

The *Handbook* of Epictetus

A New Translation

by

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1. [1] On the one hand, there are things that are in our power, whereas other things are not in our power. In our power are opinion, impulse, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever is our own doing. Things not in our power include our body, our possessions, our reputations, our status, and, in a word, whatever is not our own doing.

[2] Now, things that are in our power are by nature free, unhindered, unimpeded; but things not in our power are weak, slavish, hindered, and belong to others. [3] Remember, therefore, that whenever you suppose those things that are by nature slavish to be free, or those things that belong others to be your own, you will be hindered, miserable and distressed, and you will find fault with both gods and men. If however you suppose to be yours only what is yours, and what belongs to another to belong to another (as indeed it does), no one will ever compel you, no one will hinder you; you will find fault with no one, reproach no one, nor act against your own will; you will have no enemies and no one will harm you, for no harm can touch you.

[4] Thus, when aiming at such great things remember that securing them requires more than a modest effort: some things you will have to give up altogether, and others you will have to put aside for the time being. If you want such great things but at the same time strive for status and wealth, you may well not even obtain these latter things because you are seeking the former; at any rate, you will certainly fail to secure those former great things which alone bring freedom and happiness.

[5] Straightaway then, train yourself to say to every unpleasant impression, 'You are an impression, and by no means what you appear to be.' Then examine it and test it by the rules that you have, firstly (in this way especially) by asking whether it concerns things that are in our power or things that are not in our power: and if it concerns something not in our power, have ready to hand the answer, 'This is nothing to me.'

2. [1] Remember that, on the one hand, desires command you to obtain what you long for, and on the other, aversions command you to avoid what you dislike. Those who fail to gain what they desire are unfortunate, whilst those who fall into what they seek to avoid are miserable. So if you seek to avoid only those things contrary to nature amongst the things that are in your power, you will accordingly fall into nothing to which you are averse; but if you seek to avoid sickness, or death, or poverty, you will be miserable. [2] Therefore, remove altogether your aversion for anything that is not in our power, and transfer it to those things contrary to nature that *are* in our power. For the time being, completely restrain your desires, for if you desire any of those things not in our power you are bound to suffer misfortune. For of those things in our power, which it would be proper to desire, none is yet within your grasp. Use only choice and refusal, but use even these lightly, with reservation, and without straining.

3. With respect to any of those things you find attractive or useful or have a fondness for, recall to mind what kind of thing it is, beginning with the most trifling. So if you are fond of an earthen pot, say, 'I am fond of an earthen pot.' Then you will not be upset if it gets broken. When you kiss your child or wife, say that you are kissing a human being; then, should they die, you will not be distressed.

4. When you are about to undertake some task, remind yourself what sort of business it is. If you are going out to bathe, bring to mind what happens at the baths: there will be those who splash you, those who will jostle you, some will be abusive to you, and others will steal from you. And thus you will undertake the affair more securely if you say to yourself from the start, 'I wish to take a bath, but also to keep my moral character in accordance with nature.' Do likewise with every undertaking. For thus, if anything should happen that interferes with your bathing, be ready to say, 'Oh well, it was not only this that I wanted, but also to keep my moral character in accordance with nature, and I cannot do that if I am irritated by things that happen.'

5. It is not circumstances themselves that trouble people, but their judgements about those circumstances. For example, death is nothing terrible, for if it were, it would have appeared so to Socrates; but having the opinion that death is terrible, *this* is what is terrible. Therefore, whenever we are hindered or troubled or distressed, let us never blame others, but ourselves, that is, our own opinions. The uneducated person blames others for their failures; those who have just begun to be instructed blame themselves; those whose learning is complete blame neither others nor themselves.

6. Do not take pride in any excellence that is not your own. If a horse were to say proudly, 'I am beautiful,' one could put up with that. But when you say proudly, 'I have a beautiful horse,' remember that you are boasting about something good that belongs to the horse. What, then, belongs to *you*? The use of impressions. Whenever you are in accordance with nature regarding the way you use impressions, then be proud, for then you will be proud of a good that is your own.

7. Just as on a voyage, when the ship has anchored, if you go ashore to get water you may also pick up a shell-fish or a vegetable from the path, but you should keep your thoughts fixed on the ship, and you should look back frequently in case the captain calls, and, if he should call, you must give up all these other things to avoid being bound and thrown on board like a sheep; so in life also, if instead of a vegetable and a shell-fish you are given a wife and a child, nothing will prevent you from taking them – but if the captain calls, give up all these things and run to the ship without even turning to look back. And if you are old, do not even go far from the ship, lest you are missing when the call comes.

8. Do not demand that things should happen just as you wish, but wish them to happen just as they do, and all will be well.

9. Illness interferes with one's body, but not with one's moral character, unless one so wishes. Lameness interferes with one's leg, but not with one's moral character. Say this to yourself regarding everything that happens to you, for you will find that what happens interferes with something else, but not with you.

10. On every occasion when something happens to you, remember to turn to yourself to see what capacity you have for dealing with it. If you are attracted to a beautiful boy or woman, you will find that self-control is the capacity to use for that. If hardship befalls you, you will find endurance; if abuse, you will find patience. Make this your habit and you will not be carried away by impressions.

11. Never say of anything, 'I have lost it,' but rather 'I have given it back.' Has your child died? It has been given back. Has your wife died? She has been given back. Has your land been taken from you? Well, that too has been given back. 'But the one who took it from me is a bad man!' What concern is it of yours by whose hand the Giver asks for its return? For the time that these things are given to you, take care of them as things that belong to another, just as travellers do an inn.

12. [1] If you want to make progress, set aside all considerations like these: 'If I neglect my affairs, I will have nothing to live on'; 'If I do not punish my slave-boy, he will be bad.' For it is better to die of hunger, free from distress and fear, than to live perturbed amidst plenty. It is better for your slave-boy to be bad than for you to be wretched.

[2] Begin therefore with little things. The olive-oil is spilled. The wine is stolen. Say to yourself, 'This is the price for peace of mind, and this is the price for being free of troubles. Nothing can be had without paying the price.' And when you call your slave-boy, bear in mind that it is quite possible he won't heed you, or even if he does heed you it is quite possible that he won't do the things you tell him to. But he is not in so fine a position that your peace of mind depends upon him.

13. If you want to make progress, submit to appearing foolish and stupid with regard to external things. Do not wish to appear knowledgeable about anything, and if others think you amount to something, distrust yourself. For you should know that it is not easy both to keep your moral character in accordance with nature and to keep secure external things, for in attending to one, you will inevitably neglect the other.

14. [1] It is foolish to wish that your children and your wife and your friends should live forever, for you are wishing for things to be in your power which are not, and wishing for what belongs to others to be your own. It is foolish in the same way, too, to wish that your slave-boy should never do wrong, for now you want badness not to be badness, but something else. However, if you wish not to fail in what you desire, this you are able to do. Exercise yourself, therefore, in what you *are* able to do. [2] A person's master is the one who has power over that which is wished for or not wished for, so as to secure it or take it away. Therefore, anyone who wishes to be free should

neither wish for anything nor avoid anything that depends on others; those who do not observe this rule will of necessity be the slaves of others.

15. Remember, you ought to behave in life as you would at a banquet. Something is carried round and comes to you: reach out and take a modest portion. It passes by? Do not stop it. It has not yet arrived? Do not stretch your desire towards it, but wait until it comes to you. So it should be concerning your children, your wife, your status, your wealth, and one day you will be worthy to share a banquet with the gods. If, however, you do not take these things even when they are put before you, but have no regard for them, not only will you share a banquet with the gods, but also rule with them. By acting in this way, Diogenes and Heraclitus, and people like them, were deservedly gods and were deservedly called so.

16. When you see someone weeping in grief because their child has gone abroad or because they have lost their property, take care not to be carried away by the impression that these external things involve them in anything bad, but be ready to say immediately, 'This person is not distressed by what has happened (for it does not distress anyone else), but by the judgement they make of it.' Do not hesitate, however, to sympathise with words, or if it so happens, to weep with them; but take care not to weep inwardly.

17. Remember that you are an actor in a play of such a kind as the playwright chooses: short, if he wants it short, long if he wants it long. If he wants you to play the part of a beggar, play even this part well; and so also for the parts of a disabled person, an administrator, or a private individual. For this is your business, to play well the part you are given; but choosing it belongs to another.

18. When a raven croaks inauspiciously, do not be carried away by the impression, but straightaway draw a distinction and say to yourself, 'This portent signifies nothing with respect to me, but only with regard to my body, my possessions, my reputation, my children or my wife. To me, however, all portents are auspicious, if I wish them so. For however the affair turns out, it is in my power to benefit from it.'

19. [1] You can be invincible if you never enter a contest in which it is not in your power to win. [2] Beware that, when you see someone honoured before others, enjoying great power, or otherwise highly esteemed, you do not get carried away by the impression and think them happy. For if the essence of good lies in what is in our power, it is wrong to feel envy or jealousy, and you yourself will not wish to be praetor, senator or consul, but someone who is free. There is only one way to attain this end, and this is to have no concern for the things that are not in our power.

20. Remember that the insult does not come from the person who abuses you or hits you, but from your judgement that such people are insulting you. Therefore, whenever someone provokes you, be aware that it is your own opinion that provokes

you. Try, therefore, in the first place, not to be carried away by your impressions, for if you can gain time and delay, you will more easily control yourself.

21. Let death and exile, and all other things that seem terrible, appear daily before your eyes, but especially death – and you will never entertain any abject thought, nor long for anything excessively.

22. If you set your heart on philosophy, be prepared from the very start to be ridiculed and jeered at by many people who will say, ‘Suddenly he’s come back to us a philosopher!’ and ‘Where do you suppose he got that supercilious look?’ Now, for your part, do not show a supercilious look, but hold fast to the things that seem best to you, as someone who has been assigned to this post by God. And remember that if you persist in your principles, those who at first ridiculed you will later admire you. But if, on the other hand, you are defeated by such people, you will be doubly ridiculed.

23. If at any time it should happen that you turn to external things with the aim of pleasing someone, understand that you have ruined your life’s plan. Be content, then, in everything, with being a philosopher; and if you wish also to be regarded as such, appear so to yourself, and that will be sufficient.

24. [1] Do not be troubled by thoughts such as these: ‘I will be valued by no one my whole life long, a nobody everywhere!’ For if lacking value is something bad (which it is), you cannot be involved in anything bad through other people any more than you can be involved in anything disgraceful. Is it any business of yours, then, to acquire status or to be invited to a banquet? Certainly not! How, then, can this be regarded as lacking value? And how will you be a nobody everywhere, when all you have to be is a somebody concerning those things that are in your power, with respect to which you can be someone of the greatest value?

[2] ‘But my friends,’ you say, ‘will lack support.’

What do you mean, ‘lack support’? Certainly they won’t get much cash from you, neither will you make them Roman citizens! Who told you, then, that these things are amongst those that are in our power, and not the business of other people? And who can give to others things they do not have themselves?

[3] ‘Get some money, then,’ someone says, ‘so that we can have some too!’

If I can get it whilst also preserving my self-respect, my trustworthiness, my magnanimity, show me how, and I will get it. But if you ask me to forsake those things that are good and my own, in order that you may acquire those things that are not good, see for yourself how unfair and thoughtless you are. Besides, what would you rather have, money, or a friend who is trustworthy and has self-respect? Therefore help me towards this end, and do not ask me to do anything by which I will lose those very qualities.

[4] ‘But my country,’ you say, ‘as far as it depends on me, will be without my help.’

I ask again, what help do you mean? It will not have colonnades and bathhouses on your account. But what does that mean? For neither is it provided with shoes by a smith, nor weapons by a shoemaker: it is enough if everyone properly attends to their own business. But if you were to provide it with another trustworthy citizen who has self-respect, would that not be of use to your country?

‘Yes.’

Well, then, you also cannot be useless to it.

[5] ‘What place, then,’ you ask, ‘will I have in the community?’

That which you may have whilst also preserving your trustworthiness and self-respect. But if, by wishing to be useful, you throw away these qualities, of what use can you be to your community if you become shameless and untrustworthy?

25. [1] Has someone been honoured above you at a banquet, or in a greeting, or in being called in to give advice? If these things are good, you should be pleased for the person who has received them. If, on the other hand, they are bad, do not be upset that you did not receive them yourself. Remember, with respect to acquiring things that are not in our power, you cannot expect an equal share if you do not behave in the same way as other people. [2] How is it possible, if you do not hang around someone’s door, accompany them or praise them, to have an equal share with people who do these things? You will be unjust, therefore, and insatiable, if you refuse to pay the price for which these things are sold, but wish instead to obtain them for nothing. [3] For what price are lettuces sold? An obol, let’s say. When someone else, then, pays an obol and takes the lettuce, whilst you, not paying it go without, do not imagine that this person has gained an advantage over you. Whereas they have the lettuce, you still have the obol that you did not pay.

[4] So, in the present case, if you have not been invited to someone’s banquet, that is because you have not paid them the price for which a banquet is sold. They sell it for praise; they sell it for flattery. Pay the price, then, for which it is sold, if you think this will be to your advantage. But if at the same time you do not want to pay the one, yet wish to receive the other, you are insatiable and foolish.

[5] Do you have nothing, then, in place of the banquet? You have this – you have not had to praise the person you did not want to praise, and you have not had to bear the insolence of their doorkeepers.

26. We can understand the will of nature from those things in which we do not differ from one another. For example, when our neighbour’s slave has broken a cup, we are immediately ready to say, ‘Well, such things happen.’ Understand, then, that when your own cup gets broken you should react in just the same way as when someone else’s cup gets broken. Apply the same principle to matters of greater importance. Has someone else’s child or wife died? There is no one who would not say, ‘Such is the way of things.’ But when someone’s own child dies they immediately cry, ‘Woe is me! How wretched I am!’ But we should remember how we feel when we hear of the same thing happening to other people.

27. Just as a target is not set up in order to be missed, so neither does the nature of evil exist in the world.

28. How angry you would be if someone handed over your body to just any person who happened to meet you! Are you not ashamed, then, when you hand over your mind to just any person you happen to meet, such that when they abuse you, you are upset and troubled?

29. [1] In every undertaking, consider what comes first and what comes after, then proceed to the action itself. Otherwise you will begin with a rush of enthusiasm having failed to think through the consequences, only to find that later, when difficulties appear, you will give up in disgrace. [2] Do you want to win at the Olympic games? So do I, by the gods! For that is a fine achievement. But consider what comes first and what comes after, and only then begin the task. You must be well-disciplined, submit to a diet, abstain from sweet things, follow a training schedule at the set times, in the heat, in the cold – no longer having cold drinks or wine just when you like. In a word, you must hand yourself over to your trainer, just as you would to a doctor. And then, when the contest comes, you may strain your wrist, twist your ankle, swallow lots of sand, sometimes be whipped, and after all that, suffer defeat. [3] Think about all this, and if you still want to, then train for the games, otherwise you will behave like children, who first play at being wrestlers, then at being gladiators, then they blow trumpets, then act in a play. In the same way, you will first be an athlete, then a gladiator, then an orator, then a philosopher, but you will do none of these things wholeheartedly – but like a monkey, you will mimic whatever you see, as first one thing, then another, takes your fancy. All this because you do not undertake anything after properly considering it from all sides, but randomly and half-heartedly. [4] So it is when some people go to see a philosopher and hear someone speak such as Euphrates (and who can speak like him?) – they too want to be philosophers. [5] But first consider what sort of undertaking this is, then examine your own capacities to see if you can bear it. So you want to be a pentathlete or a wrestler? Look at your arms, your thighs, examine your back. Different people are naturally suited to different tasks. [6] Do you think that if you do these things you can still eat in the same way, drink in the same way, give way to anger and irritation, just as you do now? You must go without sleep, endure hardship, live away from home, be looked down on by a slave-boy, be laughed at by those whom you meet, and in everything get the worst of it: in honours, in status, in the law courts, and in every little affair. [7] Consider carefully whether you are willing to pay such a price for peace of mind, freedom and serenity, for if you are not, do not approach philosophy, and do not behave like children, being first a philosopher, next a tax-collector, then an orator, and later a procurator of the Emperor. These things are not compatible. You must be one person, either good or bad. You must cultivate either your ruling principle or external things, seek to improve things inside or things outside. That is, you must play the role either of a philosopher or an uneducated person.

30. The actions that are appropriate for us can generally be determined by our relationships. He is your father. This tells you to take care of him, to yield to him in all things, to put up with him when he abuses you or beats you.

‘But he is a bad father.’

Nature did not provide for you a good father, but a father. Your brother wrongs you? Well then, maintain your relationship to him. Do not think about what he is doing, but about what you will have to do if you want to keep your moral character in accordance with nature. For no one can harm you unless you wish it. You will be harmed only when you think you are harmed. If you get into the habit of looking at the relationships implied by ‘neighbour’, ‘citizen’, ‘commander’, you will discover what is proper to expect from each.

31. [1] Know that the most important thing regarding devotion to the gods is to have the right opinions about them – that they exist and administer the universe well and justly – to stand ready to obey them, to submit to everything that happens, and to follow it willingly as something being accomplished by the most perfect intelligence. Do this and you will never blame the gods nor accuse them of neglecting you. [2] But you will not be able to do this unless you remove the notions of good and bad from things that are *not* in our power. For if you believe that anything not in our power is good or bad, then when you fail to get what you want or get what you do not want, it is inevitable that you will blame and hate those responsible. [3] For every living thing naturally flees and avoids things that appear harmful (and their causes), and pursues and admires things that are beneficial (and their causes). It is impossible, then, for someone who thinks they are being harmed to take delight in what they suppose is causing the harm, just as it is impossible for them to take delight in the harm itself. [4] This is why even a father is reproached by his son when he does not give him a share of those things the son regards as good. Thus, in thinking a king’s throne to be something good, Eteocles and Polyneices became enemies. This is why the farmer reproaches the gods, and so too the sailor, the merchant, and those who lose their wives and children. For people are devoted to what they find advantageous. Therefore, whoever takes proper care of their desires and aversions, at the same time also cares properly for their devotion. [5] But it is everyone’s duty to offer libations, sacrifices and first-fruits according to tradition, with a pure disposition, not slovenly or carelessly, neither too meanly nor beyond our means.

32. [1] When you make use of divination, remember that you do not know how events will turn out (this is what you have come to learn from the diviner), but if you really are a philosopher you know before you come what sort of thing it is. For if it is one of the things that are not in our power, then necessarily what will happen will be neither good nor bad. [2] Therefore do not bring desire and aversion to the diviner (for, if you do, you will be fearful of what you may hear), but go with the understanding that everything that happens will be indifferent and of no concern to you, for whatever it may be it is in your power to make good use of it, and that no one can hinder you in this. Go with confidence to the gods as your counsellors, and afterwards, when some advice has been given, remember from whom you have

received it and whose counsel you will be disregarding if you disobey. [3] Approach the diviner in the way Socrates thought appropriate, that is, only in those cases when the whole question turns upon the outcome of events, and when there are no means afforded by reason or any other art for discovering what is going to happen. Therefore, when it is your duty to share a danger with a friend or with your country, do not ask the diviner whether you should share the danger. For even if the diviner should happen to tell you that the omens are unfavourable, that death is foretold, or mutilation to some part of the body, or exile – even at this risk, reason requires you to stand by your friend or share the danger with your country. Pay attention, therefore, to the greater diviner, Pythian Apollo, who threw from the temple the man who did not help his friend when he was being murdered.

33. [1] From the outset, establish for yourself a certain character and disposition that you will maintain both when you are by yourself and with other people.

[2] For the most part, keep silent, or say only what is required in few words. On rare occasions, when circumstances call for it, we will speak, but not about ordinary things: not about gladiators, nor horse-racing, not about athletes, nor about food and drink (which are the usual topics); and especially do not talk about people, blaming or praising or comparing them. [3] If at all possible, turn the conversation of the company by what you say to more suitable topics; and if you happen to be alone amidst strangers, keep silent. [4] Do not laugh a great deal, nor at many things, nor without restraint.

[5] Avoid swearing oaths altogether, if possible; otherwise refuse to do so as far as circumstances allow.

[6] Avoid banquets given by strangers and uneducated people. But if there is ever an occasion to join in them, take every care never to slip into the ways of the uneducated; be assured that if your companion is dirty it is inevitable that in their company you will become dirty yourself, even if you happen to start out clean.

[7] As to things concerning the body, take only what bare necessity requires with respect to such things as food, drink, clothing, shelter and household slaves: exclude everything that is for outward show or luxury.

[8] As for sex, you should stay pure before marriage as far as you can, but if you have to indulge, do only what is lawful. However, do not be angry with those who do indulge, or criticise them, and do not boast of the fact that you do not yourself indulge.

[9] If you are told that someone is saying bad things about you, do not defend yourself against what is said, but answer, ‘Obviously this person is ignorant of my other faults, otherwise they would not have mentioned only these ones.’

[10] It is not necessary for the most part to go to public games; but if it is ever appropriate for you to go, show that your first concern is for no one other than yourself – that is, wish only to happen what does happen, and wish only those to win who do win, and in this way you will meet with no hindrance. Refrain entirely from shouting or laughing at anyone, or getting greatly excited. And after you have left, do not talk a great deal about what happened (except in so far as it contributes to your

own improvement), for doing so would make it clear that you have been impressed by the spectacle.

[11] Do not go randomly or thoughtlessly to public readings; but when you do go, maintain your own dignity and equanimity, and guard against offending anyone.

[12] When you are about to meet someone, especially someone who enjoys high esteem, ask yourself what Socrates or Zeno would have done in such circumstances, and you will have no difficulty in making proper use of the occasion.

[13] When you go to see someone who has great power, propose to yourself that you will not find them at home, that you will be shut out, that the doors will be slammed in your face, that this person will pay no attention to you. And if in spite of all this it is your duty to go, then go, and bear what happens, and never say to yourself, 'It wasn't worth the trouble!' For that is the way of the uneducated person, someone who is bewildered by external things.

[14] In conversations, avoid talking at great length or excessively about your own affairs and adventures; however pleasant it may be for you to talk about the risks you have run, it is not equally pleasant for other people to hear about your adventures.

[15] Avoid also trying to excite laughter, for this is the sort of behaviour that slips easily into vulgarity and at the same time is liable to diminish the respect your neighbours have for you.

[16] There is danger also in lapsing into foul language. So whenever anything like this happens, if the opportunity arises, go so far as to rebuke those who behave this way; otherwise, by keeping silent and blushing and frowning, make it clear that you disapprove of such language.

34. When you get an impression of some pleasure, as in the case of other impressions, guard against being carried away by it, but let the matter wait for you, and delay a little. Now consider these two periods of time, that during which you will enjoy the pleasure, and that when the pleasure has passed during which you will regret it and reproach yourself. Next set against these how pleased you will be if you refrain, and how you will commend yourself. When, however, the time comes to act, take care that the attraction, allure and seductiveness of the pleasure do not overcome you, but set against all this the thought of how much better it is to be conscious of having won this victory over it.

35. When you do something from a clear judgement that it ought to be done, never try to avoid being seen doing it, even if you expect most people to disapprove. If, however, it would not be right to do it, avoid the deed itself. But if it *is* right, why be afraid of anyone who wrongly disapproves?

36. Just as the propositions 'It is day' and 'It is night' can be used meaningfully in a disjunctive proposition, but make no sense in a conjunctive proposition, so at a feast, to choose the largest share may make sense with respect to nourishing the body, but makes no sense for maintaining the proper kind of social feeling. Therefore, when you are eating with someone else, bear in mind not merely the value to your body of

what is set before you, but also the value of maintaining the proper respect for your host.

37. If you undertake a role that is beyond your capacities, you both disgrace yourself in that one and also fail in the role that you might have filled successfully.

38. Just as in walking about you take care not to step on a nail or twist your ankle, so also you should take care not to harm your ruling principle. If we guard against this in every action, we will engage in affairs with greater security.

39. Everyone's body is the measure for their possessions, as the foot is a measure for the shoe. If then you hold this principle you will maintain the proper measure, but if you go beyond it, you will inevitably be carried over a cliff. Thus, in the case of the shoe, if you go beyond the foot, first you will get a gilded shoe, then a purple one, and then an embroidered one. For once you have gone beyond the measure, there is no limit.

40. Once they reach the age of fourteen years, women are addressed by men as 'ladies'. Accordingly, when they see that there is nothing else but pleasing men with sex, they begin to use make-up and dress up, and to place all their hopes in that. It is worth our while, then, to make sure they understand that they are valued for nothing other than their good behaviour and self-respect.

41. It is a sign of foolishness to spend a lot of time on things that concern the body, such as exercising a great deal, eating and drinking a lot, defecating and having sex. These are things that should be done in passing. Instead, you should turn your whole attention to the care of your mind.

42. When someone treats you badly or says bad things about you, remember that they do or say these things because they think it is appropriate. This is because it is not possible for someone to act on how things appear *to you*, but on how things appear *to them*. Accordingly, if someone has a wrong opinion, because this is the person who has been deceived, it is *they* who suffer the harm. In the same way, if someone supposes that a true conjunction is false, it is not the conjunction that is harmed, but the person who has been deceived. If you proceed, then, from these principles, you will be gentle with the person who abuses you, saying on all such occasions, 'To them, this is how it seemed.'

43. Every circumstance has two handles. Use one, and it may be carried; but use the other, and it cannot be carried. Therefore, whenever your brother treats you unjustly, do not take hold of the matter by the handle that he has wronged you (for this is the handle by which the matter cannot be carried), but rather by the other handle, that he

is your brother, that you were raised up together, and you will take hold of it using the handle by which it may be carried.

44. These inferences are invalid: 'I am richer than you, therefore I am better than you'; 'I am more eloquent than you, therefore I am better than you.' But these are better argued: 'I am richer than you, therefore my property is greater than yours;' 'I am more eloquent than you, therefore my speech is superior to yours.' For *you* of course are neither property nor speech.

45. Does someone bathe hastily? Do not say that they do so badly, but hastily. Does someone drink a great deal of wine? Do not say that they do this badly, but that they drink a great deal. For until you understand their motives, how do you know that what they do is bad? Understand this and you will never receive convincing impressions but assent to quite different ones.

46. [1] On no occasion call yourself a philosopher, and do not talk a great deal amongst uneducated people about philosophical principles, but do what follows from those principles. For example, at a banquet do not talk about how people ought to eat, but eat as someone should. Remember how Socrates had so completely eliminated ostentation that people would come to him wanting him to introduce them to philosophers, and he would take them off to other philosophers: so little did he care about being overlooked. [2] And if a discussion about philosophical principles should arise in uneducated people, keep silent for the most part, for there is great danger that you will immediately vomit up what you have not yet digested. And when someone says to you that you know nothing, and you are not offended, then know that you have begun your work. For sheep do not present their fodder to the shepherd to show how much they have eaten, but they digest their food within to produce wool and milk on the outside. So do not display your philosophical principles to uneducated people, but show them the actions that result from the principles when you digest them.

47. Once you have adapted your body to plain simple living, do not make a show of it. When you drink water, do not declare on every occasion that you are drinking water. If you want to train yourself to endure hardships, do it by yourself, away from other people. Do not embrace statues, but if you are ever thirsty, take a mouthful of cold water and spit it out without telling anyone.

48. [1] The condition and character of the uneducated person is this: they never look for benefit or harm to come from themselves, but from external things. The condition and character of the philosopher is this: they look for every benefit and harm to come from themselves. [2] The signs that someone is making progress are these: they blame no one, they praise no one, they find fault with no one, they accuse no one, they never say anything of themselves as though they amount to something or know anything. When they are impeded or hindered, they blame themselves. If someone

praises them, they laugh inwardly at the person who praises them, and if anyone censures them, they make no defence. They go about as if they were sick, cautious not to disturb what is healing before they are fully recovered. [3] They have rid themselves of all desires, and have transferred their aversion to only those things contrary to nature that are in our power. They have no strong preferences in regard to anything. If they appear foolish or ignorant, they do not care. In a word, they keep guard over themselves as though they are their own enemy lying in wait.

49. When someone prides themselves on being able to understand and explain Chrysippus, say to yourself, ‘If Chrysippus had not written obscurely, this person would have nothing on which to pride themselves.’ But what do I want? To understand nature, and to follow her. Therefore I seek someone who can explain this to me, and when I hear that Chrysippus can do so, I go to him. But I do not understand his writings; so I seek someone who can explain them to me. Now, up to this point there is nothing to be proud of. When I find someone to explain them, what remains is my putting his principles into practice; this is the only thing to be proud of. But if I am impressed merely by the act of explaining, what else have I accomplished but become a philologist instead of a philosopher, except only that I can explain Chrysippus instead of Homer? No, when someone says to me, ‘Explain Chrysippus to me,’ rather than feel proud, I would blush when I am unable to manifest actions that agree and harmonise with Chrysippus’ teaching.

50. Abide by the principles you have adopted as if they were divine laws, as if it would be sacrilegious to transgress them. Pay no attention to what people say about you, for this is no longer yours.

51. [1] For how long will you put off demanding of yourself the best, and never to transgress the dictates of reason? You have received the philosophical principles to which you ought to agree, and you have accepted them. What sort of teacher are you waiting for, that you put off improving yourself until they come? You are no longer a child, but a grown adult. If you remain negligent and lazy, always piling up delay upon delay, fixing first one day then another after which you will attend to yourself, you will fail to make progress without even realising, but will continue to live as someone uneducated until you die. [2] From this moment commit yourself to living as an adult, as someone who is making progress, and let everything that appears best to you be a law that you cannot transgress. And if you are presented with anything laborious, or something pleasant, with anything reputable or disreputable, remember that the contest is *now*, that the Olympic games are *now*, that it is no longer possible to put them off, and that progress is won or lost as the result of just once giving in. [3] This is how Socrates attained perfection, by paying attention to nothing but reason in everything that he encountered. But even if you are not yet Socrates, you should live as someone who wishes to be Socrates.

52. [1] The first and most necessary topic in philosophy concerns putting principles to practical use, such as, ‘We ought not to lie.’ The second is concerned with demonstrations, such as, ‘Why is it that we ought not to lie?’ And the third is concerned with confirming and articulating the first two: for example, ‘Why is this a demonstration?’ For what is a demonstration, what is entailment, what is contradiction, what is truth, and what is falsehood? [2] Thus the third topic of study is necessary for the second, and the second is necessary for the first. But the most necessary, the one where we ought to rest, is the first. But we do the opposite – we spend our time on the third topic, upon this we expend all our efforts, whilst entirely neglecting the first topic. Thus, whilst at the same time as lying, we are more than ready to explain why it is wrong to lie.

53. [1] We must always have these thoughts at hand:

‘Lead me, Zeus, and you too, Destiny,
Wherever you have assigned me to go,
and I’ll follow without hesitating; but if am not willing,
because I am bad, I’ll follow all the same.’

[2] ‘Whosoever properly with Fate complies
we say is wise, and understands things divine.’

[3] ‘Well, Crito, if this pleases the gods, let it happen this way.’

[4] ‘Certainly, Anytus and Meletus may put me to death, but they cannot harm me.’

NOTES

Chapter 4: ‘moral character’ translates the Greek term *prohairesis*, which is the capacity of agency that rational beings have for making choices and intending the outcomes of their actions. *Prohairesis* is also sometimes translated as *will*, *volition*, *intention*, *choice*, *moral choice*, *moral purpose*. This faculty is understood by Stoics to be essentially rational. It is the faculty we use to ‘attend to impressions’ and to give (or withhold) assent to impressions. *Prohairesis* also occurs in Chapters 9, 13 and 30.

Chapter 36: The disjunctive proposition is ‘Either it is day or it is night,’ and the conjunctive proposition is ‘It is the case both that it is day and it is night.’

Chapter 53: The first passage is an extract from Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus*, quoted by Diogenes Laertius, and also by Seneca, *Moral Letters* 107; the second is a fragment from Euripides (fr. 965 Nauck); the third and fourth are the words of Socrates from Plato, *Crito* 43d, and *Apology* 30c–d (slightly modified).

GLOSSARY OF STOIC TERMS

adiaphora ‘indifferent’; any of those things that are neither good or bad, everything, in fact, that does not fall under the headings ‘virtue’ or ‘vice’. The indifferents are what those lacking Stoic wisdom frequently take to have value (either positive or negative), and hence take to be desirable or undesirable. Pursuing them, or trying to avoid them, can lead to disturbing **emotions** that undermine one’s capacity to lead a *eudaimôn* life.

apatheia freedom from **passion**, a constituent of the *eudaimôn* life.

aphormê aversion; the opposite of *hormê*.

apoproêgmena any ‘dispreferred’ **indifferent**, including such things as sickness, poverty, social exclusion, and so forth (conventionally ‘bad’ things, usually taken to disadvantage those who suffer them). Enduring any of the dispreferred indifferents does not detract from the *eudaimôn* life enjoyed by the Stoic *sophos*. See *proêgmena*.

appropriate action see *kathêkon*.

aretê ‘excellence’ or virtue; in the context of Stoic ethics the possession of ‘moral excellence’ will secure *eudaimonia*. For Epictetus, one acquires this by learning the correct use of **impressions**, following **God**, and following **nature**.

askesis training or exercise undertaken by the Stoic *prokopton* striving to become a Stoic *sophos*.

assent see *sunkatathesis* and *phantasiai* (impressions).

ataraxia imperturbability, literally ‘without trouble’, sometimes translated as ‘tranquillity’; a state of mind that is a constituent of the *eudaimôn* life.

duty see *kathêkon*.

ekklisis avoidance; opposite of *orexis*.

ektos ‘external’; any of those things that fall outside the preserve of one’s *prohairesis*, including health, wealth, sickness, life, death, pain – what Epictetus calls *aprohaireta*, which are not in our power, the ‘indifferent’ things.

emotion see *pathos*.

end see *telos*.

eph’ hêmîn what is in our power, or ‘up to us’ – namely, the correct use of *impressions*.

eudaimonia ‘happiness’ or ‘flourishing’ or ‘living well’. One achieves this end by learning the correct use of *impressions* following *God*, and following *nature*.

eupatheiai ‘good feelings’, possessed by the Stoic wise person (*sophos*) who experiences these special sorts of emotions, but does not experience irrational and disturbing *passions*.

excellence see *aretê*.

external thing see *ektos*.

God see *theos*.

hêgemonikon ‘commanding faculty’ of the soul (*psuchê*); the centre of consciousness, the seat of all mental states, thought by the Stoics (and other ancients) to be located in the heart. It manifests four mental powers: the capacity to *receive impressions*, to *assent* to them, *form intentions* to act in response to them, and to do these things *rationally*. The *Discourses* talk of keeping the *prohairesis* in the right condition, and also of keeping the *hêgemonikon* in the right condition, and for Epictetus these notions are essentially interchangeable.

hormê impulse to act; that which motivates an action.

impressions see *phantasiai*.

indifferent see *adiaphora*.

- kathêkon*** any ‘appropriate action’, ‘proper function’, or ‘duty’ undertaken by someone aiming to do what befits them as a responsible, sociable person. The appropriate actions are the subject of the second of the three *topoi*.
- katorthôma*** a ‘right action’ or ‘perfect action’ undertaken by the Stoic *sophos*, constituted by an appropriate action performed virtuously.
- nature** see *phusis*.
- orexis*** ‘desire’ properly directed only at *virtue*.
- passion** see *pathos*.
- pathos*** any of the disturbing emotions or ‘passions’ experienced by those who lack Stoic wisdom and believe that *externals* really are good or bad, when in fact they are ‘indifferent’. A *pathos* according to the Stoics is a false judgement based on a misunderstanding of what is truly good and bad.
- phantasiai*** ‘impressions’, what we are aware of in virtue of having experiences. Whereas non-rational animals respond to their impressions automatically (thus ‘using’ them), over and above using our impressions, human beings, being rational, can ‘attend to their use’ and, with practice, assent or not assent to them as we deem appropriate. The capacity to do this is what Epictetus strives to teach his students.
- phusis*** nature. To acquire *eudaimonia* one must ‘follow nature’, which means accepting our own fate and the fate of the world, as well as understanding what it means to be a rational being and strive for virtue. See *aretê* and *God*.
- proêgmena*** any ‘preferred’ *indifferent*, conventionally taken to be good and advantageous, including such things as health and wealth, taking pleasure in the company of others, and so forth. Enjoying any of the preferred indifferents is not in itself constitutive of the *eudaimôn* life sought by the Stoic *prokopton*. See *apoproêgmena*.
- prohairesis*** ‘moral character’ or ‘moral resolve’, the capacity that rational beings have for making choices and intending the outcomes of their actions, sometimes translated as *will*, *volition*, *intention*, *choice*, *moral choice*,

moral purpose. This faculty is understood by Stoics to be essentially rational. It is the faculty we use to ‘attend to [impressions](#)’ and to give (or withhold) [assent](#) to impressions.

prokopton one who is making progress (*prokopê*) in living as a Stoic, which for Epictetus means above all learning the correct use of [impressions](#).

proper function see [kathekon](#).

right action see [katorthôma](#).

Sage see [sophos](#).

sophos the Stoic wise person who values only [aretê](#) and enjoys a [eudaimôn](#) life. The *sophos* enjoys a way of engaging in life that the [prokopton](#) strives to emulate and attain.

sunkatathesis assent; a capacity of the [prohairesis](#) to judge the significance of [impressions](#).

tarachê disturbance, trouble; what one avoids when one enjoys [ataraxia](#).

telos end; that which we should pursue for its own sake and not for the sake of any other thing. For the Stoic, this is [virtue](#). Epictetus formulates the end in several different but closely related ways. He says that the end is to maintain one’s [prohairesis](#) in proper order, to follow [God](#), and to follow [nature](#), all of which count as maintaining a [eudaimôn](#) life. The means by which this is to be accomplished is to apply oneself to the ‘[three disciplines](#)’ assiduously.

theos God, who is material, is a sort of fiery breath that blends with undifferentiated matter to create the forms that we find in the world around us. He is supremely rational, and despite our feelings to the contrary, makes the best world that it is possible to make. Epictetus says that we should ‘follow God’, that is, accept the fate that He bestows on us and on the world. Stoics understand that the rationality enjoyed by every human being (and any other rational beings, should there be any) is literally a fragment of God.

topoi ‘topics’. The ‘three topics’ or ‘fields of study’ which we find elucidated in the *Discourses* is an original feature of Epictetus’ educational programme. The three fields of study are: (1) The Discipline of [Desire](#),

concerned with desire and avoidance (*orexis* and *ekklisis*), and what is really good and desirable (*virtue*, using *impressions* properly, following *God*, and following *nature*); (2) The Discipline of Action, concerned with impulse and aversion (*hormê* and *aphormê*), and our ‘*appropriate actions*’ or ‘duties’ with respect to living in our communities in ways that befit a rational being; and (3) The Discipline of *Assent*, concerned with how we should judge our *impressions* so as not to be carried away by them into *anxiety* or disturbing *emotions* with the likelihood of failing in the first two Disciplines.

- virtue** from the Latin *virtus* which translates the Greek *aretê*, ‘excellence’.
- Zeus** the name for *God*; Epictetus uses the terms ‘Zeus’, ‘God’, and ‘the gods’ interchangeably.

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