

Epictetus and Chrysippus

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Without Chrysippus there would have been no Stoa (D.L. 7. 183). Similar assessments of Chrysippus' importance have been made in modern times, most notably by Hans von Arnim, who claimed that Chrysippus' teachings influenced Stoicism for centuries, and that the Roman Stoa was mainly dependent on Chrysippus.¹ Von Arnim's views were later supported by Max Pohlenz, who wrote, "die spätere Zeit kennt das stoische Lehrsystem nur in der Form, die Chrysipp ihm gegeben hat."² Such evaluations of Chrysippus' influence seem exaggerated, but they emphasize that, among Roman Stoics such as Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, Chrysippus had a position of prominence.³ Musonius Rufus, Epictetus' famous teacher, seems an exception to the previous observation: In the fragments of his works, preserved largely by Stobaeus, there is no mention of Chrysippus.⁴ There are at least two ways of explaining this situation: First, Musonius' works are fragmentary, and Chrysippus may well have been mentioned in what is now lost; and second, Chrysippus' influence on the first and subsequent centuries A.D. was certainly not eclipsed by that of his predecessors, Zeno and Cleanthes, who are mentioned by Musonius. Indeed, since Epictetus himself mentions Chrysippus some fourteen times, it would be most odd if his teacher Rufus had not known Chrysippus' doctrines.

This study's scope is not, however, Chrysippus' influence on later Stoics in general, but on Epictetus in particular. There are several reasons for focussing on Epictetus. First, reports of his teachings by Arrian are fairly extensive.⁵ Second, unlike Seneca or Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus was

¹ See von Arnim, "Chrysippus 14," *RE* III.2 (1899) 2502-09, and J. B. Gould's critique in *The Philosophy of Chrysippus* (Leiden 1971) 1-3 and 16-17.

² M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa: Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung* I (Göttingen 1948) 32.

³ See Gould (above, note 1) 10-14 for a brief survey of Chrysippus' importance for the Roman Stoa.

⁴ See the indices to *C. Musonii Rufi reliquiae*, ed. O. Hense (Leipzig 1905) 144-48.

⁵ Arrian's role in recording Epictetus' teachings has been much discussed. Perhaps the best conclusion is that of P. Stadter, who believes that truth lies somewhere between K. Hartmann's view that the *Discourses* are verbatim transcripts and that of T. Wirth, who believes that they are Arrian's literary reworkings, so that one must not speak of Epictetus' *Discourses*, but of

a full-time teacher of Stoicism, devoted to living and propagating his philosophy within a circle of students and visitors to Nicopolis.⁶ Moreover, Epictetus' teachings, as reported by Arrian, provide a relatively coherent and limited scope for study, unlike the many and diverse writings of Seneca, or the introspective, personal musings of Marcus Aurelius. To be sure, Epictetus was not exactly a systematic thinker, and if Arrian's transcripts can be trusted, much of his teaching seems ad hoc, devoted to individuals and to specific situations and topics. Still there are problems, not least of which is the fragmentary state of Chrysippus' own voluminous works. Moreover, the methodological principle which affects Posidonian studies also affects Chrysippean, that is, whether to consider anything by Chrysippus if not explicitly assigned to him by an ancient source. In what follows, this principle will be observed, but there seems to be enough known about Chrysippus' views to conjecture that some of Epictetus' beliefs were probably influenced by him even if he is not explicitly mentioned. Indeed, as Adolf Bonhöffer argued, Epictetus' doctrines were primarily those of the early or ancient Stoa, not those of later Stoics. But in his very admirable and learned studies⁷ Bonhöffer seldom discussed Chrysippus' influence on Epictetus at length, and doctrines of Chrysippus are often treated together with those of Zeno, Cleanthes and other early Stoics. Bonhöffer's works thus need careful reading, but even then no clear conception of Chrysippus' influence on Epictetus emerges. Josiah Gould's *The Philosophy of Chrysippus* has a brief account of Chrysippus' influence on Epictetus, usually relying on Ludwig Edelstein's methodological principle first applied to Posidonius, that is, only to elucidate teachings explicitly attributed to him. Except for Bonhöffer's often brief and sporadic remarks, and some paragraphs in Gould's book, there has been no comprehensive account of Chrysippus' influence on Epictetus.

The most obvious feature of Chrysippus' influence on Epictetus is that his works were read and discussed in Epictetus' school at Nicopolis. At 1. 4. 14, in a diatribe on moral improvement or progress (προκοπή), Epictetus refers to *On Impulse* (Περὶ ὀρμῆς), the title of a work by Chrysippus known only from this passage. Again, at 2. 17. 34, there is reference to Chrysippus' *On the Liar* (Περὶ τοῦ ψευδομένου), a subject on which he is

Arrian's *Discourses of Epictetus*. See Arrian of Nicomedia (Chapel Hill, NC 1980) 26–29 and 202 for the relevant bibliography. All translations of the *Discourses* are those of W. A. Oldfather, *Epictetus I and II*, in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, reprinted 1979 and 1985 respectively).

⁶ Although old, I. Bruns, *De schola Epicteti* (Kiel 1897) remains useful. B. Hijmans, *ΑΣΚΗΣΙΣ: Notes on Epictetus' Educational System* (Assen 1959), F. Millar, "Epictetus and the Imperial Court," *JRS* 55 (1965) 141–48 and P. Brunt, "From Epictetus to Arrian," *Athenaeum* 55 (1977) 19–48 also have good observations on Epictetus' school. -

⁷ The works of Bonhöffer referred to are: *Epictet und die Stoa* (Stuttgart 1890) and *Die Ethik des Stoikers Epictet* (Stuttgart 1894). His *Epictet und das Neue Testament* (Giessen 1911) is not used in this study.

reported to have written six books addressed to Aristocreon, his nephew (D.L. 7. 196). Several other books were composed by Chrysippus on the Mentiens Argument (*ibid.*), and at 3. 9. 21 Epictetus mentions the syllogism called "The Liar," most likely with Chrysippus in mind.⁸ (There is also mention of "The Denier," an argument whose formulation is unknown, though Chrysippus wrote two works on "Denial" [D.L. 7. 197].)

In addition to references to these treatises, there are other passages which suggest that Chrysippus was read in Epictetus' school: At 1. 4. 5 Epictetus remarks that making progress in virtue, and achieving serenity (εὐροια), do not consist in reading many treatises of Chrysippus, or having knowledge of his thought; in order to be a philosopher one must do more than read Chrysippus (2. 16. 34), and "we shall never even come near to making progress, even if we go through all the introductions and treatises of Chrysippus, with those of Antipater and Archedemus thrown in" (2. 17. 40). It is especially important to value one's moral purpose (προαίρεσις), and not to be concerned about making good impressions by having read Chrysippus or Antipater (3. 2. 13). It is also important to assimilate the principles learned, to show change in one's own governing principle (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν), and not to worry about lecturing on Chrysippus' doctrines "as no one else can" (3. 21. 7). Still another passage in the *Encheiridion* (49) suggests that not only were Epictetus' students reading Chrysippus, but they boasted about comprehending him: "When someone gives himself airs because he can understand and interpret Chrysippus' books, say to yourself, 'If Chrysippus had not written obscurely (ἀσαφῶς), this man would have no reason to give himself airs.'" As will be seen, if Arrian's notes can be trusted, Epictetus himself may not always have understood Chrysippus.

For the moment, it is clear that the previous passages are evidence for the availability of Chrysippus' works to Epictetus and to his students. He clearly knew some of Chrysippus' writings at first hand⁹ and any assessment of Chrysippus' influence on Epictetus needs to acknowledge this fact. But beside passages where Epictetus refers to Chrysippus' treatises, there is other evidence for Chrysippus' influence on Epictetus: For example, Aulus Gellius refers to Epictetus' *Discourses* "arranged by Arrianus, and no doubt in agreement with writings of Zeno and Chrysippus" (*quas ab Arriano*

⁸ Recently, in "Προαίρεσις in Epictetus," *Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1991) 111-35, R. Dobbin rightly remarked that Epictetus is one of the "best sources" for this argument, "which figured in the debate on fate and responsibility" (126).

⁹ The impression given by ancient authors of an impoverished Epictetus, e.g. Simplicius, who reports that "even his dwelling in Rome needed no bolt for the door since there was nothing within except for a straw mattress and rush mat" (*In Epict.* 9), merits some doubt. Since Arrian has Epictetus quoting from, or referring to, works of Chrysippus and other ancient authors, e.g. Xenophon and Plato, sometimes verbatim, it seems that either he or his students owned books, or had ready access to them. Indeed, his remarks at 4. 10. 26 suggest that he had a library, though he may simply put himself in the place of a prosperous inquirer. See Hijmans (above, note 6) 3.

digestas congruere scriptis Zenonis et Chrysippi non dubium est, 19. 1. 14–21). Whatever the faults of Gellius, he was learned, and his report seems in keeping with the general contents of Epictetus' diatribes. A second passage, from Epictetus himself (1. 17. 16), is probably more important, but not as laudatory of Chrysippus as is sometimes suggested: Epictetus (or someone else) turned to Chrysippus as a guide to or interpreter of nature (ἐξηγητῆς τῆς φύσεως), but discovered that his views also needed interpretation.¹⁰ As Oldfather noted, Epictetus perhaps puts himself in place of a Roman pupil who would understand Chrysippus more easily if he had written in Latin.¹¹ So far, Epictetus appears to be critical of Chrysippus: He wrote obscurely, and needs interpretation. Such a negative assessment of Chrysippus, however, may not be that of Epictetus himself, and is at variance with other passages where Chrysippus is mentioned. For example, in a somewhat obscure passage (1. 10. 8 ff.), Epictetus suggests that he read and reflected on certain texts before meeting his students, and so learned from Chrysippus about the administration or arrangement of the cosmos (ἡ τοῦ κόσμου διοίκησις), and the place of rational beings in it. In a previously cited passage (1. 17. 17 f.), Chrysippus (or any Stoic thinker) is said to interpret nature (φύσις), but if the philosopher does not "follow" (ἄκολουθεῖ) it, he does not deserve praise. This and other remarks in his diatribes show Epictetus' concern not only for right thinking, but also for right conduct.

Earlier it was suggested that Epictetus may not always have understood Chrysippus. Gould, for example, refers to "the bewildered Epictetus' remark" at 2. 17. 34: "I wish to know what Chrysippus means in his treatise on *The Liar*."¹² But, as Oldfather correctly translated the passage, the remark is not Epictetus', but that of an inquirer.¹³ That Gould took it as Epictetus' own probably results from reliance on von Arnim's quotation in *SVF* (II 280, cited by Gould) which gives no context, only the quotation itself, and so creates not only an impression that Epictetus misunderstood Chrysippus, but was not well versed in logic. Logic was, of course, Chrysippus' specialty (more than a third of his writings, or some 311 volumes listed by Diogenes Laertius, dealt with logic), and he systematically promoted its study. Owing to the loss of his works it is thus often hard to know if complaints about Chrysippus' obscurity or inconsistency arise because of the complexities of his logical studies, or because of his "inelegant," or sometimes incorrect, Greek style. Moreover, there is not much evidence in Epictetus' diatribes as to how logic was taught

¹⁰ See Gould (above, note 1) 13 and Bonhöffer, *Epictet und die Stoa* (above, note 7) 16 on this passage.

¹¹ Oldfather (above, note 5) I 117 n. 3.

¹² Gould (above, note 1) 88.

¹³ See Oldfather (above, note 5) I 346 for the old sophism: "If a person says, 'I am lying,' does he lie or tell the truth? If he is lying, he is telling the truth; if he is telling the truth, he is lying."

in his school (perhaps by handbooks, as Benson Mates suggested¹⁴), and, most important, the diatribes sometimes give an impression that Epictetus himself was not very interested in logic. 2. 19 suggests, for example, indifference to the subject: Sections 1–4 are an exposition of the “Master Argument,” of which only two of its three propositions can be held at the same time. Asked which pair he himself maintains, Epictetus replies: “I don’t know.” Pressed further, he replies: “I don’t know, and I was not made for this purpose—to test my own external impression (φαντασία) upon the subject . . .” But the belief that Epictetus disliked or was indifferent to logic is false. Indeed, in his own probably original three-fold division of philosophy (3. 2. 1 ff.), Epictetus includes logic under “avoidance of error and rashness of judgment, and, in general, about cases of assent.” There is little evidence to show that Epictetus neglected the study of logic; it was a vital part of his teaching, with difficult or much-discussed problems reserved for more advanced students. Indeed, the diatribes often presuppose knowledge of logic, e.g. at 4. 1. 61: “That is why we even worship those persons [e.g. Caesar] as gods; for we consider that what has power to confer the greatest advantage is divine. And then we lay down the wrong minor premiss: ‘This man has power to confer the greatest advantage.’ It needs must be that the conclusion from these premisses is wrong too.”

On the whole, Epictetus’ diatribes reveal no aversion or indifference to logic as pursued by Chrysippus, but a very “practical” interest in it. After all, logic was for Chrysippus and other Stoics the science of correct reasoning and speech, and was essential to proper human conduct. Finally, it is important to remember Phillip De Lacy’s thesis that the dominant principle of the organization of the diatribes is that ethics is subject to logical analysis, and that Epictetus remained faithful to Chrysippus.¹⁵ 1. 5–8, which deal, for example, with hypothetical arguments and the reasoning faculties, are an application of logic to ethics. But whether it can be concluded from these diatribes and other passages that all were arranged according to Stoic principles of logic, or that Arrian “veiled” the “logical structure of Epictetus’ ethics” under the diatribe form,¹⁶ seems unconvincing. Suffice it to note that Arrian (or Epictetus) did not omit consideration of logic because it was very much a prerequisite for understanding Stoic ethics and physics with their emphasis on rationality.

Thus far, it is clear that Epictetus knew Chrysippus’ works at first hand and that he was influenced by Chrysippus’ devotion to logic. But it is

¹⁴ See B. Mates, *Stoic Logic* (Berkeley 1961) 8, who notes that not long after Chrysippus handbooks commonly entitled “Introduction to Logic” (εἰσαγωγή διαλεκτική) had wide circulation.

¹⁵ See P. De Lacy, “The Logical Structure of the Ethics of Epictetus,” *CP* 38 (1943) 112–25.

¹⁶ De Lacy (previous note) 113

difficult to go further in assessing the impact of Chrysippus' thought on Epictetus. Here Bonhöffer and Gould have made interesting, though not always persuasive, suggestions. According to Gould, for example, the distinction between "things in our power" (τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) and "things not in our power" (τὰ οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) had a "pivotal position" in Epictetus' thinking, and this is certainly correct (see, for example, the very beginning of the *Encheiridion*).¹⁷ If the report in Epiphanius *Adv. haeres.* 3. 2. 9 (3. 36) Diels p. 592 (= *SVF* I 177, p. 45) can be trusted, the distinction goes back to Zeno. Chrysippus also employed a similar distinction in his effort to reconcile human choice and fate. Indeed, Aulus Gellius quotes Cicero's fragmentary *De fato* at *Noct. Att.* 7. 2. 15 (= *SVF* II 977): *Chrysippus aestuans laboransque, quonam <pacto> explicet et fato omnia fieri et esse aliquid in nobis, intricatur hoc modo.* And Nemesius in *De nat. hom.* 35 (= *SVF* II 991) ascribes to Chrysippus a similar distinction between "what is in our power" (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν; cf. Cicero's *aliquid in nobis*) and what happens according to fate (τὸ καθ' εἰμαρμένην; cf. Cicero's *fato omnia fieri*). Given Cicero's report in Aulus Gellius, it seems certain that neither Gellius nor Nemesius was influenced by his knowledge of Epictetus in reporting Chrysippus' distinction and, in fact, there are two passages in the diatribes which suggest that Epictetus was influenced by Chrysippus in making his famous distinction: At 3. 24. 81, in a diatribe directed against yearning for things not in our control (οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν), he refers to philosophical principles (θεωρήματα) presumably learned by his students, and asks: "How has Chrysippus wronged you that you should prove by your own conduct his labors to be useless?" It is tempting to think that what was learned involved the ἐφ' ἡμῖν principle. In another diatribe, 2. 6, on indifference (ἀδιαφορία), Epictetus quotes Chrysippus at section 9 (= *SVF* II 191). What purport to be Chrysippus' words are introduced by Epictetus' remark that "if you always bear in mind what is your own and what is another's, you will never be disturbed." Then follows the Chrysippus quotation:

As long as the consequences are not clear to me, I cleave ever to what is better adapted to secure those things that are in accordance with nature; for God himself has created me with the faculty of choosing things. But if I really knew that it was ordained for me to be ill at this present moment, I would even seek illness; for the foot also, if it had a mind, would seek to be covered with mud.

It seems that underlying Epictetus' initial remark and the supporting quotation of Chrysippus is really the more basic distinction between what one can control ("what is your own") and what one cannot control ("what

¹⁷ See Gould (above, note 1) 142 ff. The distinction may ultimately have been a "general principle" of Hellenistic philosophy. See the excellent introduction by M. Hossenfelder to *Die Philosophie der Antike* III, ed. W. Röd: *Stoa, Epikureismus, und Skepsis* (Munich 1985) 11–41. Among the *Grundzüge* of Hellenistic philosophy may be Epictetus' famous ἐφ' ἡμῖν distinction.

belongs to another"). Certainly the Chrysippus quotation involves a distinction between what is fated (and thus not in our power) and what is chosen (and so presumably in our power). But, without going into Chrysippus' attempts to deal with fate and human choice, it seems that he anticipated Epictetus' later famous distinction between "what is in our power" and what is not.

Yet another instance where Chrysippus' "very doctrine" may inform Epictetus is the latter's belief that "of beings whose constitutions (κατασκευαί) are different, the works and the ends (τέλη) are different" (1. 6. 16–17).¹⁸ Underlying this belief is possibly Chrysippus' view (*SVF* III 20) that for each kind (*genus*) of living being there is a faculty peculiar to it, and whose development (and functioning) constitutes the excellence or virtue of the individuals in that kind (*in eo genere*). In the case of human beings, this excellence or virtue consists in living in accord with reason (*SVF* III 16). In fact, expressions such as "life according to reason" are equivalent to "life in accord with nature," "to live a morally good life," etc. Some of this is Aristotelian, and one cannot be sure whether it was the Stagirite or Chrysippus who influenced Epictetus in this passage. After all, Aristotelian influence on Epictetus' doctrine of moral choice (προαίρεσις) seems almost certain.¹⁹ In any case, this is one of several passages in Epictetus where "Chrysippean" influence may exist although Chrysippus himself is not mentioned. And at this point we reach an area where sometimes only speculation is possible, and this concerns the problems of assessing one thinker's influence on another when there is little direct evidence. It is a problem to which Epictetus would most likely have given little attention because he was convinced that he was simply an heir to and propagator of the teachings of ancient Stoics such as Zeno and Chrysippus, who especially furnished books that provide harmony with nature and subsequent tranquility (1. 4. 28 ff.). This passage, almost a hymn of praise to Chrysippus, underscores his importance for Epictetus: He "brought to light and imparted to all human beings the truth which deals, not with mere life, but with a good life—who among you has for that set up an altar in his honor, or dedicated a temple or a statue, or bows down to God in gratitude for him?" One is perhaps reminded of Lucretius' similar adulation of Epicurus. Yet there is little justification for some of Bonhöffer's remarks, e.g. that Chrysippus' works "bilden für seinen [Epictets] Unterricht und seine Homileen [*sic*] in ähnlichen Weise die Grundlage für die christliche Predigt."²⁰ More persuasive are Bonhöffer's comments on Epictetus'

¹⁸ Gould (above, note 1) 117 seems a bit too confident.

¹⁹ See Dobbin's essay (above, note 8), which rightly emphasizes Aristotle's influence on Stoicism. F. H. Sandbach's *The Stoics* (London 1975) seems odd in leaving Aristotle "almost entirely out of account." Προαίρεσις was an important concept for Aristotle, as any reader of the *Nicomachean Ethics* knows.

²⁰ Bonhöffer, *Die Ethik* (above, note 7) 2.

teachings when, for example, he suggests that Epictetus was a true disciple (*Anhänger*) of Chrysippus in refuting Posidonius, and using lines from Euripides' *Medea* to illustrate that every passion is an error (*Verirrung*) of reason (*Vernunft*).²¹ Bonhöffer shows here possible connections between the philosophies of Chrysippus and of Epictetus. At the same time, Bonhöffer's very learned comments, with sometimes scanty evidence to support them, are not always convincing. In making this observation, however, there is no intent to disregard Bonhöffer's valuable studies, but to draw attention to them and to the possibility of further investigation of Chrysippus' influence on Epictetus.

In conclusion, insofar as Epictetus' teachings conform to those of the ancient Stoa, he was certainly influenced by Chrysippus. He knew works by Chrysippus at first hand. These were read and commented on in his school, and evidence of Chrysippus' influence can be seen in those passages where Epictetus deals with formal logic; contrary to the impression sometimes given, logic was for Epictetus, like Chrysippus before him, an extremely important discipline. Epictetus' admiration for Chrysippus is clear, and some teachings, such as his famous distinction between "what is in our power" and "what is not," may well derive from Chrysippus. The fragmentary state of the works of the Stoics, Chrysippus included, does, however, create problems for tracing specific teachings of Epictetus to Chrysippus. Indeed, singling out the doctrines of Chrysippus from those of Zeno, for example, is not always an easy matter. There may thus be far more of an influence of Chrysippus on Epictetus than has been shown in this and other studies.²²

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²¹ Bonhöffer, *Die Ethik* (above, note 7) 4. See 1. 28. 6 ff. Neither Posidonius nor Chrysippus is mentioned here by Epictetus. In fact, Posidonius is nowhere mentioned by him. Oldfather was inclined to see 1. 9. 4-6 as a quotation from Posidonius, yet noted that similar beliefs were ascribed to various Stoics and especially to Chrysippus. The "quotation" concerns the *κοινωνία* of God and human beings by means of reason (*λόγος*). Here is another of those possible influences of Chrysippus on Epictetus.

²² A version of this study was presented in German at the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin in November 1991, before its "Abwicklung." I wish to thank Reimar Müller for some helpful comments.