

BOOK REVIEW

The Stoics on Lekta: All There Is To Say. By ADABRONOWSKI. Oxford, UK.: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xiv + 478. Hardback, \$130.00. ISBN 978-0-19-884288-0.

The Stoic account of the *lekta*, the “sayables,” has been a controversial matter since antiquity. For a start, the nature of the *lekta* are unclear. Are they essentially “meanings,” what we capture when we successfully signify something in speech? Do they depend on the mind or language? Or are they somehow independent of both, constitutive of reality and there to be said or grasped by the mind? Much modern scholarship has focused predominantly on the role of the *lekta* in the realm of language and semantics. This book challenges that approach and offers a complete reappraisal of the place of *lekta* in Stoic philosophy. The main thesis is that the *lekta* are a crucial part of the entire Stoic philosophical system, having an independent ontological status as one of the four “incorporeals” (along with place, time and void). The *lekta* are there regardless of whether they are said, regardless of whether there are any language users at all. Indeed, language, it turns out, is but one way of capturing the *lekta* (Bronowski provides a neat appendix detailing how dance may achieve it too). Once the ontological status of the *lekta* is made clear, Bronowski proceeds to explain how they feature in more or less every philosophical topic that drew the attention of the Stoics – from teaching and learning to ethics to causality to semantics and the nature of grammar.

The book covers a vast range of topics and in many ways is a total reappraisal of Stoicism. The introduction and opening chapter look at the systematic nature of Stoic philosophy and the famous model of three parts – logic, physics and ethics. It is shown compellingly that those parts are in fact inseparable; for the Stoics, there is but one *systema*, “a structure of interdependent co-constitutive components” (12). With this foundation laid, the second chapter adds another core building block: Bronowski considers how the *lekta* relate to human thoughts and impressions, and establishes that they are independent of the mind. The third chapter then takes this feature of *lekta* to highlight the affinity with the other

“incorporeals” and clarify the place of the *lekta* in the Stoic ontological system. In this chapter there is an engaging comparative discussion of how the Stoic *lekta* compare with Plato’s Forms and how the Stoics develop many of their distinctive views through a critical interaction with Platonism, a theme that percolates throughout the book as a whole. The other six chapters all flesh out the details of a single unified system in which *lekta* are the keystone, with a particular focus on causation and semantics. In doing so, the author evaluates a scattered and disparate range of primary source evidence. The handling of this evidence is most impressive. In particular, the recovery of original information about what the Stoics actually said through meticulous sifting of the layers of distortion and simplification in authors such as Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius and Stobaeus is absolutely first-rate. The work on display is very much a model for scholarship in ancient philosophy, showing how a combination of painstaking literary analysis and the methods of analytical philosophy can uncover fresh information and make possible the reconstruction of what is otherwise lost.

The author also excels at reconstructing and evaluating major inter-school debates that took place across the centuries. There is engaging discussion of the importance of the works of Plato, particularly the *Sophist*, and the mutual influence of Stoics and Platonists on each other (often seen in the use of technical philosophical vocabulary). Often the views of the Peripatetics are the focus, again with attention given to the ways in which there was mutual influence as the philosophical landscape developed over time. There is also detailed discussion, where appropriate, of the views of the Epicureans and other grammarians and commentators. The place of the *lekta* in these inter-school disputes becomes very clear – time and again they are seen to play an integral role in defining the distinctly Stoic position on issues in logic, physics, metaphysics and semantics, and time and again they draw the critical attention of other philosophical schools, who find other ways to account for the things done by the *lekta* in the Stoic system. The central thesis that the *lekta* are a fundamental part of the Stoic ontological framework is well supported by numerous strands of evidence – it is because they are so fundamental that they figure everywhere in the Stoic philosophical system.

In every chapter the level of detail presented is astounding, although at times things risk becoming overwhelming given the technical Stoic terminology and the decision to transliterate key terms rather than translate them. In the final chapter on grammar in particular, the sheer number of technical terms makes things very hard going. The author herself is clearly completely at home with the Stoic material (indeed, at times she seems to be writing as a Stoic) and confident

about what is at stake philosophically, but for the uninitiated it can quickly become quite confronting: this is a difficult and challenging book that is pitched for an audience of specialists. That said, anyone with a serious interest in Stoic philosophy should read it, and its critical methodology is a model for students and scholars of ancient philosophy.

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