



# PROMETEUS - FILOSOFIA



MESTRADO EM FILOSOFIA/ UFS - CATEDRA UNESCO/ ARCHA

JANEIRO/ JUNHO DE 2014 - VOLUME 7 - ANO 7 - N. 15

ISSN: 2176-5960

## EPICETUS: DIAIRESIS AND CONTRADIAIRESIS

FRANCO SCALENGHE

Phd in Biology

Independent Researcher in Philosophy

**ABSTRACT:** ‘Diairesis’ and ‘Counterdiairesis’ are the names that the activity of our proairesis takes when it operates the distinction between what is proairetic and what is aproairetic. When this distinction is done in the right way, Epictetus says that our proairesis is ‘right’ and is using diairesis. When this distinction is not done, or is done in a way that is not the right one, Epictetus says that our proairesis is ‘wrong’ and is using counterdiairesis (this is a term that we don’t actually find in the extant works of Epictetus, but that he clearly suggests and that I have introduced for simplicity).

**KEYWORDS:** Diairesis. Counterdiairesis. Epictetus. Stoicism.

**RESUMO:** ‘Diairesis’ e ‘Counterdiairesis’ são os nomes que a atividade de nossa proairesis toma quando opera a distinção entre o que é proairético e o que é aproairético. Quando essa distinção é feita do modo certo, Epicteto diz que nossa proairesis is ‘correta’ e está usando diairesis. Quando essa distinção não é feita, ou é feita de um modo que não é correto, Epicteto diz que nossa proairesis está ‘errada’ e está usando contradiairesis (esse é um termo que não encontramos realmente nas obras de Epicteto, mas ele claramente o sugere e eu o introduzi por simplicidade).

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Diairesis. Counterdiairesis. Epicteto. Estoicismo.

I was born in Italy, in a very small town of the Po valley, in the middle of WWII (March 1943), the first son of a young metalworker and of his poor peasant wife. I first learned ancient Greek in Torino (Italy) on the school desks of my Italian ‘Liceo’, between 1956 and 1961, and I remember vividly how certain lines of Archilochus’ or Sappho’s poetry echoed powerfully within me.

I always had a special love for literature and philosophy, but I then chose to study Science at the University of Torino. In 1965 I got my B. A. in Biology and was declared a Molecular Biologist a few years later. I spent the years between 1968 and 1982 in several European Universities and Research Institutes (Napoli, Geneva, Heidelberg and others) trying to understand the regulation of gene activity in *Drosophila melanogaster*. Among the most rewarding achievements of that time was that of being the first biologist able to get DNA clones from the manual ‘micro-dissection’ of the polytene chromosomes of *Drosophila*. A couple of my papers of those years are now in the history of Biology. If someone, at that time, had asked me about my job, my answer would have been: “I am a geneticist”.

Scientific research in Molecular Biology was apparently enough to give a sense, so to speak, to the lives of my colleagues. But it was not at all enough to me, and it was clearly becoming more and more a substitute for what I was really looking for. What kind of Truth is the Truth of the so-called Scientific Research? And can a Truth ever exist, when it is separated from Happiness and Beauty? What have I to do with Pseudo-culture?

“My dear, even if you call this Pseudo-culture, its findings are very often useful and pretty things!” “And who says that they are not? But as transit stations, as inns. For what prevents the man who expresses himself like Demosthenes from being misfortuned? What prevents a Nobel Prize winner from being a miserable fellow? What prevents him from mourning, from envying, in short from being a disconcerted and unhappy man? Nothing! You see, then, that the ones of Pseudo-culture are worthless inns and that our program was a different one”.

In the mid-1980s, I therefore dropped Molecular Biology and chose to find myself naked and alone, but eventually confronted with the Science that for me was, and still is, the only one and true Culture: the Science of Happiness.

I drastically reduced my needs, in order to find the time necessary to settle my accounts with the Christian education I had received, with Marxism and with Science as I had known and prac-

ticed it, things towards whom all I had matured a deep uncertainty and distrust. I made then an apparently extravagant resolution: I turned to Music and Poetry, and decided to spend my time reading all the works and learning by heart all the poems of the Italian author who, when I was a young boy, left in me the strongest impressions both as a philosopher and as a poet, Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837). This I did, and in 1988 I came across his old (1825) Italian translation of the ‘Handbook’ of Epictetus. This text, which I had never read before and which nobody had told me about, was the decisive encounter. The ‘Handbook’ of Epictetus turned out to be the key that allowed me to recognize myself and to put all the pieces of the puzzle in their own place.

My ancient Greek quickly re-emerged. I’ll never say that I am a classicist; I only say that it was, and still is, what I really needed. Why ancient Stoicism? Because only the masters of ancient Stoicism have found the Truth, not about living, but about living well; and have given us the key to it. And why Epictetus? Because, in my opinion, Epictetus is to Philosophy what Einstein is to Physics. To the fellows who today ask me about my job, my answer is: “I am the man who re-entered the door that Adam and Eve had to exit when they were driven out of the Garden of Eden”.

I have spent the last twenty-five years translating from ancient Greek into Italian, and in some cases also into English, the works of Epictetus and of many other ancient Greek authors, including those of the so-called First Stoa (Zeno and Chrysippus among others), and of the so-called Last Stoa (such as Musonius Rufus and Marcus Aurelius). Then, in 2001, I started the website [www.epitteto.com](http://www.epitteto.com). My website was, and still is, intended as a container of the results of my research on why and how I have an unusual approach to Life and Death, to Good and Evil, to Time and Space. In 2010 I started publishing my translations and commentaries also as books.

My Stoicism is the Stoicism of the old Masters and of Epictetus, which revolves around a few clear, simple and empirically true foundations: in particular the concepts of ‘Proairesis’, ‘Diairesis’, ‘Counterdiairesis’ and ‘Nature of things’. Before I explain them let me immediately add that human beings educated to Counterdiairesis by Religion, Ideologies or Technology cannot be but unhappy people and, as a consequence, ‘living war’; while people educated to Diairesis by Stoicism, on the contrary, will be happy people and ‘living peace’. This is the main reason why, considering that all sort of books give voice mostly to unhappy people, I decided to let loose the voice of happy people and wrote my ‘United States of Stoicism’ ([http://www.epitteto.com/192\\_United\\_States.html](http://www.epitteto.com/192_United_States.html)) This book is a collection of 192 short stories, one for each country of the World, conceived to show something that all sort of media never talk about.

The terms ‘Proairesis’, ‘Diairesis’, ‘Counterdiairesis’ and ‘Nature of things’ are extensively analyzed and clearly explained in English in the ‘Five dialogues on the Stoic philosophy of Epictetus’ that can be found on my site (<http://www.epicteto.com/Five dialogues.html>) These concepts are at the core of the Stoicism of Epictetus and of all my books. We can simplify and briefly summarize them as follows. ‘Proairesis’ is the name that Epictetus gives to the human faculty able, and specifically dedicated, to establish what is in our exclusive power (the ‘proairetic things’: for example, the intention to walk) and what is not in our exclusive power (the ‘aproairetic things’: for example, the act of actually walking; as a number of different causes might make it impossible for me to walk). Proairesis is not a judgment (as Aristotle believes) or a choice, but a faculty that all human beings are naturally endowed with, and whose existence has been till now unknown or completely ignored by Philosophers, Psychologists and Biologists.

‘Diairesis’ and ‘Counterdiairesis’ are the names that the activity of our Proairesis takes when it operates the distinction between what is proairetic and what is aproairetic. When this distinction is done in the right way, Epictetus says that our proairesis is ‘right’ and is using diairesis. When this distinction is not done, or is done in a way that is not the right one, Epictetus says that our proairesis is ‘wrong’ and is using counterdiairesis (this is a term that we don’t actually find in the extant works of Epictetus, but that he clearly suggests and that I have introduced for simplicity). While proairesis, then, is a faculty, diairesis and counterdiairesis can be correctly conceived as judgments of our proairesis. Concerning the term ‘Nature of things’, it’s easy to understand that, as Universe is Nature, nothing in the Universe can be against Nature; and so the nature of things is simply the name that Epictetus gives to the empirically evident bipartition of all natural things into proairetic and aproairetic ones.

We have now at our disposal all the elements needed to answer the question: What is a person’s virtue? In general, virtue is the excellence of a certain thing or of a certain condition. Which is, then, the excellence or virtue of a person? A person’s virtue is the state of excellence of what distinguishes him/her from all other creatures, that is, of his/her proairesis. As our proairesis -Epictetus repeats again and again- is by nature free, infinite, impossible to be enslaved by other people and impossible to be subordinated to other human faculties, people are virtuous when they keep their proairesis in this state. How can they keep their proairesis in this state? They keep their proairesis in this state only if they use diairesis, which means only if they respect the nature of things. Can a person not respect the nature of things? Of course one can do this, and this one does when one makes the mistake of considering proairetic what is aproairetic or aproairetic what is proairetic, that is,

when one's behavior is guided by counterdiáresis. As a consequence, the use of diáresis is also the only way through which a person can achieve happiness, which is the twin brother of virtue.

Obviously, many people are not at all Stoics and ask frequently questions like this one: “Does Epictetus mean that in order to get rid of unhappiness we must accept anything that happens to us? The attitude towards life suggested by the Stoics does not confine us to a sort of passivity? If everything is aproairetic except our judgments, we can change absolutely nothing!”

One of the many possible Stoic answers is the following. When we play cards we cannot refuse the cards that chance gives us. Our skill lies in the ability to make the best possible use of the cards that we have. Right is therefore only the use of proairesis that allows us to be happy in circumstances of life that we have not chosen. Moreover it's not true that we can change nothing. First of all we can change our judgments, and it's not correct to call 'activity' the attempt to dominate and change aproairetic things, and call 'passivity' the project of making the right use of our proairesis. Second, we all admit that none of us can live without interacting with other people and with external and aproairetic things. Well, it's clear that we should not be afraid of these interactions with what is external to us, and that we should not expect from them any harm or evil but only a good if we know, thanks to diáresis, how to value properly what is aproairetic. Third, if we agree that learning diáresis is possible for all of us, then learning diáresis becomes essential in order to recognize the nature of things and so be able to use the materials of our existence without neglect, without recklessness and without carelessness. We must always remember that it's indeed true that all aproairetic things are indifferent to our happiness or unhappiness, but that our use of them is not at all indifferent and requires attention, diligence and extreme care.

If anyone wants to deepen his/her knowledge on such topics, here are links to the English material on my website [www.epitteto.com](http://www.epitteto.com)

- All Epictetus newly translated by Franco Scalenghe

<http://www.epitteto.com/THE DIAIRESIS TREE BOOK I.html>

- 'The table of Cebes' newly translated by Franco Scalenghe

<http://www.epitteto.com/TABLE OF CEBES INTRO.html>

- Five dialogues on the Stoic philosophy of Epictetus

<http://www.epitteto.com/Five dialogues.html>

- Invariance of the ‘Nature of things’ and invariance of the ‘Speed of light’: Is there a way to happiness?

<http://www.epitteto.com/3 to 1.html>

- Synopsis of all the passages containing the terms ‘Proairesis’, ‘Proairetic’ and ‘Aproairetic’ in the works of Epictetus

<http://www.epitteto.com/Sinossi ENG.html>

- Did Socrates ever say: “I know that I know nothing?” Does the ‘Demon’ of Socrates foreshadow the ‘Proairesis’ of Epictetus?

<http://www.epitteto.com/Socrates-Epictetus.html>