god does not will, he does not will either. [100] ‘How, then, can this be achieved?’ – Why, how otherwise than by considering god's purposes and his governance? What has he given to me to be my own and subject to my own authority? What has he reserved for himself? He has given me whatever lies within the sphere of choice (*ta prohairtika*), and made that over to me free from all hindrance and restraint.

The gods are safe, trustworthy, strong, and incapable of treachery, and so their reliability as fellow-travelers is total. Human beings remain fallible, frail, and fickle,

¹ In *Disc.* 4.3.9 Epictetus urges the modest and self-respecting man to say “I am a free man and a friend of god” (*eleutheros gar eimi kai philos tou theou*).

and thus they fall short of such perfect fidelity. Their perfect fidelity is thus the second reason why the gods are counted as the first group of friends.

This is not to suggest, however, that Epictetus generally distrusts people. To the contrary, social *oikeiōsis* knits all human beings together into a second community of friends (3.24.11). Epictetus' belief in the beneficial power of reason is expressed in his teaching that the Stoic should rejoice with those people who are present without grieving when others depart. Unlike the ravens and crows that do not miss their abandoned nests—perhaps because they either cannot or do not remember them—human memory, fortified by a healthy, reasoned belief in cosmopolitanism, enables us to remember absent friends while judging the travels that separate them from us as inevitable and not regrettable. The rational Stoic can celebrate with whatever company he has, and is content with no human company at all.¹ Strangers encountered along a journey should not be feared as threats, but welcomed as friends. Stoic cosmopolitanism thus precludes xenophobia, racism, and ethnic or cultural provincialism.

Now the problem raised above concerning how the Stoic can determine Zeus' will about when and where he should travel can be addressed. What calls the Stoic to relocate to a new *polis*, to take a trip and return, or to stay put? Analysis of the texts examined reveal five factors that determine travel. First, the Stoic's role as friend to the gods or to human beings.² Second, obligations arising from his familial role or roles. Third, obligations arising from his social, civic, or professional roles. Fourth, the need to tend his own mundane affairs. Fifth, acting the role of an intelligent cosmic spectator. Let us explore each in turn.

Friendships provide the Stoic with reason to travel or stay put. But what kind of trip would be necessitated by friendship with the gods? They certainly need no one's help. Epictetus considers the special vocation of the Cynic to be a sort of lifelong journey for the sake of one's friendship with the gods. Sent by Zeus as part messenger and part scout for human beings (3.22.23–25), the Cynic's mission is extraordinarily demanding for the many reasons Epictetus explains to his students. The point of particular relevance here is that it is the only role Epictetus discusses that requires *constant travel*. The rigors of the Cynic's calling make it the wrong choice for nearly everyone, including the Stoic.³ The student willing to undergo the tough training (*askēsis*) of Stoicism need not also live without family, friends, spouse, children, fellow citizens, public offices, or income.

The friendship of human beings, on the other hand, is a common occasion for travel. Epictetus explicitly rejects divination because many use it to neglect many of their responsibilities. He clearly thinks there are circumstances when it is necessary to risk one's life for one's friend, and circumstances when one ought to die for one's friend (2.7.1–3). Though Epictetus does not provide in this discourse an example of a circumstance in which one must risk one's life for a friend, he does cite the example of Maximus sailing all the way to Cassiope during the winter with this son, in order to see him on his way (3.7.3).⁴ If a father ought to accompany his son on a risky sea voyage, it stands to reason that a similar occasion would call for someone to travel with his friend. So just as one's friendships with other people can warrant travel, so too can one's familial responsibilities.

¹ See *Disc.* 3.13.1–6 where Epictetus defines desolation (*erēmia*) as the condition of being bereft of help and vulnerable to injury rather than the condition of being alone. Stoics must train themselves to become capable of being self-sufficient, as Zeus is at the *ekpurōsis*.

² Cf. *Disc.* 1.1.16–17; 2.5.9–12.

³ See Montiglio, ch. 8 and ch. 9, 204–213.

⁴ As noted above (Skeel 93; Casson 149–150), sea voyages in winter were especially dangerous.

Notice that being and acting as a friend and being a father, son, or brother and acting accordingly are examples of social roles that carry with them clear obligations and motivations.¹ Epictetus uses a military simile to illustrate other roles that guide conduct. He says that the business of life is like a campaign (*strateia*). Consequently, one must be ready to perform whatever task one is assigned, including travel, since it is not possible for all to stay in the same place, nor is it better (3.24.31). “Everyone’s life is a kind of campaign, and a long and complicated one. You must observe the character of a soldier and perform each act at the bidding of the general” (3.24.34; cf. *Ench.* 17). One reason that our lives are complicated is that we each have multiple roles at any one time and different, shifting sets of roles over the course of our lives. These multiple roles often enough compete by pulling us in different trajectories of action. Thus it is a serious and ongoing challenge for us as agents to manage and balance the weights of these competing roles appropriately. Determining when one course of action dictated by one role must be postponed or even replaced by another course of action dictated by another role requires careful adjudication and deliberation. Indeed, Epictetus seems to hint that juggling our various roles at times requires us to subordinate some to others when he remarks that the affairs of one’s household require little time, and most of the time one has to be away commanding, being commanded, serving some official, serving in the field, or sitting as a judge (3.24.36). So although attending to the affairs of one’s household (*oikonomein*) takes little time, it nevertheless would seem to count as a distinct (fourth) type of justification for travel.

One could complain that in speaking of life as like a campaign in which we ought to act as good soldiers by obediently performing each task *as it is assigned to us by the general*, Epictetus is again appealing to Zeus’ will, and so we return to the problem of how confidently to discern Zeus’ commands to us. Indeed, this aspect of the simile suggests that acting out our social, civic, and professional roles is in fact at the same time being friends to the gods. By occupying a wider range of public, civic, and military offices than the Cynic, Stoics dutifully obey their divine general no less than the divine messenger-scout the Cynic does. But each new role emerges from a pre-existing web of prior roles and relationships. Consequently figuring out what tasks we are “assigned” turns out not to be some kind of mysterious process of divination. Rather, we can take stock of our strengths, talents, and natural abilities and make a sensible judgment about whether we are suited to a particular task, role, or position.² Self-knowledge of this kind is not difficult to achieve, and so selecting tasks that match our abilities is as much a process of canny self-assignment as it is a discernment of Zeus’ commands. Zeus’ will is written plainly enough in what nature displays to our observation.

The fifth justification for travel is to be an intelligent cosmic spectator. Returning to 1.6.23–27, we can understand that a trip to Olympia to behold Pheidias’ famous statue of Zeus is not in itself illicit, so long as it is undertaken with due caution and the right (Stoic) motive. The right motive is to behold and appreciate the wondrous, enduring spectacle of Zeus’ cosmos as a whole from the perspective of any one of its local parts. The wrong motive would be to want to gawk at a flashy, cunningly crafted statue with the false belief that such an impermanent artifact, wrought by human hands, remotely approaches the beauty, grandeur, or wise governance of

¹ On obligations (*kathēkonta*) being measured by social relationships (*skheseis*) see *Ench.* 30.

² *Disc.* 3.15 is instructive here. When considering whether to undertake some task or project, Epictetus urges his students to consider (1) the practices involved in the enterprise, (2) the sacrifices that must be made to engage in those practices, and (3) one’s own natural abilities to succeed in those practices. Specifically, he notes that few have the talent for oratory of a Euphrates, and few have the burly physique of wrestlers.

Nature. If beholding Pheidias' work of art reminds the Stoic spectator of the providential splendor of Zeus' crafted cosmos, then this kind of sightseeing trip is legitimate.

Identification and analysis of these five reasons to travel establish a substantial basis for understanding how travel fits into the Stoic account of the good life, that is, the life in accordance with nature, reason, and virtue. But it would be misleading to think that Epictetus considers travel simply as one activity among many, and of no greater significance than the others, that occupy a Stoic's life. A deeper significance to one of Epictetus' travel similes emerges from the next set of texts.

Consider the following text in which Epictetus discusses choosing among things of value. He notes that externals can be powerful distractions that deflect the Stoic from the destinations to which his roles direct him.

[2.23.35] We ought, for instance, to take care of our eyes also, but not as the highest thing, but only on account of the highest; because that will not preserve its own nature unless it uses the eyes with reason and chooses some things rather than others. [36] What is the usual practice, then? People behave like a traveler, who, returning to his own country, comes across a good inn on the road, and because the inn pleases him, remains there. [37] Have you forgotten your intention, man? You were not traveling to this place, but only through it. 'But this is a fine inn.' And how many other fine inns are there, and how many pleasant meadows? But only to be passed through on the way. [38] Your business is the other thing; to return to your country, to relieve the anxieties of your family, to perform the duties of a citizen, to marry, to have children, and to hold public office. [39] For you have not, I think, come into the world to pick out the most charming places, but to live and act in the place where you were born, and of which you have been appointed a citizen.

Montiglio interprets this passage as follows: "Since we have no control over the journey and the journey has no otherworldly aim..., we should not have any intended destination other than our internal disposition, which, apart from suicide, is the only controllable goal of the journey: not where to travel but how to travel. Indeed, Epictetus identifies Odysseus's 'home' as the right mental disposition. The man who makes progress is a traveler who uses all the facilities that he finds along the way for the sake of the moral purpose, by reaching which he returns to his 'native country' (2.23.38)."¹ Montiglio describes the right mental disposition as the Stoic's destination, and if we construe 'destination' as a metaphor for goal, then this claim is accurate enough.² However, she oversteps by plumping a symbolic interpretation of *pa/tra* that is not supported by the text in 2.23.38–39. Epictetus explicitly states that the prescribed task (*to prokeimenon*) is to return to one's country, help one's family, perform the duties of a citizen, marry, have children, and hold office. Fulfilling these familial, civic, and public roles at one's city of birth is clearly the concrete manifestation of the virtuous mental disposition of the Stoic traveler. Montiglio also errs in collapsing the Stoic's reasons to travel or stay put with Epictetus' complex account of when choosing to depart from *life* is and is not justified.

Many of Epictetus' students, we should remember, are also travelers away from their homes in Rome. So this text also serves to remind them that after receiving their education in Stoicism at Epictetus' school in Nicopolis, they must return to their

¹ Montiglio, 209.

² For her insightful discussion of Epictetus' celebration of Heracles and Odysseus for their inimitable wanderings, coupled with his view that Stoics are too modest to set themselves up as divine overseers of the deeds of others as Cynics do, see Montiglio chs. 8 and 9.

homes and carry out their familial and civic responsibilities. Their purpose in leaving their homes in the first place was to remedy their pathologies of irrational judgments, false beliefs, and frustration-causing desires for things beyond their control by leaving behind the old habits at home that produced these pathologies.

[3.16.11] It is for this reason that philosophers even advise us to leave our country, because old habits distract us, and prevent us from beginning to develop new ones. ... [12] Thus physicians send patients with chronic disorders to a different place and a different climate; and rightly so. [13] And you also should adopt different habits. Fix your opinions, and exercise yourself in them.

Epictetus' school is a hospital for his students' philosophical therapy. Their Stoic training in new, healthy habits of thought frees their minds of disturbances and equips them to help their parents and fellow citizens at home (3.21.5–9).

The simile of travelers at an inn (*pandokeion*) quoted above (2.23.36–37) is repeated several times in the *Discourses* because it serves as a powerful lesson in Epictetus' pedagogy. Epictetus uses this simile to illustrate how his students ought to think about *all* externals in their lives, including their loved ones.

Never say about anything, 'I have lost it'; but rather 'I have given it back.' Is your child dead? It is given back. Is your wife dead? She is given back. Is your farm taken away? Well, that also is given back. 'But the person who took it was bad.' And does it matter to you through what means the giver demanded it back? For so long as he gives it to you, take care of it; but as something that is not your own, as travelers treat an inn. (*Ench.* 11; cf. *Disc.* 4.1.107)

Since our family members are with us week after week and month after month, we foolishly come to expect that they will continue to be with us for years to come. This expectation is pernicious, however, because it typically leads to the further belief that the people closest to us belong to us as ours. Epictetus wants to cure his students of this false and harmful belief. One's own beliefs, judgments, intentions, decisions, and desires are the things truly one's own because only such internals are by their very nature always and completely within one's power. In sharp contrast, one's possessions, one's body,¹ and other people are externals that one can never possess and so never lose. If, when, and how such externals come into our lives is essentially not up to us, as are when and how such externals are 'given back'. Externals are not and cannot be constituents of one's psychic, volitional life, so they are not and cannot be elements of one's self-identity. That is why Epictetus urges that we take care of all such externals as things that are on temporary loan to us, as travelers treat an inn. Travelers are free to enjoy the amenities of their inn fully, so long as their unbridled enjoyment is coupled with the clear realization that those amenities will be returned to the inn-keeper.²

While the travelers at an inn simile in *Ench.* 11 invites reflection on the mortality of beloved others, Epictetus employs a naval metaphor to invite reflection on one's mortality.

When you are on a voyage, and the ship is at anchor, if you go ashore to get water you may pick up some small shellfish or vegetable on your way, but your

¹ See *Disc.* 1.24.14.

² For details on Roman inns of the time, see Casson, 185.

thoughts should be fixed on the ship, and you should look back constantly in case the captain should call; and, if he calls, you must cast all these things aside, if you want to avoid being thrown into the vessel with your legs bound like the sheep. This is the case in life also: if, instead of a vegetable or a shellfish, a wife or a child is granted you, this need not hinder you; but if the captain calls, leave all these things and run to the ship without even looking back. And if you are old, never wander far from the ship, so that when the call comes, you will not be left behind. (*Ench.* 7)

The common theme in both of these last two texts is that if one is granted a wife or child, one is not thereby hindered. Unhindered living here means wisely remembering that people are temporary (mortal) gifts in our own mortal lives, they do not belong us, and we should love them on those terms.

The kind of emotional detachment from loved ones urged by Epictetus is one of the most difficult aspects of his Stoicism for us moderns to accept. We may, after all, be disinclined to believe in divine providence. We may even doubt that there is a ‘captain’. Is Epictetus’ philosophy of travel practicable if our scientific views of cosmology and evolution undermine belief in a providential deity? A final text from the *Discourses* can shed light on this concern.

[2.18.29] Remember god, call upon him to help you and stand by your side, just as voyagers in a storm call upon the Dioscuri. For what storm is greater than that stirred up by powerful impressions that unseat reason? As for the storm itself, what else is it but an impression (*phantasia*)? [30] To prove this, just take away the fear of death, and then bring on as much thunder and lightning as you please, and you will realize how great is the calm, how fair the weather, in your ruling principle (*hēgemonikōi*).

Epictetus was confident that reason had the power to dispel false beliefs, foolish judgments, and groundless fears, thereby equipping the Stoic traveler with peace of mind (*hēgemonikon*) amidst the storm of uncertainties of life. But whereas Epictetus also believed that Zeus governs the cosmos, bestowed human beings with reason (*logos*) as the most valuable part of his divine nature, and provides rain, plants, and animals to us as resources,¹ a modern-day Stoic need not share these beliefs. The modern-day Stoic need only share Epictetus’ confidence in the power of reason and rigorously apply Stoic wisdom about what is up to us, what is not, what is good, what is evil, and what is indifferent to our lives in order to become tranquil and content. If so, then the Stoic traveler need not believe in Zeus’ providence in order to escape the anxious, accidental tourism of Macon Leary. Flight delays, cancellations, turbulence, and the rudeness of other passengers are all beyond the control of the airline passenger, after all, and so need not disturb him. Treating airline personnel and fellow-passengers with courtesy, on the other hand, is up to the Stoic traveler and is his responsibility. The maintenance of one’s automobile and driving it safely are up to the motorist, whereas the weather, road conditions, traffic, and road rage of other motorists are not. The latter challenge one’s equanimity, but the motorist is responsible only for the former. One need not believe in Zeus to find such considerations eminently reasonable. One need only be convinced that reason is itself sufficiently providential for any tourist.

¹ See, for example, *Disc.* 1.19.11–12 and 4.1.100–105.