
EPICTETUS

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HIS CONTINUING INFLUENCE
AND
CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

edited by
Dane R. Gordon
and
David B. Suits

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Epictetus: His Continuing Influence and Contemporary Relevance

Edited by Dane R. Gordon and David B. Suits

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INTRODUCTION

Dane R. Gordon and David B. Suits

In our initial discussions about whether or not to hold a conference on Epictetus, we wondered how much interest there was. Epictetus (c. 50–120 CE) is less well-known than other Stoics, and his teaching is not regarded by all scholars with unqualified esteem. W. A. Oldfather observes that because so many passages in Epictetus can be paralleled from remaining fragments of Musonius Rufus, his teacher, “there can be no doubt but the system of thought of the pupil is little more than an echo, with changes of emphasis due to the personal equation, of that of the master” (“Introduction”, viii, n2).¹

A. A. Long, in his study of Epictetus, published many years later, does not agree. He discusses the issue of originality and concludes, “much of Epictetus’ philosophy appears to be fresh in formulation and distinctive in emphasis” (*Epictetus*, 32). Long provides strong affirmation: “Epictetus is a thinker we cannot forget, once we have encountered him, because he gets under our skin. [...] [N]o one who knows his work can simply dismiss it as theoretically invalid or practically useless. In times of stress, as modern Epictetans have attested, his recommendations make their presence felt” (*Epictetus*, 1).

Epictetus’s mother was a slave, and he himself was a slave in the early part of his life. Epaphroditus, Epictetus’s master, allowed him to attend the lectures of Musonius Rufus, a distinguished Stoic teacher, and later gave him his freedom.

Throughout his life freedom was of greatest importance to him. Oldfather writes, “I know no man upon whose lips the idea more frequently occurs. The words ‘free’ (adjective and verb) and ‘freedom’ appear some 130 times in Epictetus, that is, with a relative frequency about six times that of their occurrence in the New Testament [...]” (“Introduction”, xvii).

Epictetus did not write for publication. What he taught was taken down in stenographic form by Flavius Arrian, one of Epictetus’s pupils, and published in eight books of *Diatribai*, or *Discourses*, of which four survive; and a brief selection of his work, known as *Encheiridion* (*Manual* or *Handbook*) was published for those of the general public who could not take time to read the *Discourses*.

They are remarkable in ancient philosophic work as providing the *ipsissima verba* of the lecturer, following the twists and turns, the abrupt changes

1 Bibliographic information for all references can be found in the Select Bibliography at the end of this Introduction.

and sometimes contradictions of his thought. They reveal the personality of a teacher absolutely committed to what he taught.

Cynthia King remarks that according to Musonius Rufus, “philosophy, done properly, should affect us personally and profoundly. [...] [O]ne of the primary objectives of philosophy [is] to reveal to us our shortcomings so we can overcome them and thereby live a good life” (“Editor’s Preface”, 11). Reading the *Discourses*, it is clear that Epictetus fully agreed with that.

Perhaps the most important of Epictetus’s beliefs is the distinction between what is in a person’s power and what is not. From the opening passage of the *Encheiridion* we find this:

Under our control are conception, choice, desire, aversion, and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not under our control are our body, our property, reputation, office, and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing. Furthermore, the things under our control are by nature free, unhindered, and unimpeded; while the things not under our control are weak, servile, subject to hindrance, and not our own. Remember, therefore, that if what is naturally slavish you think to be free, and what is not your own to be your own, you will be hampered, will grieve, will be in turmoil, and will blame both gods and men; while if you think only what is your own to be your own, and what is not your own to be, as it really is, not your own, then no one will ever be able to exert compulsion upon you, no one will hinder you, you will blame no one, you will find fault with no one, will do absolutely nothing against your will, you will have no personal enemy, no one will harm you, for neither is there any harm that can touch you. [*Encheiridion* 1]

The moral of life for Epictetus was to accept what God had determined one should be and do. “Remember”, he declares, “that you are an actor in a play, the character of which is determined by the Playwrite [...]. For this is your business, to play admirably the rôle assigned you; but the selection of that rôle is Another’s” (*Encheiridion* 18.17).

Epictetus had a high level of personal responsibility that stemmed first of all from the fact that we are citizens of the world and are expected to be concerned for one another, and then from the fact that we all have a portion of the same God. We carry him within us and must take care not to defile him by what we say or by our behavior.

Understandably, a number of early Christians regarded Epictetus’s teaching as strongly evocative of the New Testament. The Epistle of James has numerous suggestive parallels. Such apparent similarities continued to

be attractive. The seventeenth-century scholar Thomas Gataker wrote that “it may be boldly asserted, there are no remaining monuments of the ancient strangers, which come nearer to the doctrine of CHRIST, than the writings and admonition of these two: Epictetus and [Marcus Aurelius] Antoninus.” The quote is taken from a review by Noel Malcolm of Christopher Brooke’s 2012 book, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau*. Malcolm notes that Stoicism “was an omnipresent yet problematical factor in early modern intellectual life”. We believe that it remains a potent factor still, in particular in the teaching of Epictetus. Consider Long’s comment, quoted earlier: “Epictetus is a thinker we cannot forget [...]. In times of stress, as modern Epictetans have attested, his recommendations make their presence felt.” In 2013, we live in times of stress. It might seem that almost everyone who can afford it, at least in North America, has a personal counselor to find relief from stress. In that respect Epictetus’s teaching is pointedly relevant to the anxieties of contemporary life. His basic advice is good: take life as it comes, don’t worry about what is not in our control; do be concerned with what is in our control—with how we think, with what we choose and how we behave toward other people. “Hardly philosophy”, some people may object; “no more than self-help.” But to others Epictetus’s teaching is profoundly philosophic. Self-help and helping others were motivating factors for the earlier philosopher Epicurus, and before him Aristotle, and before him Socrates. Epictetus, who was not widely familiar with other philosophers, would nevertheless most likely have known Socrates’s maxim “know thyself”. These philosophers shared the belief that life requires the exercise of reason, not excluding emotion, to guide us in how we behave, and in our concern for one another.

We went ahead with the conference in April of 2012. Attendees came from different parts of the United States, from Poland, and from the United Kingdom. The conference itself was lively, discussion after the papers at times animated. One of those who came told us that in twenty years of teaching and scholarly interest in Epictetus, this was the first conference he had known that dealt specifically with that philosopher.

Eleven papers are included in this book. (For reasons of time constraints, only nine of them were presented at the conference itself.) What follows are brief sketches of salient ideas and questions to be found in each one. The reader may notice the range of topics the authors address, an indication to us that what Epictetus taught provides strong incentive to contemporary philosophical thinking.

Brian Earl Johnson discusses the implication of a passage in the *Encheiridion*: “We are actors in a play”. According to this, each person has a divinely given role and is responsible for playing it well. But a person has other roles: husband, wife, senator, soldier, or cobbler. Do these roles have value of their own or do they simply “deflate” into the larger cosmic role that we are given?

Christopher Davidson considers Epictetus from the point of view of Foucault. “Foucault’s work on the Ancients”, he writes, “is better understood as a challenge or interrogation of current understanding of freedom.” This is especially true of *askesis*—“the self adjusting the self”. Foucault’s understanding of *askesis*, as seen in his reading of Epictetus, unsettles what has become obvious. He prompts us “to think of a different kind of self: a self which, if internally compelled and constituted by techniques of *askesis*, is determined to become free”.

Katja Maria Vogt suggests we should ask “whether the seemingly antithetical attitudes of taking the same things seriously and not seriously are rational modes of valuing”. In the conclusion of her essay she writes: “Stoic ethics is the only major ethical theory that focuses on what I take to be a pervasive task in ordinary life: taking the same thing seriously and not seriously. [...] The Stoics [...] address the challenge of taking the same things seriously and not seriously as a fundamental component of their ethical theorizing. As I see it, it is a virtue of a philosophical theory to acknowledge how widely this challenge figures in ordinary life, and to try to account for the rationality of the relevant attitudes.”

Jeffrey Fisher explains that the goal of his paper is to explain “why exactly Epictetus’s *epistēmē* of life should be understood as an *epistēmē* in the orthodox Stoic sense [...] as a system of cognitions”. Fisher points out that according to Epictetus we can have cognitions of general ethical truths and their application. To Epictetus, therefore, the *epistēmē* of life is comprised of cognitions. In sum, the *epistēmē* of life as Epictetus understands it is “an *epistēmē* in the orthodox Stoic sense”.

Matthew Pianalto offers “an account of the defense of patience that places it at the center of the moral life”. He shows how the significance of patience is reflected in Seneca and Epictetus. He writes in his abstract (not included in this book): “understanding the value and scope of patience, and the vices and emotions it opposes, also provides a way of understanding and defending the Stoic ideals of fortitude, detachment and tranquility of mind because patience itself is a central virtue for the Stoics, even if not often or explicitly named.”

Eleni Tsalla notes that according to Epictetus, the examination or observance of names is “foundational for the philosophical endeavor”. But deciphering the meaning of names reveals the nature and function of things only when they are understood with reference to the nature of the whole, i.e., the cosmos. In similar manner, a comprehensive impression is “one by means of which the observer entertains an immediate impression of a thing while at the same time positioning the thing securely in the structure of the cosmos”. To a contemporary reader reflecting on Tsalla’s paper, this may capture the feeling of insignificance that people have in the face of great events, such as death, and the encouragement to be drawn from belief that we live in an ordered universe in which there are reasons for what happens.

Matthias Rothe claims that of all Stoic philosophers, “Epictetus appears to be the one who resonates most with Kant’s thinking”. Both Kant and the Stoics grounded their ethics on “the dignity of man in freedom”. This freedom, Rothe writes, “is realized or guaranteed in Kant through the categorical imperative. And there is indeed a concept in Stoic philosophy” used most systematically by Epictetus “that can be understood as a functional equivalent of the categorical imperative: the circle of familiarities”. In these ways Kant and Epictetus are similar in their ethical teaching. But Rothe also calls our attention to an important difference between them.

Carrie L. Bates writes on behalf of the equal status of women. She argues that, according to Epictetus, a person’s true status is that of a child of God. Our bodies belong to the category of “not up to us”. Our sex, man or woman, is accidental and plays no part in who we really are. Gender difference, therefore, is irrelevant.

Pavle Stojanovic writes about apprehensive impressions, “the only type of impression whose propositional content is such that it could not turn out to be false and which, because of this, unmistakably represents the thing that caused the impression”. He asks whether the Stoics thought that the moral and practical perfection of the Sage is based on apprehensive impressions, and if so, whether they consider that apprehensive impressions ensure that the Sage’s actions are always morally right. He introduces a “Discrimination Requirement” that provides the basis for morally perfect action.

Scott Aikin considers the “curious case” of *Encheiridion* 33.11–15, in which Epictetus appears to argue that whether or not others are pleased by what we say and do is morally irrelevant, yet criticizes certain kinds of talk because it is liable to “lessen your neighbor’s respect for you”. That appears to be a contradiction. Aikin argues that if, in specific circumstances, we see the opinions of others as being a feedback mechanism that enables us to evaluate our own virtue, then the two views are consistent.

According to **William O. Stephens**, Epictetus’s views on Naminals (as Stephens calls nonhuman animals) have not been scrutinized by philosophers because, to the Stoics, Naminals lack the ability to reason; their behavior is irrelevant to the art of living. Yet for Epictetus, Naminals have a beauty when they behave in accord with their own nature. In that respect humans can take them as their model. But it is natural for lions to be vicious, pigs to wallow in the mud, characteristics which humans should avoid. How do we resolve that?

* * *

It was a pleasure for us to hear these papers, and to discuss them at the conference, and, as editors, to become acquainted again with the ideas and issues. We hope your experience of them will be as enriching.

— David B. Suits and Dane R. Gordon

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SOCRATES, HERACLES, AND THE DEFLATION OF
ROLES IN EPICTETUS¹

Brian Earl Johnson

The Socrates of Plato's *Apology* rather famously defends his life by arguing that he was stationed to be a kind of philosophical gadfly by the god at Delphi (Ap. 28d–29e, 30e, and 37e–38a). Plato's Socrates defends his actions by reference to his own special station in life. Whereas Socrates expects others to engage in the same self-examination that he practiced, he appears to treat his own station of gadfly as nearly *sui generis*, for he suggests that a man like him is hard to replace (31a). In addition, he provides no hint about how others might interpret their own lives as a station with special obligations.

To the question of how we might universalize the Socratic position in the *Apology*, the Stoic Epictetus adopts the Socratic idea of a station (*taxis*) and asserts that the life of each person represents a post that is assigned by the divine general (*Discourses* iii.24.34 and 95–99; cf. i.16.20–21). Epictetus appears to equate this military analogy with a stage metaphor according to which every agent should be understood as inhabiting a divinely given role (*prosôpon*):

Remember that you are an actor in a drama, which is as the playwright wishes; if the playwright wishes it short, it will be short; if long, then long; if the playwright wishes you to play a beggar, [it is assigned] in order that you good-naturedly play even that role; [and similarly] if [you are assigned to play] a disabled person, an archon, or a lay person. For this is what is yours: to play finely the role [*prosôpon*] that is given; but to select [that role] itself is another's [i.e., the divine playwright]². [Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 17]

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- 1 I would like to thank the editors of *Ancient Philosophy* for their permission to reprint this paper, an earlier version of which was published in Vol. 32 (Spring, 2012): 125–145.
 - 2 Translations are my own, but I am indebted to the translations of Oldfather and Hard, both of which frequently agree. I have also benefited from Dobbin, *Epictetus: Discourses*, Book I and Dobbin's translations in *Epictetus: Discourses and Selected Writings*. Bibliographic information for all references can be found in the Select Bibliography at the end of this essay.

Just as Plato's Socrates insists that he must steadfastly remain in his military-like station or be disgraced (*Ap.* 28d), so Epictetus insists that each of us must fulfill his or her assigned role or else be disgraced (*Ench.* 37).

Beyond universalizing the station to all agents, Epictetus appears to have worked out a simple classification scheme for the roles that we must play. He implies that our roles divide into two sorts (iii.23.3–5),³ one sort is common to us as rational human agents (ii.9.1–10), and another sort is more specific to us as individuals: “son, father, brother, citizen, husband, wife, neighbor, fellow-traveler, ruler, and subject” (ii.14.8), and so on. Applied to Socrates, Epictetus's account means that Socrates had the common role of a human being that includes the obligation to practice the canonical Greek virtues and treat externals as a matter of indifference. In addition, Socrates had the more specific role of philosophic teacher that included such obligations as playing the gadfly and inflaming the jurors at his defense,⁴ a role potentially shared by only a small sector of humanity.

Interestingly, whereas this account provides an innovative framework for Socrates's remarks in the *Apology*, Epictetus's account of roles immediately confronts interpreters with its own difficulty: what is the status of these more specific roles? In particular, do these specific roles (such as brother or gadfly) lay upon us any special obligations that are not stipulated by or necessitated by our human role? Does Socrates's role as gadfly represent a special obligation to cross-examine others, an obligation that is distinctive from his general human obligation to seek a life of virtue? Or, do these specific roles arise merely from the application of our universal, human role to some given circumstance? That is, does Socrates's role as gadfly arise simply because he has (in his view) received a divine order and thus his mission is nothing more than the human virtue of piety? In turn, this question about the status of Socrates's role as gadfly has significance for how (on Epictetus's view) we ought to evaluate our own lives and actions relative to Socrates's actions.

Thus far in the literature, the most common response to these examples of specific roles has been the latter interpretation. For example, two noted authors on the subject, Bonhöffer (*The Ethics of the Stoic Epictetus*) and Gill (“Personhood and Personality”), doubt that Epictetus awards these specific roles such as father or philosophic teacher with a substantive place in the prudential reasoning of individuals. Both scholars appear to believe that Epictetus endorses only one kind of role, our human one, with all other “roles” as the expression of our humanity in specific contexts and circumstances. Since this reading favors only one role holding for all, we might call it the “deflationary” reading.

3 This passage is discussed below in Section I.

4 This is how Epictetus interprets Socrates. See i.9.23–26 and iii.1.19–23; cf. the echoes in i.16.21 and iii.24.99. Also cf. note 26.

Bonhöffer treats those actions that fulfill our role as brother or friend as mere applications of our universal (human) obligations. For example, regarding Epictetus's claim that a brother's role requires "deference, obedience, good speech, and never laying claim against your brother for any of the things beyond [the province] of choice" (ii.10.8), Bonhöffer says that one "sees at once that these duties contain really nothing characteristic, but are essentially the same ones which generally hold good in dealings with human beings" (*The Ethics of the Stoic Epictetus*, 129)⁵. Thus, Bonhöffer does not believe that different jobs will require different appropriate acts. This way of reading specific roles seems an application of the view that the Stoics have "the tendency [...] to obliterate and [make] uniform individuality" (153).

Similarly, Gill offers a deflationary reading of two of the key discourses (i.2 and ii.10). According to Gill, Epictetus's "advice to maintain [one's] own *prosôpon* is converted into the advice to maintain our universal *prosôpon* as human beings" ("Personhood and Personality", 189)⁶. Correspondingly, Gill argues that *Discourses* ii.10 is interested only in our universal role as human beings, and that our roles such as ruler or guest "are, in essence, simply regarded as contexts in which rational moral agency can be expressed" (191). Gill suggests that for Epictetus these specific roles do not have "a weight and value of their own" (192).

5 A version of this position also seems to be put forward by N. White: "It does appear that [Panaetius], more than Epictetus, stressed the differences that might obtain among various people all aiming at the same ideal. For although Epictetus is concerned [...] with giving advice to imperfect human beings, he tends to assume that generally speaking the same advice will do pretty well for all of us" (*The Handbook of Epictetus*, 7).

6 Gill makes a weaker version of this claim, saying that specific roles "should, in effect, be subordinated to our common human role" ("Personhood and Personality", 189). This weaker claim is echoed by A. A. Long and J. Annas. Long appears to hold that our specific or "secondary roles" consist of our own endowments and relations, which mediate the norms laid down by our humanity in the same way that our own circumstances mediate Aristotle's mean relative to us (*Epictetus*, 232 and 237–241). Annas treats roles as "embedded perspectives" that offer a way of "aspiring to the Stoic ideal in our everyday life" ("Epictetus on Moral Perspectives", 148). She identifies this Stoic ideal with the universal reason of the human role (145). In her view, whereas it is realistic and pragmatic to work within our specific roles, we must nonetheless aim at the one, universal ideal (cf. 150). While I agree with Gill, Long, and Annas that the universal human role should take priority (since the demands of our specific roles should never undermine our humanity), I am opposing them by arguing that, in Epictetus's view, these specific roles are not merely extensions or mediations of our human role, but are substantial fixed points in our practical reasoning.

This deflationary view is plausible, but it generates a number of difficulties for Epictetus's account of roles. Above all, Epictetus does not fulfill the stated purpose of his account. He announces that we can account for many different lives as different kinds of roles (*Ench.* 17); but, according to the deflationary model, we need only to reflect on our lone role as human beings. Moreover, it is puzzling that Epictetus bluntly tells us that we cannot all be like Socrates (i.2.33) because "all horses do not become fast" (i.2.34). Stranger still, Epictetus nowhere invokes our humanity in the examples of roles in *Discourses* i.2, even though the deflationary reading requires it to do the important work of the account.⁷ Indeed, on the deflationary reading, it is hard to see what a role even is.

Alternatively, if we take Epictetus to be differentiating the role and obligations of Socrates from other kinds of roles and their obligations, we can account for these oddities. Epictetus introduces the stage metaphor and exemplifies each life as a kind of role, putting emphasis on the specific roles that we inhabit, from friend to teacher. I shall examine cases in which Epictetus suggests how specific roles feature in the deliberations of agents. Epictetus sketches a layered picture of humanity, according to which we have our human role and our more specific roles.

I.

Towards the end of *Discourses* ii.5, Epictetus takes up the view that we, as human beings, are attached to the cosmos just as a foot is connected organically to the body; and, just as a severed foot is no longer a foot, so a "detached" human would no longer be a human being (ii.5.24–26). Immediately following this claim, Epictetus clarifies it by pointing out that we are citizens of the cosmos and citizens of a human city. He then concludes the discourse by examining the trial and condemnation of an individual who sounds like Socrates (ii.5.27–29). I attempt to unpack ii.5.24–29 in order to show that it provides a layered picture according to which our calculations about our human role are distinct from our calculations about our specific roles. This analysis focuses on Epictetus's treatment of Socrates's universal role as a human being and the resulting conflict with his specific roles as gadfly and father. I demonstrate that one layer of reasoning does not "deflate" into the other, and that role conflicts are possible.

Discourses ii.5.26 asserts that human beings are members of two *poleis*: "For what is a human being? A part of a *polis*; first, [of that *polis* composed]

7 R. Dobbin (*Epictetus*, 80) thinks that our humanity is invoked at i.2.26 where a great athlete's fatal decision is justified on the grounds that he acted "as a man", but the Greek is *anêr*, not *anthrôpos*. In addition, Epictetus further qualifies the athlete's role as that of an Olympic athlete who thus differs even from ordinary athletes or nonathletes (cf. 84–85).

of gods and humans; and then, of that which is said to be as close as possible [*hôs engista*] [to that],⁸ [the *polis*] that is a certain small copy [*mimêma*] of the universal [*polis*]” (ii.5.26).⁹ This passage regards us as citizens of the *polis* of gods and humans, and it seems apparent that this citizenship refers to our cosmopolitan role as a human being. It also makes us members of a microcosmic *polis* such as Athens or Corinth, and gives us the many other roles that citizens assume there, such as senator or shoemaker (cf. *Ench.* 24.4). Epictetus’s understanding of the relationship between these two forms of citizenship holds great importance for determining what he thinks about the relationship between the universal role and specific roles.

Epictetus claims that our political community is a “small copy of” and is “as close as possible” to the cosmic community. It seems that he sees city-states as “copies” of the cosmic state inasmuch as the citizens of both ought to obey a sovereign and act for the benefit of the whole:

What, then, is the profession of a citizen? To keep nothing profitable in private, to plan about nothing as if he were detached [from everyone], but [to act] just as the foot or

8 Oldfather renders this line in ii.5.26 as “and then of that which is said to be very close to the other”, whereas Hard renders it as “and next, of that to which you immediately belong”. On Oldfather’s reading, Epictetus indicates a close kinship between the cosmic *polis* and the human *polis*; on Hard’s reading, Epictetus merely says that we are immediately proximate to our civic *polis*. Although, grammatically speaking, we might debate what is being called close to what, there are good grounds for favoring Oldfather’s interpretation as the more consistent. If we follow Hard’s interpretation, we have made Epictetus say that our civic *polis* is nearer to us than the city of humans and gods. Unless we attribute to Epictetus the rustic and non-Stoic view that the gods inhabit a faraway place (such as Mount Olympus), it is difficult to make sense of this interpretation. For Epictetus, as for any Stoic, the cosmic *polis* envelops us; in fact, Epictetus forcefully asserts that our immediate and fundamental kinship is not to our civic *polis*, but to the cosmic *polis* (i.9.1–7). Epictetus cites Socrates as an exemplar of this cosmopolitan kinship, and he explains the primacy of our cosmic citizenship by reference to the fact that we are “interwoven with God through *logos*” (i.9.5). Indeed, this immediate kinship with the cosmos is even emphasized in lines before ii.5.26 when Epictetus urges that we ought to consider ourselves as “parts of the whole” (ii.5.25). The cosmic kinship is also reflected in Epictetus’s emphasizing that we are surrounded by physical nature and all the random events of life (ii.5.27 and iii.24.29). For these reasons, my translation takes Epictetus to say that the human *polis* is as close as possible to the cosmic *polis*.

9 See also ii.6.9–10 and ii.10.4–6, of which the latter passage is preceded by a discussion of our universal (human) role.

the hand, which, if they had reason and understood the construction of nature, would never exercise an impulse or a desire in any other way than by reference to the whole. [...] [Our place] is assigned from the arrangement of the whole, and the whole is more sovereign than the part, and the state more sovereign than the citizen. [ii.10.4–5]

Indeed, whenever Epictetus discusses our cosmic (human) commitments in relation to our specific political commitments, he mirrors these themes about reasoning holistically (see i.9.1–7 and ii.15.10). The *polis*, then, is a *mimêma* that is “as close as possible” to the cosmos because the two have parallel components expected to perform corresponding functions: a citizen ought to obey the sovereign just as a human being ought to obey nature, a citizen should benefit the whole just as a human ought to benefit the world, and so on. Features of my political citizenship arise from the part that I play in my specific *polis*, just as features of my cosmic citizenship arise from the part that I play in the world at large.

In opposition to the deflationary reading, Epictetus treats our cosmic and political stations as hierarchical but distinct cases of membership (as parts) in a whole.¹⁰ He does not treat one as an instance of the other. Moreover, outside of the ii.10.4–6 passage on citizenship, Epictetus’s picture of cosmopolitanism makes the distinction between cosmic and civic memberships even stronger. In his cosmopolitan view, Epictetus distinguishes our political citizenship from our cosmic citizenship, and he values cosmopolitanism over our more narrow commitments because it is our relation to nature that makes possible our civic communities (i.9.1–7). Even though the universal form of citizenship is more fundamental, this fact does not support the deflationary reading, because the priority means that we should meet our civic commitments after trying to meet our cosmic attachments. By distinguishing our specific roles from our cosmic role, Epictetus opens the possibility of conflict between our specific roles. Role conflict clashes with the deflationary model because that model regards specific roles as nothing more than applications of the universal role to our particular circumstances. The universal role cannot demand *p* while its particular applications demand *q* and *r* such that *q* and *r* are in conflict.¹¹

10 Cf. iii.24.34–36 where he speaks of Nature as a general ordering up troops, but he adds that “that General [i.e., God] and this one [i.e., an ordinary general] are not the same, either in strength or the superiority of character” (iii.24.35).

11 Curiously, the subject of role conflict is rarely addressed in the literature on Epictetus, and yet it is the natural question to ask of Epictetus’s account (cf. Cicero’s criticisms of Panaetius on this score: *De Off.* i.152–161). Regarding role conflict in Epictetus, Annas (“Epictetus on Moral Perspectives”, 140–142) raises the problem of conflict between our universal human role and our more specific