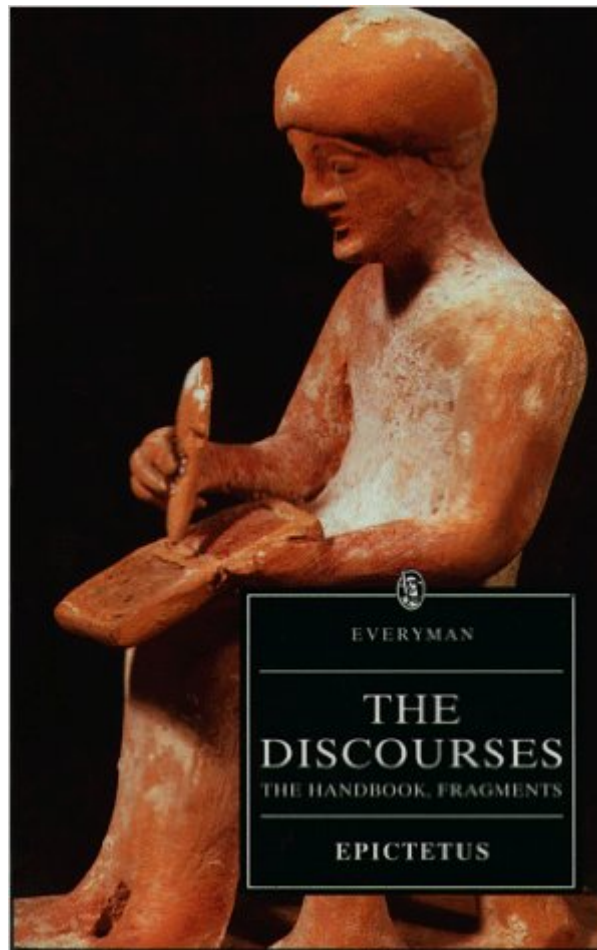


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The Discourses Of Epictetus - The Handbook - Fragments (Everyman's Library)



Synopsis

For centuries, Stoicism was virtually the unofficial religion of the Roman world. Yet the stress on endurance, self-restraint and power of the will to withstand calamity can often seem coldhearted. It is Epictetus, a lame former slave exiled by the Emperor Domitian, who offers by far the most positive and humane version of stoic ideals. The Discourses, assembled by his pupil Arrian, catch him in action, publicly setting out his views on ethical dilemmas. Committed to communicating with the widest possible audience, Epictetus uses humor, imagery, conversations and homely comparisons to put his message across. The result is a perfect universal justice, calm indifference in the face of pain – which have proved so influential throughout Western history. The most comprehensive edition available with introduction, notes, selected criticism, glossary and chronology of Epictetus' life and times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Many of us are prone to think of ourselves as somewhat "pitiful" in comparison to others: we drive a Chevrolet; they drive a BMW: we have 1900 sq. ft. in our home; they have 3200: we make \$35,000 a year; they have a yacht on the Caribbean. Suppose you were lame; a freed slave; and subject to arrest by "the leader of the free world" if he didn't like your teaching. Such was Epictetus who, along with other philosophers, was expelled from Rome by the emperor some 19 centuries ago. Epictetus was not the founder of Stoicism, but he was--apparently--its greater teacher because it is his discussions which have survived in the most nearly complete form for us. This volume contains not only the four "books" of discourses, but also the distillation called the "handbook" or "enchiridion",

and various fragments preserved in other writings. These teachings were written down by Arrian, a student of Epictetus and author of a biography of Alexander the Great. Here we hear, as it were, the voice of Epictetus teaching: often within the text we have the questions of a student to whom Epictetus is replying; we are able to catch the teacher's irony and wit. It is as if we are sitting in his presence, just a little farther away than we might wish. Epictetus's "program" is simple: to teach us how to live without fear or grief or unsatisfied desire; to teach how to "worry" ourselves only over those things which we can control, which--to put it simply, as Epictetus always does--are our own reactions and responses. I cannot control my wife; I can control how I respond to her. I cannot control the Senators; I can control how I respond to them. I cannot control whether I have cancer or not; I can control how I react to that situation.

Stoicism is the Philosophy of Choice. It emphasizes emotional responsibility, physical and intellectual temperance, and spiritual connection to a world beyond thoughts and words. The basic tenets of all Stoics are as follows:- I always have a choice. My impulses, whether emotionally or physically based, can be controlled by my Will. I can choose to react to them or to ignore them.- The choices of others only effect me in so far as I allow them to effect me. I Will myself into the role of victim or victor. These are choices. No one can harm me.- I choose to engage life rather than disengage from life. For a Will is best when it is tempered in action. The texts included in this book, written by Arrian, cover a myriad examples of these principles applied in life, as well as a large set of refutations of what the author construes as contrary philosophies. (The schools of Cynicism and the Epicurean are the main adversaries here.) Of the current English editions available, the Everyman Library's version is by far the most comprehensive collection. Why one of the reviewers below felt compelled to outline (rather clumsily) the differences between Epictetus and Jesus is beyond my field of study, but I can say that I find the two "philosophies" (for, in truth, Jesus offers not just a philosophy but a faith) quite complimentary. Gandhi thought so too, and his philosophy of satyagraha was a rare combination of both. As any student of Stoicism will find, the one tenet missing from the Stoic lexicon is the following:- I cannot say that he/she/it/they always has/have a choice.

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