

Ada Bronowski, *The Stoics on Lekta: All There Is to Say* (2019), *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2020): 1-4.

Ada Bronowski's *The Stoics on Lekta: All There Is to Say* offers a comprehensive reconstruction of the role of lekta in Stoic philosophy. Indeed, as one works one's way through 496 pages, it is hard not to feel that the author (from hereon, AB) says all there is to say about lekta.

Of course, AB's subtitle is not or not primarily intended as descriptive of the book's contents. AB argues that the Stoics are the first philosophers in the Western tradition to work their way toward a view that is in the neighborhood of, though emphatically not identical with, Wittgenstein's pronouncement that the world is the totality of facts. On AB's reconstruction, lekta are all there is to say about corporeals—the cosmos, people, grains of sand, and so on—and about incorporeals—time, lekta themselves, and so on—as the Stoics conceive of them. What there is to say about the world comes primarily in the form of propositions. Accordingly, *axiomata*—complete lekta that are true or false—are the primary kind of lekta. With this proposal, AB rejects the traditional view that corporeals are fundamental for the Stoics, while incorporeals such as lekta have a secondary status. Corporeals and incorporeals have “parallel modes of reality” and are “complementary” (p. 330). Lekta are all there is to say, about corporeals and incorporeals, but they are not thereby, as in Wittgenstein's dictum, “the world” or its foundation.

To lay out her proposal, AB makes a general claim about Stoic philosophy, namely that it is “systematic.” Here AB coins an English word, intended to capture how Stoics speak of a *sustêma*. The key idea is that the Stoics examine their topics from the points of view of several disciplines. Core themes are addressed in logic, physics, and ethics, or even more fine-grained, within several subfields of each of these disciplines. This provides AB with a structure for her book. In order to explore the role and status of lekta, she argues, we need to work our way through significant portions of several subfields in Stoic thought.

Chapter 1 rejects the traditional view that the tripartite distinction between logic, ethics, and physics cuts deeply. Systematicity runs deeper than partitioning between fields. Chapter 2 characterizes the lekton as a signified thing and language as that which signifies. One lekton (the singular of lekta) can be signified in different languages. A lekton is there to be said, but need not be said. In the light of this analysis, AB rejects the traditional translation of “lekton” as “sayable.” Chapter 3 introduces the distinction between corporeals and incorporeals, which is needed to make sense of the Stoic claim that lekta are incorporeals. Chapter 4 argues that “reality” has a structure, made up of states of affairs. The mind grasps these states of affairs or structures, which are “there to be said” and hence called lekta. Chapter 5 explores the relevant sense of “saying,” and chapter 6 elucidates in which sense lekta are there to be said and yet not dependent on being said. Chapter 7 is devoted to the role of lekta in causation. The Stoics call what is caused a *katêgorêma* (often translated predicate, but that would be too linguistic a term

for AB's purposes). Chapter 8 argues that a *katêgorêma* is something that is said of something. Chapter 9 is about the primacy, as AB sees it, of the *axioma*, the kind of lekton that is either true or false.

Each chapter engages with a wealth of evidence. Those who have reflected on the texts before will recognize many considerations and appreciate AB's cautious assessment. AB's approach to particular passages is informed by nuanced views on the outlooks of source authors and the dialectic between different ancient theories. Of course, experts are bound to disagree on any number of specifics. For present purposes, however, I focus on concerns that bear on AB's project as a whole. The rest of this review lays out two philosophical queries, a caveat about AB's engagement with secondary literature, and a note on her reluctance to translate key terms.

My first philosophical query concerns the relation between thought and speech as AB construes it. AB infers from the observation that lekta can be said, but need not be said, that they have a degree of independence from language: "It follows that the kind of thing a lekton is, is distinct, or, at the very least, distinguishable from its role in language" (p. 86). It is not clear, however, that this follows. A lekton could be the kind of thing that is "sayable," as standard translations have it, whether or not it is said. Relatedly, when AB discusses the relation between thought and speech, she does not forefront a report that may seem relevant. According to the Stoics, reason (*logos*) has a dual nature, comprising inner and externally uttered thought (Porphyry, *De abstinentia* III 2, p. 187,10-24 N. =

Hülser 529A; cf. SE M 8.275-6 = Hülser 529). It is a substantive question whether the reason of the cosmos also has this dual nature, which merges thought and speech. If it does, then AB's claim that lekta aren't linguistic items constituted by human thought is compatible with an account that ascribes an inherently linguistic dimension to them.

My second philosophical query concerns a terminological choice that bears on AB's reconstruction as a whole. AB talks about "reality" from the get-go, without any qualifications or hesitations, thereby inviting those who don't come to her book as specialists to assume that this notion plays an important role in Stoic philosophy. However, "reality" does not map onto any key concept in Stoic thought, and is not explicitly introduced by AB as if it did. Arguably, AB's notion of reality is philosophically undermotivated, perhaps even misleading.

AB offers a gloss of how she thinks of reality: everything that is mind-independent is real in the relevant sense. Lekta meet this criterion. Lekta are not mind-dependent or constituted by mental activity. So far, so good. However, AB's notion of reality relies on a modern way of carving up the philosophical territory, which spells out realism and anti-realism in terms of mind-independence and mind-dependence. Traditionally, this modern framework presumes that mind and world are fundamentally different, such that it is puzzling how a non-physical mind can reach the physical world. Updated versions of the distinction avoid this premise, and speak of attitude-independence versus attitude-dependence. The updated concern invokes a further modern distinction; if something is

constituted by our attitudes, the thought goes, it may be subjective rather than objective. Either way, the modern distinction between realism and anti-realism thinks of the mind as something we ascribe to individual human beings.

But for the Stoics, things look fundamentally different. AB rightly says that the Stoics face their own puzzle, namely how human minds, which are corporeal, can relate to incorporeal lekta. And yet, this underrates how deeply different the Stoic outlook is. It is one question whether lekta—all there is to say, in AB's gloss—are independent of the attitudes of particular human reasoners. But are they independent of the world's reason? If not, this complicates the picture significantly, for the Stoics hold that our minds are literally portions of the world's mind. This is not the place to discuss this question. My aim is just to raise it, and ask whether AB's notion of reality is ultimately less helpful than initially it may appear.

AB's book comes across as the work of decades. The benefit of this is clear: AB has thought through many texts in careful ways. There is, however, also a cost to this, and this is the caveat I want to mention. Research that has been done in recent years is rarely cited in AB's analyses, and even less often engaged with. For example, as far as I can see some contributions are included in the bibliography, such as Meyer (2009) on causation, but not actually referenced in the chapter on causation. Assuming that those of us who find the technical side of early Stoic philosophy fascinating share the goal of reconstructing it and making it accessible, there might be a lesson here—namely to be in

touch with each other also about emerging work, to the effect that Vanessa de Harven, Tamer Nawar, Whitney Schwab, Simon Shogry, and other next generation philosophers are already included among one's intellectual interlocutors.

Finally, here is a note on AB's preference for transliterations and adaptations of Greek terms over translations. Along these lines, and to discuss her views, I have been talking of "lekta" throughout this review. AB argues that lekta are as important for the Stoics as Forms are for Plato. If she is right, then the neologism "lekta" might be as acceptable as talk of Forms, which, though not visibly Greek, is only comprehensible if introduced in the context of Plato's metaphysics. But AB makes this choice not only with respect to lekta. Instead, any number of Greek philosophical terms remain untranslated. Some scholars have reservations against this approach. They argue that, as long as we cannot express something, at least for the most part, in our own language we have not completed the process of interpretation.

However this issue is to be resolved in general, here is an observation about AB's book. Readers are almost asked to learn a philosophical language in order to engage with the philosophical theory therein. Sprinkled in are words like "itemsbodies" (p. 141). Are these more neologisms needed to communicate the intricacies of the Stoic system? Or, as seems more likely, typesetting artifacts, reflective of the fact that a book like this requires almost superhuman proofreading? In effect AB asks a lot also of her readers, at times almost ironically so, as if she wanted to say that the patience to read 496 pages of

nuanced discussion is not enough. In addition, the reader must solve a few riddles along the way. And yet, the payoff is significant. AB's core contention, that we must study lekta within the Stoic system, is compelling, though this is easier said than done. It requires a tour de force through many subfields of Stoic thought, and this is precisely what AB offers.