Delimiting a self by God in Epictetus[1]

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1. Introduction

The word 'self' is a variable for that which is being denoted when people use the singular personal pronouns 'I' and 'you'. The connotation and thus definition of 'self' changes with the individual user or class of users of the word, but three essential features restrict the range of meanings that the variable can take. Selves occur with[2] people: only people use the word 'self' and they use it only with reference either to themselves or to other entities that they treat like people; selves are reflexive: the user of a personal pronoun implies that the entity referred to not only exists but is also aware of its existence;[3] and selves presuppose some form of symbolic, conceptual thought, as is implied in the pronouns or the deixis expressed by them.

It is clear that Epictetus,[4] the philosopher to be studied in this paper, does propose an understanding of 'self' in the basic sense outlined above. He shares the Stoics' general concern about language and reason (both: λόγος) as the distinguishing mark of people, and also the Stoic interest in the reflexive side of agency. Activity of both non-rational and rational animals is explained by οἰκείωσις, self-appropriation and the perception of things as something appropriate for the individual agent.[5] Humans, however, differ from animals in that this first-level reflexive relation of appropriation is made explicit in a further, second-level reflexive step involving their faculty of reason. They are not only aware of what is appropriate for them but also tell it to themselves and assent to what they tell themselves.[6] Epictetus explores this reflexive relation of the agent to himself and provides us with clear-cut distinctions in terms whose technicality and lack of variation indicate their purpose to express a thoroughly considered and well-defined overall conception of 'self'.[7]

At the same time, Epictetus adds, or enhances, a feature of selves that is not essential according to the general meaning indicated above but becomes important if one wishes to understand how the self relates to God: according to Epictetus, the human self is delimited by distinguishing it from everything else. It is what is 'one's own' (ἐμόν) in contrast to what is 'not one's own' (οὐκ ἐμόν) or 'alien' (ἀλλότριον). This basic demarcation is accompanied by other classificatory features, most of which can be sorted according to the two basic categories of what is one's own and what is not. Very important, for example, is a distinction of inside and outside, with the self and that which is one's own being located inside, whereas the outside is not one's own but alien. But even within the range of what one normally might call 'inside', the place occupied by the self is further narrowed down. The body, for example, is not self (Long 2002, 158-61), nor the psyche as a whole; only the leading part of it, the ἡγεμονικόν, can be regarded as the seat of the self. The Stoics did not undertake a further spatial subdivision of this part of the soul but distinguished different functions or powers

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[1] I wish to thank Thomas Bénatouïl for his valuable comments on a first draft this paper.

[2] The preposition 'with' was chosen to avoid locating the self and to counter Anscombe's objection (1975) that 'I' has no referent. Even if there is no such thing as a self, people still say 'I' and believe that they are referring to something, so that the term has a certain meaning for them.

[3] This is obvious in the case of 'I'. The speaker using the word 'you (sg.)' also expects the addressee to understand that it is the addressee he is referring to, which is only possible if the addressee is aware of himself as a self. Reydams-Schils 2005a, 15 and 17 regards reflexive pronouns as the signifiers of 'self'.

[4] By 'Epictetus' I mean the speaker presented in those texts that have been transmitted to us as documenting the words uttered by the 1st/2nd cent. philosopher Epictetus. For the purpose of this paper it is not necessary to distinguish the historical from the reported Epictetus or from Arrian, the author of the *Discourses*.

[5] See, e.g., 1.19.9-15; 1.22.14 and 19; 1.27.12-14. References to the *Discourses* will be made by number only.

[6] Sen. *Epist*. 113.18 (most probably reporting a standard Stoic tenet); 1.1.1-5; 1.20.

[7] *Pace* Bonhoeffer 1894, 16 and Gourinat 2005, 105 n. 60.

(δυνάμεις) within it, and Epictetus uses such a functional subdivision to further delimit that which really is one's own: it is only a certain function performed by the leading part of the soul, namely the 'use of appearances' (χρῆσις τῶν φαντασιῶν).

The final demarcation line, however, is drawn with yet another concept: *prohairesis*,[8] which is the faculty whose activities are assent (συγκατάθεσις), impulse (ὁρμή) and striving with its counterpart recoiling (ὀρεξις and ἔκκλισις) as well as all those activities themselves.[9] As such, *prohairesis* is also a particular type of cause (Gourinat 2005, 113) and responsible for those things that are 'in one's power' (ἐπ' ἐμοί, ἐφ' ἡμῖν). Accordingly, it is *prohairesis* that serves as the basic criterion for further divisions fundamental to Epictetus' world-view and ethics (2.5.4-8), such as: object of *prohairesis* vs. not to be taken by *prohaireis* (προαιρετικόν / ἀπροαίρετον), free vs. slave (ἐλεύθερον / δοῦλον) or unimpeded vs. impeded (ἀκώλυτον / κωλυτόν). *Prohairesis* is a narrower concept than simple 'use of appearances'. It is a faculty characteristic exclusively of the minds of people and does not occur in animal minds. Animals, too, use appearances according to Epictetus, but humans do it differently, adhibiting a further important faculty specific to rational beings: *parakolouthēsis*, the reflective observation and evaluation of self and others.[10] The *prohairesis* activities listed above imply assent to something that the reflecting mind tells itself when it has an appearance, and thus also the possibility of error. As a result of this, the natural activity of humans is not just the use appearances, as it is for animals, but the *correct* use of appearances.[11] This understanding of *prohairesis* as correct, or in the case of failure incorrect, use of appearances further implies that mental activities which do not involve judgements, *e.g.* having appearances without assenting to them or conceiving of something like a centaur without believing that centaurs exist, are not part of *prohairesis* in the proper sense of the word.

A human being's world seems to have a clear antithetical structure according to Epictetus. Yet things are not quite as easy as that. There are several areas where we might expect fuzzy or dissolving boundaries between inside and outside, between what is mine and what does not belong to me. Body and psyche, for example, interact according to mainstream Stoic theory, and it is not even clear what exactly a body is supposed to be. There is also the interface between external world and mind through sense perception (αἴσθησις) and appearance (φαντασία): here inside and outside seem to meet in such a way that the contribution of each is difficult or maybe even impossible to delimit. What about friends (the other selves) and social relations, that which Epictetus calls σχέσεις? How does the self, which according to the Stoics is essentially social, both immerse and distinguish itself from the networks in which it is entangled?[12] Another such problem is the place and role of the divine in the apparently clear-cut distribution of things and faculties in the world, and it is this last problem that I wish to address. 'The divine' for Epictetus is first of all the divinity that he calls 'Zeus' or 'God' (ὁ θεός) and to whom he attributes the creation and management of the cosmos.[13] How do human selves fit into this universal creation? Who makes them, who manages them and what is their place in the whole? Such questions are usually explored from the human side by looking at how they develop and manage their self or how the self is educated and plays its

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[8] I regard this word as untranslatable. The best attempt I know of is Bénatouïl's (2009) 'résolution'.
[9] In this I follow Gourinat 2005, 108 and 114 ('une faculté dont les activités sont l'assentiment, l'impulsion et le désir') and disagree with Long (2002), who translates *prohairesis* as 'volition' or 'will' and argues for a less strictly delimited understanding of the term (28-9): 'The crucial idea is that volition is what persons are in terms of their mental faculties, consciousness, character, judgements, goals, and desires: volition is the self, what each of us is, as abstracted from the body. [...] You and I are not our bodies, nor even do we own our bodies. We, our essential selves, *are* our volitions.' The self thus is 'the purposive and self-conscious centre of a person' (207).
[10] 1.6.12-17; 2.8.4-8.
[11] See, *e.g.*, 1.1.7; 1.12.34; 1.20.15; 2.19.32; 2.22.29; 2.23.40; 3.22.20; 4.12.12; *Diss. Frg.* 4 (Stob. 2.8.30).
[12] This question is addressed in Reydams-Schils 2005a.
[13] Radice 1982 analyzes the use of theological terms in Epictetus. On God and Zeus see in particular 15-29.

role in a social or cosmic nexus.[14] Here I wish to approach the problem from the perspective of physics and ontology and discuss three intimately linked questions.

- How is the self delimited from God? God is all-pervading according to standard Stoic theology. If this is also true for Epictetus, where is God to be placed in the dichotomies of own and alien or inside and outside?

- In which way is God the cause, creator and shaper of the self? And how does this relate to the self-shaping that humans perform themselves, especially that undertaken by the philosopher in progress?

- If, as will become apparent in the discussion of the previous questions, the shape and activities of human selves originate from God and should be perfectly aligned with God, in which sense can we still speak of a separate, individual human self?

## 2. Delimiting self from God: 'inside' or 'outside'?

The first, most elementary question to start with is whether God is 'inside' or 'outside', different from the self or the same. If God is 'outside', he is excluded from the sphere of that which can be good or bad and would have to be regarded as irrelevant. If God is 'inside', *i.e.* in the self, how can we still speak of a self, instead of just omnipresent God? It is clear that such questions lead us into a hotly debated area, that of Epictetus' alleged theism in contrast to the more pantheistic theology of other Stoics. However, I am not sure whether these modern terms are particularly helpful for understanding Epictetus' position on the issues he himself is interested in, and will therefore not resort to them for classifying my findings.[15]

## 2.1 Selves as parts of God and humans as parts of the cosmos

As simple as our question whether God is inside or outside might sound, Epictetus' answer is far from clear. For example, he refers to God as 'a different one' (ἄλλος),[16] while also stating more than once that God is inside.[17] One solution to this paradoxical evidence consists in assuming a part-whole relation. It is noteworthy that Epictetus does not use the word 'someone else' (ἕτερος) when referring to God as different from the self. According to a distinction attributed to Stoics in general, the whole is neither 'the same' as the parts (τὰ αὐτὰ τοῖς μέρεσιν) nor 'something else' than or 'beside' the parts (ἕτερα παρὰ τὰ μέρη), and in fact, Epictetus does describe God and man as standing in such a relation to each other.[18]

It might therefore seem natural to assume that man is a part of God and wonder, with A. A. Long (2002, 148) 'how we as individuals are capable of thinking for ourselves and able to assume responsibility for our own lives' 'if our minds are simply and directly "parts" of

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[14] Almost every study of Epictetus touches upon this aspect of his philosophy. See in particular Long 2002, 207-30 and *passim* , but also Gill 2006, 371-91 and 2008, Sorabji 2006, 181-97 and 2007 as well as both scholars' discussion of each other's views in Remes and Sihvola 2008.

[15] An excellent treatment is Algra 2007 (see also 2009b, 244). Algra highlights the width and thus imprecision of the terms (2007, 37) and engages with the views of Long 2002, 142-79. A more detailed review of earlier literature is given by Vanhaegendoren 2004, who regards Epictetus as a theist. Radice 1982, 83-91 argues against a pantheistic reading of passages in which Epictetus talks about God and, without explicitly saying so, rejects the use of a terminology that is not Epictetus' own. Bonhoeffer's conclusion (1894, 2) that one finds a 'für unsere Begriffe kaum verständliches Gemisch von Theismus, Pantheismus und Polytheismus' encapsulates the problem: our categories are not Epictetus' own.

[16] 1.25.13; 1.30.1; 2.5.22; 3.1.43; 3.3.13; 4.1.103.

[17] Epictetus both refers to God (1.14.13-14 ὁ θεὸς ἔνδον ἐστὶ; 2.16.33) or a god (2.8.12-14) inside. These are the most unequivocal passages; more passages can at least be interpreted in a similar sense.

[18] Sext. Emp. *Pyrrh. Hyp.* 3.170 (SVF 3.75); 1.1.12; 1.14.6; 1.17.27; 2.8.10-11.

God's mind'. However, as with pantheism and theism, this might not have been the way in which Epictetus viewed the problem. As it turns out, he seems to envisage different types of part-whole relations between God and man. For example, it is less clear than one would expect who of the two is the part and who the whole of which the other is a part. Sometimes, [a] humans or their souls are described as parts of a whole, namely God,[19] but then again [b] humans appear as wholes that contain a part of God.[20] One even finds both relations back to back in the same passage:

> [Interlocutor:] 'So what? Aren't they [*i.e.* plants and animals] works of gods too?'
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> [Epictetus:] 'They are, but they are neither primary nor parts of gods. [a] But you, you are a primary being, you are a detached portion (ἀπόσπασμα) of God. [b] You've a part of him in yourself. (2.8.10-11)[21]

These two different relations are to be explained by an important distinction that Epictetus makes when speaking about the cosmos and God and the parts of each. [a] When speaking of humans as selves, as individual *prohaireseis*, he describes them as parts of God and, in fact, the only parts of God. [b] When speaking of humans as the complete body-soul compound and three-dimensional body, he regards them as wholes into which God has placed a part of himself. [c] As such wholes of body and soul, humans are parts too – not of God, however, but of the cosmos, 'the whole' or the cosmic city.[22] Epictetus never explicitly identifies the cosmos with God. This does not mean that he did not regard the cosmos as a divine, immortal living being ensouled by an active principle,[23] but it clearly shows that he took care to use the name 'God' in a more restricted manner.

Further ambiguities can be identified, if we consider the nature of the part-whole relation. As we have seen, a human self in Epictetus can be defined spatially, as the leading part of the soul in contrast to all the rest, or in a functional and causal sense, as a specific faculty (*prohairesis*) and its appropriate activities or 'works' (ἔργα). Accordingly, we could ask whether human selves are spatially extended parts of God or rather parts in a different, qualitative, causal or functional manner.

There are clear indications that Epictetus regards the human soul-body compound as a spatio-temporal part of the cosmos. It is there for a certain time, taking up space that it must leave again for others to come.[24] Just as all other bodies and beings that are part of the cosmos, the human soul-body compound is also a functional part in an organised whole: like a limb, a human being exists for the benefit of the whole organism and is, accordingly, less important and subordinate to the community of parts.[25] However, this is only true of the human body-compound as part of the cosmos. Matters seem to be different when Epictetus talks about human reason and thus the *prohairesis*-self:

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[19] 1.14.6; 2.8.10, where the plural 'gods' is used.

[20] 1.1.12; 1.17.27; 2.8.11.

[21] All translations are my own, made with the intention to render the Greek as literally as possible.

[22] 1.12.26; 1.14.10; 1.20.16; 2.5.13; 2.5.25-26; 2.10.3; 2.10.5; 4.1.78; 4.7.6-7. A similar distinction is made by Sorabji (2006, 182): '[...] the student is to be narrowed down to his will, and his will to what is under its control. And the agent who does the narrowing is the embodied person who walks the streets at dawn.' However, for Sorabji the body-soul compound is the 'total entity' and *prohairesis* only an aspect of the whole (187).

[23] Only rarely is the cosmos spoken of in terms applicable to God. In 1.12.14 someone blames the cosmos for his misfortunes; in *Diss. Frg.* 3 [Stob. 4.44.66] everything obeys and serves the cosmos. In 1.9.1, 6 the attribute κόσμιος ('citizen of the world/belonging to the world') is explained with the fact that humans have their origin from God. On the other hand, there are passages in which God seems to be separated from the cosmos as something which he has produced (4.7.6) and has use for in a specific state (1.29.29). However, also the cosmos itself may have use for something (3.24.94 χρείαν ἔσχεν). Vanhaegendoren 2004, 506 concludes: 'Mit dem Kosmos ist Gott somit auf keinen Fall identisch.' See also Radice 1982, 41-3 and below, n. 37 and n. 42.

[24] 2.5.13-14; 3.24.10; 3.24.92-4; 4.1.106.

[25] 2.5.24-26; 2.10.5; 4.7.6-7.

> Don't you know, how minute a part [you are] in comparison to the whole? But only with regard to the body, since with regard to reason you are in no way inferior to the gods nor even smaller. The size of reason is assessed not by length or height, but by beliefs. (1.12.26)

Nor does the relation between *prohairesis*-self (part) and God (whole) seem to be a causal one, in such a way that the part would be a sub-cause of the whole and thus unable to become active as a cause against or independently of it. Epictetus asserts that Zeus cannot overcome a *prohairesis* (1.1.23), not even the *prohairesis* of a fool.[26]

So far, we have seen two reasons why *prohairesis*-selves would *not* be parts of God at all: in terms of capacity and quality they are, at least potentially, equal to or coextensive with God; as causes, they are independent and act separately. And there is yet a third understanding of the relation between God and human selves that also seems to preclude a part-whole relation in the proper sense. Men are described as sons of Zeus;[27] human selves are thus genealogically related to God.[28] Epictetus presents it as common Stoic knowledge that 'seeds have fallen from God [...] into all that is born and grown on earth, primarily, however, into the rational beings [...]' (1.9.4-5). In other passages, he calls human souls, humans or selves 'detached portions' (ἀποσπάσματα) of God.[29] It is very likely that this word is a technical term. Zeno is said to have defined it as 'a part and detached portion of the soul' of the parent, and in other Stoic texts the word always indicates detached portions of God that are humans or their minds.[30] Often, this is taken as reference to 'seed-descriptions' (λόγοι σπερματικοί), which are inside all bodies and living beings of the cosmos and, at the same time, contained in the divine cosmos and its cosmic λόγος, the active principle as a whole.[31] However, the term ἀπόσπασμα seems to point to a different relation. It is not used with regard to non-rational beings, which also have λόγοι σπερματικοί, and the literal meaning of ἀπόσπασμα indicates that something is pulled away from a whole[32] so that, just as seed in the ordinary sense of the word, it is no longer part of the whole but detached as a separate entity.

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[26] That this is true also of fools can be seen from passages such as 4.6.5-6 and 4.9.18, where Epictetus states God's inability to make people wise or happy, *i.e.* make them have the right beliefs. Beliefs are the exclusive possession of each individual human (4.7.35; see also 4.2 below). In 4.1.100 the objects of *prohairesis* (προαιρετικά) are exempt from the circle of destruction and reconstruction. See also Sorabji 2006, 191-2.

[27] 1.13.3-4; 2.14.27; 3.24.95; 4.1.154; Heracles is the mythical hero that exemplifies this relationship: 2.16.45; 3.24.16. – God is not described in motherly terms but clearly as father (πατήρ), and there is no passage where Epictetus refers to women as God's daughters. Of course, this does not mean that the theory does not apply to women as well, but he never expresses the idea in such a gender-neutral manner.

[28] 1.9.11; 1.9.13; 2.8.11 (συγγένεια).

[29] 1.14.6; 1.17.27; 2.8.11.

[30] Zeno in [Galen], *Defin. medic.* 94, 19.370-1 Kühn (SVF 1.128, 2.742); Reydams-Schils 2005a, 124; further discussion and references in Wildberger 2006, 228-9 with note 1128. Most scholars do not assume a more specific meaning of the term but treat it as equivalent with other expressions for parts of God. According to Long 2002, ἀποσπάσματα are 'literally "offshoots" of God, parts of God that God has assigned to be the mind or self of each person' (145) and 'integral parts' (148). Does this imply that God without these offshoots would be incomplete? Algra (2007; compare already Bonhöfer 1894, 78-9) proposes a non-biological interpretation of the 'father-son' relationship between God and man (45-6): God is 'father' as a providential cause that endows humans with reason; humans are 'sons' if they 'exhibit a special [*i.e.* filial] attitude to god' (46). This reading complements the one proposed here. Taking the descriptions in a more literal, biological sense has, however, two advantages: it explains why God is the father of *all* human beings, not just those who have a filial attitude towards him, and it explains *why* humans should have this filial attitude. In a later article (2009a) Algra explains ἀπόσπασμα more precisely as 'in a literal and physical sense a derived part' of the same kind (365), but also 'a separate, individuated substance, not just a continuous part' (367-8). According to Tieleman (2002, 193) ἀπόσπασμα, when applied to humans, refers to the seed after it has been detached from the parent's body.

[31] For a more detailed discussion and references see Wildberger 2006, 205-8.

[32] This is confirmed by Epictetus' use of ἀποσπάω in a non-technical sense (1.23.2; 1.25.10; 2.4.8; 4.1.112).

## 2.2 The evidence of *Discourse* 1.14

We have seen, that humans are detached causally, at least in the sense that they have become independent causal agents. Are they also spatially detached? This is a question difficult to answer when interpreting Stoics in general, but even more so when reading Epictetus. The texts we have do not offer extensive descriptions of the cosmos's physical make-up, and it is not unlikely that sometimes we are dealing with figurative speech. When God and humans are separate, the human being has come from God (2.8.11; 3.24.95) and, as it seems, from heaven. Seed has fallen down into the bodies on earth (1.9.4; 1.13.3). God is looking down from heaven (1.30.1), while humans are looking up to God and the divine (1.13.5), expecting to shed their bodily weight in death and return home to the heavens and God (1.9.11, 13-14).

This latter passage, in particular, is strongly reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedo*. However, even such allusions do not help to clarify the question because Plato can also be read in a Stoicising sense. While Plato has Socrates visualize a radically dualist conception of body and soul in figurative language, many Stoics regarded the ascent of the leading part of a sage's soul as a physical reality.[33] Similarly, the use of the word 'place' (χώρα) is ambiguous when Epictetus, again imitating Socrates in the *Phaedo*, adhorts a (fictitious) youth not to take his life but stay at the 'place' (χώρα) assigned to him by God (1.9.16). A Platonist would read χώρα in the common translated sense of 'task' or 'role'; a Stoic could also understand the more literal sense of physical location.[34]

There is one section, however, in which Epictetus seems to discuss the spatio-temporal position of God and the physics of the relation between God and his detached portions. In *Discourse* 1.14 Epictetus has been asked to make plausible the idea that God oversees each single action performed by a person. Epictetus gives an answer in two parts, arguing first that it is physically possible for God to perceive every detail in his creation (1-11) and then that God is also present inside humans (12-17). The first argument develops from two concpetions that Epictetus takes for granted as common and well-known Stoic tenets: that 'all things are unified' (ἡνῶσθαι τὰ πάντα) and that there is 'co-affection' (συμπάθεια) between them. In traditional Stoic physics something is 'unified' if it has one single *pneuma*[35] that permeates it and holds it together (συνέχειν). There is only one such *pneuma* capable of unifying and holding together the cosmos as a whole: God, the active principle of the world.[36] Epictetus could therefore argue that God is everywhere in the cosmos and so perceives everything, pointing out that God can also be regarded as the soul of the cosmos. However, in the extant texts, Epictetus never describes God as such a cosmic psyche and only sometimes refers to him as 'nature (φύσις) of the whole'.[37] Here in *Discourse* 1.14, he offers a more complex argument that implies a specific location of God in the world: God in the proper sense, he who is called ὁ θεός or Zeus, seems to reside in heaven.

Epictetus hightlights the special case of co-affection between heaven and earth, as if it were necessary to explain how someone in heaven can be aware of what happens on earth. Things

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[33] Hoven 1971; Algra 2009a; 369-72; further references in Wildberger 2006, 223-5.

[34] Epictetus often blends the two meanings, e.g. 1.2.26; 1.9.16; 4.1.109.

[35] This is yet another untranslatable and highly debated Stoic term. I understand it as referring to God as a whole, the shares of God that constitute individual bodies, the Stoic elements air and fire and god-matter mixtures that belong to the expansion range of these two elements (Wildberger 2006, 22-4. 60-80. 208-40).

[36] Chrysippus in Alex. Aphr. *Mixt.* 216,14-17 Bruns (SVF 2.473); further references in Wildberger 2006, 16-17. Compare also 4.1.102.

[37] Long 2002, 143 n. 2 and, *e.g.*, 1.16.4; 1.16.9; 1.19.60; 1.20.16. It is not always clear whether the word is applied to an individual nature or to cosmic nature. That the cosmos has a φύσις means that he is a living being, at least at the level of plant life. Radice 1982, 58 observes a 'superiorità di Dio sulla natura per ciò che concerne gli aspetti cosmologici, ed una sostanziale identità fra i due termini per ciò che riguarda l'aspetto provvidenzíale e la sfera dei rapporti con l'uomo.' – On God as the soul of the cosmos see Wildberger 2006, 20 with notes.

on earth, also human bodies, are affected by the phases and movements of the moon and the sun (4-5), and plants undergo regular changes initiated by God.

> From where does [it come about] in such a regular fashion, as if by order of God, that plants blossom when he tells them to, grow buds when he tells them, bring forth fruit when he tells them, let them ripen, and again wait and rest when he tells them to throw off [their fruit] and shed their leaves, to gather themselves in themselves and wait quietly and rest? (1.14.3)

In the quoted passage Epictetus does not explain a causal mechanism. The 'order' of God is introduced as a comparison (καθάπερ) that leaves it open how exactly the plants learn and do what God 'tells them to'. Nevertheless, it is clear that the affection is transmitted spatially from one place above to another, on earth below, and this fact is also enhanced by the repeated use of the local interrogative adverb πόθεν (3, 4).

Later on, Epictetus compares God's access to everything in the world with the sun's ability to shed light all over the world.

> And God should not be able to oversee all things, to be present with all and receive some kind of transmission from all of them? So the sun is able to illuminate such a big part of all the world, leaving only a small [area] unilluminated, as much as can be covered by the shadow cast by the earth, but the one who has made even the sun and leads him in a circle, as a small part of himself in comparison to the whole, that one should *not* be capable of perceiving all things? (1.14.9-10)

Epictetus takes up the idea that the cosmos is a unified body in which all parts are co-affected, as the term 'transmission' (διάδοσις) seems to indicate. It occurs in a Stoic argument for the existence of God in which the influence of celestial bodies on the sea, the atmosphere and beings on earth is used as evidence that the cosmos is a unified and not just a composite body. Only in a unified body, the anonymous Stoic argues, is such co-affection or affection 'by transmission' (κατὰ διάδοσιν) possible.[38] One such instance of transmission is the communication between the leading part of the soul and the senses or other parts of the same soul.[39]

That Epictetus is thinking about some spatially extended connection that can relay information to or from God is also supported by the example of the sun whose light permeates the atmosphere. Interestingly, he calls the sun 'a small part of [God] in comparison to the whole'. As we have seen, the human soul-body compound is no such part of God, but only contains a part of God. The sun, on the other hand, is fully part of God and led by him in a circle. If we take this literally, God, *i.e.* the whole of which the sun is a part and by which it is led in a circular motion,[40] is the heaven.

This is the closest Epictetus ever comes to describing God in the specific Stoic sense of the leading part or mind of the cosmos, which was identified with the ether, the fiery outer layer of the cosmos, or the purest uttermost part of it.[41] Just as the leading part of a human soul is in touch with the whole soul-body compound that it perceives and directs, so God as the leading

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[38] Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.79-80 (SVF 2.1013). In *Math.* 9.256-7 διάδοσις implies complete blending, *i.e.* that one body permeates the other and does not just touch it from the outside. That passage is, however, not of Stoic origin, nor was διάδοσις an exclusively Stoic term. Further parallels, *e.g.*, Cic. *Nat. deor.* 2.19 are listed in Dobbin 1998, 151. Radice 1982, 80-3 points to the 'automatic' character of διάδοσις.

[39] On διάδοσις as a technical term in this sense see Tieleman 2002, 190-2. Laurand 2005, 525-6 points out that Epictetus in *Discourse* 1.14 is less interested in the co-affection between single parts of the cosmos but explains how these parts are perceived by a single agent. I only disagree with his designation of the agent as 'un tout agent', which he then identifies with the active principle ('la raison agissant dans la matière du cosmos').

[40] Radice 1982, 36 n. 34 and p. 87-9 refutes readings according to which 'the whole' is the cosmos and not God.

[41] Wildberger 2006, 22-3 with further references.

part of the world is in touch with, directs and, of course, perceives everything that happens in the cosmos. In this sense, then, God and humans (whether soul-body compounds or *prohairesis*-selves) would be spatially separate but intimately connected through the active, all-pervading principle of the cosmos that other Stoics, but not Epictetus, also call God.[42]

However, it is exactly in this *Discourse* that Epictetus insists that our souls are not only in touch (συναφεῖς) and connate (συμφυεῖς) with God, but also his parts and interwoven with him (1.14.6). The use of the term ἀπόσπασμα indicates that Epictetus is here referring to the leading parts of human souls or to their *prohairesis*, *i.e.* the human self in the narrower sense. The imagery of binding or braiding as an expression for the particular relationship of God and rational beings reoccurs in another, particularly cryptic passage that also discusses humans as beings that contain seeds of God (1.9.4-5). According to that passage, seeds of God have primarily fallen into rational beings (λογικά) because they are the only ones whose nature it is 'to partake (κοινωνεῖν) with God of a companionship, being interwoven [with him?] according to [by?/through?] reason'.[43]

There are at least two possible conclusions one can draw from these passages about the relationship of God and human selves. One possibility is to read them as references to [a] a functional or qualitative relationship of parts and whole, that might also have a spatial dimension. Epictetus states that the οὐσία of God is 'mind, knowledge, right reason' (2.8.2). We may take οὐσία as referring to the essence, the essential features of God.[44] Then we could say that humans are parts of God in a qualitative sense, insofar as they have the same essential features. If, on the other hand, we take οὐσία as substance, we could say that [b] humans are parts of God, insofar God is, or extends over, all that is rational in the world. This latter reading is confirmed by a reference to the *scala naturae*, the hierarchy of beings, and the local adverbs used in the context:[45] if one wishes to find something good, one must look for it where God is, *i.e.* in rational beings, not in plants or speechless animals.[46] According to this latter reading [b], God would not be one single unified body but bits of rational *pneuma* spread out all over the cosmos, wherever there is a some rational animal.

However, the passage (1.9.4-5) seems also to indicate [c] a social community between God and humans, for which humans are qualified by their specific make-up as rational animals (λογικά). Humans have reason in common with the gods (1.3.3), and this reason endows them with citizenship of the cosmic polis.[47] As in 4.1.102, the imagery of interweaving might therefore point to a social bond and not to some physical or qualitative connection. Their rationality, which includes *parakolouthēsis*, allows humans to contemplate, appreciate, assent to and thus share in God's perfect management of the cosmos. Man has come into the world

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[42] Algra 2007, 36 proposes to frame the question of theism and pantheism in terms of Stoic conceptions: pantheism would correspond to an identification of God with the cosmos (which Epictetus rejects or downplays; see n. 23); theists would identify God with the active principle that permeates the cosmos. Long 2002, 148 remarks that Epictetus describes God as mind rather than the cosmos, but understands this as a reference to 'universal mind' (= the active principle?) and, similar to Radice 1982, assumes that Epictetus simply refrained from explaining (and thus conceiving [149-52]) God's 'presence throughout nature [...] in physical terms'.

[43] 1.9.5 ὅτι κοινωνεῖν μόνον ταῦτα πέφυκεν τῷ θεῷ τῆς συναναστροφῆς κατὰ τὸν λόγον ἐπι<πε>πλεγμένα. The reading τῷ θεῷ is the result of a correction (maybe from pl. to sg.) in the archetype. Compare also 2.14.27 and Radice 1982, 95.

[44] This is the reading preferred by the translators Oldfather ('true nature'), Souilhé ('Qu'est donc Dieu en réalité?') and Dobbin ('divine nature').

[45] On the scala see Wildberger 2006, 208-43 with further references.

[46] 2.8.1-4. See in particular 1 ὅπου ἡ οὐσία τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐκεῖ εἶναι καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ; 3 ἐνταῦθα [...] ζήτει [...]. The expression ἐν τῇ παραλλαγῇ τῇ πρὸς τὰ ἄλογα, on the other hand, supports a reading in which spatial expressions are metaphors for conceptual relations.

[47] See n. 23 and 2.5.26; 2.10.4; 3.22.4; 3.24.11; 4.1.155; Wildberger 2006, 254-60 with further references. In 2.20.7 Epicureans are criticised for denying that 'among rational beings there is a natural partnership' (φυσικὴ κοινωνία τοῖς λογικοῖς πρὸς ἀλλήλους). The sociable nature of rational beings is asserted, *e.g.*, in 1.19.13.

'to live on earth with a little bit of flesh, to contemplate God's management, to partake in his sacred procession and to celebrate the festival with him for a little while'.[48] Here, human selves are parts of God insofar as they mirror, confirm and, so to speak, retrace God's activities, thus introjecting them as true perceptions and volitions about what is happening in the world. Similarly, Epictetus in *Discourse* 1.14.7-9 presents human cognition as an argument *a minore ad maius* to prove that God must have some such cognitive faculty too. Human selves would then be parts of God in that their actions and thoughts somehow overlap with the corresponding thoughts and actions of God himself.

Readings [a] and [b], the first two of the three readings suggested here, can be more easily aligned with the second argument that Epictetus proffers in the same *Discourse* to persuade his addressee that God perceives everything one does or thinks, namely that 'God (ὁ θεός) is inside [us] and is our divine spirit (δαίμων)'.[49] This divine spirit is a human being's reason that is part of all the reason in the cosmos; as something rational and thus sharing the substance and/or essence of God, it is divine and has the power of *parakolouthēsis*. On the other hand, the nature of the good is such that, once it has been attained, all three readings coincide. If a human swears the oath of allegiance to 'this god here' (1.14.15), *i.e.* his inner divine spirit, he commits himself to exactly the loyal behaviour that is required by God as the manager of the whole. Observing and following that manager, assenting to the truth he observes and wanting the things that happen, a human cannot help to carry God around within himself (2.16.33) also in the third sense.

To sum up what has been worked out so far: God can be regarded as both outside and inside the self. Spatially and functionally, God is inside the self insofar the self is part of cosmic reason and the *pneuma* that is the bearer of cosmic reason and its faculties. But God is also outside the self both insofar as he is located in heaven and the self within a body on earth and insofar as he as well as his management of the world are objects of human perception. This perception is also called *parakolouthēsis* but different from *parakolouthēsis* as self-perception. Only the body-soul compound, not the *prohairesis*-self is called a part of the cosmos, and as a cause, the self appears to be more independent of both the cosmos and God than one would expect if something were just a part of a whole. The rest of this paper will be devoted to a better understanding of the self as a cause which is either independent or embedded and bound-up in a whole.


3. Formation of the self by God: nature, nurture and necessity

I will start with a discussion of the manner in which God forms, *i.e.* creates and determines the shape of a human self. We have already seen that human selves are a special type of divine seed, a detachment of the *pneuma* that is God, the father of human beings. A seed (σπέρμα) was defined by the Stoics as 'that which is capable of generating beings like those from which it was discharged'; as Chrysippus had clarified, a seed in the Stoic sense was only the *pneuma* in what was called a seed or semen in ordinary language (Diog. Laert. 7.158-9 [SVF 2.741]). Epictetus' characterisation of human selves as seeds and detached portions, then, indicates that God shapes human selves by giving them a certain type of *pneuma*, their soul, that is capable of developing in a specific manner. In fact, the natural make-up of humans is an important parameter for the formation of their selves. This make-up comprises far more than what is usually listed under the heading of rationality. In Epictetus' discourses, human selves are delimited and determined by a detailed construction grid. The faculties of *parakolouthēsis* and *prohairesis* are only part of their 'preparation' (παρασκευή)[50] or

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[48] 4.1.104. Compare also, *e.g.*, 1.16.21; 3.5.10; 4.7.7.
[49] 1.14.14. On 'internal demons' see Algra 2009a, 365-9. For Epictetus see in particular Long 2002, 163-8.
[50] 1.2.30-1; 1.6.37 and 43; 3.22.107 and 109; 4.8.41-3.

constitution (κατασκευή),[51] to which they are appropriated; they also have a rich selection of powers (δυνάμεις)[52] and 'starting points' (ἀφορμαί)[53] that make them capable and inclined to perform certain acts and behave in a specific manner.

As a result, certain unchangeable laws are, so to speak, wired into human nature.[54] For example, a human being's use, evaluation and reaction to an object will necessarily be determined by the belief he has formed about it (1.3.4), and this faculty of forming beliefs is further restricted by an inability to accept as true what is perceived as contradictory (2.26.3). If something appears as a good, then the agent has no choice but to go for it, just as he would necessarily move away from it if it appeared as something bad (3.3.1-4). Necessarily, too, the good of human beings must be located in their self, *i.e.* their *prohairesis,* since no animal can help but love itself and want its own benefit (see n. 5). Humans have to obtain their good from themselves and no one else[55] but cannot achieve it for themselves without acting sociably at the same time (1.19.13-5). Even the precise nature of their good is predetermined for humans: they have been designed by God for a certain purpose.[56] Toward this goal they are steered by an interaction between the driving forces provided by their natural make-up (2.20.15) and a second factor that serves as a redirecting or inhibiting corrective for such impulses. This second factor is necessity, both internal and external. External necessity, *e.g.* the unavoidable reality of death, must be recognized and accepted.[57] Humans cannot but fail if they strive to become masters of what is outside the causal power of their *prohairesis* (ἀπροαίρετα) and recoil from what they cannot avoid. If they do not stop such attempts and turn in the right direction, internal necessity, the unchangeable laws described above, will unavoidably lead to the concomitant punishment: since human nature is unable to bear failure in striving or recoiling, they must inevitably suffer mental pain and unhappiness.[58]

But humans need not just stumble around, bumping into impossibilities and searching for alternative routes through open spaces of possibility like someone trying to reach the other side of cluttered room in the dark. There is a third factor, that allows them to shape their selves according to the design envisioned for them by God. This factor is learning and education, in short: philosophy.[59] Shaping a proper human self requires knowledge.

> If someone does not know who he is and for which purpose he came into being; in what kind of world he is here and in community with whom; what is good and bad and what beautiful and ugly – reflecting (παρακολουθῶν) it neither by reason nor proof –; [if he does not know] what is true and what false, being unable to tell them apart, then he will neither strive according to nature nor recoil nor have impulses nor set himself a purpose nor assent nor reject nor defer [judgement]. All in all, he will walk around deaf and blind, appearing to be someone but, in fact, a nobody. (2.24.19)

This is so, because humans do not have a finished constitution (κατασκευή). Not everything is unchangeably fixed and determined in them. They have a natural preparation (παρασκευή)

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[51] 1.6.10, 15-18; 1.17.27; 1.19.13; 2.8.18; 2.10.4; 3.6.10; 3.24.63.

[52] Examples of such powers are a sense of decency, natural loyalty, love for others, altruism and tolerance (2.10.21-3) or greatness of soul, courage and nobility (1.6.28, 37 and 40; 1.12.30-31; 4.1.109; 4.5.14). There is no definite number of powers, but a hierarchy with the power of *prohairesis* at the top (2.23.5-22).

[53] 1.6.37 and 43; 1.29.39; 3.5.8; 3.24.3; 4.1.51; 4.7.7; 4.10.14.

[54] Long 2002, 187-8; Bénatouïl 2009, 174-5.

[55] 1.29.4. See also n. 26 and Algra 2007, 44.

[56] 2.14.27 ἔργον; 1.16.15-18.

[57] 1.27.7; 2.6.16; 2.11.1; 2.13.8; 3.22.101; 3.24.10; 3.24.28; 4.1.78; 4.1.90; 4.1.110; 4.10.11.

[58] 2.13; 1.4.19; 1.19.16; 1.27.13; 2.1.12; 2.2.25; 2.6.16; 2.16.47; 2.17.17; 3.1.9; 3.19.1; 3.22.61; 4.1.56-61; 4.4.32-8; 4.5.27; 4.7.10-11; 4.10.6; 4.13.21. See also Algra 2007, 44-5 on passages where this is presented as a punishment by God.

[59] A recent discussion of this topic in imperial Stoicism is Reydams-Schils 2010.

given to them by God, but this preparation must be completed by further self-preparation.[60] Everything they need is there, but their inborn internal structure offers only starting points from which to begin, among them starting points for 'finding the truth', for answering the questions raised in the quoted passage by means of reasoning and reflection, and for completing God's design once it has been understood.[61]

From these starting points, the philosopher will gain an understanding of the factors discussed above; he will become aware of his power, but also his weaknesses and the limitiations set for him by internal and external necessity (2.11.1; 2.17.17). Cutting back his striving and recoiling to that which is an attainable object of his *prohairesis*, he will develop, augment and strengthen the powers that he has.[62] In particular, reflection will show him what he *can* do and thus reveal the only safe and satisfying way through the obstacle course of mortal life: that one wants everything to happen exactly as it does. The job of the philosopher is 'to harmonize his own volition with what is happening, so that nothing that happens happens against our will and nothing that does not happen does not happen although we wanted it to'.[63]

## 4. Self and individuality

Here is not the place to expand on the well-discussed question why and how Epictetus arrives at this description of correct, educated agency. Instead, I wish to devote this part of my paper to the question of how such a conception of humans as mere assenters to the will of another is compatible with the idea of a self. As we have seen, the formation of a human self is determined by three factors: the natural make-up given by God; internal and external necessity; and education. Of these only the third factor is something for which the agent himself, *i.e.* the self inside, is responsible. But now it turns out that this inside activity has only one purpose: to align the inside exactly with the outside. If the self thus becomes nothing more than a mirror image of what happens in the world outside, is this still a self at all, or does the philosopher, in fact, learn to no longer have a self of his own? And if this mirror-self still *is* a self, what could be the purpose and meaning of the concept? Why would Epictetus insist again and again on the distinction between inside and outside, me and other, instead of just distinguishing the possible from the impossible and advising us to go only for that which is possible?

There is one question I do not wish to raise since it is raised and answered by Epictetus himself. An interlocutor objects that freedom cannot consist in wanting that which is happening. On the contrary, the interlocutor would want those things to happen that seem right to him, however they might be like (1.12.11). This, according to Epictetus would be madness. One would not write the letters of a word in an arbitrary order either, and similarly, there is a right way for things to happen in the world. No one knows better what should happen than God, the one who has designed the cosmos and manages it (1.12.12-16). In the perfect Stoic world, which is ordered by God *qua* artful Reason, Providence and Law, it makes no sense to wish for things to be different from how they are. Changing this world would not be desirable according to Epictetus.

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[60] 1.1.31; 1.2.32; 1.20.13; 1.30.6; 1.30.7; 2.6.3; 2.6.23; 3.10.6; 3.13.6; 4.1.81; 4.4.11; 4.4.30.

[61] 4.1.51; 4.7.7; 4.10.14. Bénatouïl 2009, 179 observes that Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius 'conçoivent leur entreprise simultanément comme un perfectionnement immanent de nos capacités naturelles et comme la réalisation d'un projet divin'. He also raises the question whether the natural make-up is sufficient for attaining perfection in every individual (159-61). However, even if it were insufficient, individual agency and responsibility would still consist in using one's natural faculties as best as one can.

[62] 2.18.1, 7; 2.20.21.

[63] 2.14.7. See *e.g.* also 1.12.12-19; 1.17.14, 28; 2.6.9-15; 2.10.5; 2.14.7-13; 2.16.4, 47; 2.17.22-3; 2.17.29; 3.5.9-10; 3.24.96-103. 8; 4.1.99-101, 145; 4.3.10; 4.4.21, 29-32; 4.6.21; 4.7.20.

In Stoic and Epictetus' terms we must rather ask how a *prohairesis*-self can still be a self at all, if as a faculty it is a product of God's design and if, in the ideal case, the thoughts and volitions as well as the resulting actions and mental states this faculty produces should follow, affirm and reproduce God's thoughts and descriptions (*qua* Reason), volitions (*qua* Providence) and directives (*qua* Law).[64] The answer is to be found in the nature and the source of that agreement between man and God. As we have seen, the *prohairesis*-self is partly a God-given state (that one possesses a certain faculty which functions in a certain way) and partly the thoughts, volitions and actions produced by this faculty: assent, impulse and striving with its negative counterpart recoiling. It is this latter component of the *prohairesis*-self where education comes to bear and where, in the previous passage, we had located the core of human responsibility and thus also individuality. Unlike the faculty of *prohairesis*, the self as such prohairetic *activity* is not a state but a continuous series of processes by which the agent reacts to incoming appearances. This fact, I would suggest, is the basis for attributing individuality even to a self that perfectly mirrors the world and God's volitions outside. The self's specific individuality consists in its agency as the one, and the only one, who is capable of bringing about alignment with the world outside in an *ongoing process* – not only when an individual learns to become a perfect mirror of God by way of education but also after such perfection has been attained. Even then, the perfect self has to maintain its perfection by continuous performance of the right acts that the perfected faculty of *prohairesis* is designed to perform. In short, a *prohairesis*-self is not just a certain content or form that could be attributed to various individuals at the same time, but an activity that requires separate performing agents if it is to happen independently and in addition to the activity of God.

## 4.1 The self as a process: the image of the statue in *Discourse* 2.8

That selfhood according to Epictetus is not a punctual state or condition but a continuous process of completion, perfection and maintenance by an internal cause is nicely illustrated with the famous image of the self as a statue, which ultimately derives from Xenophon's Socrates but receives an original treatment in *Discourse* 2.8. What is important to note is that Epictetus actually gives us not only one but a sequence of four different images that gradually unfold various aspects of his conception of self.[65] He begins with an illustration of the idea that humans (*i.e.* the human body-soul compounds) have a god inside them: their divine spirit, which is their *prohairesis*-self.

> If there were a sculpture of the god (τοῦ θεοῦ)[66] nearby, you would not dare to do any of the things you are doing right now. With the god himself present inside, overseeing and listening to everything, aren't you ashamed to think and act like this, numb as you are to your own nature and hated by god (θεοχόλωτε)?[67] (2.8.14)

The basic idea at this point is that people tend to and should behave respectfully in the presence of a god. Just as the *prohairesis*-self of the interlocutor might not yet be a particularly fine, high-quality specimen, the statue is respected not because of any particular quality of its own. It is to be respected because of what it represents and stands for: a god. Accordingly, Epictetus demands even more respectful behaviour if that which is present is, in

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[64] Discussion and evidence for the different mental activities implied in the various names of God is to be found in Wildberger 2006. The alignment of human action with divine volition (βούλησις) is part of Chrysippus' description of the end (Diog. Laërt. 7.88 [SVF 3,4]). See also Reydams-Schils 2005b.

[65] Coulardeau 1903, 243-4 and Algra 2009b, 245 discuss it as one single image.

[66] In principle, this could be read as a reference to God, but it is more likely that the article has an anaphoric function here, referring back to 'a god' that the interlocutor is carrying around inside himself (2.18.12) and 'some [god] outside made of silver or gold' (13).

[67] He is hated by god because he, *i.e.* his god inside, does not like him in this condition and because he, *i.e.* his god inside, maltreats and harms himself by behaving so badly.

fact, a god and not just an image of one, and if the distance between the divine observer (the statue or self) and the agent is reduced to zero.

In the next passage, a further actor enters the stage: the artist. The interlocutor, on the other hand, is now identified with the statue, *i.e.* with his own self.

> But if you were the sculpture of Phidias, his Athena or Zeus, you wouldn't forget who you are and who's the artist, and if you had some sense, you would try not to do anything unworthy of the one whose work you are or of yourself and avoid appearing in an undignified posture to those who see you. Yet now that Zeus has made you, because of this you won't care about how you present yourself? And is the one artist in any way comparable to the other or one artwork to the other? (2.8.18-19)

Again, the main issue is Epictetus' exhortation to behave well out of respect for someone or something. The objects of respect are now two: both the statue and the artist. The reason for being respectful is twofold as well: the statue and the artist deserve respect because of the art in both the producer and the artwork he has produced; the other reason for respect is divinity: the statue of Phidias represents a god, while the artist who has sculpted the human self is a god himself. In this section of the comparison, the self is valuable and worthy of respect not only because it is a god but also because it embodies and demonstrates the art of a god, its divine creator.

By identifying the artwork with the self and suggesting that the artwork should assume dignified postures, Epictetus begins to indicate that, unlike a statue, the self is not a just an immobile, fixed state but something that implies certain activities. This is developed in the next step, where the valuable artwork is entrusted to the self as its own curator that must continuously maintain the good state of the artwork.

> He has handed you over to yourself and says: 'I didn't have anyone in whom I could trust more than in you. Take care of this one here for me, keep him in his natural state: decent, loyal, sublime, undaunted, unaffected and imperturbable.' So, won't you take care of him? (2.8.23)

Epictetus thus clarifies the idea of respect introduced already at the first stage. The artwork must be kept in its natural state of decency (αἰδήμων), *i.e.* its sense of respect for self and others must be maintained. That the self behaves respectfully, beautifully and in the manner worthy of a work of God is the very quality that makes it so wonderful and valuable. As wonderful as a 'self-moving, breathing, appearance-using, evaluating' (20) sculpture might already be, the real beauty of this most perfect artwork consists in just the excellences the curator both has to maintain in the entrusted artwork and needs himself in order to do so. In other words, if the statue-self were not given to the curator-self, so that it could demonstrate and practice its virtues, it would not be the artwork, and self, it is.

This idea that a self must be maintained in a continuous process and that this process constitutes both the existence and value of the self is further developed in the fourth and last step. Epictetus imagines the remonstrations that such high-flown talk about oneself as Zeus' masterpiece might provoke and confesses that, indeed, he is not yet worthy of it.

> I'm still not confident in what I've learnt and assented to, I still fear my own weakness. But wait, let me gather confidence: then you'll see me with the look and the posture befitting [a god], then I'll show you the masterpiece, when it has been perfected and polished. (2.8.24-5)

As we learn now, the statue is still unfinished. What exactly the statue looks like is not described, but we know that Zeus must have provided the basic natural design: a human *prohairesis*-self with a certain constitution and preparation, with powers and starting points. It

is the job of that self itself to shape this roughly forged object, and there are a range of possibilities what it could become. The speaker whose voice Epictetus assumes in this passage has devoted himself to education and seems to be a man far in progress, someone who is almost a sage and a god. In other cases, where the self has made different choices, the final product might turn out to be a fox or a worm.[68]

It is both as a cause of a process and this embodied process itself that the self has an important function in Epictetus' thought. The shape of a perfect self is predetermined by God in the sense that a person's natural make-up together with the internal and external necessities deriving from that make-up and the nature of the world in which the individual is placed determine what would be a correct choice for that self in each particular situation.[69] However, it is the self that must make the choice and suffer failure and imperfection if it chooses incorrectly. For immobile perfection there would be no need to differentiate an independent self from the cosmic continuum. But that which God has made is not unmoving or finished once and for all. The execution of this artwork and its maintenance are the tasks of the *prohairesis*-self, *i.e.* of the artwork itself, and not of God. It is precisely the fact that it has been designed to be self-shaping and self-maintaining in this manner that makes it different from everything else and something that has an inside and an outside.

## 4.2 The essential particularity of the self

Why this is so becomes clearer if one considers how the *prohairesis*-self shapes itself, namely by accepting or rejecting appearances, *i.e.* that which Epictetus calls the use of appearances. In this act three aspects of individuation and selfhood can be observed: the causality and process discussed above; the opposition of inside and outside; and the concretisation of an ideal plan in the execution of an individual token. The appearance is the interface by which the self communicates with the outside world. Having or not having appearances, and also the kinds of appearances one has, is *not* in the power of the self and not part of *prohairesis*.[70] *Prohairesis* is the correct use of the appearances that happen to occur in the leading part of a soul. Others have discussed the implications of this conception of agency, including questions of subjectivity and constructivism.[71] The important point here is that the self must do more than just haughtily ignore what reaches it from outside or 'switch off the noise' as a Buddhist might recommend. There is no dissolution of the self in a more perfect whole, no fatalist resignation that doggedly accepts the load or disinterestedly lets things pass however they happen to turn out. The purpose and perfection of a *prohairesis*-self is something different: the enthusiastic acceptance of everything that happens as something good. It does not only bear adversities, it goes for them when it realizes that it is God's plan to have them happen to it (2.6.8-14). The proper function of a *prohairesis*-self is to *want* whatever is happening.

A. A. Long underscores 'the enthusiasm with which [Epictetus] commends obedience to God', which for him implies 'a literal association between the *person* of God and the individual self'.[72] It is clear that the *prohairesis*-self can only enter into such a personal and thus also social relation with God if it is a separate agent performing separate acts of volition. The mirror imagery is misleading in this respect: it does not make a difference whether the same thing is reflected in one or a thousand mirrors, or whether there exist one or a thousand

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[68] 1.3.7; 2.20.10; 4.1.142; 4.11.32.

[69] Compare Bénatouïl 2009, 174-5.

[70] 2.18.15-26 is a lively dramatisation of the self's struggle with impressions trying to force their way into it.

[71] See *e.g.* Bénatouïl 2006a, 2006b and 2009; Reydams-Schils 2005a, 26-7; Long 1996.

[72] 2002,147. It is this attitude that Colardeau 1903 identifies as Epictetus' unusually strong and personal 'sentiment religieux' (239-81). 'Pour lui, en effet, la vie est bonne, parce que Dieu est bon' (262). On Stoic ideas about God's love for humans and the friendship between God and the sage, see Wildberger 2006, 263-75.

identical statues. What human selves do when they agree with God is more than mere reproduction, as if millions of mindless dancers were imitating the movements of a master. The important difference is that humans successfully imitating God share his ideas and volitions. They know what they are doing and appreciate it. To use Epictetus' imagery: even if there is only one festival, there can now be many different visitors enjoying the event in addition to the one who has organised it.

Furthermore, as Jean-Baptiste Gourinat (2005, 110) points out, 'pour Épictète, dire de quelque chose qu'elle est *eph'hemin*, c'est seulement dire au pluriel de quelque chose qu'elle dépend de moi, et c'est seulement si un moi individuel peut en être la cause et la contrôler entièrement que nous disons de quelque chose qu'elle dépend de moi ou de nous. [...] seules les décisions individuelles sont au pouvoir d'un individu.' Turned the other way round, this means that Epictetus cannot conceive of responsibility and agency without, at the same time, imagining an individual self that, as a cause of its own, performs concrete, individual token actions. The activities of *prohairesis*, and thus of the self and that which is in our power, concern those areas (striving/recoiling, impulse and assent) in which humans exercise their faculty of choice.[73] Whenever a human being has an appearance, he must choose among three options: assent, rejection or deferral (2.24.19). If the appearance is rejected or deferred, nothing happens; it stays outside the self (1.18.19). If the appearance is assented to, it is allowed inside and becomes a belief, an impulse or an act of striving or recoiling. In this manner the preforged object made by God becomes the statue we see. It is the responsibility of the self and in its power either to make itself ugly by accepting the wrong appearances or to beautify itself (κοσμῆσαι) by using correctly whatever appearance comes its way.[74] Now, it is important to note, that this responsibility extends only to single, concrete token instances of a self having to decide whether it will take in this particular appearance. God did not make one ideal, perfect normative self of which the selves of human individuals are imperfect approximations.[75] Lacking particularity, such a universal normative self would lack essential characteristics of the self as Epictetus conceives of it and thus not be a self in his sense at all. Every single self, and also a perfect human self, is constituted both as an ongoing process and something unique. It is continuously built in its own singular manner from individual encounters this particular human being has with the world around him via the particular appearances produced in this particular human being's mind. For Epictetus there can only be individual selves continually constructing, maintaining and defining themselves through each single decision about where to set up the border between inside and outside and whether that which is presented to them from outside belongs to them or not.[76]

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[73] Gourinat 2005, 106. Bénatouïl 2009, 170 describes *prohairesis* as 'an acte ou [...] la faculté de choisir une conduite (générale ou particulière)'. While the choice might concern a general course of action, the prohairetic act itself is performed on single, concrete token appearances.

[74] 1.6.37; compare also 1.20.11. Long 2002, 172 interprets κοσμῆσαι as 'make a cosmos of myself'.

[75] Such a Platonic reading of Epictetus was proposed by Long 2002, 163-8 and commented upon by Algra 2007, 43 and 2009a, 366-7. Long arrives at his theory of the normative self mainly from two observations: the divine spirit sometimes appears different from the person addressed, and it appears as a righteous, supervising super-ego. The first problem can be solved if one assumes, as has been suggested here, that the body-soul compound can also be treated as the referent of 'I' and thus a self in a wider sense. The second phenomenon can be explained by the internal necessity arising from the fixed rules that are part of a human's natural make-up.

[76] My reading comes close to one of the two kinds of selves distinguished by Reydams-Schils 2005a: 'a general principle common to all adult human beings' and the selves of concrete individuals that function as mediators between internalised ideal and the reality of 'concrete life situations' (17). The problem with this kind of self is that it tends to dissolve, just as a good mediator would. After all, it is 'not its own final end' (13). But this is a consequence that Reydams-Schils accepts for the advantages that she sees (44): '[...] because the Stoics make room for the encounter between generally applicable regulative principles and concretely lived experiences, they are entitled to a notion of "self" to which the Platonist viewpoint cannot do justice.'

So, each time when in face of an adversity the self prays to God to lead it to whatever place he has assigned for it, it performs a *prohairetic* act that constitutes an answer to our initial question whether God is inside or outside the self: God's volition, that which was outside and 'God's business',[77] has become the self's own.[78]And by thus making God a part of itself, the self at the same time acknowledges that it is a part of God and belongs to him. Inside and outside, self and God, have become blended, paradoxically precisely *because* there is a separate self that can 'look up to God and say, "Make use of me from now on for whatever you want. I have the same views as you, I am yours"' (2.16.42 ).

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[77] 3.1.43; Long 2002, 153.
[78] Algra 2007, 48-50 explains such prayers in Epictetus as 'a way of telling oneself that one should follow the cosmic ordering' (49). This is true as long as the prayer appears as something one should learn and have 'ready at hand' (πρόχειρον). However, as soon as the prayer is actually spoken, it is an act of assent and endorsement of what God has brought about. For further discussion and references see Wildberger 2006, 294-9.

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