Rapid #: -8854497

CROSS REF ID: **1255864**

LENDER: **GZN :: Main Library**

BORROWER: **AZS :: Main Library**

TYPE: Book Chapter

BOOK TITLE: Psychology / edited by Stephen Everson.

USER BOOK TITLE: Companions to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology

CHAPTER TITLE: Representation and the Self in Stoicism

BOOK AUTHOR:

EDITION:

VOLUME:

PUBLISHER:

YEAR: 1991

PAGES: 102-120

ISBN: 9780521358613

LCCN:

OCLC #:

PATRON: **Blackson, Thomas**

PATRON ID: blackson

Processed by RapidX: 1/27/2015 3:03:51 PM

This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code)

2

Rapid #: -8854497

Odyssey
IP: 129.219.247.12/ILL

Status	Rapid Code	Branch Name	Start Date
New	AZS	Main Library	1/26/2015 2:39:27 PM
Pending	GZN	Main Library	1/26/2015 2:39:42 PM
Batch Not Printed	GZN	Main Library	1/27/2015 8:03:06 AM

CALL #: **BF161 P79 1991**
LOCATION: **GZN :: Main Library :: stacks**
TYPE: Book Chapter
BOOK TITLE: Psychology / edited by Stephen Everson.
USER BOOK TITLE: Companions to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology
GZN CATALOG TITLE: Psychology
CHAPTER TITLE: Representation and the Self in Stoicism
BOOK AUTHOR:
EDITION:
VOLUME:
PUBLISHER:
YEAR: 1991
PAGES: 102-120
ISBN: 9780521358613 GZN ISBN: 9780521353380
LCCN:
OCLC #: GZN OCLC #: 21909176
CROSS REFERENCE ID: [TN:1255864][ODYSSEY:129.219.247.12/ILL]
VERIFIED:

BORROWER: **AZS :: Main Library**
PATRON: **Blackson, Thomas**
PATRON ID: blackson

This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code)
1/27/2015 8:03:07 AM

6

Representation and the self in Stoicism

A. A. LONG

The Stoics philosophised about the mind, but they did not treat the philosophy of mind as a division of enquiry separate from their interests in logic, physics and ethics, the official 'parts' of their philosophy. Attention to this point is essential for any sympathetic understanding of their significant contributions to what *we* call 'philosophy of mind'. For example, their arguments and theses about the bodily nature of the mind and its faculties, though historically interesting and intelligible, are unlikely to impress those who know the philosophical tradition since Descartes. The Stoics distinguish the mind and the soul (of which the mind is a part) from the body, but they regard the soul as no less corporeal than the body. Do they, then, attempt to combine materialism and dualism? That would be a seriously anachronistic interpretation. The Stoics did not face the philosophical issues that we characterise by these alternatives. They wanted an account of the soul which would distinguish it from flesh, blood, bones and sinews, and at the same time explain the soul–body relation as a physical interaction. Hence they identified the soul with 'breath' (*pneuma*) that completely interpenetrates every part of the flesh, blood, bones and sinews.[1]

Notwithstanding their 'materialism', the Stoics seem to have seen no problem in theorising about psychological faculties and states *as if* the mental could be analysed as a domain of its own. In this they were surely right. A thought or an emotion is a mental event, whatever may be its actual relation to physical processes and structures. Like Aristotle (*de Anima* (*DA*) 1,2.403a29), the Stoics held that emotions can be non-reductively described

[1] See Emilsson's chapter in this volume, pp. 000. In Long [476] I offer an interpretation of how the Stoics viewed the relation of soul to body. For the basic evidence on early Stoic psychology and philosophy of mind, see Long and Sedley [367], sections 39 and 53. There is much useful material, especially for Epictetus, in Bonhöffer [471]. At the end of this chapter I argue that the Stoics can be presented with a mind–body problem of the familiar type.

in two ways: they are both judgements, the mental analysis, and 'swellings' and 'contractions', the physicalist analysis (see Long and Sedley [LS], vol. 1, 420).

For the purpose of this chapter I have decided to focus upon an aspect of Stoic thought to which questions of 'mind' as distinct from 'body' are largely irrelevant. What I want to argue is that the Stoics were primarily interested in the mind and its faculties for the light that such enquiry could shed upon the self. The self is a psychological and ethical concept. What we may loosely call Stoic 'philosophy of mind' is most creative and distinctive in the tools it provides for understanding and shaping our individual selves. This also happens to be a subject for which our evidence is not fragmentary and tendentious, as so often in the study of Stoicism. The discourses of Epictetus, transmitted by Arrian, contain a powerful philosophy of the self, unsystematic in presentation, but thoroughly clear in its general direction. In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the mental faculties which provide the Stoics with their innovative approach to the self. In the second part, I will seek an answer to the question: why does Epictetus typically characterise a Stoic's purpose as 'making correct use of representations' (*phantasiai*)?

As a preliminary, let me explain what I mean by a philosophy of the self. In recent years a new subject of enquiry has begun to burgeon: the conceptualisation and history of the individual or person.[2] It is a subject that infiltrates the conventional disciplinary boundaries of philosophy, psychology, anthropology, history and literary criticism; its special concern is 'representation'. By representation I mean the way in which individual human beings perceive themselves, or what it is for them to have a first-person outlook on the world or first-person experience. The self in this sense is something essentially individual – a uniquely positioned viewer and interlocutor, a being who has interior access of a kind that is not available to anyone else.

A self of this kind, it may seem, is always with us. But selves have histories and what their representation consists in is not something culturally or conceptually constant. Christianity, Romanticism, Marx and Freud are some of the many factors that have helped to shape ways in which we Westerners view ourselves, what we take ourselves, in first-person reflection, to be. A number of contemporary scholars have begun to recognise the significance of Stoicism among early sources of the modern self. Thus Charles Taylor [667], 137 writes:

[2] The bibliography is already huge. I have found the following particularly helpful: Rorty [654], Carrithers [612], Martin, Gutman and Hutton [635], and especially the latest work of Charles Taylor [667].

> The [Stoics'] singling out of... assent is one source of the developing notion of the will, and there is already an important change in moral outlook in making this the central human faculty. What is morally crucial about us is not just the universal nature or rational principle which we share with others, as with Plato and Aristotle, but now also this power of assent, which is essentially in each case mine.

Taylor is quite right to comment as he does on the novelty of Stoic assent, within the tradition of ancient philosophy, and its contribution to the notion of a strictly personal or individual identity and commitment. No less novel and significant, however, is the role that the Stoics assign to *phantasia*, 'representation'. In their philosophy, unlike that of their predecessors, 'representation' encompasses the entire life of the mind. This is best interpreted, so I will argue, as a new focus on consciousness, on the individuality of the perceiving subject, as the fundamental feature of the mental. Once this is understood, we see why the Stoics attached such ethical importance to control and correct use of representations.

Representation (*phantasia*) in Stoicism

The term *phantasia* makes its main historical entry as a Platonic term of art with reference to Protagorean subjectivism.[3] Plato uses *phantasia* to pick out the different 'appearance' or 'perception' that one and the same entity may generate in a pair of observers. It is important to keep this original sense in mind when considering subsequent uses of the term. *Phantasiai* are necessarily individual experiences, appearances *to individuals*. This is not to say that they must pertain to the imaginary as distinct from the actual, or that there cannot be type-identity between the *phantasiai* of a group of individuals. Realist philosophers, no less than sceptics and subjectivists, must make room for *phantasiai* in their philosophies of mind. The point is simply that any post-Platonic philosopher who wished to refer to individual experience of any kind – the way things appear to the individual subject who experiences them – had *phantasia* available as the appropriate term.

As one studies Stoicism from its fragmentary Zenonian origins down to the continuous discourses of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, it becomes evident that *phantasia* has a centrality that it lacks in Plato and Aristotle (see LS 39). No doubt the Stoics were influenced in their use of it by these predecessors, especially Aristotle. But Stoic *phantasia*, though recognisably

[3] *Theaetetus* 152c. This will not be Plato's first use of the word if those manuscripts which include it at *Republic* 382e preserve the right reading.

Aristotelian in certain respects, is not to be accounted for solely as his legacy. By the end of the *de Anima*, it is true, *phantasia* has assumed an importance not even hinted at early in the treatise: it enters importantly into Aristotle's account of perception and thought, desire and action, true and false belief, and imagination. Some of the Stoics' work on *phantasia* might be viewed as a tidying up of Aristotle, turning what is disjointed in his account into a unitary notion.[4] But I think that would be a superficial interpretation of the material. We need to understand the Stoic concept in its own terms, and so my future references to Aristotle will have that end in view.

In Stoicism psychology and ethics are intimately related. The Stoics begin their reflections on both of these subjects by considering the common properties of humans and other animals.[5] Man is an animal, albeit a 'rational' one. Man's animality is evidenced by the fact that he has a 'soul', where soul signifies agency, or a creature's capacity to cause itself to move about in the world. The self-motion of animals is due to the conjoint operation of two faculties, *phantasia* and *hormē*, 'impulse': 'They [i.e. animals] are moved by themselves when a representation occurs within them which calls forth an impulse' (Origen, *de Principiis* III.1.2–3/LS 53A).[6] Possession of a representational faculty and an impulsive faculty is what distinguishes every animal or ensouled creature from plants and inanimate beings.

Approaching the Stoics via Aristotle's psychology, we might be inclined to say that their account of animality is merely a terminological variation of his position. For Aristotle, possession of *aisthēsis*, the faculty of sense-perception, differentiates all animals from plants, and he insists that *aisthēsis* is always accompanied by *to orektikon*, the appetitive faculty (*DA* II.3,

[4] See especially *DA* III.10. 433a9, 433a20, 433a27, 433b29, and *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.8. 1150b28. These passages show that Aristotle could have anticipated most of the work the Stoics assign to *phantasia*, but I do not think that he did so in any systematic way.

[5] See Diogenes Laertius VII 85–6/LS 57A, and much more fully, Hierocles, *Foundations of Ethics*, cols. 1–6. The only text of Hierocles available at present is that edited by von Arnim [468]; for key excerpts, see LS 53B and 57C, and for a useful study of Hierocles' work, see Inwood [470]. I am preparing a new edition, in collaboration with Guido Bastianini, for the *Corpus dei papiri filosophici greci e latini*, of the Tuscan Academy of Florence.

[6] There is no agreed translation of *phantasia*, and no single modern word is entirely apt. 'Appearance', 'impression', 'presentation' and 'representation' are the English renderings most commonly adopted. In LS 'impression' is consistently used, but the Humean connotations of this term may mislead. For this chapter I find 'representation' the most effective word, and I have modified the translations taken from LS accordingly.

414b1).[7] Substitute *to orektikon* for *hormē* and *aisthēsis* for *phantasia*, and we can translate the Stoic terms into their Aristotelian equivalents. To this I would reply: little will be distorted by the former substitution, but a great deal by the latter. *Aisthēsis* in Aristotelian usage signifies particular or co-operative activities of the five senses. What the Stoics subsume under the 'representational faculty' includes impressions mediated by the five senses, but is not confined to these. According to Chrysippus, 'the first thing appropriate to every animal [from the moment of birth] is its own constitution and the consciousness (*suneidēsis*) of this' (Diogenes Laertius VII.85/LS 57A). Hierocles, a Stoic professor of the Roman Imperial period, argues at length (see n. 5 above) that the first object of an animal's *aisthēsis* is not anything external to an animal's body, but *the animal itself*. He seeks to prove that animals continuously perceive their bodily parts and their specific powers from the moment of birth, and that such self-perception is a precondition of their perceiving anything else (6.2).

This is a very striking claim. In addition, Hierocles argues that an animal must perceive itself *before* it perceives anything else (6.21) These are not Aristotelian doctrines, and I suspect that Aristotelians are Hierocles' target when (1.45) he objects to people who think *aisthēsis* is 'for the sake of perceiving externals'.[8] In using *phantasia* rather than *aisthēsis* as the name for an animal's perceptual faculty, the Stoics emphasised their difference from Aristotle. On their account of the mind, sense-perception is not a faculty in its own right, so to speak, but a sensory 'mode of representation' (*phantasia*). Likewise, in the case of humans, thought is not an independent faculty, but a non-sensory mode of representation. For Aristotle, on the other hand, *phantasia* stands for the capacity to visualise (hence the common translation, 'imagination'), and this, he argues, 'is different from both perception and thought' (*DA* III,3.427b14.) Though one must grant the notorious complications of his concept of *phantasia*, it is clear that Aristotle has no interest in unifying all objects of awareness as 'representations', appearances to a perceiving subject. His philosophy of mind does not place a unitary consciousness at the centre of an animal's life. This was

[7] Unlike the Stoics, Aristotle equivocates on the question whether all animals possess *phantasia: see* Hicks [237], note on *DA* II,2.413b22. That is sufficient by itself to show how differently he regards this faculty.

[8] Aristotle, of course, recognises that 'we perceive that we perceive' (*DA* III.2), but this reflexive consciousness need not imply self-consciousness (see Kosman [288], or a sense of one's organic unity, which seems to be what the Stoics mean by an animal's 'perception of itself', see Inwood [470], 174–7 for stimulating remarks on the Stoic soul–body compounds' awareness 'of itself as a whole'. My main disagreement with Inwood has to do with the novelty he ascribes to Hierocles. I think that Hierocles' emphasis on self-perception was standard Stoic doctrine.

the Stoics' contribution, and one which decisively marks off their philosophy of mind from all that went before.

The Stoic supposition that all animals perceive themselves from birth onward invites much greater comment than there is space to offer here. The point that needs to be emphasised now is simply this: in making self-perception basic to animals' life, the Stoics are saying that, in order to live at all, any animal must have some representation of itself, some sense of itself as the subject of its own experiences, as cat-like, dog-like, etc. This self-perception is not something unrelated to sensory operations. Rather, it is a prerequisite of them, and accounts for the fact that the seeing or hearing taking place in that body over there is that creature's seeing or hearing as distinct from your or my seeing or hearing.

The Stoics' intuition concerning self-perception is directly relevant to another distinctive feature of their philosophy of mind – their concept of the *hēgemonikon* (see LS 53H, K-M). This term picks out the soul's 'commanding part', located in the heart, the centre of an animal's body. What this part of the soul commands or governs is all that we would call today sentient, conscious and purposed life as distinct from automatic bodily processes.[9] The 'commanding part' of the soul has distinct functions of its own, minimally the pair already mentioned, *phantasia* and impulse (*hormē*). What it does not have is distinct 'parts'. In other words, that which is the subject of *phantasia* is also the subject of *hormē*. It is one thing, what we may call the animal's self or mind, to which things appear and which responds to such appearances or representations with desire or aversion. *Phantasia* and *hormē* do not constitute a division of the soul into distinct parts, potentially capable of conflicting with one another. There is no subject or ego over and above the *hēgemonikon*, no place for a self that has separate, quasi-Platonic constituents, a desiring part and a cognitive part. The *hēgemonikon* provides the Stoics with the concept of a unitary self, actively engaged as a whole in all moments of an animal's experience.

A concern to emphasise the unity of the experiencing subject is a further reason, we may presume, why the Stoics treat *phantasia* as the mental faculty which encompasses all objects of awareness. Applying the notion to human animals, we may take it as a Stoic datum that my sensing something white, my awareness that what is hurting is my leg, my recollection of someone's birthday, my current thought of Socrates, and my reflection on

[9] In Long [476] I have argued that the Stoics restrict the scope of the soul's 'commanding part' to the functions distinctive of an animal's sentient mode of life. The evidence suggests that they treated all purely organic functions – breathing, digestion, growth, etc. – as activities controlled by the heart, which needs no direction from the soul's 'commanding part'.

the square root of 2 are all alike in being representations, appearances of something to me.[10]

If the representational faculty covers all of these mental states, what mental states fall outside its scope?[11] The answer, I believe, is none. As I understand the Stoics, they classify all occurrent sensations and feelings, recollections, imaginations, and all transient thoughts as 'representations'. There is no other faculty in virtue of which mental states can appear to the self that has them.

At this point we should take note of the canonical definition of *phantasia*: 'A representation is an affection (*pathos*) in the soul, which reveals itself and its cause' (Aetius IV.12.1/LS 39B). Much could be written concerning the elucidation of the difficult expression, 'reveals itself'. Let me briefly say that I take 'reveals itself' to signify the fact that any *phantasia* is experienced as such, i.e. as an awareness of the object (its cause) that it reveals; 'reveals itself' is an attempt to capture the reflexive or phenomenological aspect of representations. The source of this definition proceeds to illustrate it by the example of seeing something white; but we should not be misled by this example into treating sense-perception as anything more than the paradigm case of representations. The Stoics, like Aristotle, maintain that representations can be of sensory or non-sensory objects. They also claim that all our concepts (*ennoiai*) are *phantasiai*; that memory is a 'store' of them; and that they enter into the causal account of everything we do (see LS 39A4, F; 53PQ; 62C8).

As a *pathos* a representation is passive; it is an instance of our being affected, 'stamped' or imprinted in such a way that we are made aware of something – for example in the case of seeing, of something white; in the case of pain, of an unpleasant disturbance to my leg; in the case of fear, of something dangerous. That of which we are made aware, or that of which the representation is a representation, is described as the 'cause' of the representation, i.e. whatever it is that brings about the representation of something white, of a painful leg, of something dangerous, etc. Frequently the relation of this cause to the content of the representation will be

[10] Our evidence does not tell us much about the ways the Stoics distinguished one type of representation from another. But see LS 39A, and also 39B, where 'imagination' and 'figments' are marked off from the general class of *phantasiai*.

[11] For this use of the term 'mental state', see Wollheim [672], 33: 'Mental states are episodic or transient phenomena'. Wollheim distinguishes them from 'mental dispositions' (such as knowledge, belief, emotions, desires, virtues and vices, characterising these as 'persistent phenomena, which manifest themselves intermittently') and 'mental activities' such as thinking a thought, 'by means of which we bring about mental states or bring dispositions into being or initiate bodily movements'.

completely isomorphic. A white house within my line of vision will normally cause me to see that there is a white house there. But as with the English expression, 'I have the impression that . . .' representations are not necessarily veridical. Appearance and reality may not coincide. The appearance of its cause that a representation mediates – for instance the appearance of a bent stick that a straight stick reveals through water – will not always justify a judgement to the effect that such and such is really the case. As is well known, the Stoics claimed that only certain representations – *kataleptic* ones – give unmistakably sound evidence concerning their causes.

Representations, then, can be false or misleading. Yet, whatever their veridical status, they always present something to the 'commanding part' of the soul, which constitutes the mind in Stoicism. In other words, the Stoics view the mind, in one of its basic operations, as a receptor which is constantly being occupied by a sequence of representations. They take it that the external world and/or one's internal condition continually acts upon the mind, and thereby provides it with some definite content or object(s) of awareness.[12] The significance of this point for their deeper intuitions will become clear when we compare and contrast their view of the difference between human representations and those of other animals.

In addition to the representational faculty, all animals have the faculty of impulse; and, as I said at the outset, the conjoint operation of these two faculties explains the purposive movement of animals. Even at the purely animal level, it seems, the Stoics will want to say that representations are thick with individual content. Think of the distinction they drew between the willing dog tied to a moving cart and the recalcitrant dog that is dragged instead (LS 62A). The way things appear to a creature – the representations it has – depends not only upon the things in question but also upon the kind of creature that it is and the kind of training and habits that it has. Now the Stoics insist that animal representations are 'simple', in contrast with human representations (LS 53T). By 'simple' they mean that animals do not synthesise and conceptualise their experience. The 'commanding part' of their souls is non-rational. That of adult human beings, on the other hand, is not only rational but rational through and through. The orthodox Stoics firmly reject the standard Platonic and Aristotelian division of the human soul into a rational 'mind' and an irrational part or parts responsible for sensing, appetite and passion (see LS 60B9–11, 65G).

The Stoics' insistence on the complete rationality of the human *hēgemonikon* is a further indication of their commitment to a unitary view of the

[12] The 'continuity' of an animal's self-perception is a conclusion for which Hierocles argues: see LS 53 B5.

mind. They do not deny that humans can act or think 'irrationally', but they insist that irrationality is a defect of reason itself and not the manifestation of a different part of the mind that makes a person inattentive to reason. What makes adult human beings rational through and through is the fact, as the Stoics see it, that all their experience is mediated by concepts and language. Thus, applying the point I stated above, how things appear to a rational animal will necessarily depend upon the kind of language user that it is; or, to put it another way, on the kind of concepts that it has. Or, to put it in Stoic terms, for every rational representation there is a *lekton* a 'sayable', which will articulate the representation in propositional form – *S* is *P* (see LS 33D-F, and p. 119 below).

Along with the development of language and rationality there develops in the human soul a third faculty in addition to those of representation and impulse, the power of giving or withholding 'assent' (*sunkatathesis*) to representations.[13] The term means casting a vote or committing oneself. As a faculty, assent functions as a power that can mediate between representations and impulses. Representations, as we have seen, are thought-contents, for instance, the way things look, smell, appeal to us, repel us, etc. As thought-contents, representations naturally claim our attention since all awareness involves attentiveness. The faculty that answers this claim is assent. Representations, considered simply as the fleeting contents of the mind, are not judgements; rather they should be regarded as potential judgements: 'That looks like my hat', as distinct from 'There's my hat'; 'I have the impression that it would be good to go to the beach', as distinct from 'It would be good to go to the beach.'

A representation, once it has occurred, cannot be revoked or erased from my life. But, according to Stoic theory, the occurrence of a representation does not impel me to act accordingly. The impulse to do so is up to me because it depends on what I do with the representation, i.e. whether I assent to it or not. The Stoics' intuition that assent is an essential faculty of the human soul draws attention to their interest in the self, the first-person perspective, what each individual does with his experience. Any representation is a part of my experience, but I can make it *mine* – my outlook, or belief, or commitment – or *not mine*, by giving or withholding assent.

Notice that the role of assent in this account of life and action is restricted to acceptance or rejection of the representation. Assent does not generate

[13] It is a matter of controversy (see Inwood [511], 72–91) whether non-human animals are endowed by the Stoics with a rudimentary kind of assent, but that question need not concern us here. If, as I myself believe, non-human animals do have such a faculty (see LS vol. 1, 322), it is of too rudimentary a kind to affect the profound difference the Stoics posited between the representations of adult humans and those of other animals.

the thought-content itself. The role of assent is judgemental, interpretative and volitional. Like it or not, I had the thought, let us say, that it would be good to go to the beach. Because there are many other things that I ought to be doing, I may pause to consider whether in fact it would be good to go to the beach. I may well wish I had not had that representation. Perhaps I say to myself, 'I must try in future to avoid such experiences.' However, because of the kind of values and beliefs and habits I have had up to now, I find myself having such representations from time to time.

We are getting close to the point where I can introduce Epictetus. Before doing so, I should sum up the principal ideas necessary for understanding the importance he attaches to our making correct use of our representations.

A representation is anything at all that 'appears' to us, anything that constitutes an instance of our awareness. Plainly representations cover an enormous range of thought-contents, but that range for any individual will not be completely unrestricted. The representations that we receive as individuals from external and internal stimuli are powerfully determined by a wide range of factors – our natures as human beings, our experience as particular persons, our beliefs, desires, foibles, education and so forth. We could express this point by saying that representations will characteristically include generic and particular elements. As putative judgements, they are amenable to description in public discourse, in forms that will be intelligible to other persons. Yet, as appearances to *this* individual, they have an irreducible particularity – they are mental affections of this and only this person. There will, in many cases, be an objectively true proposition that a person assents to in assenting to this or that representation. Yet, what it is for that person to assent to this or any other proposition will remain something unique; nor will the individual content of anyone's representation be fully specifiable in any proposition. To put it in a form that is most helpful for approaching Epictetus, how to deal with the representations that one has is something every individual must work out for himself.

Epictetus on the correct use of representations

Epictetus repeatedly insists that an ethically good life is equivalent to making correct or proper use of representations (for instance I.1.7, II.1.4, II.22.29, IV.6.34). In the first discourse of Arrian's collection, he says that this is the one and only faculty that the gods have put in our power (I.1.7/LS 62K). What does he mean by this faculty? He glosses it in a number of ways. It is our reasoning faculty, the only faculty we have that can have cognisance of itself as well as everything else. It is our desiderative and

impulsive faculty. It is our capacity to give or withhold assent. It is our *prohairesis*, or moral character. It is the faculty that tells us whether or not to do something, that passes judgement on the truth and value of anything of which we have a representation.

This faculty – let us call it *prohairesis* for short – is the essential self, as Epictetus conceives of this, the bearer of personal identity. 'You are not flesh or hair, but *prohairesis*: if you get that beautiful, then *you* will be beautiful' (III.1.40). A person's *prohairesis*, or moral character or faculty of assent, is a function of reason, a state of the soul's 'commanding part'. Yet because the role of reason that preoccupies Epictetus is the individual's autonomy and responsibility, he identifies himself not with reason *simpliciter*, 'but with the practical application of reason in selecting his commitments, in keeping his emotional balance, his serenity, by not extending himself to goals and values that lie beyond his control'. As Charles Kahn ([30], 253), the author of these quoted remarks, also observes, 'The Platonic–Aristotelian identification of the person with the intellect offers no basis for a metaphysics of the self in any individual sense. Epictetus, on the other hand, identifies himself with something essentially personal and individualized.'

We can understand Epictetus' detachment of himself from his flesh and hair. And from what has been said before, we can understand why Epictetus chooses assent or *prohairesis*, and not representations themselves, as the locus of the persisting self. If my representations are up to me to interpret, accept or reject, there must be a 'me' to which they appear and an 'I' which reacts to them – a subject that is identifiable precisely by the representations that it receives and what it does with them. Even non-rational animals, as we have seen, are credited by the Stoics with something analogous. In what follows I want to explore Epictetus' account of this 'subject', or what he takes the self-perception of humans to consist in.

Epictetus distinguishes the goal of humans from that of other animals by reference to their differences in respect to representations:

> God had need of animals' making use of their representations, but of our attending to their use. For this reason it is sufficient for them to eat and drink and rest and procreate . . . For us, on the other hand, to whom he has also given the power of attending to things, these animal activities are no longer sufficient . . . God introduced man as a student of himself and his works, and not merely as a student, but also as an interpreter of these things. (I.6.13–20/LS 63E)

The correct use of impressions, then, is a 'hermaneutic' activity. As rational beings, Epictetus is saying, we are not constituted as creatures who can act satisfactorily if we simply allow representations to determine our

conduct – eating simply because attractive food appears, running away simply because danger is evident. To function well, to live as our nature requires, we need to reflect on and evaluate the appearances that the world and our internal states generate in us. Note the stress on 'need to'. Epictetus is well aware of the fact that representations often overwhelm people and constrain them to act without proper reflection. His discourses are packed with analysis – psychoanalysis, one is tempted to call it – of the conditions under which this may happen, and of what may be done to resist such representations (see II.22.5, III.12.11, IV.3.7).

But since any representation is what appears to me or to you, is it not the way you or I take things – a full manifestation of the self, in other words? The advice to interpret representations looks suspiciously like trying to lock the stable door after the horse has bolted. If my beliefs and desires, which make me the kind of person I am, are an influence on the kind of representations to which I am subject, it is also the case, as the Stoics acknowledged, that representations have helped to generate my beliefs and desires.[14] The causal relation works both ways. Hence the prohairetic 'faculty of using representations', unless it is a transcendental 'ego', seems more likely to reinforce them than be capable of acting as their judge. Against any such transcendentalism, it may seem, is the Stoics' stress on the mind's unity. As we have seen, they reject the Platonic–Aristotelian model of a mind divided into rational and irrational faculties. On their view reason, whether soundly or perversely, is at work in all aspects of the mind's activity.[15]

Interestingly, Epictetus, and also Marcus Aurelius, do not evade this problem but face it very squarely. Marcus says: 'Your mind will be just like the repetition of your representations; for the soul is coloured by its representations' (V.16). Epictetus asks: 'Why do we assent to anything?', and answers, 'its appearing that it is the case' (I.28.1). Note 'appearing', *phainesthai*. Epictetus' point is that we are predisposed to assent to any representation the thought-content of which appears to us to be true. He then asks: 'What do we have in the case of actions that corresponds to truth or falsehood?', and answers, 'the proper and the improper, the advantageous and the non-advantageous, the autonomous and the non-autonomous' (I.28.5). The implication is that we are predisposed to assent to whatever appears to us to be proper and in our interests and in our power. Epictetus then asks: 'Is it impossible for someone to think that something is in his interests and not to choose it?', and answers that it is impossible. He

[14] Note the processes of concept formation described at LS 39D-E.

[15] See the material excerpted at LS 61B9–11, and 65 *passim*.

illustrates this thesis by interpreting the famous lines of Euripides' *Medea* (1078–9): 'I understand the evils I intend to do, but passion is stronger than [or 'in charge of'] my reflections.'[16] According to Epictetus, Medea's words illustrate the fact that she regards gratifying her anger and avenging herself on her husband as more in her interests than saving her children. He imagines someone responding: 'Yes; but she is deceived', and replies: 'Show her clearly that she is deceived and she will not do it; but until you show her, what does she have to follow except what appears', i.e. her representation of what is more in her interests.

Epictetus, like Socrates, denies *akrasia* – the possibility of doing something that you genuinely believe to be worse than what you ought to do. Medea, he says, deserves pity, not anger. According to his analysis, it was impossible for Medea, given her character, not to prefer revenge to the life of her children. He generalises the point as follows (1.28.10): 'The measure [i.e. the standard or rule] of every person's action is what appears' and offers a startling example of its application:

> The *Iliad* is nothing but a representation and the use of representations. Paris had a representation of abducting the wife of Menelaus, and Helen had a representation of following him. If Menelaus had had the representation that it was an advantage to be robbed of such a wife, what would have happened? Not only would we have lost the *Iliad* but the *Odyssey* as well.

These passages illustrate the problem I raised a few sentences ago. On the one hand, Epictetus says that a good life consists in using one's representations correctly, and that this is a faculty that human beings possess. This thesis suggests that we are able to take stock of our representations, interpret their content and accept or reject courses of action that they propose. It implies that responsibility, praise and blame, rest not with our representations but with the use that we make of them. On the other hand, he also says that people cannot fail to act in accordance with their representation of what is dominantly in their interests. He speaks of representations as being good or bad (1.28.10). His examples of Medea and the figures of the *Iliad* impute to people whose ethical principles are unsound corresponding representations that induce their assent. Their horse has already bolted. What correct use could Medea have made of the representation that she should prefer revenge to her children's life?

The tension between these points of view is undeniable. Yet it is a tension which needs to be recognised and addressed in any serious ethical enquiry.

[16] Medea's self-analysis was plainly a Stoic topos. For an interesting discussion of Chrysippus' approach to it, see Gill [505].

The two viewpoints I have just identified in Epictetus' thought correspond to a standing problem for ethical psychology. On the one hand we hold people responsible for wrong-doing, on the presumption that it was in their power to resist unethical impulses – our version of the requirement to use representations correctly. At the same time our theories of upbringing, education and social welfare are strongly influenced by the belief that people's desires and interests, and hence their representations or occurrent mental states, are strongly shaped by the kind of world they are offered. To the question: is blame or pity the more appropriate response to the wrongdoer?', Epictetus answers 'pity' (I.28.9).

Epictetus lets the tension emerge, but he does not leave matters there. To resolve it, to the extent that it can be resolved, he advances his own version of living 'an examined life'. I want briefly to consider two of his principal recommendations, both of which turn on resources he thinks anyone can employ in 'using representations'. As I run through these, the reader may find it helpful to imagine Medea as listening in.

First, he suggests various ways in which we can detach ourselves from our representations. For instance, instead of immediately assenting to a representation, we can engage it in dialogue, saying: 'Wait for me a bit, representation; let me see who you are and what you are about; let me test you' (II.18.24–6). Representations of wrong courses of action are prone to give us attractive pictures of what will follow for us if we act upon them. We should forestall such pictures by opposing to the first representation 'a fair and noble one', which will give us the incentive to chuck out its predecessor. Alternatively, offered the representation of something pleasurable, we should first reflect on the duration of the pleasure and then compare that to the time subsequent to the pleasure and the possible self-revulsion we shall experience during this later time (*Encheiridion*, 34).

Both of these strategies incorporate the two viewpoints I mentioned above, but in ways that seek to resolve the tension between them. Epictetus is not saying that we can ever act independently of representations. He preserves the thesis that people act on the basis of what appears suitable to them (as Medea does), but insists that action need not be based upon first impressions. Once we have learned that first impressions do not always present us with what, on reflection, we really want for ourselves, we can use that knowledge to produce alternative representations and thus enlarge the scope of what it is open to us to do.

But Medea might say that she has no such knowledge. Epictetus has a response to this objection which introduces the second recommendation I want to discuss. Like earlier Stoics, he holds that all human beings normally develop into persons who have 'preconceptions' (*prolēpseis*) of what is good

and bad. This does not mean that they have correct understanding of basic ethical truths, but rather that it is part of human nature to acquire such concepts as the profitability of what is good, the desirability of one's own happiness, and the identification of happiness with the possession of what is good (see I.22.1). Where human beings typically go wrong, according to Epictetus, is in the way they fit or fail to fit representations of particular circumstances to preconceptions. Medea can be asked to consider whether her intention to kill her children accords with her general views of what is good for her, i.e. whether her current representation coheres with her preconception of her own well-lived life.

This test – one of consistency – will be ethically inefficacious if a person finds no discrepancy between his current representations and long-term beliefs and aspirations. The Stoics, however, would not be impressed by this objection, since they take internal conflict or inconsistency to be the hallmark of unhappiness (Stobaeus II.75.11/LS 63B1). The unhappy person, on their view, fails to get what he wants or gets what he does not want. In other words, his desire for happiness is constantly at odds with his immediate impressions of what he should seek or avoid. If happiness is a consistent life, free from disappointment and frustration, and happiness is everyone's long-term goal, it makes excellent sense to invite the unhappy person to interrogate his representations and ask whether his impulse to pursue this or that objective matches up with his desire for happiness.

It should now be clear why Epictetus identifies ethical sensibility with the correct usage of representations. As thought-contents quite generally, the sequence of representations is the process of a human life that is available to introspection. Because representations are states of the reasoning faculty and reason can reflect on itself, we can subject our representations to scrutiny and interpretation. We can ask what they tell us about our characters and what our character tells us about them. Marcus Aurelius exhorts himself to cultivate the practice of constantly discovering 'What precisely it is that is generating your representation, and to disclose it by analysing its cause, material, reference and necessary duration' (XII.18).

There are striking similarities here and in much else that I have been saying to the views of a contemporary philosopher whose work is strongly influenced by psychoanalysis. I refer to Richard Wollheim in his book *The Thread of Life* [672]. Justifying self-examination against the strictures brought against it by Kierkegaard, Wollheim writes:

> Self-examination is an activity that is distinguishable from leading our lives . . . but it must go on even as we lead them . . . Though self-examination does . . . require us to look into the past, it is the only alternative to a more baneful relation to the past to which we are otherwise

condemned. If we show ourselves unprepared to learn, or to try to learn, from the past in the way in which self-examination asks us to, we shall be forced to live in it. (163)[17]

I take it that this is what Epictetus' Stoicism is all about. Our representations are our selves, at the level of momentary consciousness. But they are not all that we are. Unlike the beasts, we are not simply recipients and users of our representations, but 'students and interpreters of them'. Our natures are such that we fashion our own selves, and self-fashioning requires the interrogative and reflective task I have been describing, which is the work of each individual's assent or *prohairesis* or moral character. A committed Stoic will also use representations as the means of testing and training his character. He can represent imaginary situations by which to check his reactions to things or confront those of his beliefs and desires which are not yet fully in tune with his ethical principles. Having the 'correct use of representations' as his decisively human faculty, he takes responsibility for the way the world impinges upon himself.

Some of the material I have drawn on for this chapter might suggest that Epictetus is feeling his way towards the idea of 'a subject that is not identical with any set of its experiences, memories or traits, but is that which *has* all of them, and can choose either to identify with them or to reject them as alien'. This formulation, by Amélie Rorty ([654], 11), is intended to signify 'the view of the person as the "I" of reflective consciousness, owner and disowner of its experiences' as influenced by the development of philosophy and culture since Descartes. Stoicism is certainly an important part of the prehistory of this development, but I think that Epictetus' conception of the self has no vestiges of a free-floating ego. In order to be at all, he suggests, we need a persisting view of ourselves, a bottom-line representation or narrative which is called into play whenever an "I" is called upon to register and evaluate new experience.

The faculty of assent, though it includes the power of reflective consciousness, is not a noumenal self or observer, detachable from all experience, nor is it merely a monitor of representations. It constitutes a person's moral identity, and as such, it is a character formed by experience, a disposition to make or decline to make specific commitments and choice. The content of these is given in representations. It is representations that provide selves

[17] See also Foucault in Martin, Gutman and Hutton [635], 37: 'He [Epictetus] wants to watch perpetually over representations, a technique which culminates in Freud.' Foucault calls Epictetus' concern with control of representations 'a kind of permanent self-examination' (p. 38). This explains Epictetus' constant use of dialogue, monologue, personal pronouns and reflexives. Invented conversations provide him with the way of exhibiting the self to itself.

with the viewpoints which they can select as appropriate to who they are, or reject as inappropriate. The Stoic self of Epictetus is constituted not by assent *simpliciter* but by the way assent uses representations.

Throughout this chapter I have been talking about one aspect of Stoicism, the access that individuals have to their own experience, a person's use of representations. Any creative discussion of Stoic philosophy requires a distinct focus, but there is always a risk of distortion by omission or emphasis since the system was peculiarly holistic. Two points in particular have an importance that I have barely hinted at in the main argument.

The first concerns human beings generically. Responsible, though they take each of us to be, for the way we relate to or 'appropriate' the world, the Stoics insist that we are endowed with natures which make us 'parts of the whole' (Diogenes Laertius VII.87–9/LS 63C). There is a normative way of living, a rational life 'in accordance with nature', which we are genetically equipped to understand, as our reason and experience develop, and which specifies what we should all seek as moral agents. Stoic self-fashioning is not a case of making up one's own values, but learning to take the norms of nature as one's own.[18]

A second determinant of the self is that set of circumstances which characterises one's unique position in the world – one's nationality, gender, age, family relationships, status, profession and personality. The Stoics developed interesting categories for analysing individuals along these lines.[19] These roles or *personae* fall outside the scope of this chapter, but they are obviously central to a person's use of representations. For, as Epictetus makes plain, representations will typically involve our picturing ourselves in one or more of these roles, for instance Medea as dishonoured wife and as mother. Epictetus invites someone to consider 'who you are' by running through a sequence of 'designations' – human being, citizen of the world, son, brother, etc. (II.10). For each designation he offers a normative account, a representation of how someone so entitled should conduct himself. The idea is that, in order genuinely to be what one is (son, citizen, etc.), each person must internalise a set of rules that constitute that role.

There is also a further dimension, too large to be fully developed and too large to be omitted altogether. According to the Stoics all representations that befall normal adult humans are 'rational'. As Michael Frede ([487], 68–71), has shown, this means that such representations presuppose concepts and make the mind conceptualise their object in a certain way. The

[18] For a stimulating and recent discussion, see Engberg-Pedersen [519].
[19] Recent discussions include Gill [524] and Long [522].

Stoics acknowledged this point by associating 'sayables' (*lekta*) with rational representations. *Lekta* specify the propositional content of these; they give us a description of the object that is presented (Sextus Empiricus (S.E.), *adversus Mathematicos* (*M*) VIII.70/LS 33C). And here lies an intriguing problem.

Phantasiai are physical structures – modifications of the corporeal mind *Lekta* are incorporeal. It is a basic axiom of Stoic metaphysics that bodies cannot affect non-bodies, or non-bodies bodies (LS 45C). So, it would seem, there can be no straightforward causal relation between *phantasiai* and the propositions that state our conceptualisation and interpretation of them – no straightforward causal relation between my representation of *p* and *p*. The only surviving Stoic answer to this problem is quaint and obscure. According to Sextus Empiricus, the Stoics said that *lekta* influence the mind not, as bodies do (for instance something white), by direct contact, but at a distance; they are likened to a trainer who may stand back and invite his pupils to imitate his movements instead of manipulating their limbs directly (S.E., *M* VIII.409/LS 27E). Representations are not generated 'by' *lekta* (by their direct agency), but they can none the less 'result from' them.[20]

The problem that concerns Sextus Empiricus is how the Stoics can account for the representation of something incorporeal, such as a proof. But I think we are entitled to use this passage as a basis for speculating about the relation between any representation and its corresponding proposition.

Epictetus constantly emphasises the fact that the way things affect us depends upon how we describe them:

> You say, 'I don't like leisure, it is solitude'; 'I don't like a crowd, it is confusion.' Instead of talking like this, if circumstances bring you to a state of spending time alone or with just a few, call it peace and use the situation in the right way. Talk to yourself, train your representations, work at your preconceptions. But if you fall in with a crowd, call it games, a festival, a holiday, try to celebrate with the people. [IV.4.26]

In this passage Epictetus invites someone to redescribe his experience, to *re*-present or replace 'solitude' with 'peace' and 'a crowd' with a festival', i.e. to fit a different *lekton* to the situation of which the person is aware, to dispose himself differently to that situation. Applying the passage from Sextus Empiricus, we should say that the way someone views his situation (cf. Medea from above) will depend on the *lekton* he selects as the paradigm appropriate to his belief-set and values. *Lekta* will 'result in' representations, not because they are the physical source of what we perceive or think but because they are the way we are disposed to interpret that source. Epictetus

[20] The Greek originals of 'by' and 'result from' are *hupo* with the genitive and *epi* with the dative. The latter is familiar in the expression *eph'hēmin*, 'in our power'.

insists that 'the correct use of representations' is 'in our power'. It is reasonable to suggest that what is in our power is a *lekton* or description, and that this is 'our' individual contribution to our representations. In that case, the mind's freedom from constraint, so strongly emphasised by Epictetus, gains a (transcendental?) dimension that scholars of Stoicism have overlooked. A person is not constrained by incorporeal *lekta* to experience his representations in one determinate set of ways. Rather, it seems, it is up to him to decide what *lekton* matches his situation, what precisely he is experiencing, and how he should evaluate that experience. If this is on the right lines, the Stoics may have room for a stronger sense of free will than is normally admitted. Epictetus' injunction to use representations correctly gains a useful conceptual resource in the causal gap which the self or assent fills between *phantasiai* and *lekta*.

Yet, as so often in philosophy, a solution in one area generates problems in another. The corporeal mind of the Stoics must have access to the incorporeal *lekta*, but the process by which it does so remains a mystery.[21] Since only minds can have access to *lekta*, there is an aspect to the Stoic self which raises the familiar dualist problems of mental and physical after all. It is tempting to conclude with the thought that the Stoics find themselves in this position precisely because they discovered the mind to be the centre of *consciousness*. We still don't know what consciousness is, but it should be clear from this chapter that it is what the Stoics meant by 'representation' or *phantasia*.[22]

[21] Problems about the mind's relation to *lekta* are further discussed in Long [476], 51–3.

[22] In writing this chapter I have benefited from comments by the editor, and also from the discussion a version of it received at the meeting of the Scottish Association for Ancient Philosophy in Edinburgh, July 1989.