Epictetus' Handbook *and the Tablet of Cebes: Guides to Stoic Living*. By Keith Seddon. New York and London: Routledge, 2005. $29.95 (paper). ISBN 0415324521.

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Some study Stoicism in order to track the development of ancient Greek philosophy after Aristotle. Some have a particular interest in the terms of debate among the Hellenistic schools. Others seek to understand a dimension of the intellectual milieu of Imperial Rome or to ascertain the influence of Stoic ideas on early Christian thought. Yet some few approach Stoicism neither as scholars nor as historians nor as professional philosophers but as seekers of spiritual enlightenment intent on practicing it as a way of life. Keith Seddon is one of these few. Even academics especially sympathetic to Stoicism refrain from confessing a cautious, qualified allegiance to it; Becker 1998 is the sole exception. Consequently Seddon's candid admission that he has tried to embrace and practice Stoicism is both striking and refreshing. The Stoic practitioner aims to eliminate distress and dissatisfaction from his life and to uphold the ideal of fully flourishing in a way that befits our true human nature (preface, ix-x). So it is as a self-declared Stoic practitioner that Seddon presents, in part 1, his translation of and commentary on Epictetus' *Handbook*, subtitled 'Stoic transformation of the soul' (1). Part 2 contains the ecphrasis of an unknown author probably dating to roughly the period of Epictetus' life known as the *Tablet of Cebes*, subtitled 'The journey to happiness'. It is because of its strong Stoic flavor that Seddon includes this allegory of a journey through an odd landscape populated by personifications of Happiness, Fortune, the Virtues, and the Vices described in a fictional tablet said to be discovered in a temple of Cronus by an unidentified narrator.

Given his aim, Seddon's primary audience are fellow seekers of spiritual enlightenment, either newcomers curious to learn about Stoicism or those for whom it already resonates. This group includes participants in the International Stoic Forum [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stoics], who are thanked in the acknowledgments (xii). But accompanying the translation of and commentary on the *Handbook* (30-172) and the translation of the *Tablet of Cebes* (185-200) are a list of abbreviations (xiii), two introductions (3-29, 175-184), three appendices (201-215), a glossary for each work (216-232, 233-242), an extensive bibliography (243-266), an index of key terms in the *Handbook* (267-275), and a general index (276-282). These appurtenances are for the use of scholars, so academics appear to comprise a second target audience. Accordingly, it seems fair to apply here the usual standards of evaluation expected by readers of this journal.

In the introduction to part 1 Seddon sketches Epictetus' life, briefly explains what the *Discourses* and the *Handbook* are, reports the controversy over their authorship, and endorses the view (Bonhöffer 1996, 3) that Epictetus' thought conforms to the doctrines of Chrysippus (8). Seddon accepts Oldfather's (1925,

viii n2) claim that 'there can be no doubt but the system of thought in [Epictetus] is little more than an echo, with changes in emphasis due to the personal equation, of that of [Musonius Rufus]' (4). This claim can be challenged. To take just one example: the routine male chauvinism in several of Epictetus' texts (*Disc*. ii 16.44, iii 1.27-33, iii 24.5, iv 10.32, *Ench*. 40) echoes poorly the considerably egalitarian view of the sexes in Musonius. Seddon holds that the distinctive Stoic outlook Epictetus teaches by means of the doctrine of the three *topoi* 'is wholly in accord with the principles of the early Stoics, but *how* he does this is uniquely his own method' (9). This introduction concludes with a clear and tidy overview of key concepts in Epictetus' Stoicism: the promise of philosophy, what is really good, what is in our power, making proper use of impressions, the three *topoi* (the disciplines of desire, action, and assent), God, on living in accordance with nature, metaphors for life as a festival, as a game, as weaving, as a play, as an athletic contest, and as military service, and a final section on making progress. Oddly, five different translations of excerpts from the *Discourses* are quoted in the introduction. This yields inconsistent renditions of *prohairesis* from Dobbin's (1998) transliteration in lieu of translation (11) to Matheson's (1916) 'will' (17, 24) to Oldfather's (1925-1928) 'moral purpose' (19, 21) to Seddon's own 'moral character' (10, 11, 15, 17, 22). He gains nothing by relying on Long 2004 (1848), Matheson 1916, Oldfather 1925-1928, Hard 1995, and Dobbin 1998 while neglecting to explain why he chose each translation for each excerpt. I will remark on the commentary and points of interpretation before returning to the translation.

The translation of each chapter of the *Handbook* is followed by a list of the key terms and the (transliterated) Greek words they translate. Seddon urges the reader to read the *Handbook* from beginning to end and presents his commentary as an expository progression. The commentary is clearly written and full of apt references to Epictetus' *Discourses*, some other ancient sources, and scholarship in English. Epictetus' thought is rarely compared to that of other Imperial Stoics. Redundant explanations, e.g., that 'good flow of life' translates *euroia biou*, cropping up in the commentary irritate the reader who proceeds in order chapter by chapter. The commentary also grows rather repetitious as it progresses.

Seddon's devotion to Epictetan ethics is unflinching. Epictetus insists (*Ench*. xxxi 5) that it is everyone's duty to the gods to offer the traditional libations, sacrifices, and first-fruits in the appropriate way. Seddon admits that this injunction 'is perhaps difficult to follow for Stoics in the modern world. The Pagan revival is as yet in its infancy, and most Stoics will find it difficult to locate venues where they can join with others in the worship of Zeus… But there is nothing to prevent our making private devotions according to our inclinations… Some, perhaps, may like to focus their thought by reciting a brief hymn to Zeus' (122). Does this revival include, say, divination? Epictetus addresses how to approach diviners in *Ench*. xxxii. We learn in his comments that for several years Seddon worked as a diviner using the Tarot and that, despite their pleas, he refused to tell his clients what to do (125). A shrewd Stoic, however, recognizes that all the out-

comes forecast by diviners are things not up to her, and so are of no concern to her. She can deal with any event virtuously, so it is difficult to see how knowing what will occur would bring any advantage. Divination seems a grand waste of time and money. One may suppose that mere curiosity about future events could be harmless. Yet should such curiosity intensify, the Stoic would risk developing a concern about her future, a worry that would disturb her equanimity. Confidence in Zeus' wise handiwork of future events would effectively rule out bothering with diviners.

Some elements of the commentary are mildly vexing. For instance, Seddon says that the Stoics were materialists (21), but they held that all that exists are *bodies*, rather than holding that matter is the only substance. So to call them *corporealists* is more accurate. Seddon explains that the successful Stoic student tests the impression that he has spilled paint all over the carpet and assents to the proposition that it is nothing to him. Consequently, the Stoic does not get upset about this 'decorating catastrophe' (38). But this fails to explain why, since the Stoic does not consider spilled paint to be something *bad*, he would bother 'clearing up the mess' (38). Commenting on *Ench*. xxxiii Seddon explains why Epictetus discourages criticizing others for indulging in premarital sex (129), but does not explain why Epictetus encourages criticizing others for using foul language. Such explanations are what we look for in commentaries.

Other concerns are more serious. Seddon includes the Myth of Er in Plato's *Republic* in Appendix 1 to help expound *Ench*. v and Socrates' view of death. But there is plain evidence that Epictetus rejects the possibility of an afterlife or reincarnation and no evidence that he entertains that possibility. Hence it is at best distracting and at worst misleading to import Platonic texts describing an afterlife in order to explicate a Stoic who rejects this notion. Nonetheless Seddon remarks on Epictetus' ship-of-death parable (*Ench*. vii) that when we leave life, we will 'be carried off across the sea and into that mystery whence we came' (57). If Epictetus truly maintained that a mysterious afterlife awaits us, his view would be sharply heterodox among Stoics. So it is troubling that Seddon neither argues for this radical reading of *Ench*. vii, which would collide with his position that Epictetus was faithful to the early Stoics (8), nor disabuses the reader from attributing it to Epictetus.

Keen to present Epictetus in a consistently charitable light, Seddon departs from the Stoic outlook in his comments on *Ench*. ix. He claims that the person who has advanced dementia, brain damage, or a major stroke 'truly is unfortunate' and her 'condition is hopeless' (62). As reasonable as this view may be, Stoics reject it. Epictetus and his fellow Stoics consider pain, lameness, injury, illness, and death to be dispreferred indifferents, not evils. Only vice—the use of impressions contrary to nature, false judgments—renders one unfortunate. Suppose a person suffers a stroke that destroys her *prohairesis*. Such an 'accident' would be willed by Zeus (fated by Nature), not chosen by the stroke victim. Seddon is free to contend that the mentally disabled person 'falls out of the moral sphere' because progress toward *eudaimonia* has become permanently beyond

her grasp (62). But while a Stoic could and would judge a condition of permanent mental disability to be a dispreferred indifferent, she could not consider it 'unfortunate' or 'hopeless'.

Seddon translates *Ench*. xxvii: 'Just as a target is not set up in order to be missed, so neither does the nature of evil exist in the world' (106). He favors interpreting this as the 'stronger thesis' that 'the nature of evil does not exist in the world' (107). Yet curiously he concedes that '[i]n one sense, we will have to say that evil exists in the world, because the world is full of vicious people' (108). Seddon tries to dispel this stubborn fact by arguing that the evil of all those vicious people can never be an evil *for me* unless I choose to make it so by judging falsely. But if *this* were Epictetus' claim, he could surely have said exactly that: 'the evil of another is not your own unless you so choose'. A serious problem with attributing the stronger thesis to Epictetus is its lack of connection to the first part of *Ench*. xxvii about the purpose of setting up a target. Seddon recognizes that sometimes targets are missed. But it is clear enough that Epictetus correlates missing a target with evil existing in the world. On the stronger thesis that there is no evil in the world, this would only follow logically from Epictetus' target simile if no target were ever missed. Since this is absurd it makes more sense to interpret *Ench*. xxvii as asserting the 'weaker thesis', which Seddon attributes to Chrysippus in Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights* vii 1 (106). (Note that Seddon's opinion that Epictetus and Chrysippus differ on this issue clashes with his earlier claim of conformity [8].) On the weaker thesis, just as inevitably sometimes targets are missed despite the intentions of archers, inevitably evil things sometimes occur in the world. The world does not exist in order for there to be evil. Evil comes into existence by accident when rational beings err, judge falsely, and capitulate to vice, despite aiming for the only good, virtue. Compare *Disc*. i 12.16: 'He [Zeus] ordained that there be summer and winter, abundance and dearth, virtue and vice, and all such opposites for the harmony of the whole.' The weaker thesis harmonizes with this text; the stronger thesis conflicts with it.

In his comments on *Ench*. xxxviii Seddon cites several scholars to support his claim that for Epictetus *hêgemonikon* and *prohairesis* are essentially synonymous. He also quotes with approval the view (Rist 1969, 24-25) that the 'personality' or 'true self' of a human being 'is in many ways the most convincing modern equivalent of *hêgemonikon*' (138). Yet equating *hêgemonikon* with 'true self' is worrisome. Epictetus explicitly says that 'you *are* your *prohairesis*' (*Disc*. iii 1.40, cited by Seddon on 140) while nowhere in the extant *Discourses* does he make the same identity claim for one's *hêgemonikon*. Like other Stoics Epictetus understands *hêgemonikon* to be the 'ruling faculty' of the soul that controls the five senses, reproduction, and speech. But Epictetus' use of *prohairesis* seems innovative. The extant testimony does not show earlier Stoics to have equated *prohairesis* with self.

A second worry with construing *hêgemonikon* as 'personality' might be that the latter's modern sense includes the set of dispositions, affective habits, likes, dislikes, and behavioral tendencies that make an individual unique. But when

Epictetus emphatically states that you are your *prohairesis*, he may be suggesting that such idiosyncratic features constitutive of personality pale in importance compared to the choices that define one's identity. Even were *hêgemonikon* essentially synonymous with *prohairesis* for Epictetus, however, it would mislead to gloss either as 'personality'. *Persona* is the Latin stand in for πρόσωπον, by which Epictetus usually means 'role'. Thus his terminology supports the view that 'person' and its cognates etymologically derive from πρόσωπον, not ἡγεμονικόν or προαίρεσις.

Seddon comments on *Ench*. xlv that keeping an appointment after bathing hurriedly is surely better than arriving late but supremely clean (148). Yet Epictetus extols cleanliness of the body as a sign of inward purity and godliness (*Disc*. iv 11.1-4). In contrast, I know of no text in which Epictetus praises punctuality. I imagine that if the appointment were to perform a task required by one's social role and tardy arrival would impede that task, then Seddon's interpretation of *Ench*. xlv might fit. Yet if the purpose of the appointment is to ingratiate oneself with a potential patron in order to increase one's wealth, advance one's status, or profit with respect to another mere external, then Epictetus would more than likely commend the painstaking bather who blows off the appointment to toady. After all, Epictetus links bodily cleanliness to *social courtesy* (τὸ κοινωνικόν), since body odor offends those nearby. The whole point of *Ench*. xlv is that one must know an agent's motive before one can condemn his act.

Commenting on *Ench*. li 2 Seddon notes that Epictetus' claim that 'progress is won or lost as the result of just once giving in' is also found at *Disc*. iv 3.4-6, where Epictetus uses the analogy of the helmsman who can lose his ship due to even a single small mistake (164). Seddon thinks that the contrasting view offered by Epictetus, according to which when we falter we can always try, try again, 'seems to make the most sense and to offer the most hope' (164). But in each view Epictetus is cognizant of different kinds of situations. The helmsman, airline pilot, and motorist are all in the kind of situation in which a single small error, a hasty misjudgment, or a momentary lapse of attention, can have disastrous results, including loss of life or limb. Sometimes moral agents find themselves in such perilous, unforgiving circumstances. Other times our errors have no such devastating effects on us or others. On these occasions we can get back on our feet, dust ourselves off, and again grapple with the 'wresting-master' who has thrown us down. Seddon rightly notes Epictetus' remark at *Disc*. iv 12.19 that it is not possible to be completely without fault, but it is equally true that sometimes one 'small error' can cause grave, irreparable harm. In those situations there is no second chance to rebound. We can count ourselves fortunate when life *does* offer us additional chances for progress precisely because it is not always so.

The translation of the *Handbook* is readable and sufficiently accurate, though a bit tepid. One minor complaint is that translating *spoudaios* 'good' (155) misses its sense as 'serious' or 'earnest' (see Stephens 1996, 208-209 on *Disc*. ii 22.1-3). A nagging impression is that Seddon has canvassed other translations of the

Handbook in order to keep his renditions closest to the center of the field of semantic options, least risky, and most palatable. This impression is reinforced by a list of Seddon's and eighteen other translators' translations of *prohairesis* and a list of his and eleven other translators' translations of *aidôs*, *aidêmon*, *pistis*, and *pistos* in an appendix.

The introduction to the *Tablet of Cebes* provides an overview of the content of this ecphrasis, a persuasive discussion of its authorship and date, an able outline of the allegory and its simple framing story, and a discussion of whether the *Tablet* is 'fundamentally Stoic in outlook' (176). Seddon argues that neither the Cebes reported in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* nor the Cebes of Cyzicus mentioned in Athenaeus' *The Deipnosophists* is the author of the *Tablet*. Instead, Seddon plausibly reasons that the author of the *Tablet* is the Cebes Lucian mentions in *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses* and *A Professor of Public Speaking*, since in both works Lucian depicts satirical inversions of the *Tablet* allegory. Seddon's conclusion that the *Tablet* is 'a fundamentally Stoic work' (183) may be overstated, given the non-Stoic elements he himself identifies. His argument for that conclusion is rather weak. I am less puzzled than he by the absence of a description of attaining happiness in terms of living in accordance with nature. Animating an allegory with personifications of Daimon, Fortune, Happiness, Grief, Luxury, Opinions, Desires, Truth, and many virtues and vices seems more effective than plumping a definition. The *Tablet*'s scene of people choosing the lives they will be born into sufficiently resembles the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic* to warrant Seddon in including the latter in an appendix. But this otherworldly aspect of the allegory sits least comfortably with its Stoic earmarks. The translation of the *Tablet* is fluent. Overall, given Seddon's case for dating it roughly during Epictetus' life and its loud Stoic messages, the *Tablet of Cebes* accompanies Epictetus' *Handbook* well enough.

The focus of this review has been largely critical. Yet if its flaws considerably reduce the book's value for scholars, might it not well enough serve its primary readership, the budding Stoic practitioners? If so, they would have to overcome the book's most conspicuous shortcoming: its relentless grammatical gaffe of using the relative pronouns 'they', 'their', and 'them' with singular subjects. This tired solecism mars the translations of chapters 16, 19, 23, 24, 25, 28, 33, 39, 42, 45, 48, 49, and 51 of the *Handbook*, two texts in the translation of the *Tablet of Cebes* (192, 199), and in all no fewer than 254 instances of it pepper the book. This is a shame. Seddon has obviously devoted much time to this labor of love. It includes tables, charts, a diagram of the *Tablet*'s enclosures and personifications, and his wife's nifty drawing of the *Tablet*'s path to true education. Though limited entirely to publications in English, the twenty-three page bibliography is painstaking. One omission, Barnes 1997, could have been referenced in the comments on *Ench*. xxxvi and lii.

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