The Relevance of Moral Theory to Moral Improvement in Epictetus

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DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199233076.003.0002

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter argues that Epictetus accepted and followed the views of the original Stoics, according to which the essential thing in moral improvement was an increase in one’s understanding of the philosophically articulated reasons for believing the fundamental Stoic claims about the human good and how to achieve it. He did not accept that such improvement could be achieved by merely rhetorical efforts to paint attractive pictures of life according to Stoic principles, as other Imperial Stoic authors, such as Seneca before him and Marcus Aurelius after, did. His Discourses, which do employ lots of such rhetorical devices to this effect, do not represent his teaching to his pupils; but we can recover from them sufficient information about his teaching of Stoic philosophy to confirm that he did accept and follow the original Stoics' ideas about how moral improvement does require: increasingly deep philosophical understanding of the reasons why the Stoic theories about how one should live are true.

Keywords: early Stoics, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, teaching

Both Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, who are besides Epictetus our main examples of Stoic philosophy in Imperial times, show considerable ambivalence about ethical theory itself (philosophical argumentation of a ‘technical’ sort about how to live our lives) and about the relevance of extensive knowledge of it to their projects of improving their own lives and (in Seneca's case) helping readers to improve theirs. They little emphasize the crucial importance in Stoicism, or anyhow for ‘classic’ Stoics like
Chrysippus, of increased philosophical understanding of the full array of Stoic ethical doctrines, and (most emphatically) a deep knowledge of the philosophical grounds on which they rest, for the moral life, and for any at all helpful steps taken towards living it. Instead they rely, almost overtly, upon rhetorical appeals of a not very philosophical sort. They use these in order to persuade themselves or their readers to feel that they believe, and even, on that basis, to stand by, the bottom-line conclusions about human life to which Stoic ethical argument and analysis leads—as if a firmly felt, enthusiastic commitment to these doctrines, constantly renewed through imaginative appeals to various attractive aspects of them, but without the need of full rational support through philosophical understanding of why they are true, would suffice. Was this feature of Seneca's (p. 10) and Marcus' work (they were philosophical laymen, not professional teachers of philosophy) somehow special to their laymen's approach to self-improvement? Or did it derive from or reflect developments during their time within Stoic philosophical teaching and Stoic philosophy itself, as practised by recognized experts? Did Stoic philosophers too, during the first and second centuries AD, adopt the same approach? May one point to this tendency in Seneca and Marcus as characteristic of Stoicism in general during this last phase of its existence in antiquity? A natural, indeed almost the only available, place to turn with these questions in mind is to Epictetus, the only Stoic philosopher and teacher of Stoic philosophy from that period, any of whose works have survived. My contribution to these proceedings is devoted to that task.

Our knowledge of Epictetus as a philosopher and a teacher of philosophy is derived almost entirely from the Diatribai or Discourses of Epictetus published by Arrian, together with the excerpts from them that Arrian published separately as the Enchiridion or Manual. Internal evidence shows clearly, however, that (as the title of ‘diatribes’ itself suggests) these addresses were not part of the formal course of instruction in Epictetus’ school. They were, with only a few exceptions, ancillary and informal admonishments or protreptics, or bits of practical advice, addressed to his pupils and delivered, it would seem, in the afternoons or evenings, after the main work of the day was already completed. At a number of places Epictetus (or Arrian in introducing a Discourse) indicates in passing several features of the formal instruction itself. It consisted in part of instruction in (what we call) logic: a student was set an argument to read out and analyse (I.26.1, 26.13, II.17.27). Also, students read out and commented on passages of set texts, or perhaps also short writings of their own (II.1.30, 1.35, 16.20, 16.34). But, it appears, the main part of the curriculum consisted in the
systematic reading out loud of classic ‘old’ Stoic texts—particularly those of Chrysippus, but we hear mention several times of Antipater (p. 11) and Archedemus as well, and once of Diogenes of Babylon—together with Epictetus' oral commentary and interpretation of them. ³

Thus Epictetus' teaching followed very much the standard pattern of Platonist and Peripatetic teachers later on, and indeed beginning already by his time, in their 'lectures' or readings of the works of Plato and Aristotle. It consisted of exegesis of classic texts of Chrysippus and others of the 'founding generations'. Naturally, like that of his Platonist and Peripatetic contemporaries, his exegesis would not have been driven by any desire simply to understand and interpret accurately the thought of his authorities, in the manner of a philosophical scholar today. Rather, he presumably used their authority in the way Platonist and Peripatetic philosophers in later antiquity did, as a means of addressing questions of philosophical debate, and human life itself, that were then current. Besides setting out, explaining and defending the Stoic outlook quite generally, he would claim to find his own solutions to these contemporary questions already set out in the authoritative writings, if those were suitably interpreted. His own philosophical creativity would be shown largely in those efforts of interpretation. Thus, just as with Peripatetics and Platonists, he could appeal to the presumed 'wisdom' of the ancients—for him as a Stoic, of course, these would have to belong to the third century bc, no earlier—as grounding for his own philosophical and moral conclusions, even where modern scholars would rightly say that those differed to some extent from the views of the 'ancients'.

In his ancillary and informal Discourses we certainly find Epictetus expressing many of these conclusions (indeed over and over again, even ad nauseam), along with sketches of his philosophical reasoning in reaching them, or at any rate in pressing them upon others (these would not necessarily be entirely the same, of course). From the philosophical point of view, however, even if not that of social history, one would rather that Arrian, or someone better qualified than he presumably was for such a task, had left us records of some of Epictetus' lectures ('readings') instead of these Discourses. Then we could presumably have seen for ourselves how (how on earth, one is tempted to say) Epictetus managed to relate his own peculiarly passive and defeatist Stoicism (nonetheless triumphalist, of course, however hollowly so) to the (in fact) quite different moral outlook of Chrysippus and the other founders. And we might have been able to learn more about any special philosophical significance to attach to the fact that in the Discourses
never once does Epictetus use the Zenonian terminology of *proēgmena* and *apropoēgmena* (‘preferred’ and ‘dispreferred’ objects or conditions that are nonetheless neutral so far as the goodness or badness of one's life goes), and that he uses the Aristotelian term *prohairesis* (considered choice, decision, commitment) with a special, narrower, Stoic significance (where it means, roughly, the *ability* to choose, decide, commit oneself as to questions of fundamental importance in life)—along with other anomalies or novelties of language or thought. As it is, we have only the informal, protreptic *Discourses* to go on in understanding and evaluating his philosophy.

When we turn to the *Discourses* seeking an answer to my question about the relevance, for Epictetus, of moral theory to moral improvement, we need to bear clearly and firmly in mind Epictetus’ audience in these addresses. These are teenage boys or young men who have been attending his school, reading the Stoic classics under his guidance and hearing his exegeses of them. His main concern is to help *them*—people at that age and life-stage—to improve themselves morally, i.e. as persons, in coming into adulthood. He is not talking to the general reader—say, an already educated adult seeking for means of self-improvement (as Seneca's Lucilius is presented as being). Bearing this context in mind, then, what do we find?

Epictetus frequently berates his pupils for not engaging in their studies in the right way, for approaching the Stoic texts and the problems of philosophy in the wrong spirit. They too busily read Chrysippus and the other Stoic authorities in the spirit of research (*historia*), seeking to learn just what opinions they held, and how to explain the philosophical (p. 13) grounds for them. He warns in particular against the tendency of the young (anyhow, the young of his day) to get too much pleasure from and take too great an interest in logic and logical paradoxes for their own sake—and to pride themselves, by comparison with the philosophically uneducated, on their mastery of the rules of logical inference as those are set out by Chrysippus. Some of his remarks in this connection might make one think—wrongly, as I will explain—that Epictetus supposes there is nothing to be gained for the improvement of human life in logic, or in detailed knowledge of Stoic ethical or physical theory, such as was relentlessly pursued in Chrysippus’ writings. Thus in I.4, on what it is to ‘make progress’, i.e. to advance one's condition in the direction of being virtuous and so living well to perfection, he imagines a student telling him, in evidence of his progress, ‘Take the treatise *On Impulse* and you can see how I have read it!’ Epictetus replies (with his usual ingratiation): ‘Slave, that is not what I am looking into, but what your impulses toward and away from things are like, what sort of desire and
aversion you have, how you go about achieving your purposes, 7 in what way you aim at things, how you make your preparations—whether in agreement with nature or out of agreement.’ 8

As to logical studies, in discussing the Master argument in II.19 he imagines someone asking him what his own solution is. ‘I wasn't in fact born for that, to weigh my own impressions about the correct solution, to compare together and critically evaluate the things said about it by (p. 14) others, and form an opinion of my own on the topic.’ 9 He goes on to compare himself with a philologist asked who the brothers of the Iliad’s King Priam were: the philologist can't have any personal view of his own on such matter (how could he know?), the most he can do (and what he does do) is to cite the authorities in full (Homer, for example). Just so, Epictetus says, he can tell you what Diodorus Cronos had to say on the puzzle and its solution, and Cleanthes and Antipater, and finally Chrysippus who advanced a third solution. Beyond that he can't go, and doesn't need to. By contrast, on the question what is truly good and what bad for you—there, you really ought to weigh your impressions carefully, examine what the philosophers have said on the question, and form a solid and stable opinion for yourself, that you then stick to, not as a matter of theory and philosophical debate, but in actually making your decisions and performing your actions (I.19.14–15).

But no one should allow passages like these to lead them to think that Epictetus holds that learning Stoic moral theory, including its detailed arguments, or any of the rest of Stoic technical philosophy, for example dialectic or logic, is not needed, or of any use, for moral improvement. Nor yet that he favours instead some other sort of persuasion—for example by rhetorical appeals rather than logical argumentation, to get a pupil to accept the bottom-line Stoic ethical doctrines—thinking that that would suffice, and indeed work better. Dialectic or logic is a special case, to which I will turn shortly, but as for technical ethical theory (and, it would seem, physical theory too, though in the Discourses Epictetus never really alludes distinctly to that part of Stoic philosophy) Epictetus’ views are quite clear. His objection is solely to a wrong approach to reading the authoritative texts, one perhaps specially characteristic of the young (and, as we will see, this applies as well to logic, once its special status is taken into account). Sixteen- or eighteen-year-olds might well aim to please by showing the teacher (or their parents) how much they have read, how learnedly and correctly they can discourse on Stoic topics, how well they perform if asked difficult or trick questions about the doctrines. Or they might like simply to impress other people, at dinner parties perhaps, with their recently acquired learning.
That is, however, altogether the wrong way to behave, and the wrong objective, Epictetus insists. It represents a perverse idea of what education (paideia) (p. 15) consists of. Epictetus tells his pupils repeatedly that what truly matters is their purpose in reading the texts. If instead they read them to learn how to think correctly, and then, as a result of further practice, they learn actually to think that way in facing the situations that arise in life—well, that is the sort of pupil that Epictetus does want. He wants one who will read Chrysippus’ treatises with care and retention, and will put into effect in their daily lives the lessons Chrysippus has to teach. Epictetus does not in his daily lessons make his pupils read and learn the authoritative texts simply so that they will know what is in them. He teaches these texts as an integral and, he must think, necessary part of true moral improvement. His point is simply that the texts must be approached properly and utilized in the way he intends—with a view to moral improvement. Thus, it would seem, full knowledge of Stoic moral theory, derived from the study of the Stoic authorities, retains for Epictetus the central place in morality and moral improvement that it had for Chrysippus himself.

There are complications, however, which threaten to cloud this pleasingly direct, exculpatory account. What does Epictetus mean when he includes the condition, as I have just put it, that the pupil should not just read Chrysippus and the other authorities in order to learn what it is to think correctly, but should also learn how, by further practice, to think that way in facing the situations of life? What does this practice consist of? Here we need to consider in some detail one of Epictetus’ apparent innovations—his distinction of three main themes or topoi in the training (askēsis) which one needs to undergo if one is to become fully good. This is expounded, though less completely and less clearly than one would wish, in Discourses III.2, and alluded to or applied a number of other times, already in fact in I.4.11 (the Discourse cited just above), well before any account of the topoi has been provided.

The first theme—the first step to take—is to train oneself with regard to desires and aversions ‘so that one will not fail to get what (p. 16) one desires and won’t run up against what one is averse from’. The Greek for desires and aversions here is orexis and ekkliseis, terms used in classic Stoic theory with special meanings, though unfortunately we are nowhere given a precise account of them: Arius Didymus tells us that ‘desire’ does not refer generically to the desires of rational beings (humans, as distinct from animals) but rather to a special case of that sort of desire. But orexis seems, as Epictetus himself elsewhere says (I.4.1), to be desire for
something (conceived as) good (while *ekklisis* is an aversion from something conceived as bad for you). Now, for the original Stoics the principal reason why one ought to restrict desire and aversion in such a way that they do not take anything ‘external’ as their objects was that, as philosophical analysis could show, no such thing could ever in fact *be* good or bad for you: you should make only your own internal state, your orientation to and action in relation to external things, the object of your desire and aversion, because in fact only it could possibly be either good or bad for you.

Characteristically, Epictetus starts instead from the pretty questionable assumption that everyone who desires anything thereby strongly insists upon having it, and can't *stand* the idea of missing out on it (and *mutatis mutandis* for aversion). 16 So, for him, the aim in this first step is to train ourselves so that our desire and aversion cannot possibly be frustrated. On Stoic principles, only desire and aversion taking our internal state as its object can achieve this, and, as a preliminary step towards achieving it, we can try to avoid having any of the usual human desires or aversions at all, ones directed toward ‘externals’.

The second step concerns impulses towards and away from external things, and hence also appropriate actions, since appropriate actions, of course, are directed at obtaining or avoiding specific external objects or conditions. 17 Here, recognizing that of course no desire that could possibly lead to action can fail to involve a further impulse, one towards or away from some or other objective to be achieved in the world outside our minds, Epictetus directs us to train ourselves so that we adopt (p. 17) objectives of that sort that are appropriate for us (and, of course, so that we are impelled towards or away from them in the right way, i.e. without thinking of them as either good or bad for us).

Before turning to the third step, let us pause to consider how Epictetus envisages our taking these first two steps. He speaks of training (*askēsis*), which certainly suggests something more than just thinking clearly and understanding truths of a philosophical or indeed any other sort—more than intellectual inquiry or study. But he says very little concretely about it. There is some suggestion that at the beginning of the first stage one must for a time bring oneself not to desire anything at all, to totally suspend desire (i.e. desire aimed at anything, conceiving of it as good for oneself). 18 But presumably such suspension will function as a respite enabling one to consider without distraction, and come fully to appreciate, the reasons why it is correct to limit one's desire to having and maintaining a certain condition
of one's mind. And, for this, hearing or reading and thinking for oneself about what Chrysippus and other Stoic philosophers have to say about goods and bads will be essential conditions. Likewise, at the second stage one must hear philosophers explaining (with rationally convincing arguments) what are appropriate external things to aim at under different circumstances, and how to aim at them. For example, as Epictetus puts it at one place in the Enchiridion (ch. 2), but nowhere in the surviving books of the Discourses, one must aim at them ‘with reservation’, meth’ hupexaireseōs—i.e. with the rider ‘deo volente’. If one heard no arguments, or heard none one found convincing, one could hardly be expected to come to direct one's impulses in the required way. As Epictetus himself frequently says, the mind by nature believes the true (i.e. what it takes to be true) and disbelieves the false, and the mind is for him, as for the classic Stoics, the source of all our impulses. 19 So far, then, Epictetus' askēsis is in large part the training of our minds by stocking them with truths that we come to have rational appreciation for as truths, things true for compelling reasons. Presumably Epictetus (p. 18) did not feel the need, in discussing his three ‘themes’ for training in his Discourses, to go into all this in detail, because he could count on his pupils’ knowing it from their daily lessons, when they read and heard Epictetus’ exegesis of Chrysippus' treatises.

What then about the third and final stage of training? This is ‘concerned with proof against being led into error and with wariness, and in general with assents’. 20 In a related passage Diogenes Laertius explains that for Stoicism the knowledge of dialectic—skill at reasoning and the detection of fallacies, based on a knowledge of the theory of valid inferences, or more generally the ability to distinguish truths from falsehoods 21—was itself a virtue, necessary, as virtue in general is, for living a good life. 22 That is because, without that skill, one will inevitably sometimes assent to impressions when there is good reason not to, or fail to assent when one should, or become confused and withdraw assents that one has previously correctly given. The good or bad quality of our lives depends directly upon what we assent to and withhold assent from, because our assents determine what we do and in what spirit we do it. It is therefore crucial to bring ourselves into the condition in which our determination to assent, and to withhold assent, precisely and only when there is sufficient reason to do so, is deeply and firmly implanted. It is with training for this purpose that Epictetus' third stage is concerned. He emphasizes, reasonably, that this third stage is only for those who have already made substantial moral progress, by having been trained to a fair extent in the first two stages (III.2.5). You can't secure your tendencies to assent correctly, until you actually are in the
habit of so assenting (see III.26.14–15); and the first two steps are aimed at achieving that necessary prior condition. And it is in discussing this stage that, reasonably again, Epictetus makes (p. 19) special reference to training in logic (2.6–7). In order to deeply and firmly implant this determination to assent correctly, what we need to do is improve our understanding of reasoning itself, by studying and mastering Stoic logical theory.

This brief examination of Epictetus' account of the stages one must follow in making moral progress shows, then, that, according to Epictetus, the intensive study of logic is necessary for achieving the good life. But it ought properly to be postponed to late stages in one's self-improvement, when one is already educated, and trained, sufficiently so that one can derive from it the good that it promises. It is in this light that we should understand Epictetus' not infrequent complaints (mentioned above) about his pupils' excessive attention to, indeed fascination with, logical studies. He does not at all mean that these are useless for moral improvement and moral training, or dispensable; he only means that teenage boys would do better to focus their attentions elsewhere, since they are not yet ready, morally speaking, for this sort of work, anyhow not at the level of real intensity. They should concentrate, first, on the first two topoi in Epictetus' three-stage model for moral progress.

However replete, then, with rhetorical appeals to self-improvement Epictetus' Discourses (including here the excerpts from them making up the Enchiridion) may be, we should bear in mind the special circumstances from which they derive. They are ancillary discussions addressed to his own pupils, teenage boys and young men, who are studying the classic Stoic texts with him. Their moral improvement, on Epictetus' own account of it, is to be derived from their philosophical studies themselves, and the application of those to their daily lives—not from these pep talks. Unlike Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus remains fully aware and fully committed, when it comes to offering his assistance in their moral improvement, to the classic Stoic position that moral improvement simply is a matter of increased and deepened understanding of the truths of Stoic theory, and of the bases in philosophical reason on which they rest.

Notes:

(1) By the time of the Larnaca conference I had delivered one part or the other of a paper about this aspect of their works, ‘Seneca and Marcus Aurelius on Moral Theory and Moral Improvement’, at a conference in
Pittsburgh (Ideas in Motion, February 2000), a conference in Chicago (Roman Stoicism, April 2000), and in the Columbia University Philosophy Department Colloquium series (September 2000). Descendants of this paper have appeared as ‘Moral Theory and Moral Improvement: Seneca’ and ‘Moral Theory and Moral Improvement: Marcus Aurelius’, in Cooper (2004).

(2) The only clear exceptions are provided by Disc. I.26 and II.14, where Arrian reports two sets of remarks allegedly made by Epictetus in the classroom itself. In addition, I.11, I.13, I.14, I.15, II.24, II.25, III.1, III.4, III.5, III.6, III.7, III.9 and III.22 purport to give us conversations Epictetus had with individual persons, rather than general addresses to his assembled pupils—but it is quite possible that at least some of these were responses in those assemblies to questions asked by pupils or others (or, as perhaps in II.4, remarks occasioned by some outsider's entrance into them). In any case, these are all informal remarks, not part of his formal teaching, even when they are reported as occurring in the course of a formal lesson.

(3) See II.14.1, 21.10 ff.; III.21.6–7, 23.10–11 and 16 for descriptions of formal teaching. In some of these places, Epictetus does not describe his own teaching but the teaching that he imagines a pupil prematurely aspiring to in imitation of himself and other teachers of philosophy.

(4) It looks almost as if Epictetus agreed with Ariston of Chios, against Chrysippus, in rejecting this distinction altogether, in favour of a simple undifferentiated category of ‘indifferents’ none of which has value of any sort, whether positive or negative. Epictetus frequently emphasizes that humans simply receive, or do not receive, externals from Zeus, and that their whole function in the cosmos is to gladly accept and then live with and within those conditions. This, plus his frequent appeal to the image of humans as actors in a drama written by Zeus, sounds very much like Ariston's views as we learn of those from Diogenes Laertius (VII.160). However, Epictetus never mentions Ariston in the surviving four books (of the original eight) of Discourses, and he repeatedly speaks of Chrysippus as his authority.

(5) See III.21.7 and 10; I.17.13.

(6) On the vogue of logical studies among the young in Imperial times, see Barnes (1997).

(7) Inwood (1985 : 231–4) notes that the verbs for ‘achieving your purposes’ etc. here (epiballēi . . . ) all have technical uses among the classic Stoics (their nouns get special definitions in Arius Didymus’ Epitome of Stoics).
Ethics, p. 87.14 ff. (Wachsmuth), along with several others). I agree with Inwood that Epictetus’ usage of these terms (all of which recur reasonably frequently in his Discourses) does not in any clear way conform to any technical standards. I disagree with him, however, when he endorses the idea (Voelke’s; see Inwood 1985 : 324 n. 34) that Epictetus uses the term epibolē frequently in the sense ‘basic plan of life’. In fact it almost every time clearly just means ‘purpose’, ‘goal’, ‘aim’. (So for that matter does prothesis.) In my translations here I have been guided by Epictetus’ usage elsewhere.

(8) I.4.14: ‘labe tēn peri hormēs suntaxin kai gnōthi pōs autēn anegnōka.’ andrapodon, ou touto zētō, alla pōs hormas kai aphormas, pōs oregēi kai ekklineis, pōs epiballēi kai pro[s]tithesai kai paraskeuazēi, potera sumphōnōs tē phusei ē asumphōnōs. From the context (see I.4.6–9) one would infer that the treatise referred to here is one of Chrysippus’, though we do not hear elsewhere in Epictetus or any other ancient source of a work of his under this title (both Zeno and Cleanthes are credited with one).

(9) I.19.6: oude gegona pros toutōi, tōi basanisai tēn emautou phantasian kai sunkrinai ta legomena kai dogma ti emautou poiēsasthai kata ton topon.

(10) See e.g. I.26.9, II.21.17, IV.4.42.


(12) On this see, most recently, the account in Long (2002 : 112–18). Long, misleadingly I think, calls these ‘fields of study’, thus downplaying the fact that they are explicitly set out as elements in askēsis (training, i.e. the practice of self-improvement). My account below differs considerably from his, partly as a result of my emphasis on this aspect of what Epictetus has in mind in speaking of askēsis in this connection.

(13) See also I.17.22–4, 21.2; II.17.15–17 and 31–3; III.9.18, 12.13–14, 26.14. Contrast the different list of three topoi in Ench. 52.

(14) III.2.1: ho peri tas orexeis kai tas ekkliseis, hina mēt’ oregomenos apotunchanēi mēt’ ekklinōn peripiptēi. See also I.4.11.

(15) Stobaeus Eclogae II.86.17 ff. (SVF 3.169 = Long and Sedley 53Q).

(16) See Enchiridion 2.
(17) III.2.2, 'the second concerns impulses toward and away from things, and, to put it simply, concerns appropriate action, so that one [acts] in an orderly fashion, reasonably, not carelessly': ho peri tas hormas kai aphormas kai haplōs ho peri to kathēkon, hina taxei, hina eulogistōs, hina mē amelōs. See also I.4.11.

(18) See I.4.1, III.22.13, and Enchiridion 2. Note that Epictetus is quite explicit in these places both that one should stop, for a time and as a first step, altogether from having any desires, and that one should stop having aversions only from anything ‘external’, while instead having aversions from bad states of mind. Thus he treats desiring differently from aversion: apparently, he considers that at the very beginning of training one can muster aversions against bad states of mind (i.e., ones that really are bad, according to Stoic theory), but he mistrusts beginners' ability to desire the good states of their own minds at all.

(19) See I.18.1–2, 28.1–9; II.24.20–1, 26.3; III.3.2, 7.15; Ench. 42.


(21) Diogenes Laertius gives two definitions of ‘dialectic’ for the Stoics (VII.42 = Long and Sedley 31A5), one as ‘knowledge of how to carry on question and answer discussions correctly’, the other as ‘knowledge of what is true, what is false, and what is neither true nor false’.

(22) See Diogenes Laertius VII.46–7 (SVF 2.130 = Long and Sedley 31B), where the term aneikaiotēta recurs (DL explicates it as meaning ‘reason which is strong against what is plausible, so as not to give in to it’); but nothing seems directly to correspond to Epictetus' anexapatēsian. Below (2.9), in explaining his third step, Epictetus mentions also ametaptōsia (proof against being argued out of anything you have once accepted) as one of the concerns of this stage—and in VII.47 Diogenes Laertius explains knowledge itself (epistēmē) as ‘a standing condition in the receipt of impressions that cannot be changed (ametaptōton) by argument’.