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A Disputed Fragment of Epictetus in Marcus Aurelius

JOHN SELLARS

In his 1908 OCT edition of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, J. H. Leopold proposed in a note that *Med.* 11.39 was likely to be a fragment from Epictetus: “locus omnino inter fragm. Epicteti recipiendus”.¹ However he offered no further comment. A number of editors since have repeated Leopold’s suggestion, while others have simply reported it without passing judgement.² One of these was H. Schenkl, who noted Leopold’s claim in the apparatus to his 1913 edition of the *Meditations* (“inter Epicteti fragmenta recipiendum esse censet Leopold”).³ Schenkl had not included the passage in the collection of fragments in his 1894 edition of Epictetus,⁴ but, in the light of Leopold’s remark, did include it in his revised 1916 edition of Epictetus, where it became ‘fr. 28a’.⁵ It is also to be found in Oldfather’s Loeb edition of Epictetus, based on Schenkl’s revised version, with Leopold and G. Breithaupt cited as authorities.⁶ Not everyone has accepted this attribution

¹ Leopold 1908.

² Those repeating it include Trannoy 1925, 134. Those simply reporting it include Theiler 1951, 344, “auch Epiktetfragment (Leopold)?”, and Dalfen 1987, 106, “inter Epicteti fragmenta recipiendum esse put. Leop.”.

³ See Schenkl 1913, 149.

⁴ Neither had previous editors, the most important of which was Schweighäuser 1799 (see vol. 3, 120 with 215).

⁵ Compare Schenkl 1894, 420, and Schenkl 1916, 472.

⁶ See Oldfather 1928, 2, 470: “Ascribed to Epictetus by Leopold and Breithaupt”. For the latter see Breithaupt 1913, 51.

however: in his commentary on the *Meditations* A. S. L. Farquharson insisted that “there is no adequate ground for making the ch. a fragment of Epict.”.⁷

What we have, then, is a series of assertions either for or against *Med.* 11.39 being a fragment of Epictetus, but little in the way of reasons for or against the attribution. This is in part to be expected given that the claims have generally been made in brief textual notes not suited to extended argument. In what follows I offer an argument in favour of attributing the fragment to Epictetus, that is, Arrian’s *Discourses of Epictetus*, of which we have four books out of a probable total of eight.⁸ First, I give the passage in question:⁹

‘Ο Σωκράτης ἔλεγεν· “τί θέλετε; λογικῶν ψυχὰς ἔχειν ἢ ἀλόγων;” “λογικῶν.”
 “τίνων λογικῶν; ὑγιῶν ἢ φαύλων;” “ὑγιῶν.” “τί οὖν οὐ ζητεῖτε;” “ὅτι ἔχομεν.”
 “τί οὖν μάχεσθε καὶ διαφέρεσθε;”

Socrates used to say: ‘What do you want? To have souls of rational or irrational beings?’ ‘Rational.’ ‘What rational beings, sound or inferior?’ ‘Sound.’ ‘Why don’t you seek them?’ ‘Because we have them.’ ‘Why then do you fight and disagree?’

⁷ Farquharson 1944, 881. He continues: “It seems rather to be an extract from a *Florilegium*”.

⁸ It is generally thought that Arrian’s *Discourses of Epictetus* was originally comprised of eight books. This is based on the statement in Photius, *Bibl. cod.* 58 (17b11-20 = test. 6 Schenkl 1916). Aulus Gellius’s reference to (and quote from) Book 5 is also often noted (*NA* 19.1.14 = fr. 9 Schenkl 1916). Photius also mentions another work in twelve books (*ibid.*), although his is usually taken to be mistaken. See further Souilhé 1975, xi-xix.

⁹ I quote both text and translation from Farquharson 1944, 234-5. The more recent critical edition in Dalfen 1987 prints ἔλεγε in place of ἔλεγεν but is otherwise the same. Because it is about Socrates, it is also printed in *SSR I C* 545.

The argument in favour of this being a fragment of Epictetus is based on its context within the *Meditations*. It follows immediately after a series of passages from Epictetus. *Med.* 11.33-36 are all quotations (not necessarily verbatim) from the *Discourses*,¹⁰ while *Med.* 11.37-38 are both established as otherwise unknown fragments from Epictetus (fr. 27 and 28 Schenkl) on the basis of their use of “he says” (ἐφη), which are taken to refer back to Epictetus’s name which appears in *Med.* 11.34 and 11.36.¹¹ In short, the texts assembled in *Med.* 11.33-38 all come from Epictetus. They are followed by our passage, *Med.* 11.39, the final chapter of Book 11. This could be either a standalone entry in Marcus’s notebook or a continuation of the immediately preceding series of passages from Epictetus. The text, as we can see, is a report of something Socrates is supposed to have said. As such, it looks very much like a quotation rather than a thought of Marcus’s own. Assuming that it is a quotation, there are two possibilities: either it is another quotation from Epictetus continuing the series in *Med.* 11.33-38 or it is a quotation from a completely different and unknown source tacked on at the very end of the book. The former seems more plausible.

It is also worth noting that the chapter divisions in the *Meditations* in use today date back only to Thomas Gataker’s edition of 1652. The *editio princeps* of 1559 contained no chapter divisions, while other editions predating Gataker’s used

¹⁰ Thus *Med.* 11.33 = *Diss.* 3.24.87 (not verbatim); *Med.* 11.34 = *Diss.* 3.24.88; *Med.* 11.35 = *Diss.* 3.24.91; *Med.* 11.36 = *Diss.* 3.22.105.

¹¹ Farquharson 1944, 881, credits this way of reading ἐφη (as referring to Epictetus) to Upton, and suggests that it might equally refer to Socrates. Farquharson points to a couple of passages in the spurious *Alc. II* in which ‘Socrates’ makes a Stoic-style division between the wise and foolish (139c, 145a). However, the immediate context in the *Meditations* makes Epictetus far more likely to be the subject. See also Upton 1741, vol. 2, 223 (ad *Diss.* 3.25.3).

different systems: the 1626 edition prepared by Amadeus Sally and the first to use numbered chapters divided Book 11 into 31 chapters rather than our present 39, while Meric Casaubon's translation of 1634 had 32 chapters and his edition of 1643 had 28. In the last of these, our *Med.* 11.36-39 are all a single chapter, "11.28", opening with the explicit reference to Epictetus in our 11.36. Casaubon's decision to group these texts together does not prove anything, of course, but it does illustrate the contingency of the chapter divisions in use since Gataker.¹² It is a modern editorial decision to separate 11.39 from its immediate predecessors. There is no firm reason, then, to insist that *Med.* 11.39 is distinct from the immediately preceding chapters, all of which are universally attributed to Epictetus. If, for instance, we were to take *Med.* 11.38-39 as a single text it would read:

‘So we are contending,’ he [Epictetus] said, ‘for no ordinary prize, but for whether we are to be sane or insane. Socrates used to say: ‘What do you want? To have souls of rational or irrational beings?’ ‘Rational.’ ‘What rational beings, sound or inferior?’ ‘Sound.’ ‘Why don’t you seek them?’ ‘Because we have them.’ ‘Why then do you fight and disagree?’ ’

There are two issues, then: first, whether *Med.* 11.39 is a fragment from Epictetus; and second, whether *Med.* 11.38-39 should be treated as a single passage. With regard to the first issue, I have suggested that the immediate context makes it likely

¹² One might also note that in the *editio princeps*, based on the now lost Palatine MS, *Med.* 11.38-39 run together as a single passage. However, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, this was inevitable given its corruption of the text from ἡ μή to εἰ μή at the end of *Med.* 11.38.

that the passage does come from Epictetus. Schenkl also pointed to a textual parallel with *Diss.* 3.22.37:¹³

τίνων ὄντων; φρονίμων ἢ ἀφρόνων; εἰ φρονίμων, τί αὐτοῖς πολεμεῖτε; εἰ ἀφρόνων, τί ὑμῖν μέλει;

Who are they? Wise men or foolish? If wise, why are you fighting with them? If foolish, why do you care?

Here we see Epictetus arguing in his own voice in a manner very similar to the Socrates in our passage. As to the second issue, it is much harder to judge whether *Med.* 11.38-39 originally formed a single passage taken from Epictetus. It is possible to point to passages in Epictetus where a general discussion ends with a Socratic saying, such as *Diss.* 1.26.17-18. But the possibility remains that Marcus may have taken *Med.* 11.38 and 11.39 from quite different places in the lost books of the *Discourses*. There are no firm grounds to decide either way; the only point I make here is that the usual division into two distinct passages is a modern editorial intervention that ought not to prejudge the matter.

With regards to its content, the passage is of course about Socrates. As A. A. Long has noted, Socrates is alluded to “on every other page” of the *Discourses*,¹⁴ and so the passage is in harmony with what we see in the surviving four books. That, combined with the context in which we find it in the *Meditations*, makes it quite

¹³ See Schenkl 1916, 472. I quote the text and translation in Oldfather 1925-28.

¹⁴ Long 2000, 85.

plausible to suggest that it is a fragment from one of the lost books of the *Discourses*, and Farquharson's scepticism is unwarranted. As we have seen, Schenkl labelled *Med.* 11.39 as fr. 28a, but it is also possible, although far from proven, that *Med.* 11.38-39 were originally a unity, in which case it would simply be a continuation of fr. 28.

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