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A. A. LONG

Epictetus

A STOIC AND SOCRATIC GUIDE TO LIFE

EPICTETUS

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A. A. Long

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PREFACE

The idea of writing this book began to crystallize while I was teaching a graduate seminar on Epictetus at Berkeley in the spring of 1999. My students were far more responsive to his Stoic discourses than I had dared to hope, and by the end of the semester I myself was thinking about little else. By a happy coincidence, I was about to begin a sabbatical year of research leave, generously assisted by grants from my university. My official project for this leave had not been a study of Epictetus, but now I knew that this was what I wanted to write, and so I set to work.

Although the idea of this book arose only recently, Epictetus has been on or near my desk for more years than I care to recall. I have been fascinated by him ever since I began to work on Hellenistic philosophy, and I have incorporated him in much that I have previously published. But I had never devoted a whole course to Epictetus before, and I had never immersed myself in him completely. Like many others, I tended to read him piecemeal, concentrating on passages that bore on my general interests in Stoicism rather than trying to engage with his singular mind and arresting style for their own sake. Now, instead, I read him through in entirety several times.

In doing so, I became especially interested in his educational strategies and his devotion to Socrates, and I also found myself increasingly impressed by the distinctive stamp of his Stoicism and by his remarkable personality. Quite coincidentally, excerpts of Epictetus were beginning to reach a large public through Tom Wolfe's brilliant novel *A Man in Full*. Reactions to that book in newspapers had shown that Epictetus' text, just by itself, was capable of touching modern nerves. Yet, there was no up-to-date and comprehensive introduction to Epictetus. All the more reason, I thought, to write a book that would offer a sufficiently

in-depth treatment in a manner that could attract new readers to him as well as those to whom he needs no introduction.

That is what I have tried to do, with the strong encouragement of Peter Momtchiloff of Oxford University Press and his anonymous advisers, for whose advice at the planning and later stages I am most grateful. I do not presume any prior knowledge of Epictetus or Stoic philosophy, and I have liberally included my own translations of numerous passages, using these as the basis for all my detailed discussions. These excerpts are the most important part of the book, because its main purpose is to provide sufficient background and analysis to enable Epictetus to speak for himself. What he says, however, often stands in need of clarification and interpretation. Research on Epictetus has a long way to go. I hope I have contributed a number of fresh ideas, but it would defeat the purpose of this book if I defended them in the main text with a barrage of scholarship. At the end of chapters I append bibliographical details and provide guidelines on various details and points of controversy.

My warm thanks are due to numerous people. First, I am delighted to mention all those who attended my seminar on Epictetus: Chris Brooke, Tamara Chin, Luca Castagnoli, James Ker, Erin Orzel, Miguel Pizarro, Walter Roberts, Tricia Slatin, Belle Waring, and two visiting scholars, Antonio Bravo Garcia and Bill Stephens. I learnt a lot from them all, and I especially thank Chris Brooke, whose seminar paper on Epictetus in early modern Europe introduced me to some references I have gratefully incorporated in my Epilogue. I have been wonderfully served by Christopher Gill, Brad Inwood, Vicky Kahn, and David Sedley. They read the entire first draft of the book and gave me extremely helpful comments. Peter Momtchiloff has been a splendid editor, not only through his publishing expertise but also by acting as the book's model reader. Our e-mail correspondence over the past year has been a great stimulus and pleasure to me.

The final product is appreciably better as a result of all this advice. I have benefited from the publications of scholars too numerous to acknowledge completely, but among my contemporaries I especially thank Rob Dobbin, Christopher Gill, Rachana Kamtekar, Susanne Bobzien, Michael Frede, David Sedley,

Pierre and Ilsetraut Hadot, Brad Inwood, Julia Annas, Jonathan Barnes, and Robin Hard. James Ker, a graduate student at Berkeley, has earned my gratitude not only by assembling data and checking references but also by vetting my translations and suggesting other improvements. I am also very grateful to Hilary Walford for her care and courtesy as my copy-editor and to Charlotte Jenkins for her fine management of the book's production.

I presented some of the material in Chapters 3 and 4 as Corbett Lecturer at the University of Cambridge, and this is now published in my article, 'Epictetus as Socratic Mentor', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 45 (2000), 79–98. I also gave related talks to the Loemker Conference on Stoicism, at Emory University, Atlanta, the Stoicism seminar at the Centre Léon Robin of the University of Paris Sorbonne, the Philosophy Department of the State University of Milan, and the Philosophy and Classics Departments of the University of Iowa. I am very grateful for these invitations, especially to Steve Strange, Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, and John Finnamore, and for the feedback I received in discussions following the lectures. When my typescript was in its final stages, I delivered some of the material in a series of seminars at the École Normale Supérieure of Paris under the kind auspices of Claude Imbert. My French colleagues and students were a wonderful audience, and their comments enabled me to make several last-minute corrections and additions. Finally I thank the University of California Berkeley for the Humanities Research Fellowship I was given and also the Office of the President of the University of California for the award of a President's Research Fellowship in the Humanities.

I dedicate this book to my wife, Monique Elias. With her artistry, beauty, and spontaneity, she has seen me through all the dry days, and she has been a magnificent companion at every stage of composition.

A.A.L.

Berkeley
June 2001

CITATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

References to ancient authors are generally given in full. For citations in the form Frede (1999), see the References. The following abbreviations are used:

ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
DL	Diogenes Laertius
Ench.	Epictetus' *Encheiridion* or *Manual*, compiled by Arrian
EN	Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
In Ench.	Simplicus' commentary on the *Encheiridion*
LS	A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1987). Volume i includes translations of the principal sources, with philosophical commentary, and volume ii gives the corresponding Greek and Latin texts, with notes and bibliography. A reference in the form LS 61A refers to the chapter number of either volume and the corresponding letter entry.
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1903–5). This is the standard collection of evidence for early Stoicism.

ANTHOLOGY OF EXCERPTS

Epictetus' discourses translated in full or extensively:

Selection of shorter excerpts:

Introduction

Epictetus is a thinker we cannot forget, once we have encountered him, because he gets under our skin. He provokes and he irritates, but he deals so trenchantly with life's everyday challenges that no one who knows his work can simply dismiss it as theoretically invalid or practically useless. In times of stress, as modern Epictetans have attested, his recommendations make their presence felt.

Living as an emancipated slave and Stoic teacher in the Roman Empire, Epictetus inhabited a world that is radically different from the modern West. Yet, in spite of everything that distances him from us—especially *our* material security, medical science, and political rights, and *his* fervent deism—Epictetus scarcely needs updating as an analyst of the psyche's strengths or weaknesses, and as a spokesman for human dignity, autonomy, and integrity. His principal project is to assure his listeners that nothing lies completely in their power except their judgements and desires and goals. Even our bodily frame and its movements are not entirely ours or up to us. The corollary is that nothing outside the mind or volition can, of its own nature, constrain or frustrate us unless we choose to let it do so. Happiness and a praiseworthy life require us to monitor our mental selves at every waking moment, making them and nothing external or material responsible for all the goodness or badness we experience. In the final analysis, everything that affects us for good or ill depends on our own judgements and on how we respond to the circumstances that befall us.

Epictetus expounds these ideas in numerous ways, but he is chiefly concerned with the training and contexts for their implementation, and with rebutting objections to them. The contexts range over the whole gamut of human experience—tyrannical threats to life and limb and political freedom, loss of property, jealousy and resentment, anxiety, family squabbles and affections, sexual allure, dinner-table manners, bereavement, friendship, dress, hygiene, and much more. This guide to life is as demanding as it is comprehensive; for it is central to Epictetus' philosophy that no occasion is so trivial that his salient doctrines do not apply.

His cultural and historical significance have never been in doubt. He was revered by many of his contemporaries and by those, including the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who knew him later through his student Arrian's record of his teaching. Early Christian writers mentioned him approvingly, and Simplicius, the great Neoplatonist commentator on Aristotle, wrote a commentary on the *Manual*. Translations of this abridgement of Epictetus were so familiar during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that Epictetus became virtually a household name for the European and early American intelligentsia. William Congreve starts his play *Love for Love* with a penniless young man reading Epictetus in his garret. Elizabeth Carter, a prominent member of the Bluestocking Circle, was the first person to translate the whole of Epictetus into English. Her near contemporaries, Shaftesbury and Butler, are two of the British moralists who invoked him during the eighteenth century, and in America his later admirers included Thomas Jefferson, Walt Whitman, and Henry James.

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, Epictetus was not a central figure. He was largely treated as a Stoic popularizer, lacking depth and creativity. Since about 1970 Epictetus has begun to regain his former status as a powerful thinker on ethics and education, worthy of discussion alongside Socrates and Plato, but he still tends to be read selectively, either as the author of maxims preaching self-reliance or simply as a spokesman for Stoic philosophy or for life under the Roman Empire. Happily that situation is changing, as this book's References section shows. Yet, there is no modern book that pre-

sents Epictetus in the round as author, stylist, educator, and thinker. That is the gap I hope to fill by publishing this volume.

Epictetus can be explored from many different perspectives. These include intellectual and social history, the interpretation of Stoicism, ethics and psychology, both ancient and modern, the theory and practice of education, rhetoric, and religion. As a historian of ancient philosophy by profession, I have concentrated on the analysis of Epictetus' main ideas, but all the perspectives I listed are relevant to my goal—which is to provide an accessible guide to reading Epictetus, both as a remarkable historical figure and as a thinker whose recipe for a free and satisfying life can engage our modern selves, in spite of our cultural distance from him. I have given a lot of space to translated excerpts, building my discussion of many details around these, and I have also included the full text of several of the shorter discourses. All these passages are numbered throughout the book, and I have collected the main ones at the beginning in an Anthology of Excerpts, where they are briefly described for ease of reference.

I start from the assumption that Epictetus is deceptively simple to read, or, rather, that he is a complex author with patterns of thought and intention, including irony, that have been scarcely appreciated. When he is read rapidly and selectively, Epictetus can appear hectoring, sententious, or even repellent. I do not maintain that these qualities simply disappear under analysis. His work contains passages I prefer not to read, which have even on occasion deterred me from writing this book. Yet I am also convinced that a good many candidates for such passages are ironical or at least rhetorically motivated by reference to cultural conventions, his educational programme, and its youthful audience.

Epictetus has also been misunderstood because his appeals to theology, which are ubiquitous, have been consciously or unconsciously read in the light of Christianity. In my opinion, Epictetus' deepest ideas are remote from the main Christian message, notwithstanding notable parallels between some things he says and the New Testament. His ethical outlook includes stark appeals to self-interest, which ask persons to value their individual selves over everything else. Yet, Epictetus *is* a moralist, an

advocate of uncompromising integrity in human relationships and a forerunner of Kant in his stance that material considerations and contingencies have no bearing on the rightness of a right action. How his theology, egoism, and social commitments tie together is a major question, and one that has been little addressed up to the present. I try to answer it in the second half of this book.

A further source of misunderstanding has been the description of his teachings as *diatribes* or sermons, with the implication that he is a preacher to human beings, or at least men, in general. I prefer to call the surviving record of his work dialectical lessons, in order both to call attention to his persistently conversational idiom and to register his deliberate affiliation to Socratic dialectic. Socrates, rather than any Stoic philosopher or even the Cynic Diogenes, is Epictetus' favoured paradigm, not only as a model for life but also as a practitioner of philosophical conversation. The point is not that Epictetus refrains from sermonizing or haranguing; that is one of his styles. But it is a style he adopts in response to a specific audience.

Our Epictetus is only what his pupil Arrian chose to record, edit, and then publish. Like Socrates, Epictetus did not compose for publication, but Arrian's reports put us in the position of being a fly on the wall in his private classes, and on occasions when he was visited and consulted by someone passing through. Taking account of this auditory context, which quite often focuses upon a single, generally anonymous individual, is indispensable if we want to evaluate the tone and purpose of numerous discourses. Epictetus is typically addressing precisely the people—young men—who have opted to study with him. Recognition of this audience aids appreciation of the hyperbole, irony, and repetitiousness that are characteristic of his teaching.

I have tried to make this book as accessible as possible by sparing use of footnotes and by largely confining bibliographical and other scholarly matters to appendices at the end of chapters. To the extent that seemed essential I have explained Epictetus' relation to his Stoic authorities and tradition, and I have sometimes compared him with the other Roman Stoics. But I have been concerned throughout to keep the focus on Epictetus as author,

letting him speak for himself rather than reducing him to the status of one among other Stoic philosophers. Much more could be said than I have offered by way of positioning him within the Stoic tradition. My excuses for playing this history down are simple—such a treatment would not only have turned this into a lengthy and technical book, which I was keen to avoid; it would also have detracted from the distinctive power of Epictetus' voice. Readers who are eager to compare Epictetus with other Stoics will find ample material in the sections of Further Readings and Notes that I have appended to the chapters.

The book is designed to be read in the sequence of the chapters, but each of these can also be approached independently. Those who are interested in first sampling Epictetus' discourses could consult the Anthology of Excerpts or begin with Chapter 5, where I translate two short discourses in full and give a detailed analysis of their style and thought. Chapters 1–4 are chiefly concerned with placing Epictetus in his intellectual and cultural context and with the methodology of the discourses. In Chapters 6–9 I focus on the themes and concepts that I find central to his thought and its fundamental unity. However, this division is by no means hard and fast. The reader who reaches Chapter 6 after proceeding through all the earlier chapters will have already seen most of Epictetus' principal concepts at work. What I offer in Chapter 6 onward is a more sustained treatment of his philosophy, topic by topic. This procedure involves some unavoidable repetition, but any account of Epictetus that disguised his repetitiousness would be quite misleading. In an Epilogue I give a selective account of Epictetus' afterlife in Europe and America, and I also ask what we can make of him today.

A final word about my translations. I have naturally striven for accuracy, and by that I include respect for the tone and rhetoric of the original rather than a literalness that could jar or misrepresent the effect of Epictetus' Greek. For example, Epictetus often uses the vocative *anthrôpe*, literally '(O) human being' or '(O) man'; but neither of these translations works in modern English. So I have preferred to write 'friend' or 'my friend'; and I occasionally use a modern colloquialism such as 'wow!', where that seems just right to capture the feel of the original. Because

the discourses are largely composed as conversations, I have tried to reproduce that effect by having my excerpts printed accordingly, with the interventions of Epictetus' generally fictive interlocutors, or his responses to his own questions, presented in italics. The original text lacks most modern devices of punctuation, and it can be difficult to decide how to distribute its questions and answers. When in doubt, I have adopted continuous paragraphs, so readers can be confident that whatever appears in the book as dialogue is so in the original.

FURTHER READING AND NOTES

Texts and translations

The most accessible Greek text of Epictetus, together with English translation, is the two-volume Loeb edition of Oldfather (1925–8). This includes the four books of discourses, the *Manual*, and fragments (short excerpts quoted by various ancient authors from works that have not otherwise survived). The major edition of the Greek text of the discourses is Schenkl (1916), and there is also an excellent four-volume edition, together with French translation and detailed introduction, by Souilhé (1948–65). Boter (1999) is the best edition of the *Manual*. His book includes a remarkable account of that work's manuscript tradition, and Boter has also edited Greek versions of the *Manual* that were adapted to monastic use; see p. 261 below.

There is no modern commentary on the whole of Epictetus, but Dobbin (1998) is an outstanding commentary on book 1 of the discourses, together with translation. Gourinat (1996) is a French translation of the *Manual* with a fine introduction to Epictetus and his Stoicism. Hadot (2000) is a further French version of the *Manual* with an excellent analysis of the work's structure. For commentary on 3.22 (on the ideal Cynic), see Billerbeck (1978), and for commentary on Epictetus' discourses that deal with logic, Barnes (1997).

The best English translation of Epictetus in entirety is Hard in Gill (1995). For the *Manual* on its own, see White (1983).

CHAPTER 1

Epictetus in his Time and Place

> What else am I, a lame old man, capable of except singing hymns to God? If I were a nightingale, I would do the nightingale's thing, and if I were a swan, the swan's. Well, I am a rational creature; so I must sing hymns to God. This is my task; I do it, and I will not abandon this position as long as it is granted me, and I urge you to sing this same song.
>
> (1.16.20–1)

1.1 ORIENTATION

In the early years of the second century AD, with the Roman Empire under Trajan, its most effective ruler since Augustus, a group of young men were to be found studying together in the city of Nicopolis, situated immediately north of the modern Greek port of Préveza on the Ionian Sea. They were the students of Epictetus. One of them, Arrian, made a detailed record of his master's teaching, and it is these *Discourses* that enable us to read Epictetus today and to treat him as a virtual author in his own right.

Epictetus was a Stoic philosopher, one of many to be found in Rome and other cities of its vast empire. The essence of his teaching went back to Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, the

founding fathers of Stoicism in the third century BC at Athens. Their original writings are lost, and, although some of what they contained is recoverable through accounts by later authors, Epictetus is the Stoic teacher we are in a position to read most extensively.

For that alone his work would be important, but its value and interest go far beyond what it tells us about the doctrines and rationale of Stoicism. In Epictetus' work that philosophy is not so much expounded as lived, made urgent and even disturbing by his remarkable personality and powers of expression. He has an inimitable way of specifying and interpreting Stoicism for his students, and he appropriates Socrates more deeply than any other philosopher after Plato. These things, together with much else that will be explored in this book, make Epictetus one of the most memorable and influential figures of Graeco-Roman antiquity.

Epictetus needs no defence concerning his capacity to interest and challenge modern readers. Thanks to the celebrated *Manual*, a summary set of rules and doctrines that Arrian extracted from Epictetus' discourses, he has never gone out of print.[1] He has even been copiously quoted in Tom Wolfe's best-selling novel *A Man in Full*, where the character who encounters a book containing translations of Epictetus finds his life transformed accordingly, and converts another character to Stoicism. The popularity of self-help books and therapy sessions has its ancient prototype in the *Manual*, where one finds such thoughts as these:

1 Don't ask that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do, and you will go on well. (*Ench.* 8)

2 Sickness is an impediment to the body, but not to the will unless the will consents. Lameness is an impediment to the leg, but not to the will. Tell yourself this at each eventuality; for you will find the thing to be an impediment to something else, but not to yourself. (*Ench.* 9)

[1] 'Manual' translates the Greek *encheiridion* (abb. *Ench.*), sometimes rendered as 'handbook'.

3 If someone handed your body over to a passerby, you would be annoyed. Aren't you ashamed that you hand over your mind to anyone around, for it to be upset and confused if the person insults you?
(*Ench.* 28)

Packaged in this way, Epictetus has his appeal, but if this were all we would scarcely call him a major precursor of our modern *philosophical* tradition. We would relate him rather (and I do not mean disparagingly so) to the rule books of Christian monasticism or to the Wisdom literature of Buddhism and Confucianism. Those contexts and their meditative practices are appropriate up to a point; Epictetus recommended his students to concentrate on such thoughts as those excerpted above, and some of his work has a mantra-like quality. The excerpts of the *Manual*, however, are only that—passages Arrian organized, selected, and compressed from the full record in order to present Epictetus' teaching in a more accessible and memorable form. They give a limited and somewhat grim impression of his thinking and speaking in his actual *Discourses*.

There, rather than advancing maxims and potted doctrines, he chiefly tries to show why the prescriptions of the *Manual* are grounded in truths he thinks he can prove concerning the nature of the world at large, human nature, and a rational mind's dialogue with itself. In addition, he addresses this instruction quite specifically to his student audience, relating it to questions and problems they face as would-be Stoics and as persons engaged in social life, with aspiration to various careers including the teaching of philosophy. To engage their attention, he intersperses quiet reflections with histrionic wit, hyperbole, and Swiftian pungency. The *Discourses* represent a unique blend of philosophy, pedagogy, satire, exhortation, and uninhibited dialogue.

In this book, therefore, my focus will be on the Epictetus of the *Discourses* rather than the potted excerpts of the *Manual*.

1.2 BIOGRAPHY

Little is known of the details of Epictetus' life. He was born probably in the years AD 50–60 at Hierapolis, a major Graeco-Roman city in what today is south-western Turkey, 100 miles due east of Ephesus, and connected with that great centre by a Roman road. Probably a slave by birth rather than seizure, he was acquired by Epaphroditus, a famous freedman and the secretary of the Emperor Nero. This may have happened after Nero's death in AD 68, but Epaphroditus resumed his secretarial career under Domitian (accession AD 81). We can infer, then, that the young Epictetus had direct experience of the imperial court. This is confirmed by his vivid references to persons soliciting emperors, hoping for favours from people like Epaphroditus who had the emperor's ear, and by his anecdotes about the fate of those who had incurred imperial displeasure.

In the *Discourses* Epictetus speaks of himself as a lame old man (1.16.20). His lameness may have developed only in later life, but Christian sources attribute it to the cruelty of a master, though not to Epaphroditus specifically; and in fact Epictetus mentions his former owner in ways that, though not complimentary, are far from savage (1.1.20; 1.19.19; 1.26.11). He was permitted, while still a slave (1.9.29), to attend lectures by Musonius Rufus, a prominent Stoic teacher, and Epaphroditus may have freed him soon after this began. Under the patronage of Musonius, Epictetus probably began his teaching career in Rome. In AD 95 Domitian banished all philosophers not only from the capital but also from Italy itself. It was presumably at this time that Epictetus moved to Nicopolis with a reputation sufficiently assured to enable him to attract students there and to live simply off payments he received from them.

Nicopolis, founded by Augustus to commemorate his victory over Marc Antony at nearby Actium (31 BC), was a large and resplendent city, as its modern remains still show. It became the political and economic centre for Roman rule in western Greece, while its coastal location made it the stopping place for numerous persons travelling between Greece and Italy. In choosing Nicopolis as the site for his school, Epictetus was no

doubt influenced by the city's metropolitan status and facilities. His students will have found good lodgings there, and the resources of Nicopolis will have been reassuring to their parents.

There, apart perhaps from short visits to Athens and Olympia, he appears to have stayed until his death in around the year AD 135. He is reputed to have been visited by the Emperor Hadrian, and the *Discourses* indicate that other prominent figures sought conversations with him. In the main, though, young students seem to have been the centre of his life until old age, when he adopted an infant that would otherwise have been exposed to death, and after years of celibacy took a wife (or live-in female servant) to support the child.

Not a strikingly eventful life, but yet a memorable one, especially in the context of elite Roman society and its conventional members' jockeying for position over wealth, repute, and status. Former slaves, as the career of Epaphroditus shows, could rise well up the social ladder, but Epictetus without any of that achieved renown simply by being a dedicated teacher, impervious to all external marks of success. In this he contrasts radically with the immensely wealthy and powerful Seneca, who was not a practising teacher and whose Stoicism, though certainly sincere, was fully tested only in old age when Nero forced him to commit suicide. Epictetus escaped that end, but his slavish origins, chronic ill health, exile, and probably precarious income are experiences to keep in mind as one reads his often severe comments on the inability of more materially fortunate people to handle themselves with dignity and equanimity.

Threats to life, torture, exile, and bodily infirmities all figure prominently in Epictetus' discourses, but slavery versus freedom is more than one of his themes. The contrast between a mental freedom available in principle to anyone and self-inflicted slavery encapsulates his chief message throughout. Freedom and slavery had long been metaphors for states of mind and attitudes pertaining to people irrespective of their social status. Yet when, as often, Epictetus calls one of his free-born students, 'slave', his words are charged with a resonance that goes well beyond either this convention or the Stoic paradox that only the wise man is free. As a person who knew the indignity of slavery from direct experience

and who had also lived under the tyrannical regime of Domitian, Epictetus' philosophy acquires an experiential dimension that removes from it any vestige of mere theorizing or posturing. Marcus Aurelius, who ascended the imperial throne in AD 161, probably never met Epictetus, but the *Discourses*, or at least a written account of Epictetus' teaching (see p. 41), were a profound influence on the emperor's Stoic *Meditations*. That an ex-slave actually shaped a Roman emperor's deepest thoughts is one of the most remarkable testimonies to the power and applicability of Epictetus' words.

1.3 INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

We can make only guesses about Epictetus' early education and first acquaintance with philosophy. Intelligent masters were quick to spot talented slaves, so it is likely that Epaphroditus encouraged him and helped him to get access to books, but his formal training as a teenager was probably rudimentary in comparison with the students he subsequently taught at Nicopolis. In a conversation with a self-important man, who had visited him on his way to Rome, Epictetus pulls no punches in exposing the person's trivial interests in philosophy:

4 You will say:

Meeting Epictetus was like meeting a stone or a statue.

I agree—You took one look at me, that's all. But the person who really encounters another is one who gets to know the other's judgements and reveals his own in turn. Get to know my judgements, show me your own, and then say you have met me. Let's examine one another, and if I have a bad judgement, remove it; if you have one, bring it out into the open. That's meeting a philosopher. But that's not your way:

We're passing by, and while we're renting the boat we can also look in on Epictetus; let's take a look at what he's saying.

Then you leave:

Epictetus was zero; his language was quite ungrammatical and unidiomatic.

What else could you assess when you came with that attitude?

(3.9.12–14)

Epictetus likes to exaggerate and play himself down. Although he has no time for discourse that is merely elegant and flowery, he is a virtuoso user of colloquial Greek. Unlike his students, however, he probably did not have the elaborate training in schoolbook rhetoric that was the staple of Roman education. While his discourses are replete with allusions to Greek myths, he draws on figures and situations familiar to anyone with a smattering of culture—especially Homer's Achilles, Ajax, Agamemnon, and Odysseus, and Medea, Oedipus, Eteocles, and Polyneices. Likewise, his examples of historical figures, such as Croesus, Demosthenes, Philip and Alexander, and Lycurgus. All the names of this incomplete list are likely to have figured in the books by earlier Stoics that he read. His literary and cultural allusions are quite limited in comparison with the displays of learning characteristic of such contemporaries as Plutarch, Aulus Gellius, Philostratus, and Dio Chrysostom. By further contrast with them, he specializes in homely and sometimes shocking illustrations—chamber pots, greasy fingers, wobbly legs, dunghills, cracked saucepans, and the like. He must have known Latin, but the language has left only superficial traces on his text, and his references to Rome and Roman persons pertain either to his own time or to the recent past.

As with his self-deprecating remarks about language, we should not simply assess Epictetus' level of education from what he chose to exhibit in his discourses. He makes it a point to distinguish his role as a teacher of philosophy from literary interpreter or 'grammarian' (*Ench.* 49). His disdain for mere learning is one of his ways of stating the incomparably greater importance of training oneself to live well; in the words he uses to inculcate that project he is as artful as the rhetoricians from whom he officially distances himself. Still, Epictetus was probably not widely read as compared with Cicero, Seneca, and his own erudite contemporaries.

The most important influence on Epictetus from a living person was almost certainly his Stoic teacher, Musonius Rufus. A knight or member of the equestrian order, Musonius was one of a number of upper-class Romans whose Stoicism and resolute character displeased the paranoid emperor Nero. During the latter's reign

(AD 54–68) Musonius along with Cornutus, another famous Stoic, was banished to the small Greek island Gyara, which became a byword for exile (Epictetus 1.25.20; 2.6.22). Musonius was able to return to Rome after Nero's death, but may have suffered exile again under Vespasian. With the accession of Titus (AD 79), he was certainly back in Rome, and it is to this period that we can probably date the beginning of Epictetus' association with him.

As a would-be Stoic, he found the right teacher. Musonius' pupils may have included Euphrates, whose undemonstrative excellence is singled out by Epictetus (3.15.8; 4.8.17), while Musonius himself was widely heralded as an exemplar of Stoic fortitude and contentment. Although he did not publish, we have a record of some twenty of his lectures and also a collection of sayings. His themes include such (by then) standard topics as the endurance of pain, exile, and old age, but his work is most noteworthy for its treatment of more specific questions—for instance, the income appropriate to a philosopher, whether a philosopher should marry, and, most interestingly, the education of girls who, he argues, should be trained no differently from boys and regarded as no less suitable to practise philosophy.

In their transmitted form, made by an auditor, Musonius' lectures hardly live up to the promise of his enlightened themes. They are a dull read by comparison with Arrian's record of Epictetus. Perhaps Epictetus would always have overshadowed his teacher, but the impression Musonius made on him was unforgettable, and something that plainly influenced not only his Stoicism but also his teaching style. Take the following passage, where Epictetus cajoles his students for not working hard enough:

5 Why are we still idle, lazy, and sluggish, looking for excuses to avoid making efforts and staying awake as we work at improving our own rationality?

Well, if I go astray in this, I haven't killed my father, have I?

No, you slave, your father wasn't there for you to kill.

So, what have I done (you ask)*?*

You have made the one mistake you could have made in this case. I myself too, you see, made exactly the same retort to [Musonius] Rufus when he chided me for not spotting the one thing omitted in a syllogism. I said:

It's not as if I've burned down the Capitol.
Slave (he said): the thing omitted here *is* the Capitol. (1.7.30–2)

Evidently Musonius taught Epictetus how to use black humour and hyperbole to make a philosophical point. We can also gather from this passage that Musonius included logic in his curriculum. That is not evident from the digest of his lectures, but the Suda Lexicon describes him as 'Logician and Stoic'.

As Stoics, Musonius and Epictetus aligned themselves with the philosophy that elite citizens, or at least the few who had any time for it, found most in keeping with the traditional Roman virtues of rectitude in public and domestic life, material simplicity, and self-discipline. It was far from being their only option. Apart from Epicureanism, which was the philosophy most antithetical to Stoicism, Scepticism (alternatively called Pyrrhonism) was offering a lively challenge to both these schools. Aristotle's technical writings, after centuries of obscurity, were beginning to be closely studied. Academics, whose title registered their claim to be the heirs of Plato, were radically divided between a sceptical sect, who interpreted Plato's dialogues as authorizing suspension of judgement about everything, and those who took Plato to be voicing a systematic philosophy in these works. At the time of Epictetus, doctrinal Platonism was undergoing a revival that would eventually inspire the rarefied metaphysics and spirituality of Plotinus (that we call Neoplatonism); this development was coupled with an interest in number mysticism and magic, unhistorically linked to the name of Pythagoras (Neopythagoreanism).

Best known to the general public were Cynics, itinerant ascetics and preachers, whose official (though often sham) cult of austerity and opposition to conventional norms looked back to Diogenes and Socrates. Cynicism had been a powerful influence on the formation of Stoic philosophy. At the time of Epictetus it was enjoying a new vogue, and he treats it at its best as a calling that an unusually dedicated and qualified witness to Stoicism could adopt (3.22).

Besides all these philosophies, with their roots stretching back to Hellenistic and classical Greece, a potential student of Epictetus could encounter numerous teachers, intellectual

movements and religions whose relation to established philosophies might be strong, eclectic, or non-existent. Two of the greatest scientists of antiquity, Galen and Ptolemy, would flourish a generation or so later; their copious writings are steeped in the philosophical tradition. This was an era, often called the Second Sophistic, when professional rhetoricians, such as Aelius Aristides, Favorinus, and Dio Chrysostom, all of them familiar with more than a smattering of philosophy, would lecture to mass audiences on political and cultural topics, cultivating a style that was studiedly classical. The houses of the highly educated would involve dinner parties where the entertainment included conversation by grammarians and other scholars, competing over their knowledge of recondite points of language and mythology. The religious scene was notably fluid. Traditional cults of the Graeco-Roman pantheon, including worship of the emperor, continued; but those attracted to a religion that promised salvation would turn to the worship of Isis and, with increasing momentum, to Christianity.

Locating Epictetus within this rapid sketch is relatively easy. So far as philosophy is concerned, he uses a number of terms that *we* associate chiefly with Aristotle, but he probably did not derive these directly from conning the Aristotelian corpus. At this date the language of philosophy had become too eclectic to warrant such an inference; Epictetus never names Aristotle, and he makes only one disparaging reference to Peripatetics (2.19.20). He was aware of moralizing verses (falsely) attributed to Pythagoras (3.10.2–3), but his discourses betray no inclination for the mystical and other-worldly tendencies of Neopythagoreans and some contemporary Platonists. Epictetus' religious sympathies and spirituality (a topic for Chapter 6) are broadly in line with traditional Stoicism, but they are also infused with a deep and ubiquitous affinity for the Socrates of Plato's dialogues. Along with Stoicism, Epictetus' philosophy is principally Socratic, with a lesser but still important affiliation to an idealized Cynic, Diogenes. The schools he explicitly attacks are Epicureanism and Scepticism, both Pyrrhonean and Academic. He shows no interest in technical science, and he strongly distances his philosophical project from the rhetorical and

cultural embellishments offered by rhetoricians and grammarians.

As for salvation, Epictetus perhaps alludes without further comment to Christians in an intriguing passage that likens his students to being only 'nominally baptized' (2.9.21, p. 110 below), but, however one assesses his thought in relation to the New Testament, there is no reason to think that Christians or Christian texts have directly influenced him, though he could have encountered them while still a child at Hierapolis.[2]

A few words about this picture of Epictetus, as it begins to emerge. In contrast with some of his contemporaries, who have interests in dream interpretation, magic, incubation in temples, and other occult practices, his mentality is rationalistic and down to earth, though he consistently speaks of God (or Zeus) in tones that convey personal faith and experience as well as Stoic and Socratic piety. He believes, as leading philosophers before him had believed, that human beings are born with all that they need, in terms of basic capacities, to understand the world, and that impediments to living well can be corrected or at least ameliorated by a combination of the right doctrines and unremitting self-discipline.

Do these attitudes show Epictetus to have been conservative and unadventurous? That must be right, up to a point. Having encountered Stoicism through Musonius, studying and testing it in his own life, noticing its practice by others, and teaching it, he clearly found this philosophy not only theoretically sound but also validated by his own experience. He saw no reason to experiment with other options. One of my aims in this book, however, is to show that Epictetus used Stoicism selectively and creatively. That is partly due to his distinctively Socratic leanings, which have been insufficiently appreciated, but it also reflects his own interpretations of what it meant to be a Stoic philosopher and teacher.

[2] St Paul had missionaries in that city (*Col.* 4.13), and he spent time in Nicopolis (*Titus* 3.12).

1.4 STOICISM

What Stoicism signified by Epictetus' time can hardly be summarized in a few pages, but for the benefit of readers new to the subject something needs to be said about the history of the school and what it predominantly stood for. As a preliminary, it is essential to realize that Stoicism, like all other mainstream philosophies of classical antiquity, offered itself as a comprehensive outlook on the world rather than something narrowly technical or academic in the modern sense. The choice of Stoicism over Epicureanism, its principal rival, was decisive not only for one's ethical values and priorities but also for one's understanding of the world's general structure, one's theology, and the importance to be attached to systematic reasoning and the study of language. Yet, however much these and other schools disagreed over their accounts of such things, they all shared the view that philosophy should provide its adepts with the foundation for the best possible human life—that is to say, a happiness that would be lasting and serene.

At Epictetus' date (and in fact, from long before) philosophy in general was taken to be a medicine for alleviating the errors and passions that stem from purely reactive and conventional attitudes. To put it another way, the choice of Stoicism over another philosophy depended not on its promise to deliver an admirable and thoroughly satisfying life (that project would not distinguish it from rival schools) but on its detailed specification of that life and on the appeal of its claims about the nature of the world and human beings.

Extending back from Epictetus by almost 400 years, the Stoic philosophy initiated by Zeno had been elaborated, interpreted, and modified in numerous ways. Modern historians have often distinguished three phases of Stoicism, Early, Middle, and Late, allocating Epictetus along with Seneca, Musonius, and Marcus Aurelius to the last of these. Their rationale for such categories was not simply chronological, but reflected the following assumptions about the main features of each phase.

Early Stoicism was the most creative stage in terms of hard-edged doctrine and debate, with its principal representatives,

above all Chrysippus, establishing the system on a basis that would be treated as orthodox thereafter. Middle Stoicism included Panaetius and Posidonius, each of whom was too idiosyncratic and innovative to be seen as simply a continuator of the Early phase. Late Stoicism, by contrast, the phase of Stoics during the Roman Empire, showed an absence of significant innovation, a decline of interest in theory, and a focus on practical ethics at the expense of logic and enquiry into physical science.

This picture has its value as a broad generalization, but much of it is misleading and liable to distort an appreciation of the individuality and significance of the Roman Stoics, especially Epictetus. To correct it, we need to take account of at least four points.

First, differences in curricular emphasis and doctrinal formulation were characteristic of Stoic philosophers throughout the school's existence. It is true that Chrysippus' writings acquired canonical status, but this did not oblige the Late Stoics to become his clones or to give up thinking for themselves.

Secondly, treating philosophy as a guide to life was the dominant focus right from the start. It was for that that Zeno acquired his renown, and while he did not restrict his curriculum to ethics, one of his principal followers, Aristo, took that step.

Thirdly, leading Stoics tended to specialize in different fields—as, for instance, Posidonius' interests in geography and ethnography, and the work of Diogenes of Babylon on grammar and music.

Fourthly, logic was still so widely studied by Stoic philosophers at the time of Epictetus that he is constantly warning his students against treating it as an end in itself. As for technicalities of physics, which he scarcely explores in the preserved discourses, they engaged the interest of Seneca, who wrote about numerous physical phenomena in his *Natural Questions*.[3]

Epictetus does indeed concentrate his teaching on students' application of Stoic doctrines to their own lives; in this he seems

[3] Arrian wrote a work on comets, which, while it could signify an interest inspired by Epictetus, is more likely to have been stimulated independently. We have a detailed astronomical treatise by the Stoic Cleomedes, probably written in the later years of the second century AD; see Bowen and Todd (forthcoming).

to fit the model of so-called Late Stoicism. Yet this assessment of him also needs to be qualified in two large respects. First, as we shall see later, the surviving discourses do not exemplify all that he taught, and even they make it clear that his own pedagogy included logic. Secondly—and this is the most important point—his focus on applied ethics and his reticence about technicalities of physics, as distinct from general truths about nature, plainly reflect his own judgement of what Stoicism chiefly has to offer his students. He is not simply conforming to trends supposedly characteristic of Late Stoicism in general, but shaping the philosophy in the direction he finds in most urgent need of emphasis. He was not alone in this, as we can see from all that he shares with Seneca and Musonius. But we need to remember that the Stoicism we know best from the Roman period was preserved precisely because it was perceived to have great educational and ethical value. There were many Stoic philosophers at Epictetus' time who continued to write in a more detached and scholarly vein.[4]

My qualifications to the Early/Middle/Late categorization of Stoicism show that this school was never a closed shop, unaccommodating to innovation or the special interests of individual philosophers. Some of them, though not Epictetus, were primarily renowned for their technical writings, but from first to last Stoicism was a practice grounded in theory rather than simply a theory or method of enquiry.

As such—and notwithstanding the special interests of individual Stoics—what the school throughout its history primarily offered was a systematic plan of life that would, ideally, assure purposefulness, serenity, dignity, and social utility at every waking moment, irrespective of external circumstances. The Stoics' rationale for this bold project was founded on their understanding of nature in general (physical reality) and human nature in particular. They take all phenomena and living beings to be the

[4] An example of this is Hierocles' *Foundations of Ethics*, a work partially preserved on papyrus and therefore available to us purely thanks to chance discovery: see Long (1993*a*). Excerpts of another work by Hierocles (or conceivably from a part of the papyrus text that has not survived), which treat questions of practical ethics, are quoted extensively in a Byzantine anthology. This is transmitted, like most classical texts, through copies made by medieval monks.

observable effects of a cosmic order, constituted and implemented by a principle they called Zeus, God, reason, cause, mind, and fate. This principle, though divine, is not supernatural, but nature itself, as manifested in such different things as the movements of the heavens, the structure of minerals, and the vital properties of plants and animals. Everything that happens is ultimately an expression of this single principle, which by acting on 'matter' extends itself throughout the universe and makes it one gigantic organism.[5]

Hence Stoics take God/reason/fate to be present everywhere, but they do not take this fact to collapse the obviously vast differences between the kinds of things that make up the universe, or to reduce human beings to the level of cogs in a machine. As human beings, we share in the structure characteristic of minerals, the vegetative capacities belonging to plants, and the sentient and goal-directed mobility of animals in general. Yet, none of these things constitutes the nature distinctive of our species. That nature expresses itself in our minds, thanks to which we have the capacity to discover where human beings fit within the cosmic order and to organize our lives as a community of persons, cooperating in social objectives and respecting one another as rational participants in the scheme of things. This nature of ours equips us to become reflective, active, and confident contributors to every situation we encounter.

For this to happen, however, we are required to understand two corollaries to our position in the universe. First, everything that falls outside our own mentality and character is not our business but belongs to other parts of the cosmic plan. We have good reason to try to bring about certain outcomes, for ourselves and for others (health, material prosperity, family solidarity, and so forth), but our well-being does not depend on these eventualities; it depends solely on excellence of character (virtue), which

[5] In this summary, I am presenting a rounded view of Stoicism rather than its exact presentation by Epictetus. While he endorses much of what I have written, he has his own distinctive emphases and omissions. Thus, to anticipate Chapter 6 of this book, he is reticent about such details of Stoic cosmology as 'matter' and causal determinism or fate, and he prefers to speak of God in personalist rather than in pantheistic terms.

means consistently aiming to do what is best in the circumstances, under the dictates of optimal reasoning. The second corollary concerns our desires and emotions. We have good reason to desire anything that accords with our natures as rational animals and to take pleasure in such things, but desires and emotions pertaining to things outside our control are not compatible with our natures or with the cosmic plan.

Stoicism, then, views the world as a system that is both deterministic and providential. God, the omnipresent active principle, establishes and implements everything in a causal sequence that leaves no room for events to occur otherwise than the way they do, though it does leave room (here things get complicated) for us to be the agents of our own decisions and hence answerable, praiseworthy, or blameable for what we think and do.[6] Yet, because God is taken to be supremely rational and benevolent, the causal sequence is also and no less basically the fulfilment of divine providence. Hence no state of the world at any time could have been different from what it is, nor could it have been better planned than the way it is.

The deterministic thesis explains why Stoics find it irrational and pointless to wish that things might be otherwise than what they actually experience. But if that were all, Stoicism would be largely an attitude of mere realism, fatalism, or resignation. The crucial step is the combination of determinism with providence. If the situations in which we find ourselves are providentially determined, and if, further, we are equipped with minds that can understand this dual aspect of things, then we have reason not only to accept everything that happens as inevitable but also to regard whatever impinges on our individual selves as the allotment that is right for us and as the requisite opportunity for us to discover and play our human part in the cosmic plan. Hence committed Stoics will interpret circumstances that are conventionally regarded as misfortunes as challenges to be accepted and even welcomed because they give them the means of proving and showing their rationality and dignity as fully-fledged human beings.

[6] The complication concerns the compatibility of human responsibility with strict determinism. This subject is studied with great resourcefulness by Bobzien (1998). Where Epictetus stands on it is a question for later (pp. 162 and 221).

It is this last point that has regularly troubled critics of Stoicism who today, even more than in antiquity, are likely to find the philosophy's theology and unqualified faith in divine providence naive and unpalatable. Yet, it is a serious mistake, in my opinion, to interpret Stoicism, as some modern scholars have tried to do, in ways that tone down the cosmic dimension. For, whatever we may think of that, it was central to the Greek and Roman Stoics' outlook on the world and the mainstay of the confidence this outlook engendered. Epictetus speaks to this on numerous occasions, but, before I give an example from his own words, here is a sample of relevant passages from other Stoics.

First, the celebrated lines of Cleanthes, quoted by Epictetus (*Ench.* 53):

> Lead me, Zeus, and you, Fate, wherever you have ordained for me. For I shall follow unflinching. But if I become bad and unwilling, I shall follow none the less.[7]

Next, two quotations from Chrysippus:

> There is no other or more appropriate way of approaching the theory of good and bad things or the virtues or happiness than from universal nature and from the administration of the world . . . For the theory of good and bad things must be attached to these, since there is no other starting point or reference for them that is better, and physical speculation is to be adopted for no other purpose than for the differentiation of good and bad things.
>
> (Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1035C–D)

> Since universal nature reaches everywhere, it must be the case that however anything happens in the whole and in any of its parts it happens in accordance with universal nature and its reasons in unhindered sequence, because neither is there anything that could interfere with its government from outside, nor is there any way for any of the parts to enter any process or state except in accordance with universal nature.
>
> (Plutarch, ibid. 1050C–D)

Now, an excerpt from Seneca (*On Providence* 5.6–8):

> I am under no compulsion, I suffer nothing against my will. I am not God's slave but his follower, and the more so because I know that

[7] This was Epictetus' favourite Stoic citation; he quotes its first sentence four times in the discourses; see Ch. 6 n. 13.

everything proceeds from a law that is fixed and pronounced for all time. Fate guides us and it was settled at the first hour of birth what length of time remains for each. Cause is linked to cause, and a long sequence of things controls public and private affairs . . .

Why do we complain? For this we were born. Let nature deal, as it wishes, with its own bodies. We should be cheerful and brave in relation to everything, reflecting that nothing belonging to us is perishing. What is a good man's role? To offer himself to fate. It is a great consolation to be moved along with the universe. Whatever it is that ordered us so to live and so to die, it binds the divine beings by the same necessity. An inevitable course conveys the human and the divine alike. It was the author and ruler of the world who wrote the decrees of fate, but he follows them himself.

Finally, Marcus Aurelius (v.8.2):

You must consider the doing and perfecting of what the universal nature decrees in the same light as your health, and welcome all that happens, even if it seems harsh, because it leads to the health of the universe, the welfare and well-being of Zeus. For he would not have allotted this to anyone if it were not beneficial to the whole.

Our modern languages are packed with expressions that, however superficially, reflect the popular diffusion of Stoicism as a response to severe challenges and adversity: Be a man; take what is coming to you; roll with the punches; what will be will be; show some guts; make the best of it; go down fighting; don't be a wimp; we had this coming to us; try to be philosophical; just my luck; go with the flow; don't make things worse; you'd better face up to it—and so forth. Such expressions, for all their familiarity and banality, have their uses, because every person sometimes confronts a situation for which the only alternative responses to this one are rage, despair, apathy, helplessness, or total collapse.[8] Yet, ancient Stoicism was not premised on its capacity to rationalize adversity *as distinct from* prosperity. While Stoics liked to invoke Socrates' equanimity at his trial and death as a supreme example of dignity and courage at the limit, they also insisted that outwardly favourable situations are just as demanding in

[8] Stoicism allowed suicide to be a positive or 'well-reasoned' response to circumstances and prospects that exclude the minimum provisions for continuing to live a 'natural' human life; see p. 203.

terms of the principles and care with which they should be handled.

This last point is a constant theme in Epictetus. Before concluding this chapter with an outline of his main ideas and originality, I append the full text of one short discourse (1.14).[9] This will serve better than any summary to show how he expresses and interprets the characteristically Stoic perspective on cosmic order (Epictetus prefers to call it God) and human nature.

6 *God's Oversight of Everyone*

When someone asked him how a person could be convinced that his every action is overseen by God, Epictetus said: Don't you think that the universe is a unified structure?

I do.

Well, don't you think that there is an interaction between things on earth and things in the heavens?

I do.

How else could things happen so regularly, by God's command as it were? When he tells plants to bloom, they bloom, when he tells them to bear fruit, they bear it, when he tells them to ripen, they ripen; and again when he tells them to drop their fruit, shed their leaves, contract into themselves, stay quiet and pause, they do these things? How else, at the waxing and waning of the moon and at the sun's approach and withdrawal, could we observe such changes and contrary mutations in the things on earth?

But if plants and our own bodies are so connected and interactive with the universe, does that not apply all the more to our minds? And if our minds are so connected and attached to God, as parts and offshoots of his being, does he not perceive their every movement as something belonging to him and sharing in his nature?

You, for your part, have the capacity to reflect on the divine government and each one of its features, and similarly on human affairs; and you have the capacity to be moved by countless things simultaneously, in your senses and your thinking, assenting to or rejecting some of them, and suspending judgement about others. In your mind you retain so many impressions from such a great range of things, and under their influence you find yourself having ideas corresponding to your initial impressions, and from countless things you secure a series of skills and memories.

[9] For a full commentary on this discourse, tracing its relation to the Stoic tradition and other sources, see Dobbin (1998).

Is God, then, not capable of overseeing everything and being present with everything and maintaining a certain distribution with everything? Yet the sun is capable of illuminating so large a part of the universe, and of leaving unlit only the part covered by the earth's shadow. Is he, then, who made the sun (which is a small part of himself in relation to the whole) and causes it to turn, is he not capable of perceiving everything?

I myself cannot follow all this at once.

But who tells you that your capacities are the equal of Zeus's? Yet, for all that, he has presented to each person each person's own divine spirit [*daimôn*], as a guardian, and committed the person's safekeeping to this trustee, who does not sleep and who cannot be misled. To what better and more caring guardian could he have entrusted us?

So when you close your doors and make it dark inside, remember never to say you are alone, because you are not; God is inside and your own divine spirit too. What need have they of light to see what you are doing? It is to this God too that you should swear allegiance, as soldiers do to Caesar. Now when they get their pay, they swear to put the safety of Caesar ahead of everything; so won't you, who have been given such great and numerous privileges, swear your oath, or if you have already done so, stick to it?

What, then, will you swear? Never to disobey, or press charges or complain about anything God has given you, or be reluctant in doing or suffering anything that is inevitable. Is this oath anything like that other one? There men swear to put no one ahead of Caesar. But here we swear to put ourselves ahead of everything else.

In this passage we see Epictetus giving his own *personalist* twist to Stoicism's standard conception of cosmic order and its implications for human beings' understanding of who they are and where they fit. Although he starts by justifying divine providence, the real focus of the discourse is less on this than on what it means to be endowed, as humans are, with the capacity to oversee themselves and to acknowledge their internal divinity (see Section 6.5), which is also the voice of objective reason and integrity, as their only authority.

Epictetus believed that our reasoning powers and moral sense are an 'offshoot' of the world's divine governor, whose cosmic order is a pattern for the harmony we should try to replicate in our thoughts and actions. But even if we reject that powerful though