

A Path to Freedom from the Shackles of Appearances

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A Senior Essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Integral Curriculum of Liberal Arts.

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May 11th, 2018

Note to the Reader

Dear Reader:

Please forgive the use of masculine throughout this thesis, both Plato's *Republic* and Epictetus's *Enchiridion* were written at times when philosophers were primarily males and their references and examples also referred to male characters. The study of philosophy is universal and applies to both women and men alike and has no borders. May the light of knowledge and wisdom shine on those who seek to be free.

In Plato's dialogue, the *Apology*, Socrates states "life without ...examination is not worth living" (38a5-6) and in Book Seven of the *Republic* (514a–520a), Plato has Socrates present in an allegory the philosophical journey – from the enslavement of ignorance to the freedom of enlightenment. Plato's dialogues, in general, make compelling arguments in favor of this pursuit and make the attainment of true knowledge and wisdom, as much as humanly possible, the highest goal in life. As with any goal worth attaining there are always obstacles the initiate needs to overcome. Most often the first steps are the most difficult ones. In the *Enchiridion*, Epictetus offers a number of practical ways to commence the philosophical journey. Although Epictetus' philosophy in the *Enchiridion* has its shortcomings, which will be described later, in plain language and with every day examples he provides manageable and concrete ways to free ourselves from many false impressions and distractions. He provides guidance to help the layman live a more tranquil life, and for those interested in philosophy to avoid many of the common pitfalls encountered when beginning the philosophical journey. Let us first briefly look at the allegory of the cave and then see how Epictetus can help us break free from the constraints referred to as shackles by Plato.

In the allegory of the cave Socrates has us imagine an underground cave. Inside the cave there are prisoners who are shackled by their necks and legs in such a way as to prevent them from turning their heads. They are forced to only look at the back of the cave. Between the entrance of the cave and the prisoners there is a fire burning, casting light inside the cave. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised wall where puppeteers manipulate objects over the wall, "human images and shapes of animals." (514b9-515a1) With the light from the fire, the puppeteers manipulate the

objects over the raised wall to cast shadows on the back wall of the cave for the prisoners to see. Some of these puppeteers are silent and others talk. These shadows on the wall and the echoes made by the puppeteers are the only things the prisoners are exposed to. "Then in every way such prisoners would deem reality to be nothing else than the shadows of the artificial objects." (515c1-2) This is the only reality those in shackles would know since childhood.

Socrates has us further imagine what it would be like for one of these prisoners to be set free and be able "to stand up suddenly and turn his head around" (515c7-8) and see the light of the fire for the first time. It would be painful and difficult on his eyes. It would be just as difficult for him to associate the objects he now sees to the shadows on the wall that have constituted his reality. If he was informed of the relationship of the objects and the shadows he would reject it and hold fast to his belief that the shadows on the wall were more real. If the previously shackled person was then dragged up the long and difficult ascent towards the opening of the cave and into the light of the sun, he would not be able to see anything directly; his eyes would need to adjust to the light. It would be a long, gradual and painful process to get used to the light and eventually see the real objects and be able to look at the light of the sun and "see its true nature, not by reflections in water...but in and by itself in its own place." (516 b5-6) In other words, he would then be able to see things as they really are. This illustrates what Socrates and Plato believe is the progression of human knowledge, from a state of ignorance, to knowledge of the world around us, to a higher and universal type of knowledge. The things outside the cave "seen" by the mind's eye, would be "the reality of the beautiful, the just and the good", (520c6). For instance, justice as "seen" outside the cave would

be true or universal justice, not just an example of justice. Likewise, the essence of a tree outside the cave would be the universal idea of a tree of which all physical trees partake, not a specific and physical tree.

This man now able to see things as they really are would feel pity for the prisoners down in the cave. He would no longer take any pleasure in identifying or remembering in what order the shadows appeared or predicting what shape may appear next, as he would now know that those are only shadows of the “artificial objects” (515c2) in the cave. If that man descended towards the fire and the shadows, his eyes would be unaccustomed to the dimness and he would not be able to distinguish things inside the cave at first. The others would think that his sight was ruined until he gradually became accustomed to the dimmer fire light, eventually distinguishing the shadows on the wall. If he then proceeded to tell the enslaved about his experience, the pain and difficulty of seeing the fire and about how the puppeteers use the objects and the light to cast the shadows on the wall, and the difficult ascent to the opening of the cave and the dazzling experience of seeing the sunlight along with the real objects outside the cave, the cave dwellers would think he was talking nonsense and reject his account. They would think that his sight had been ruined and think it folly to follow his path. They would not want to risk ruining their sight and returning with a warped sense of reality. If he tried to convince others to follow his path they would try to stop him at any cost.

It is important to note that there are two sources of light in the allegory of the cave, the fire and the sun. The fire inside the cave is used by the puppeteers to cast shadows on the wall whereas the second source of light is in the heavens, the sun,

which is outside of the cave. The light from the “sun” lets us see “the things themselves” (516a8) as they really are. The light from the fire allows those who are free to see the objects in the cave, which are copies or reproductions of the real things. Those free from the shackles may then choose to make their way towards the sunlight or remain near the fire. As stated above, the fire is used by those who are free to cast shadows on the wall for those in shackles who are unable to turn around. There also seems to be three types of knowledge. The first type of knowledge is exemplified by knowledge of the shadows and is likened to the knowledge acquired from youth. This knowledge constitutes the reality of the prisoners. Those who have become free can then manipulate the objects and with the light of the fire make the shadows the prisoners see. In other words, those who are free can inculcate their ideas onto the enslaved. Those free may be rulers, law makers, religious leaders, scientists, teachers, and all those who have seen that there is more to life than basic knowledge. This is not to suggest that those who are free will necessarily manipulate those who are enslaved for their own advantage: they may help those enslaved see there is more to life than the knowledge of the shadows and perhaps help them become free. Some who are free may go past the fire, up the steep ascent and towards the second source of light: these are the philosophers.

If this interpretation of the allegory is correct then the first step in the journey is to free ourselves from slavery, namely from the mundane, our basic needs, the distractions in life, money, social advancement, office, our fear of death and from the seemingly good as well as the seemingly bad things that happen in our lives. These external distractions keep us from stepping back and examining our own lives and

hinder us from either starting or moving further in the philosophical journey. Socrates, in many of Plato's dialogues, talks of the importance of living a virtuous life and the pursuit of truth through philosophy as being the highest good. He talks about the importance of distinguishing the real things from the images as the way to achieve this goal. The allegory of the cave refers to this goal when the enslaved becomes free from the shackles of ignorance and is then able to see more than shadows. He is able to see the objects in the cave and later the real things outside the cave.

Socrates' questioning method can definitely move us on along the right path of distinguishing the truth from the appearances, but the questioning process itself assumes a certain amount of freedom. The same goes for how the prisoner in the cave achieves freedom. The allegory hinges on the prisoner being freed, presumably by someone else, although it does not preclude the possibility of the prisoner being able to free himself. Without this initial freedom from the shackles the prisoner will not be able to know anything beyond the shadows and has no hope of turning around and seeing the fire and the objects, much less going up the steep ascent towards the sunlight. Socrates indicates that the "strange prisoners" (515a3) are "Like to us". (515a4) If the prisoners represent humanity and the cave is the world around us, then how can we free ourselves from the shackles of ignorance and see more than the shadows? How did those who manipulate the objects near the fire or those who have gone up the ascent gained their freedom? If we are like the enslaved and it is not within our control to set ourselves free, then we are at the mercy of fate or someone else's will to set us free. It seems more reasonable that we can set ourselves free from the shackles of ignorance; however, the allegory does not provide any guidance or advice on how to

take this first critical step. Socrates, in the allegory of the cave and in other dialogues, praises the pursuit of truth, virtue, and the good, as the highest goal in life, but does not specifically provide practical advice for those desiring to break free from the shackles to gain their freedom.

Epictetus' *Enchiridion*, in contrast to Socrates' allegory of the cave, does not assume this initial degree of freedom. This may be because Epictetus himself was originally a slave, so no assumption of freedom was made. The *Enchiridion*, although brief, provides specific and practical advice, with examples and exercises, for those wishing to free themselves and start the philosophical journey. He offers a guide for those who aspire to be philosophers, offering advice to avoid many of the common pitfalls that perhaps Epictetus himself and others like him may have experienced on becoming free from ignorance and commencing the philosophical journey. The *Enchiridion* provides information that even those not formally interested in pursuing philosophy can find useful in their everyday lives, although its primary intent seems to be more for those interested in philosophy and facing the choice of either becoming "a philosopher, or one of the mob." (En. XXIX) At the end of section XIX Epictetus states we should not desire to be anything else than to be "free".

Compared to Plato's volumes of Socratic dialogues, the *Enchiridion* is extremely short and composed of fifty-two sections which vary in length from a single sentence to a few paragraphs long; it is a concise collection of Epictetus' philosophical ideas. Although succinct, the *Enchiridion* is peppered with a number of examples and it is not written in formal Greek, but rather in informal, plain language. The word "enchiridion" is roughly translated from ancient Greek to mean a small manual or handbook. Epictetus

lived a few centuries after Socrates and Plato and was influenced by philosophers like Zeno of Citium, Chrysippus, Diogenes, Heraclitus, and also by Socrates, through Plato's dialogues. In fact, he makes several mentions of Socrates in the *Enchiridion*. (En. V, XXXII, XXXIII, XLVI and L) Additional background on Epictetus found in the preface of "The Works of Epictetus" is that he had a lame leg and was originally a slave but later in life was freed. We cannot say for sure but perhaps the obstacles Epictetus overcame may have played a significant role in shaping his philosophy by dealing with an impediment to his body and a restriction of his freedom early in life. Let us now look at a few sections of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* that epitomize how he explicitly provides guidance, advice, exercises, and words of encouragement to help us take the first step and gain our freedom from ignorance to begin the philosophical journey .

One of the simplest ways to examine things is to categorize them, and the most basic type of category is a dichotomy. Although dichotomies are binary and somewhat limiting by nature, they can be helpful at the beginning of an inquiry. The first line of the *Enchiridion* states, "There are things which are within our power, and there are things which are beyond our power." (En. I) Epictetus then provides some examples of what sort of things he is referring to and what is their nature in general.

Within our power are opinion, aim, desire aversion, and, in one word, whatever affairs are our own. Beyond our power are body, property, reputation, office, and, in one word, whatever are not properly our own affairs. Now, the things within our power are by nature free, unrestricted, unhindered; but those beyond our power are weak, dependent, restricted, alien. Remember, then, that if you attribute freedom to things by nature dependent, and take what belongs to others for your own, you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, you will find fault both with gods and men. But if you take for your own only that which is your own, and view what belongs to others just as it really is, then no one will ever compel you, no one will restrict you, you will find fault with no one, and you will accuse no one, you will do nothing against your will; no one will hurt you, you will not have an enemy, nor will you suffer any harm. (En. I)

In general the things within our control are non-tangible and internal, such as our thoughts and intents, whereas the things not within our control are external, everything physical, including our own body; the latter also includes non-tangible things, such as what others think and their actions. The above can be related to the allegory of the cave in that learning and pursuing things that are within our control is liberating and empowering and can help us become free from the shackles, as we will soon see; whereas pursuing the things that are not within our control, by mistaking them for things that are within our control and beneficial to us, keeps us in a state of ignorance and enslavement. The first few lines of the *Enchiridion* are, in a nutshell, Epictetus' main premise that he expands throughout the rest of the *Enchiridion*, often times with examples, and adding some words of advice.

His first word of advice for those embarking in the journey is to fully commit: "Aiming therefore at such great things, remember that you must not allow yourself any inclination, however slight, towards the attainment of the others." (En. I) This is similar to the allegory of the cave: there are no prisoners that are partially shackled; they are either enslaved or free from the shackles. In Epictetus' philosophical view, we either pursue the things within our control or the things not within our control but we cannot successfully pursue both. It is understandable that when we begin it will be difficult to correctly distinguish what is within our control from what is not. Changing the way we think, giving up some things and changing others will also be difficult, and Epictetus acknowledges that. He then provides an example of how we can deal with a difficult situation or "unpleasant semblance" (En. I) that is not within our control. The first step is to bring it to awareness in order to examine it. The second step is to distance ourselves

from the situation, or detach from it, in order to examine it objectively. He advises us to say to that which is being examined, "You are but a semblance and by no means the real thing." (En. I) The next step, which he points out is most important, is to evaluate the situation and determine if it belongs to the things that are within our control or not. If the impression falls outside of our control then give it its proper place and think of it as not having any significance. Depending on what is being considered, this method may be difficult to follow at first. This first section lays down the basic process that will be seen many times throughout the *Enchiridion* on how to deal with many different "things" and situations, from what appears to be good but it is not, to things that are truly good and worth pursuing, as well as from those things that we should rightfully avoid, to those that are part of our lives and we simply need to learn to accept them. One key word that may be overlooked in section I of the *Enchiridion* is "practice". Practice implies a couple of things such as actually doing something rather than only being aware of it or reasoning about it, and the other is repetition, doing something many times until it becomes a habit.

In section II Epictetus takes a closer look at two things that are within our control, namely desire and aversion. Both desire and aversion can be applied to other things within our control, and also to things not within our control. We can, for example, desire to have those things that are virtuous and within our control, such as correct opinion or judgment. In this case we should rightfully desire to have and acquire those things that are within our control and in agreement with human nature. However, if we desire those things that are not within our power and not in accordance with nature, we will inevitably be disappointed and disturbed. Aversion can also be applied to things within our control

and those things not within our control. For example, it is within our ability to avoid thinking a bad thought, such as harming someone; so in this case it is right to use aversion to stop thinking that bad thought, as it is contrary to nature and harmful to the soul. However, it is not within our power to prevent someone else from having bad thoughts about us or speaking badly about us, or doing harm to us, or in general to prevent anything that is commonly considered harmful or undesirable happening to us, such as death. If that which is being examined is not within our power or control we should not apply aversion to it, for “he who incurs the object of his aversion is wretched.” (En. II) Again, at the start when we are still struggling to distinguish what is within our power or control from what is not, it will be difficult to know what is right to desire from what is right to despise and/or avoid. Epictetus, at the end of section II, advises to use aversion and desire sparingly and only when necessary at the start.

Section III, although brief, has us apply what has been presented in the previous sections to things that we may enjoy and desire, both mental and physical. This exercise has us start with something we can handle at first; then with practice and persistence the exercise can later be performed with less effort. We can later challenge ourselves with more difficult situations to consider in order to improve the skill until we master the exercise or task at hand. Epictetus has us start with something small, for example, a cup that we own and apply the principles stated above. The first step is to bring the cup to our awareness. Then we need to detach from the cup by thinking of it as an appearance so we can make an objective opinion about it. After much thought and consideration we can make a judgement as to which of the two categories the cup belongs to. Does it belong to the things within our control or to the

things not within our control? The cup being physical and external is not something within our control. The fact that we have possession of the cup, find it beautiful, useful, or pleasant to have, has no relevance at all to which category the cup belongs to. What is important in the examination of the thing being considered is to determine if it is something within our control or not; once we have made a determination, we can then accept it for what it is. Since the cup is an object not within our control, if something happens to it, we should not be upset and must accept whatever may happen to it. If the cup is broken, for whatever reason, for example, we need to learn to accept it and bear it. The exercise can be applied to all things, both great and small. Again, because the *Enchiridion* is quite brief it goes from applying this principle to an inconsequential item, like a cup, to what most people would consider among the most precious things in our lives, such as a loved one, like a spouse or a child. The exercise is not intended to equate a broken cup to the loss of a child, as these are vastly different, but only to show that just as we cannot prevent a cup from being broken, as that is not within our control, so too we cannot prevent a child, a spouse, a close friend, or even ourselves from dying. What is important is how we view and handle things and events that happen, whether good or bad. Epictetus is trying to help us see things for what they really are so we can free ourselves from the shackles, which are the appearances of the many things that we simply accept as being true without questioning them or mistake as being under our control when they are not.

So far the process described above has been applied to external objects and people. In part IV, Epictetus provides an example dealing with actions, both by us and by others. The example helps illustrate how our way of looking at events and actions by

others can either enslave us or free us. Since public bath houses are no longer common we can make Epictetus' example more contemporary by applying it to a trip to a public pool. For example, at a public pool there will be some people minding their own business and trying to enjoy a nice day in the water and others being loud, annoying or perhaps looking for a distracted victim to steal from. If we go to the pool only with the intent to have a wonderful day at the pool without any disturbances, we will almost inevitably be disappointed, as all sorts of events and actions by others are not within our control. However, if we go to the pool with a different state of mind and think, "It was not only to...[swim]...that I desired, but keep my will in harmony with nature, and I shall not keep it thus, if I am out of humor at things that happen," (En. IV) then we can better deal with whatever happens at the pool or at any other public event. In section VIII, Epictetus revisits the topic of how to deal with situations and actions outside our control by offering these words of advice, "Demand not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go on well." (En. VIII) His advice can help both those embarking in philosophy and the laymen to become more accepting of things that cannot be changed in order to have more inner peace.

Section V goes deep into the heart of Epictetus' philosophy. For instance, regarding the things not within our control that disturb us, he says: "Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of things." (En. V) If something causes us to be disturbed and we become angry, afraid, annoyed, or sad, for example, we need to examine it first using Epictetus' method described earlier. If the thing that afflicts us is not within our control then the thing itself has no power or ability to disturb us; we can,

however, allow it to disturb us if that is our view and conviction. In other words, it is within our power for something not within our control to afflict us or not, therefore making correct judgments is key to freeing our minds from those things that not only disturb us but also prevent us from making any real progress. If that which disturbs us is something within our control, then we are correct in being afflicted because we are doing something contrary to nature; we can then ask ourselves “what faculty... [we]...have for its use” (En. X) to rectify that which afflicts us, so we can be in harmony with nature. For instance, if we are afflicted because we act impulsively, it is within our power to exercise self-control to stop acting impulsively. We will have more tranquility to focus our time and attention on things that can help us move forward in the philosophical journey by rectifying the things within our control and by not allowing things outside our control to disturb us.

There is a Christian prayer, the Serenity Prayer, that is akin to Epictetus’ method of distinguishing things that are not within our control and we need to accept, from things that we can control and we have the ability to change.

God grant me the serenity
 To accept the things I cannot change;
 Courage to change the things I can;
 And wisdom to know the difference.

In this prayer serenity may be granted by the grace of God and is a precursor to judging between the things we need to accept because we cannot change them and the things we can change but need the strength and courage to change. From a pragmatic view, we can also achieve serenity by having learned what is not under our control and therefore not allowing it to disturb our minds and to better judge new things or concentrate on the important ones under our control.

One thing we must all confront and we all have in common is death. Epictetus, in the *Enchiridion*, often refers to death in many of his examples to force us to think about a very real and extreme example of something that is not within our control yet we are forced, at some point, to deal with. In our daily lives we can choose to amuse ourselves and pass the time pursuing riches, glamor, love, and glory without giving death a second thought; but no matter our position in life or our accomplishments we will all be confronted with death. We may be able to postpone death by taking better care of ourselves or steering away from dangerous situations, but to avoid death altogether is simply not possible. The common view of death tends to be a negative one, as being something to be feared and avoided at all costs or something that will happen so far into the future, at a stage very late in life, that we can afford not to think about it today or tomorrow, while in reality death can happen to us at any age and at any time. Epictetus suggests that death, being part of the cycle of life, is not bad; its “terror consists in our notion of death.” (En. V) Death is something that inevitably happens to all mortal things.

Epictetus’ references of death show us how to deal with something significant yet not within our control by using those tools that we do have control over, such as our views, opinions, and judgments. What makes us feel afflicted and disturbed about death is not death itself but what we think of it and judge it to be. We sometimes observe a change in perspective about death in people who, because of advanced age, a terminal illness or a near death experience, have been forced to confront their mortality and reflect about the meaning of life. After much thought and reflection they tend to make peace with the situation and accept it. When the time comes they tend to let go of life with dignity, grace, and in peace. Epictetus mentions Socrates as an

example of how someone who was so learned and wise approached death. He did not approach it kicking and screaming, or by accepting help from his friends and escaping prison to avoid an unjust death sentence, but by staying true to his beliefs and principles, accepting his situation and what came of it. Socrates believed that harm to the soul or “psyche” would be more harmful than death to the body. His body could be put to death but “Neither Meletus nor Anytus can do me any harm at all; they would not have the power.” (30c7-d1)

Section VII continues on the theme of mortality and uses a metaphor of a ship at anchor to represent our temporary stay in this world. While the ship is anchored we may enjoy whatever things may come our way, a spouse, children, fame, fortune, etc.

...but your thoughts ought to be bent towards the ship, and be perpetually attentive, lest the captain should call, and then you must leave all these things, that you may not have to be carried on board the vessel, bound like a sheep.” (En. VII)

As no one really knows what happens after death, the use of a metaphor is appropriate in this passage. The captain of the ship may be God, gods or nature; but no matter what we believe, death comes to all. Epictetus’ philosophy does have some elements of fatalism but as in the case of death, fatalism is warranted as death is unavoidable. Epictetus is not morbid or obsessed about death. He wants us to talk about and confront the ultimate boogeyman for most people and urges us to start living a virtuous life now, not to waste time and delay. We can keep our thoughts on the ship for the moment the captain calls by being aware of death, but not overly concerned or obsessed about our mortality and by being alert to what is important. By being aware of the truth and remaining alert we can live our lives in the present and to our fullest potential. What happened in the past we cannot change, what will happen in the future

is also not within our control. We cannot control many things in the present, but we can take action and start living a good life now. Forming wrong opinions, submitting to bad impulses, desires and aversions, and taking the wrong actions, would be more harmful to the soul than even death to the body. These wrong actions would also keep us enslaved and shackled in such a way that we could not turn our heads to see our own selves, the others, and the world around us clearly but only as misshaped shadows we hopelessly struggle to distinguish on the cave wall.

A question to ask now is why is all this important? What is the significance of learning to distinguish what is within our control from that which is not? We do not know how much time we have to live; but no matter how long that is, it is clear that we need to use that time wisely. We can spend all our time in passive ignorance seeing the “reality” the puppeteers want us to see, telling ourselves “I’m doing fine watching shadows on the wall” as in John Lennon’s song “Watching the Wheels” or we can free ourselves, and as in another phrase of the song above, spend time “watching the wheels go round and round...no longer riding on the merry-go-round.” Then perhaps we can go beyond that, past the fire, and venture out toward the light of the sun. Epictetus, in the *Enchiridion*, shows us how to use the tools that we have within us to break the shackles that hold us in place and turn away from the shadows toward the light. Using his guidebook to philosophy, the examples he provides, and his advice can save us time figuring out what is not important so we can then focus on that which is important and take that first step of the journey. Once freed from the shackles we are faced with the choice of either turning our back to the sunlight and the opening of the cave, or move beyond that and go up the ascent towards the sunlight and the real

objects. This is the choice we all face on how far we want to take our philosophy of life. We can live shackled in ignorance and let life happen to us, or we can examine our lives and the world around us to live more meaningful lives, or we can dedicate ourselves to discovering and understanding universal truths.

The things outside the cave, according to Plato, are the real things that do not change, the universals, the things lovers of wisdom seek to discover as much as humanly possible. But the true lover of wisdom, or philosopher, according to Epictetus, is not just the scholar learning about the world around him and what lies beyond; it is the way he lives his life being true to what he has learned and putting it into practice. It is not enough to just have knowledge and write it down in a book and store it away on a dusty bookshelf, or use that knowledge to dictate how others should live their lives. Knowledge needs to be learned, internalized, incorporated and practiced by the liberated person, the independent thinker, the philosopher. Epictetus points to Socrates as the best example of how to live as a philosopher. Had Socrates decided to take the easy way out and escape prison to delay death rather than stay true to his beliefs, he might have simply faded away in time like many other philosophers. We need not give up our lives to live a philosophical life but rather we must live life in accordance to nature. Many obstacles may be in our way but how we view of them can help us overcome them. Epictetus shared with others what he believed is a practical way to start living a better life and follow the path to philosophy. He also served as an excellent example of how to achieve great things.

This is not to say Epictetus' philosophy is not without its flaws. As alluded to earlier, using a dichotomy to categorize everything can be helpful at first but it can also

be limiting as there are things that fall in gray areas, such as things that we have influence over but that are not absolutely under our control. For instance, one of the things that Epictetus states is not under our control is our own body. On the one hand, we cannot say we have complete control over our body, for example, even if we do everything we can to be healthy we can become ill. On the other hand we cannot say we do not have any control over our own bodies. For instance, people with spinal cord injuries, that are not being kept alive artificially, still have some level of bodily control. Control over our body lies somewhere in between these two extremes, although Epictetus would be correct to think that we tend to believe we have more control over our body than we actually do. It is when we become ill or when we are physically restrained that we consider and reflect on the limits of our bodily control.

Another limiting dichotomy found in the *Enchiridion* comes at the end of section XXIX:

You must be one man either good or bad. You must cultivate either your own Reason or else externals; apply yourself either to things within or without you; that is, be either a philosopher, or one of the mob. (En. XXIX)

It is understandable that one embarking in philosophy needs to commit, but the dichotomy seems to imply that only philosophers are good and that all laymen are bad. Even if we accept this dichotomy, where does it leave those who are in the philosophical path and under what specific criteria is one considered a philosopher and therefore “good”? Most of the *Enchiridion* offers advice and exercises to improve on distinguishing the things within our control from those that are not within our control. At the end of section L Epictetus offers words of encouragement for those in the path and acknowledges that even if we are not yet like Socrates we should strive to be like him.

The path of becoming like Socrates is something that is very difficult to achieve but even if we do not achieve being a Socrates it is a goal worth pursuing. The journey from ignorance to enlightenment is a long and gradual process, starting as a layman and moving towards becoming a philosopher, which implies there is a third state of being which lies between being one of the mob and being a philosopher. Perhaps the inconsistency we see in the dichotomy in section XXIX was meant to be more of a pep talk to encourage someone to embark in philosophy by contrasting the opposite end of the spectrum, to do nothing and remain ignorant and enslaved, or pursuing philosophy to find enlightenment and freedom.

Epictetus, in section XXXIII, advises not to discuss philosophy with strangers or people who are not in the philosophical path; perhaps at the start this may be good advice since other fellow “cave dwellers” may not understand and may even discourage or ridicule someone just starting in philosophy. But narrowing philosophical discussions only to people we know and share our views is not good long term advice as it limits the different perspectives the philosopher will consider when analyzing something in question. This is quite different from Socrates’ approach, which relies heavily on discussion and questioning different views, even opposing ones. Interestingly, this section mainly deals with “character and demeanor” (En. XXXIII) and we see a sharp contrast between Epictetus’ personality, which seems to be introspective or introverted, versus Socrates’ personality in the *Republic*, which seems to be extroverted and encourages others to participate in discussion. It is not that an introverted or extroverted approach is better than the other for pursuing philosophy, but rather that they are different and each has its own advantage. By working through an argument via

dialogue, in the Socratic approach, we have more viewpoints to consider and the argument is very dynamic, although sometimes at the expense of not halting the flow of discussion to ruminate about a particular point that may need more reflection. In contrast, in Epictetus' approach there is more time and tranquility to ruminate about what is being considered; but it can be more difficult to ascertain if we are correct in our thinking if we do not have someone else offer a different way of looking at the same issue. Epictetus focuses more on the self and disregards, as much as possible, everything external, whereas Socrates' method is more open and inclusive. But Socrates' method may be perceived as confrontational by some and perhaps even dangerous as it often brings into question those things that others may have strong feelings and/or opinions about, and may turn an earnest, friendly discussion into a violent argument that the novice philosopher may not know how to manage.

In critiquing Epictetus' philosophy in the *Enchiridion* we need to keep in mind that like Socrates, Epictetus seems to have spent most of his time discussing and living out his philosophical views. Almost all we know of Socrates' philosophy is from Plato's dialogues, which are numerous and masterfully written. What is left of Epictetus' philosophy is what appear to be personal notes about Epictetus' philosophy written down by Flavius Arrian, one of his students. Through his efforts, Epictetus' philosophy was not lost but was organized and, as far as we are able to know, faithfully summarized. Plato's allegory of the cave and Epictetus' *Enchiridion* show us the path from starting as an "uninstructed person" (En. V) or one shackled by ignorance, to "one entering upon instruction" (En. V) or one freed from the shackles, to "one perfectly instructed" (En. V) or the philosopher. Even with the shortcomings in Epictetus'

“manual” it is more helpful at the most critical point of the philosophical journey, the first step to attaining freedom.

Let us now close with Epictetus’ call to action at the end of section L and with some thoughts on how this is all relevant today.

This instance, then, think yourself worthy of living as a man grown up and a proficient. Let whatever appears to be the best, be to you an inviolable law. And if any instance of pain or pleasure, glory or disgrace, be set before you, remember that now is the combat, now the Olympiad comes on, nor can it be put off; and that by one failure and defeat honor may be lost – or won. Thus Socrates became perfect, improving himself by everything, following reason alone. And though you are not yet a Socrates, you ought, however, to live as one seeking to be a Socrates. (En. L)

We live in what is referred to as the “information age”. We can communicate almost instantaneously with people across the world. Our current technology allows us to access a wealth of information any time we want. We are constantly bombarded with information and people’s views, ranging from one extreme to its opposite and many views in between, each claiming to have the truth about the world around us, the cave. We are not literally shackled in such a way that we cannot even turn our heads, or are we? Turning our heads around we see the silhouettes of our peers, not by the light of the fire or the sun but by the dim glow of a screen. Technology is not a bad thing in itself, in fact it can be a very useful and a time-saving tool, so long as we do not allow it to be one more of the numerous distractions in life. Perhaps we ought to pay heed to Epictetus’ practical advice and shut off all external distractions, even for a short time, then turn our attention inward and learn to distinguish what is important from what is not. In taking this first step we may find enough tranquility to hone our inborn tools to better deal with the world around us and break free from the shackles in Plato’s cave. Once our minds are liberated and see things under a different light, it is up to us if we

want to remain where we are or explore the cave or make our way up and get a glimpse of what lies outside the cave, the universal truths. Finding ourselves at the mouth of the cave under the warm and bright light of the sun we may not want to descend. Even if our fellow cave dwellers may find it difficult to believe we must do what is right and good, and help them see there is a natural and brighter source of light. But first things first, we must take action now and become free ourselves by using the tools at our disposal. Then we can find our way up the steep and difficult ascent towards the sunlight in the heavens.

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