Robert Ritchie

Professor Zakin

PHL 105H

21 Febuary 2017

Epictetus Writing Assignment

In the first chapter of the book, Epictetus puts forward a concept which he relies upon for the rest of the text. He states simply that “if you think things that are naturally enslaved are free or that things not your own are your own, you will be thwarted, miserable, and upset, and will blame both gods and men.” The things that Epictetus claims are “our own” are the things that are “up to us” meaning we have control over them. Things such as illness and death, according to Epictetus, are not up to us, and therefore we should not emotionally invest in them. By this I don’t believe that Epictetus means that anything and everything related to the body, like death and suffering, are not our own. In chapter 25 he states “you cannot demand an equal share if you did not do the same things, with a view to getting things that are not up to us” which is an important aspect of his view. By this logic, suffering or death we could have prevented are very much our own issue. However, he would not advocate self-pity or regret, he would just try to recognize what he does or does not control. If, on the other hand, we consider death or suffering that we could not have influenced, then it is truly not our own. I think what seems hardest to accept about what Epictetus promotes is that he essentially skips the grieving process. Most people can recover from a loss or bodily injury with time and feel how Epictetus feels, but nobody can do it immediately.

With regards to Epictetus’ views on loved ones and spouses, I believe he is completely correct. Since I already addressed his views on loss, I will focus on the living relationships. It is important part in a relationship, not just romantic, to remember that it is voluntary, and that the other person is only interacting with you because they have chosen to. They are also a human being and have their own likes and dislikes, another person is never truly “your own.” This concept can also apply to property in a sense, but it is much harder to accept when in our everyday lives, we say that we own things. In chapter 11, Epictetus says to “Never say about anything ‘I have lost it,’ but instead ‘I have given it back.’” This rule is hard to accept because people do not wish to give up their belongings willingly, but that is not what Epictetus is suggesting here. What he suggests is that we have things that we consider our property, and that others will acknowledge as our property, but in the grand scheme of things, we can only influence them to some extent, and should not be overly invested in what happens beyond that, as it is external to us and we have no control over it whether or not we worry about it.