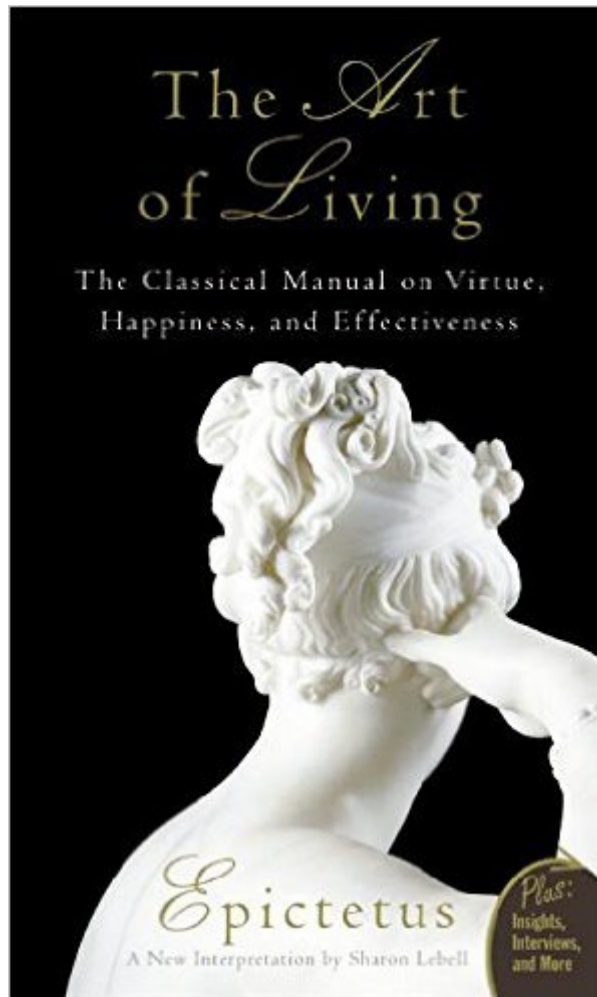


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Art Of Living: The Classical Manual On Virtue, Happiness, And Effectiveness



Synopsis

Epictetus was born into slavery about 55 ce in the eastern outreaches of the Roman Empire. Once freed, he established an influential school of Stoic philosophy, stressing that human beings cannot control life, only their responses to it. By putting into practice the ninety-three witty, wise, and razor-sharp instructions that make up *The Art of Living*, readers learn to meet the challenges of everyday life successfully and to face life's inevitable losses and disappointments with grace.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Epictetus is one of the real "greats" in the history of philosophy. From the very bottom of the Roman social ladder, he taught and practiced a philosophy (originally due to Zeno) that came to be called "Stoicism" and influenced Roman society all the way to the very top: Roman soldiers used to carry copies of the *Enchiridion* into battle, and the emperor Marcus Aurelius's famous "Meditations" consist mostly of his urging himself, apparently with limited success, to come closer to the Stoic ideal. The people who characterize Sharon Lebell's interpretive rendering as a "self-help" book have at least half a point; the written records of Epictetus's teachings (Epictetus didn't write them down himself) were self-help books in the first place. And fine ones they were. Oh, there are a few points at which Epictetus counsels heights of detachment suitable only for inhuman monsters, as when he suggests that we remember our wives and children are mortal so that we won't grieve when they die. But on the whole his teachings are firmly founded on the view that absolutely everything occurs by Providence, we are all of us children of God and citizens of the world with natural fellowship with

one another, and we should assume responsibility for precisely those things which we can control -- namely, ourselves. This view, or something very close to it, has grounded religious and philosophical programs from the Torah to Alcoholics Anonymous, from Spinoza to the Musar movement, from antiquity to the very latest modernity (e.g., Mark Rosen's excellent _Thank You for Being Such a Pain_): when you face a challenge, use it to improve yourself; that's what it's for.

Epictetus desperately needs a modern, contemporary translation. As far as I know, all of the available translations in print are either terribly academic or use Victorian language. This is NOT a translation but a very free, very loose paraphrase and condensation. I knew I was in trouble when I read the introduction. The author slams Western philosophy for being too cerebral and for not dealing sufficiently with the irrational aspects of life. She obviously does not like the use of reason to deal with day to day life. Then why, I might ask, is she paraphrasing a philosopher who is one of the presursors to modern rational psychotherapy? Like many Westerners who dabble in Eastern philosophy and only know it superficially, she assumes that it speaks more directly to the needs of people than Western philosophy. This despite the fact that Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Epictetus, etc. were immensely popular with the general population of ancient times. So much so, in fact, that common citizens wore rings and bought mirrors with sayings of Epicurus on them and Socrates could be lampooned in a popular comedy. Stoicism was the unofficial religion of the Roman army--not an elitist, irrelevant teaching. And Epicureanism had widespread allegiance and was able to fill huge communities all throughout the ancient world. The most popular devotional books of the 17th and 18th century were all basically rewrites of the ancient Greeks. By the time the introduction was finished, I knew that I was in for a very trendy, inaccurate rendering of Epictetus. The worst chapter has to be the one called "Avoid casual sex".

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