

Article based dissertation, Glenn Wehus, MF Norwegian School of Theology,
Religion and Society:

Title of the dissertation:

*Prominent Pronouns. Self-Understanding and Self-Formation in the Stoic
Philosopher Epictetus.*

Abstract

The dissertation is based on the four following articles:

- a) Article 1: Wehus, G. (2014). «'Bring Now, O Zeus, What Difficulty Thou Wilt'. Prayer and identity formation in the Stoic Philosopher Epictetus.» In *Early Christian prayer and identity formation*. R. Hvalvik and K. O. Sandnes (eds.), Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 343–369.
- b) Article 2: Wehus, G. (2019). «Freedom, Slavery, and Self in Epictetus.» *Teologisk Tidsskrift*, 8 (4), 227–242.
- c) Article 3: Wehus, G. (2023). «Know your exceptionality. The Delphic maxim 'Know yourself' in Epictetus.» In *Know Yourself. Echoes and Interpretations of the Delphic Maxim in Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Philosophy*. O. J. Filtvedt and J. Schröter (eds.), BZNW 260, Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 231–267.
- d) Article 4: Wehus, G. (2024). «'What a fine thing it is to be able to say to oneself...'. Reflexivity and verbal contexts in the Stoic Epictetus.» In *Symbolae Osloenses*, forthcoming 2024.

This dissertation is about human self-understanding and self-formation as it is portrayed in the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (ca. 55–135 AD). The four articles collectively seek to answer the following five questions, which may be seen as different dimensions or facets of one, larger philosophy of the formation of the self in Epictetus. Not all the questions are treated in all the articles or to the same extent in each article, but these are the questions addressed in the dissertation as a whole:

- a) what notion of self is present in Epictetus (anthropological dimension)?

- b) how does Epictetus understand the relation between a human being and god (or the gods) in the process of understanding oneself and forming oneself (theological dimension)?
- c) what is the role of oneself and the role of others in the process of understanding and forming oneself (sociological dimension)?
- d) what role does rhetorical and stylistic aspects in the teachings of Epictetus play in his communication of his thoughts on self and self-formation (rhetorical dimension)?
- e) what «existential» outlook on life and self is expressed or embedded in the works of Epictetus (“existential” dimension)?

The dissertation builds upon the work of scholars in recent years on the importance and novelty in the notion of self found in Epictetus. However, the dissertation is more synchronically oriented and consists in an investigation of Epictetus as such and the picture of human self, in its diverse dimensions, that emerges from a close reading of his texts. The dissertation represents a philological approach to philosophical texts, and in contrast to most other work on Epictetus which has focused on conceptual analyses of explicitly philosophical terms and vocabulary, this dissertation approaches the subject of self-understanding and self-formation by analyzing Epictetus’ dynamic use of personal and reflexive pronouns (what I term “prominent pronouns”). The primary contribution and value of the dissertation lies in its close-up, sensitive readings of a number of selected texts in Epictetus, readings which are then broadened and interpreted within the wider fabric of Epictetus’ self-formatational philosophy as a whole. The individual readings contribute to a clearer interpretation of the thoughts of Epictetus in each instance, and the cumulative effect of these detailed readings amount to a more general view on the five self-related issues in Epictetus as described above. Interestingly, although Epictetus is repeatedly claimed as of the utmost importance for the development of the notion of human selfhood, individuality, and subjectivity, there exists almost no substantial, book-length investigation devoted specifically to this topic. This dissertation wants to fill this lacuna.