

Authority and Agency in Stoicism

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SENECA mentions a famous statement of Panaetius, who, when he was asked by a young man whether a sage would fall in love, responded: “As to the wise man, we shall see. What concerns you and me, who are still a great distance from the wise man, is to ensure that we do not fall into a state of affairs which is disturbed, powerless, subservient to another and worthless to oneself.”¹ Seneca may have had good philosophical reasons for being attracted to this modest self-representation of a Stoic teacher, as a co-learner with others, and one who in his own right is still removed from the ideal he professes. In other words, it may not be a coincidence that precisely Seneca recorded this anecdote.

In a similar vein Cleanthes switches from a third-person address to the first person at a crucial point in his *Hymn to Zeus*.² He opens the poem with the first-person perspective of a ‘we’ that embraces all human beings as the off-spring of Zeus, and as sharing a likeness to god. But when his poem turns to an indictment of bad people, he bemoans the behavior of those wicked people, the ‘they’ who “neither see nor hear god’s universal law,” to their own undoing. As the closing prayer reveals, however, all human beings, in spite of their potential for godlikeness, are vulnerable to error, and so Cleanthes includes the authorial voice of the poem as well as his audience’s in his final prayer to Zeus to “protect mankind from its pitiful

¹ *Ep.* 116.5, transl. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1987) 66C.

² Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* 54I; J. C. Thom, *Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Tübingen 2005).

incompetence.” “Scatter this [incompetence] from *our* soul, Father,” he asks, and “let *us* achieve the power of judgment.”

Why would this kind of humility claim, in which the speaker deliberately puts himself on the same level as the interlocutor, be anything more than a common rhetorical trope and pedagogical device, at best (and false humility, at worst)?³ Later Stoic accounts of the first two centuries A.D. provide a particularly illuminating answer to this question by consistently establishing a connection between a certain view of teaching authority and individual agency. By ‘agency’ I do not imply here the technical philosophical notion that refers to a theory of action, but the current broader sense that includes both the ability and the duty to claim ownership of one’s actions. As this paper will argue, a full philosophical understanding of the language of interiority and selfhood in Stoicism of the Roman era requires an analysis of the manner in which this discourse is meant to empower individual agents, in their striving towards the Stoic ideal, by downplaying the authority of the philosopher as teacher.⁴ Using ‘agency’ in this context has the advantage of focusing the debate not on what the self *is*, but what it *does*, and which function it is meant to fulfill.⁵ The latter focus

³ Cf. Plutarch as a witness to this practice in *Quomodo adulator* 72A, with the claim that Socrates’ humility was genuine.

⁴ Cf. D. Oppenheim, “Selbsterziehung und Fremderziehung nach Seneca,” in G. Maurach (ed.), *Seneca als Philosoph* (Darmstadt 1975) 185–199, and G. Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection* (Chicago 2005) 17–18.

⁵ For the debate in recent scholarship see B. Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (Oxford 2005) 321–352 (repr. S. Bartsch and D. Wray [eds.], *Seneca and the Self* [Cambridge 2009]), who questions the importance of a notion of selfhood in Seneca; cf. especially 352, where the ‘self’ is “a mere artefact of literary technique.” C. Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford 2006), while recognizing the importance of the language of selfhood, argues that it does not represent a *novel* sense of *subjectivity* (325–407). For Inwood, Gill does not go far enough in this respect, cf. his review of Gill in *Philosophical Quarterly* 57 (2007) 479–483. For previous responses to Inwood see J. Ker, “Seneca on Self-examination:

does not require fundamental innovations in the technical aspects of Stoic psychology and action theory, but rather a new perspective on the ruling psychological principle, the so-called *hégemonikon* defined in the standard Stoic account, as expressed in the very modes of writing these later Stoics adopt.

The starting points for this exploration are in Seneca (*Ep.* 64.9–10) and Epictetus (*Diss.* 1.4.28–32). (Keeping these two Stoics together often proves to be fruitful.) How do Seneca and Epictetus view the authority of the founders of Stoicism, Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus (i), and how do they represent their own authority (ii)? The answer to these questions provides fresh insights into the importance of the ‘self’ of individual agents (iii).

i. *The authority of the Early Stoa*

The contrast between the highly exalted status bestowed on Pythagoras, Plato, and Epicurus by their followers, to which I return below, and Seneca’s and Epictetus’ attitude towards the Early Stoa could not be more striking. In one of his letters Seneca states the point clearly: even though he and his contemporaries owe a considerable debt to the ancients’ cures for the spirit, much work remains to be done, especially in discerning which cures are to be used when and how (*Ep.* 64.9). Seneca’s independence from the established Stoic tradition is evident throughout his writings. Thus he states, for instance (*Vit. beat.* 3.2; cf. also 13.1–2): “When I say ‘ours’, I do not bind myself to some particular one of the Stoic masters; I, too, have the right to form an opinion” (transl. Basore). And “we are in search of truth in company with the very men who teach it” (*Ot.* 3.1).⁶ He explicitly rejects what he considers to be an overly technical Stoic distinction in the claim that whereas wisdom is good, ‘being wise’ (as a predicate in language) cannot be considered as such (*Ep.* 117.1–6). This distrust of the technical

Rereading *On Anger* 3.36,” in *Seneca and the Self* 160–187, his review in *Rhizai* 6 (2009) 95–100, and my review in *Phoenix* 61 (2007) 186–189.

⁶ Cf. also *Ep.* 45.4, 74.23, 80.1.

aspects of Stoicism and its interest in logic is translated in a critique of syllogisms attributed to Zeno (*Ep.* 82.9).⁷

In his *De beneficiis* (1.3.8–14.6) Seneca criticizes Chrysippus at great length, in spite of the latter's acumen and economy of speech, for his unusually detailed analysis of the meaning of the names and attributes of the Graces, which Seneca considers fanciful and irrelevant for the heart of the matter under consideration, namely, the bestowing and receiving of benefits. The criticisms mentioned so far have mostly to do with what Seneca would consider unnecessarily technical quibbles. But in his attitude towards Posidonius in particular, he is capable of demonstrating a difference of opinion on matters of substance, such as the original condition of humanity, and the invention of the crafts and tools (*Ep.* 90), or certain scientific explanations (as in *Q.Nat.* 1.5.10–11, on the rainbow, or 6.21.2, on earthquakes).⁸

But not only does Seneca claim this kind of independence for himself, he also holds that such an attitude is fundamental for the entire Stoic tradition itself. Contrary to the Epicureans, he claims, Stoics are not beholden to the authority of a master, be it Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Panaetius, or Posidonius. “We Stoics are not subjects of a despot: each of us lays claim to his own freedom,” as he puts it (*Ep.* 33.4, transl. Gummere). Note that he consciously puts the Stoics in opposition to the Epicureans here. We find indirect confirmation of Seneca's portrayal of the Epicureans in Numenius' paradoxical praise of the Epicurean school—as opposed to all the others, including Aristotle's Lyceum, the New Academy, and the Early Stoa—because it rejected innovations and promoted unity in its ranks

⁷ Cf. *Ep.* 83.9–17, in which Seneca also rejects Posidonius' attempt to come to Zeno's rescue; *Ep.* 87.40, with a critique of Antipater's definition of poverty (for another critique of Antipater, cf. 92.5.); on this topic cf. also G. Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue: The Stoic Doctrine of Moral Progress and its Reception in (Middle-)Platonism* (Leuven 2005) 60–98, esp. 62, 68, 84, 92.

⁸ Cf. also *Ep.* 94.38, on a difference of opinion on the value of the preambles in Plato's *Laws*.

as well as fidelity to its founder's teachings (fr.24.22–36 des Places). What matters for the argument here is this perception of Epicureanism, even though Philodemus attests to the diversity of views within this school of thought too.⁹

It is striking that according to Cicero (*Luc.* 8) it was the New Academy, i.e. the Academy in its 'skeptical' phase, that had claimed independence from authority for itself, and this could imply that Seneca's presentation, quite apart from the question of the historical reality of the matter, is part of an ongoing polemic between Platonists and Stoics.¹⁰ (It is also worth noting that Aristotle himself broke away from Plato's circle by "honoring truth over friends" [*Eth.Nic.* 1.6, 1096a15], giving rise to the famous *bon mot* "Plato amicus, sed magis amica veritas.")¹¹

Chrysippus took the liberty to disagree with his teacher Cleanthes, Seneca states, so, "why, then, following the example of Chrysippus himself, should not every man claim his own freedom?" (*Ep.* 113.23). In such passages Seneca attributes a political meaning to the Stoic notion of freedom, as freedom from a despot, and transposes this notion onto the master-pupil relationship within philosophical schools. The startling implication is that a teacher who asserts his authority too strongly turns into a despot.

The fact that Seneca retrojects the low authority claim to the

⁹ M. Erler captures this point in "Orthodoxie und Anpassung: Philodem, ein Panaitios des Kepos?" *MusHelv* 49 (1992) 171–200. But note that Erler too states (198–199) that these debates relied on and reinforced Epicurus' authority rather than weakening it; as in the Platonist tradition, the key issue was which party could claim the correct interpretation of Epicurus' legacy.

¹⁰ On this issue cf. T. Bénatouïl, "Le débat entre platonisme et stoïcisme sur la vie scolastique: Chrysippe, la Nouvelle Académie et Antiochus," in M. Bonazzi and C. Helmig (eds.), *Platonic Stoicism – Stoic Platonism* (Leuven 2007) 1–21; cf. also Cicero *Nat.D.* 1.10.

¹¹ On the history of this saying see L. Tarán, "Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas. From Plato and Aristotle to Cervantes," in *Collected Papers (1962–1999)* (Leiden 2001) 3–46. I am grateful to Thomas Bénatouïl for having pointed out this connection to me.

rapport among the Early Stoics themselves is also significant. Even if Zeno's status as founder of the school was comparable to Epicurus' in the earlier period, as David Sedley has argued, Seneca clearly does not perceive his own attitude as a change in the Stoic tradition.¹² And we will discuss other features below that connect this later phase of Stoicism with the Early Stoa.

In his general assessment of his relation with his predecessors in *Ep.* 64, Seneca mentions the traditional modes of veneration with statues and birthday celebrations. (Cicero, for instance, claims that the followers of Epicurus not only have pictures of him, but also images of him on rings and drinking cups: *Fin.* 5.3.) Seneca does state that the ancients are to be revered with the rite owed to gods (*ritu deorum colendi*), as teachers of humanity. But he stops short of actually divinizing them. Moreover, these role models are interiorized: instead of attaching oneself (semi-)permanently to a philosophical school and teacher, one carries one's role models around with oneself, not even in writing, but in the interiority of one's soul. So teachers, like the norms themselves which Stoicism prescribes and its tenets, are to be continuously present to oneself.

According to Seneca (*Ep.* 25.5) Epicurus allegedly enjoined his followers to do everything as if he were watching them. Yet Seneca's own recommendation that one interiorize teaching

¹² D. Sedley, "Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World," in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford 1989) 97–119, who focuses on Philodemus' treatment of the Epicurean school tradition. Note that his article ends with an open question regarding Seneca's position vis-à-vis Stoic authority. This paper tackles that question, also by locating Seneca in the broader context of later Stoicism, and specifically reading him alongside Epictetus. Cf. also H. G. Snyder, *Teachers and Texts in the Ancient World: Philosophers, Jews, and Christians* (London 2000) 14–44. For the Hellenistic period cf. F. Deleuva Caizzi, "The Porch and the Garden: Early Hellenistic Images of the Philosophical Life," in A. Bulloch et al. (eds.), *Images and Ideologies: Self-definition in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley 1993) 303–329.

authority is nuanced in two important respects, and these nuances transform the traditional forms of veneration. Among the philosophers who are to be emulated he lists not only the Stoics Zeno and Cleanthes, but also Plato and Socrates (cf. also *Brev.vit.* 14.2). And he puts even Epicurus to good use whenever he can, notably in the first series of his letters, which tend to end with a reference to Epicurus' views. Like Cicero,¹³ Seneca does not shy away from praising Epicurus for the views he did get right, and defends him, for instance, against the charge of effeminacy and soft living (*Ol.* 1.5, *Vit.beat.* 13.1–2). (Although often there is a polemical undercurrent to the praise, too, in the sense that Epicurus is deemed better than his doctrine.) Interestingly Marcus Aurelius does attribute a similar view to Epicurus, that all the ancient sages who lived a life of virtue can function as role-models (11.26).

Seneca explicitly discusses this hermeneutic strategy: “He who writes last has the best of the bargain; he finds already at hand words which, when marshaled in a different way, show a new face. And he is not pilfering them, as if they belonged to someone else, when he uses them, for they are common property” (*Ep.* 79.6–7). All true insights are common property, for anyone to use, and not exclusive to a particular school of thought.

This attitude goes back, in fact, to views already developed earlier in Stoicism: all original humans were closer to divine truth than later generations, and thus were privileged witnesses. Human language too was originally closer to the true nature of things as the Stoics construe it. Traces of this state of affairs can be retrieved from poetry, notably Homer's, and traditional myths, for all their potential distortions, if one succeeds in digging below the surface meaning of these accounts. Cornutus, Seneca's contemporary, in particular endorses the strong thesis that there were actually philosophers among the early human beings (i.e., that their insights did not merely constitute pre-

¹³ As in *Fin.* 2.96–103; *Tusc.* 3.46, 5.26, 5.93.

philosophical views).¹⁴

Just as truth is present in the origin of humanity as a whole, the Stoics' view of concept formation in every individual human being's life also underscores that truth is a common possession. According to the Stoics all human beings come naturally equipped with a store of preconceptions, basic categories also involving god and moral notions such as good and evil, and with the ability to form other common conceptions as well as pre-philosophical generally shared beliefs, which, while needing refinement, are reliable.¹⁵ Galen, for instance, does not hold back his indignation over Chrysippus' reliance on common opinion because the latter also includes views of women, old wives' tales, non-expert opinions, etc., in other words, is not discriminating enough about which views he will use to back up his claims (as in *PHP* 2.5; 3.5.22—ultimately this debate also goes back to Aristotle's use of *endoxa*).

So if the Stoic views of the origins of humanity, of language, and of concept-formation enhance the status of truth as shared by all human beings, from this stance it also follows that sagehood is not limited to Stoics. The 'common truth' as marshaled by the Stoics does confirm the Stoic system of thought, but, and this point is crucial, it does not elevate any particular Stoic. In any case, a sage is a very rare occurrence; there may never have been one, or only one or two at the most. There is no compelling evidence that Zeno considered himself to be a sage, and some that he did not; similarly Chrysippus did not elevate

¹⁴ *Theol.graec.* 35 (75.18–76.5 Lang). For a good overview of the issues involved cf. G. Most, "Cornutus and Stoic Allegoresis," *ANRW* II 36.3 (1989) 2014–2065; G. R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (Oxford 2001); I. Ramelli, *Anneo Cornuto, Compendio di teologia Greca* (Milan 2003). I am here deliberately steering clear of the current scholarly debate over whether and to which extent the Stoics endorsed allegory.

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of this issue see T. Tieleman, *Galen and Chrysippus on the Soul: Argument and Refutation in the De Placitis, Books II–III* (Leiden 1998), esp. 160–168.

his predecessors nor himself to this rank.¹⁶ So, the founders of the Stoic school do not ipso facto qualify as sages, and even to the extent that they do command our attention and admiration as role models, they do not hold an exclusive claim to this status, nor even a privileged one.

The later Platonist tradition, and notably Numenius and Porphyry, also embraced the notion that the wisdom of all original cultures and of all sages establishes a common ground. But in striking contrast to the Stoics, for the Platonists the move reinforced rather than diminished Plato's authority as divine man (*θεῖος ἀνὴρ*), as Boys-Stones has argued convincingly.¹⁷ Plato now became a pinnacle of philosophical wisdom, and his views all the stronger for being seen as a complete and coherent reconstruction of ancient wisdom, reflected partially and confirmed in other traditions. Platonism as it came about in the late first century B.C. and the first two centuries of our era anchored itself in the high authority attributed to Plato. (Plutarch, as we shall see, occupies a special position in this regard.)

The notion of truth as a common human legacy, in addition to opening the range of philosophical models to non-Stoic thinkers, also helps to explain why Seneca makes room for a second extension of his list: he includes the two Catos and Laelius. (It is worth keeping in mind here that for Seneca Cato Uticensis constitutes the pinnacle of human perfection, as in *Constant.* 7.1, and as such is the only one to whom he may be willing to attribute the status of sage.) This inclusion is doubly significant: it gives a Roman touch to the Stoic framework, and it allows for non-philosophers to contribute towards the Stoic

¹⁶ For Zeno, cf. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.432–435; for Chrysippus, Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1048E; cf. also *SVF* III 668. For a more detailed analysis and a broader range of evidence, see R. Brouwer, "Sagehood and the Stoics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 23 (2002) 181–224.

¹⁷ Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, esp. ch. 6, 99–122. Cf. also Celsus in Origen *C. Cels.* 1.14; Plut. fr.157.1 Sandbach = Eus. *Prep. Evang.* 3.1.1. For Numenius and Porphyry and a broader discussion, cf. also M. Zambon, *Porphyre et le Moyen-Platonisme* (Paris 2002), esp. ch. 4.

ideal (by non-philosophers I mean here people who did not devote most of their life to the study and teaching of philosophy; to some extent Seneca himself belongs in this category, but more on this below).¹⁸ These notable Romans strove towards exemplifying virtue in their lives, and hence are as useful as role models, even if they would not be full-fledged sages, as the ancients whose reputation was based primarily on their role as thinkers and teachers. As to his choice of *Roman* great men, for which he has a predecessor in Cicero's *De officiis*, the context of this list in *Ep.* 64 also indicates Seneca's admiration for the Roman philosopher Sextius. Even though he is more subtle than Cicero on this issue, Seneca's writings too can show traces of a cultural rivalry between Romans and Greeks. Chrysippus, for instance, for his elaborate interpretations of divine names gets criticized as "a Greek" (*Ben.* 1.4.1).

If we turn our attention from Seneca to Epictetus, the latter's attitude towards Chrysippus is also quite revealing for how the later Stoics viewed the authority of the Early Stoa. Like Seneca, Epictetus words his praise in a restrained and nuanced manner. One should render thanks unto god, he states, for Chrysippus.¹⁹ Thus, the benefits Chrysippus bestowed on human beings are to be acknowledged, but Epictetus does not quite grant him independent divine status. Epictetus mentions other gifts to humanity, such as the vine and wheat, and the altars dedicated to Triptolemus for having discovered agriculture, claiming that Chrysippus' gift surpasses all of these. This passage should be read against the evidence we have of traces of Euhemerism in Stoicism, that is, the view that extraordinary human beings, like the heroes in traditional mythology, have been granted divine status. This view is attested for

¹⁸ This practice of including non-philosophers as exempla is not unique to the Stoics, cf. also Plut. *De prof. virt.* 85A–B, but I argue that a Stoic like Seneca could have had a special philosophical motivation for adopting it.

¹⁹ *Diss.* 1.4.28–32. Cf. R. Dobbin, *Epictetus, Discourses, Book I. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford 1998) 97–98.

Zeno's pupil Persaeus (*SVF* I 448), but is also recorded as one of the modes in which human beings recognize the presence of the divine in the world, if the relevant passage from Aëtius can be attributed to the Stoics, as von Arnim does.²⁰

Be that as it may, it is clear that at most Epictetus would here be alluding to a weak version of Euhemerism, which posits that human benefactors are traditionally revered as divine beings, but not that all gods are no more than human beings of this kind posthumously revered in such a manner. Key here is, then, Epictetus' overarching claim that one should render thanks to god, that is, Zeus, the Stoic supreme god and divine active principle, for human benefactors; and if we do so for those benefactors who secured (the material conditions of) human life, all the more so should we owe thanks for a Chrysippus who through his teachings "discovered and brought to light the truth concerning the good life" (transl. Oldfather). Yet, like Seneca, Epictetus presents Chrysippus as having only pointed the way, as a means to know the nature of true happiness. And this crucial nuance also entails that it is not sufficient simply to know and endorse what Chrysippus said, but that one has to make the 'right' way one's own. "For sheep, too, do not bring their fodder to the shepherds and show how much they have eaten, but they digest their food within them, and so on the outside produce wool and milk. And so do you, therefore, make no display to the layman of your philosophical principles, but let them see the results which come from these principles when digested," Epictetus enjoins us.²¹

That latter realization fits with the status Epictetus assigns to Chrysippus' works. In the first century A.D. we witness an earlier phase of what would become a full-fledged commentary tradition in later antiquity. This tradition posits in essence that one engages in philosophy through the exposition of the works

²⁰ Aëtius *Plac.* 1.6, *SVF* III 1009; cf. also Cicero *Nat.D.* 1.39, 2.62.

²¹ *Ench.* 46, transl. Oldfather; cf. also *Diss.* 3.21.1–3, the continuation of which is quoted below in section iii.

of the grand masters, primarily Plato and Aristotle.²² There are indications in Arrian's record of Epictetus' discourses that reading and interpreting theoretical works, and especially Chrysippus', was part of the pedagogy in Epictetus' school (cf. esp. *Diss.* 1.10.7–13; 1.26 on “reading the hypothetical arguments”; 4.9.6). (This information also tells us that it is a mistake to label these later Stoic texts as mere ‘popular’ moralizing. The knowledge of the technical foundation of Stoicism was still available and handed down, and the mode of discourse which they espoused was a deliberate choice on the part of the Stoics of the imperial era.) Yet, Epictetus also states adamantly, over and over again, that the ability to expound Chrysippus will not do one any good unless one is actually capable of putting what one has learned into practice.²³ This reservation parallels his view of logical exercises, which he shares with Seneca: while logic is a necessary prerequisite for correct thinking (see especially *Diss.* 1.7.32–33, *Ench.* 52), never to be despised, it is a mistake to become entangled in technical quibbles. Surprisingly, perhaps, such a cautionary attitude towards logic is already attested for Chrysippus himself,²⁴ in spite of his reputation of having developed the technical aspects of the Stoic system of thought to its fullest extent.

In the later Platonic tradition one often gets the impression that to engage in the interpretation of Aristotle's and Plato's works, especially after the finalizing of a formal curriculum by Iamblichus,²⁵ is to engage in philosophy (which is not to say, of

²² For the broader context of this issue see I. Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique*² (Paris 2005), esp. 411–429.

²³ As in *Diss.* 1.4.5–17, 1.17.13–18, 2.16.34, 2.17.34–40, 2.19.5–15, 2.23.44, 3.2.13–18, 3.9.20–22, 3.21.6–7, 3.24.81; *Ench.* 49.

²⁴ T. Bénatouil, *Faire usage: la pratique du stoïcisme* (Paris 2006), esp. 79–91, 136–139, with specifically Chrysippus' criticism of Academic and Megarian ‘abuses’ of dialectic.

²⁵ The seminal article on this topic is A.-J. Festugière, “L'ordre de lecture des dialogues de Platon aux V^e/VI^e siècles,” in *Etudes de philosophie grecque* (Paris 1971) 535–50 [= *MusHelv* 26 (1969) 281–296]; for a good overview of

course, that such readings are all there is to the pursuit of wisdom in the Platonist sense). In contemporary parlance, this kind of exegesis is much more *performative* than it would have been for the later Stoics. To read Plato is part and parcel of pursuing the truth in contemplation and reorienting the soul; the very structure of the curriculum is supposed to map precisely onto a soul's progress, with the culminating point consisting of the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*. Moreover, Platonic texts are interpreted as mirroring the structure of reality itself, both the sensory and intelligible realms. Plato's status as a thinker is inextricably intertwined with the status of his works. For the Stoics, by contrast, it is clear that at best the foundational texts are *instrumental*, or pointers, to borrow Epictetus' language, to help human beings unfold and apply correctly the notions with which nature has equipped them, as stated above, and make sense of their own nature and that of the world around them.

The authority of the Early Stoa for later Stoics is strikingly modest in comparison with the veneration accorded founders of other philosophical schools in antiquity. Pythagoras, for instance, seems to have acquired a quasi-divine authoritative status already during his lifetime as a teacher, even though he may have declared himself to be merely a 'lover of wisdom' rather than a sage (if the attribution of that saying to him is correct).²⁶ Famously, the expression 'he said' was considered sufficient to warrant the legitimacy of a claim,²⁷ and testimonies about his teaching methods reveal a very hierarchical approach, in which a process of initiation contains an initial

the issue cf. D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2003) 61–65.

²⁶ Cic. *Tusc.* 5.3.8–9 = Heraclides Pont. fr.88 Wehrli; Quint. *Inst.* 12.1.18–19; Diog. Laert. 1.12, 8.8; Iambl. *V.Pythag.* 44, 58.

²⁷ As Cicero too points out, *Nat.D.* 1.10, in an explicit criticism of this kind of weight given to authority; for a list of other references see A. Pease, *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum I* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1955) 149–150.

‘silent’ phase of obedience and submission to the teacher.²⁸ This image is largely derived from the biographies of Pythagoras written by later Platonists such as Porphyry and Iamblichus, who projected their Platonist views of the role and importance of a philosophical teacher.

As we have seen, Seneca draws explicit attention to the difference between Stoics’ attitudes towards the founding fathers and the Epicureans’ towards theirs, claiming, literally, that later Stoics are more free to think for themselves. Unlike his Stoic counterparts, apparently Epicurus had no qualms designating himself a sage, even though our evidence on that score may be tainted by polemics.²⁹ He is even said to have boasted that he himself never had a teacher (Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.72). Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* puts Epicurus on a divine pedestal as *the* (not merely *a*) benefactor of humanity, surpassing all others rumored as such.³⁰ The touches of Euhemerism in Lucretius’ account, of gods who in reality are humans venerated because of their accomplishments, acquire a much more poignant significance in the context of Epicureanism. Unlike the Stoic Zeus and the divinities ranked below him, the ‘real’ gods in the Epicurean system, if there are any, at best exist in a realm of their own, completely separate from ours, and do not concern themselves with human affairs (although they can still have an influence by providing role models of tranquility and as such can be invoked).³¹ And so Epicurus and other Epicurean sages become, in effect, the only ‘gods’ on whom human beings can rely for assistance.³²

Epicurus himself, we are told by Cicero and Diogenes

²⁸ As in Gellius 1.9, Iambl. *V.Pythag.* 15 ff. Seneca too is aware of these practices, as in *Ep.* 52.10.

²⁹ Cf. Plut. *Non posse* 1100A; Cic. *Fin.* 2.7, *Sen.* 43.

³⁰ As in the Prefaces to Books 3, 5, and 6; cf. also Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.43, *Tusc.* 1.48, *Sen.* 43; Plut. *De latenter vivendo* 1129A.

³¹ As in Epicurus *Ep.Men.* 124, Lucr. 6.71–78.

³² Cf. Epicurus *Ep.Men.* 135, Plut. *Non posse* 1091B–C, Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.43–49.

Laertius, stipulated in his will that his school should hold monthly celebrations of the founders, and an annual festival on the date of his birth.³³ These recommendations are in line with common practice, of which Seneca in the passage discussed above also reminded his audience, and were in all likelihood intended as ‘identity politics’, that is, a mechanism to forge and solidify the identity and cohesion of his school, thereby also ensuring its continuation. But they do reflect a conscious construal of and reliance on teaching authority. We also know, for instance, that the celebration of Plato’s birthday helped to forge the identity of Platonist circles.³⁴ (Plotinus allegedly refused to reveal his birth date because he did not want such festivals to be held in his name, but this did not stop his pupil Porphyry from putting him on a pedestal, *Plot.* 2.40.) In light of such attested practices, it is not far-fetched to suppose that the much more modest authority claims made both by the Early Stoa itself and by its later followers reflect a conscious and philosophically motivated choice that ran counter to the self-image of rival schools and a culturally predominant view of the philosopher as a public performer, to which we shall turn next. The fact that Epictetus so often has recourse to Socrates and the Cynics, notably Diogenes, as his role models, like Seneca’s inclusive listing, can, then, also be understood as part of this strategy of preventing individual Stoics rather than their views from acquiring a following.³⁵

ii. *The authority of teachers*

Seneca’s and Epictetus’ authorial voices are quite different. Seneca is strictly speaking not a teacher running a school,

³³ Cic. *Fin.* 2.101–103, Diog. Laert. 10.18.

³⁴ Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* 717B, Porph. *Plot.* 2.40, Marinus *V. Procli* 23.

³⁵ On the importance of Socrates for Epictetus see especially K. Döring, “Sokrates bei Epiktet,” in K. Döring and W. Kullman (eds.), *Studia Platonica. Festschrift für Hermann Gundert* (Amsterdam 1974) 195–226; A. A. Long, *Epictetus. A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford 2002); J.-B. Gourinat, “Le Socrate d’Epictète,” *Philosophie antique* 1 (2003) 137–165.

whereas Epictetus is. But Seneca does give advice to others, in the first instance to the addressees of his works, but in a broader sense to his entire readership. Like Musonius Rufus who as a man in exile himself advises another who is struggling with the same plight (9 Lutz/Hense), Seneca's writings start from his own existential struggles, and in describing a trajectory of progress for his addressees, he simultaneously addresses himself and maps his own progress. Like Panaetius and Cleanthes, he includes his own authorial voice among those striving towards the Stoic ideal. This realization goes a long way in explaining the shape of the limited biographical material in Seneca's writings: he focuses only on those difficulties that pose a threat to the philosophical life and situations that can be shared by others, instead of details that would have been unique to his own life. Thus he talks about the challenges of exile (*Helv.*), ill health (as in *Ep.* 78 and 104), excessive sorrow (as in *Ep.* 63.14), and disappointments in a political career (*Q.Nat.* 3 praef.), but always in terms that can be shared with his interlocutors, as experiences all too common to the human condition. In *Ep.* 52, for instance, he ranks himself among those who are not easy learners, but need to work hard at making progress, with the assistance of others (*durum ac laboriosum ingenium*, 52.7).

With Epictetus we can detect an occasional advertisement for his school, as when he gives visitors who are merely passing through a glimpse of what they could learn if they were willing to spend more time with him (*Diss.* 2.14.10, 2.20.34–35), but his restraint from presenting himself as a role model is remarkable.³⁶ This holding back is one of the main reasons why he transfers the image of the ideal sage to a *Cynic*, not a *Stoic*, who would be the scout of the god, and who comes closest to being godlike himself. (Seneca takes a similar approach by

³⁶ As in *Diss.* 1.16.20, 1.2.35, 3.1.36, 3.7.1, 3.8.7; on this aspect of Epictetus see Long, *Epictetus* 121–125; cf. also T. Bénatouil, *Les Stoïciens III Musonius, Epictète, Marc Aurèle* (Paris 2009), esp. 134–155.

weaving in praise for the Cynic Demetrius in his *On Benefits*, 7.1.) Epictetus does not call himself a philosopher, but a trainer, *παιδευτῆς* (*Diss.* 2.19.29–34).

To which extent is this teacher's discretion related to the (in)famous Socratic irony and his disavowal of knowledge? After all, the end of Plato's *Phaedrus*, like Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*, shows us a Socrates praying on his own behalf as well, for inner beauty, for an exterior that harmonizes with his inner self, for the ability to recognize that the sage is rich, and for only so much material wealth as would be compatible with temperance. (The line about only the wise man being rich would be picked up by the Stoics, as one of their notorious paradoxes, *SVF* III 589–603.) And in the *Phaedo* (91B–C) Socrates urges his interlocutors Simmias and Cebes to “care little for Socrates but much more for the truth” (transl. Gallop). Yet if we view such claims in the broader context of Plato's works, it is clear that the latter at least has no qualms presenting Socrates as supremely sovereign and in control, notably in the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and the *Apology*. Plato and Xenophon stage their version of Socrates to a much greater extent than Arrian does with his Epictetus.

An important corollary to the low profile which both Epictetus and Seneca adopt for themselves is their recommendation of discretion for a philosopher. Epictetus has stripped his Socrates and Cynics of all quirky features, and in the case of the latter, of all potentially shocking behavior. Epictetus' Cynic has been cleaned up considerably; no urinating or masturbating in public for his role model. (For this reason too we should be cautious about using Epictetus' portrait to complement our information about ancient Cynicism).³⁷ And Epictetus also endorses the more common *topos* of being very critical of those who merely look and play the part of being a philosopher, by

³⁷ On this topic see M. Schofield, “Epictetus on Cynicism,” in T. Scaltas and A. Mason (eds.), *The Philosophy of Epictetus* (Oxford 2007) 71–86, *pace* M. Billerbeck, *Epiktet Vom Kynismus, herausgegeben und übersetzt mit einem Kommentar* (Leiden 1978).

relying on props, as well of those who neglect their physical appearance altogether.³⁸ Seneca too recommends discretion; one does not flaunt one's philosophical allegiance in being an *agent provocateur*: no repulsive dress, unkempt hair, messy beard, and conspicuous rejection of luxury by wallowing in squalor (*Ep.* 5.2–3). In a famous passage about a festival, for instance, he recommends that one not hold oneself aloof in a conspicuous rejection, but take part without letting oneself go (*Ep.* 18.4). According to Stoics such as Seneca and Epictetus, we continue to do the same things, but not in the same manner.

Epictetus presents Socrates as the pinnacle of discretion, to such an extent even that when the latter was asked to take others to philosophers, he happily complied without drawing any attention to himself (*Diss.* 3.23.20–23; 4.8). There are passages in Plato that point in this direction: in the *Protagoras*, for instance, Socrates complies with providing an overly eager young admirer access to the 'great' sophist (310E), and in the *Theaetetus* he claims that he matches those who do not have an aptitude for philosophy with sophists instead (151B). Yet the tonality of these scenes is quite different from Epictetus' point. Plato's account hinges on the distinction between the sophists and the 'true' philosopher Socrates is supposed to be, whereas in Epictetus' perspective Socrates hides his very identity as a philosopher.

Epictetus explicitly justifies the value of philosophical discretion (*Diss.* 4.8.17–20). Such an attitude makes one focus on doing the right thing for one's own sake and as a tribute to god, not in order to impress onlookers. Furthermore, if one makes mistakes, one undermines only one's own reputation, not philosophy's, and one does not lead the general public even further astray. Epictetus here clearly has in mind the widespread lampooning of philosophers as hypocrites who are not able to practice what they themselves preach, and the damage

³⁸ As in *Diss.* 3.12.16, 3.14.4, 3.23, 4.8.15–16, 4.11; cf. also Musonius Rufus 16. Epicurus shared this criticism: *VS* 54.

this does to philosophy.³⁹ Seneca not only addresses this topic at some length, he even indirectly defends himself against such a charge (*Vit. beat.* 17 ff.), which, as we know, was historically leveled against him because of his great wealth and close association with Nero.⁴⁰

Epictetus puts his defense of discretion into the mouth of his contemporary the less-known Stoic Euphrates.⁴¹ But his portrait of Euphrates stands in marked contrast to that by Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 1.10.5–7), who very much focuses on Euphrates' outer appearance and rhetorical skill. Pliny describes him as a tall and comely man, with long hair and a beard—one of the physical hallmarks of a philosopher—and his style of speech as luxuriant and seductive, the epitome of rhetorical elegance. Euphrates affects his listeners as much by his appearance and discourse as he does by the integrity of his life, Pliny claims. One cannot help but notice that Euphrates in Pliny's rendering is in appearance and speech radically different from Epictetus as the latter comes across in Arrian's records, a "little old man" (*Diss.* 2.6.23) with a lame leg and a caustic wit rather than a mellifluous tongue. Instead of hiding his identity as a philosopher, as Epictetus claims he did, Euphrates seems to have presented himself as a living billboard, if Pliny is right. And even Epictetus acknowledges the attraction Euphrates exerted through his rhetorical skill (*Diss.* 3.15.8, *Ench.* 29.4) in converting people to philosophy; yet he does question the effectiveness of a speech to bring about such a tremendous outcome.

It is not historical accuracy of the descriptions that is the issue here, but the conscious presentations. Pliny's portrait is much more in line with broader cultural expectations of a philosopher's behavior, which could be quite colorful, and verging

³⁹ Cf. also *Diss.* 3.21.22, 3.24.80, 3.26.13; Plutarch uses this *topos* too, as in *De prof. virt.* 80E–81D, but he focuses on the need to combat pride.

⁴⁰ In the conflict with Suillius Rufus, cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.42–43, 14.52; Cassius Dio 61.10.1–6, 62.2.1.

⁴¹ Cf. M. Frede, "Euphrates of Tyre," in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle and After* (London 1997) 1–11.

on the sensational.⁴² Even before the Second Sophistic reached its peak in the early second century, Dio of Prusa, also called Chrysostom, who, like Epictetus, was a former pupil of Musonius Rufus, already embodies this mode of self-representation.⁴³ Through visible cultural markings a philosopher, Dio claims, distinguishes himself from all others (as in *Or.* 70.7; *Or.* 72). Culminating in Philostratus' over-the-top portrait of Apollonius of Tyana, whom Euphrates for his part had attacked and criticized severely, this mode increasingly depicts larger-than-life figures, as also in Lucian's satirical staging of the Cynic Peregrinus, who 'performed' even his own death by leaping onto a pyre. Euphrates' rebuttal of Apollonius in front of Vespasian as rendered by Philostratus (5.37) is worth quoting in this context: the emperor should "favor and embrace the kind [of philosophy] that is in accordance with nature, but avoid the kind that claims to be inspired [by (the) god(s), θεοκλυτεῖν]. For by misrepresenting the gods, such people [i.e. ones like Apollonius] prompt us to many foolish schemes" (transl. Jones). Traces of this criticism, with its concomitant rejection of magic, can also be found in Marcus Aurelius' writings (1.6, 16, 17).⁴⁴ In his *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* Eunapius has captured well the notion of philosophers as *divine men* (as in 454 Wright).

Our information about actual school practices in Platonist circles in the first two centuries A.D. is limited, though we do get glimpses, for instance in Aulus Gellius' record, throughout

⁴² On this topic see especially J. Hahn, *Der Philosoph und die Gesellschaft. Selbstverständnis, öffentliches Auftreten und populäre Erwartungen in der hohen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart 1989); P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates. The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity* (Berkeley 1995); and J. Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*² (London 2009).

⁴³ On the contrast between Epictetus and Dio cf. also Long, *Epictetus* 121–125; one could also examine more closely in this context Apuleius and Maximus of Tyre, cf. M. Trapp, *Philosophy in the Roman Empire: Ethics, Politics and Society* (Aldershot 2007).

⁴⁴ Cf. R. B. Rutherford, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. A Study* (Oxford 1989) 181–188.

his *Noctes Atticae*, of the school of the Platonist Calvenus Taurus, and in Plutarch, who expresses his admiration for his teacher Ammonius by calling him “the philosopher” (as in *De def. or.* 410F) but appears not to have adopted himself a high-authority profile and to have belonged to a more informal circle.⁴⁵ Plutarch does stand out as a special case in his range of interests and approach to philosophy.⁴⁶ The biographies of later Platonist teachers, however, such as the ones by Porphyry of Plotinus and Marinus of Proclus, show the same larger-than-life image already discussed. During their lives as teachers, these Platonists are represented as being beyond the ordinary human condition and appear to play a ‘demonic’ role of privileged mediators between the sensible and intelligible realms. They acquire an exalted status that is similar to that of the divine Plato.

Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, by contrast, will have none of this ‘cult of personality’. The proper response to a philosophical lecture, Musonius is on record as having stated, is reverent silence, not applause, because of the weightiness of the issues at stake, namely, the good life and the sorry state in which we all find ourselves (Gellius 5.1). Ultimately all human beings, including those who claim to be teachers of philosophy, are judged by how they act, and not by what they say or claim to know. This key realization brings us to the deeply rooted and philosophical significance of the connection between the low

⁴⁵ On this Ammonius see now the rich analysis by J. Opsomer, “M. Annius Ammonius, a Philosophical Profile,” in M. Bonazzi and J. Opsomer (eds.), *The Origins of the Platonic System. Platonisms of the Early Empire and their Philosophical Contexts* (Leuven 2009) 123–186.

⁴⁶ An attentive reader may have noticed the parallels between passages discussed here and passages in Plutarch’s philosophical works. On this topic see L. Van Hoof, *Plutarch’s Practical Ethics. The Social Dynamics of Philosophy* (Oxford 2010), who focuses on Plutarch’s relation to the Second Sophistic. The extent of the influence of Stoic ethics on Plutarch, however, also needs to be reexamined, but that topic would go beyond the limits of this paper.

teaching authority in Roman Stoicism and the empowerment of the individual agent.

iii. *Agency and the empowered self*

One dividend of the approach adopted in this paper is that it prepares us to investigate with fresh eyes the distinctive later Stoic emphasis on interiority. Stoic norms have to be maximally portable so that they can be implemented in a wide range of situations, and they are so in the souls of individual agents, their ‘selves’. Self-reliance is crucial. Even in a school such as Epictetus’ the ultimate purpose of a philosophical education is to return to everyday life and one’s ordinary responsibilities, in order to apply what one has learned in regular social contexts:

A builder does not step forward and say: “Listen to me give a speech about building,” but takes on a contract for a house, completes it and thus demonstrates that he has the skill. You too should act in this manner: eat like a human being, drink like one, take care of your appearance, marry, beget children, fulfill your political duties. Endure abuse: bear with an unreasonable brother, bear with a father, a son, a neighbor, a travel-companion. Show us these things, so that we may see whether you have truly learned something from the philosophers.⁴⁷

A number of Epictetus’ discourses are devoted precisely to the necessity and challenges of making the transition from his school back to the social circles from which his pupils originally came.⁴⁸ And as he points out astutely, it is quite a bit easier to hold on to the tenets of philosophy in a school setting, in which one is surrounded by like-minded people and has a teacher at hand, than in the midst of everyday life: “in theory there is nothing which holds us back from following what we are

⁴⁷ *Diss.* 3.21.4–6; cf. also Seneca *Ep.* 108.35–39.

⁴⁸ As in Epictetus *Diss.* 4.1.132–143, 4.5.37, 4.12.12; cf. also 1.29.34–35, 2.9.15–16, 2.10.29–30, 2.16.2, 3.3.17, 3.20.18. On this topic see the excellent analysis by T. Colardeau, *Etude sur Epictète* (La Versanne 2004) 165–195 [originally published 1903]; and Bénatouïl, *Les Stoïciens* III 134–155.

taught, but in the affairs of life there are many things which draw us away” (*Diss.* 1.26.3, transl. Oldfather). A Stoic teacher such as Epictetus, in other words, does not promote permanent attachments of pupils, and does not favor a transfer away from the authority of biological parents in order to become a substitute ‘father’, as is attested in the Platonic tradition.⁴⁹

In this latter tradition, as with the status of Plato’s texts discussed above, the life in the school with the circle of so-called *hetairoi* is again performative, that is, in itself it constitutes the expression of philosophy. Thus Simplicius, in his commentary on Epictetus’ *Encheiridion*, for instance, quotes Pythagoras as saying: “Once you have entered the temple, do not turn back” (68.18–19 I. Hadot). Not all the pupils of Platonist teachers became more or less permanently attached to a school, but these schools display a clear sense of an inner circle consisting of those who did form such attachments. Chrysippus, on the other hand, had already expressed his suspicion about life in a philosophical school as a life of mere pleasure (*Plut. Stoic.rep.* 1033c).⁵⁰ (A point to which a grumbling and not entirely unjustified Plutarch responded: “Who, then, grew old in this scholastic life if not Chrysippus and Cleanthes and Diogenes and Zeno and Antipater?”)

Why would the Stoics not promote such attachments to a philosophical school? For all Stoics, not just the later ones, all theory, including what we would consider theory about ethics, ultimately has to serve the correct comportment in whichever circumstances of life one happens to find oneself. In their notion of ‘living according to nature’, the study of philosophy in a technical sense and action are inextricably intertwined (cf. also *Diog. Laert.* 7.130), in function of and with the emphasis on an ethics in action. In the Platonist tradition, on the other

⁴⁹ Cf. also Musonius Rufus 16, and G. Reydams-Schils, “Virtue, Marriage, and Parenthood in Simplicius’ *Commentary on Epictetus’ Encheiridion*,” in K. Corrigan and J. D. Turner (eds.), *Platonisms: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern* (Leiden 2007) 109–125.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bénatouil, in *Platonic Stoicism* 1–21.

hand, and as early as in some Middle Platonist accounts, one can find the reverse relationship between theory and action. As Alcinous puts it succinctly in his *Didaskalikos*, in a view that will be expanded and elaborated by later Platonists, the philosopher should focus on theory as contemplation of intelligible reality as his primary goal, and engage in action only at a secondary level:⁵¹

There are two types of life, the theoretical and the practical. The summation of the theoretical life lies in the knowledge of the truth, while that of the practical life lies in the performance of what is counselled by reason. The theoretical life is of primary value; the practical of secondary, and involved with necessity. The truth of this will become plain from what follows.

Contemplation (*ἡ θεωρία*), then, is the activity (*ἐνέργεια*) of the intellect when intelligizing the intelligibles (*τοῦ νοῦ νοοῦντος τὰ νοητά*), while action (*ἡ πράξις*) is that activity (*ἐνέργεια*) of a rational soul which takes place by way of the body. The soul engaged in contemplation of the divine and the thoughts of the divine is said to be in a good state, and this state of the soul is called ‘wisdom’, which may be asserted to be no other than likeness to the divine. For this reason such a state would be of priority, valuable, most desirable and most proper to us, free of (external) hindrance, entirely within our power, and cause of the end in life which is set before us. Action, on the other hand, and the active life, being pursued through the body, are subject to external hindrance, and would be engaged in when circumstances demand, by practising the transferral to human affairs of the visions of the contemplative life.

The Stoics, for their part, do not recognize ‘theory’ as a form of pure contemplation and engagement in an intelligible, higher-order reality; for them, even though they do value contemplation of the divine order manifested in the universe, theory is primarily what we would call the theoretical aspect of philosophy, which makes sense only to the extent that it informs concrete actions and one’s overall disposition in life. Or

⁵¹ *Didaskalikos* 2, 152.30–153.24, transl. Dillon.

as Musonius Rufus puts it, “philosophy is *nothing else* than to search out by reason what is right and proper, and by deeds to put it into practice” (14 end; cf. also 4, on philosophy as the art of becoming a good human being).

But what does all of this, the limited authority of founders and teachers as well as the restricted involvement in a philosophical school, have to do with the language of selfhood and interiority in Seneca and other later Stoics? If Stoic adepts are meant to apply what they learned in whichever everyday socio-political context they find themselves, and not in some kind of idealized alternative communities, then the Stoic normative framework, as stated already, literally needs to be portable and always available within the interiority of one’s soul.

Thus, in essence, the later Stoics give a very distinctive philosophical turn to the traditional notion of self-sufficiency (*αὐτάρκεια*), or in Epictetus’ wording, ‘that which is up to us’ (*τὰ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν*): one cannot be dependent on any outside authority, not only of an emperor or any other ruler, but even of teachers, however necessary those may prove in order to jolt one out of one’s initial mistaken assumptions and bad habits, and to encourage one’s progress. “Remember that it is not merely desire for office and wealth which makes men abject and subservient to others, but desire also for peace, and leisure, and travel, and scholarship. For it makes no difference what the external object be, the value you set upon it makes you subservient to another” (Epict. *Diss.* 4.4.1, transl. Oldfather). Whether it is misdirected *eros* for another human being that puts one at the risk of subservience, as Panaetius would have it in the anecdote with which we started, or an undue attachment to philosophical studies makes no difference; both attitudes are equally wrong-headed. Ultimately it is Zeus, the divine principle, who has entrusted us to ourselves, as a duty that cannot be transferred to anybody else (*Diss.* 2.8.21–23).

The conversation with oneself and self-assessment take priority over any teaching rapport, and teaching is fundamentally—not merely, though also, rhetorically—co-learning. Epictetus could hardly be more explicit on this point: “Will you not, then, let other men alone, and become your own teacher and

your own pupil?" (*Diss.* 4.6.11; cf. also Sen. *Ep.* 33.7). As I have argued in greater detail elsewhere, the role of philosophy as the Roman Stoics saw it requires a very robust and situated notion of self whereby one would engage in a constant mediating act between norms for one's given social responsibilities as stipulated by the Stoic philosophical ideal and everyday 'business as usual'. This mediation is what the self does, and it requires a self, and a first-person perspective, both because situational challenges differ from one person to the next, but also because one cannot relegate those challenges to anyone else.⁵²

Without such a notion of self we cannot arrive at a full understanding of what the emperor Marcus Aurelius thought he was doing when he initially composed his reflections for his own use.⁵³ These reflections are much more than mnemonic devices, such as Epictetus' *Manual* could be, for the sake of always having key insights ready at hand; they constitute the very process of training in making these insights one's own and effective in the way one conducts one's life.

The first book of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, with its list of all the people to whom he owes what he has become, constitutes one of the clearest examples in later Stoicism of how teachers of philosophy constitute only one group of people who model the good life to others (see also 6.48). But even though Marcus Aurelius starts out by contextualizing his reflections in a 'pedagogical' and social setting, in the widest sense, he continues on his own, talking mostly to himself, in the remaining notes. Given that even the notion of 'friends of the emperor' (*amici principis*) was governed by heavy-handed court protocol, the only manner in which Marcus Aurelius could have left his role as emperor behind, and avoided the trap of fully identifying himself with this role (6.30), would have been through

⁵² Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics* 15–52

⁵³ Cf. P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel. The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1998); also M. Foucault, *L'Herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France. 1981–1982* (Paris 2001).

this mode of engaging in philosophy. For his sake, then, the self had better not be a mere literary device. And fortunately it was not: regardless of whether from a contemporary perspective we deem such an approach feasible or even desirable, for the later Stoics the discourse of selfhood constituted the very ground of the possibility of philosophy as they construed it.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ Versions of this paper were presented at a conference organized by the University of Crete in May of 2007, at Uppsala University in 2008/9 (both in a workshop and a conference setting), at the University of Washington in 2009, at a session of the Montréal Interuniversity Workshop in the History of Philosophy, and at a conference organized by the Centre Léon Robin in Paris, in May 2010. I am grateful to the audiences at all of these events for the many helpful suggestions, and would also like to thank Thomas Bénatouïl, James Ker, and the anonymous reviewer of this journal, in particular, for their comments on earlier drafts, as well as Brad Inwood for many years of sustained and fruitful discussion.