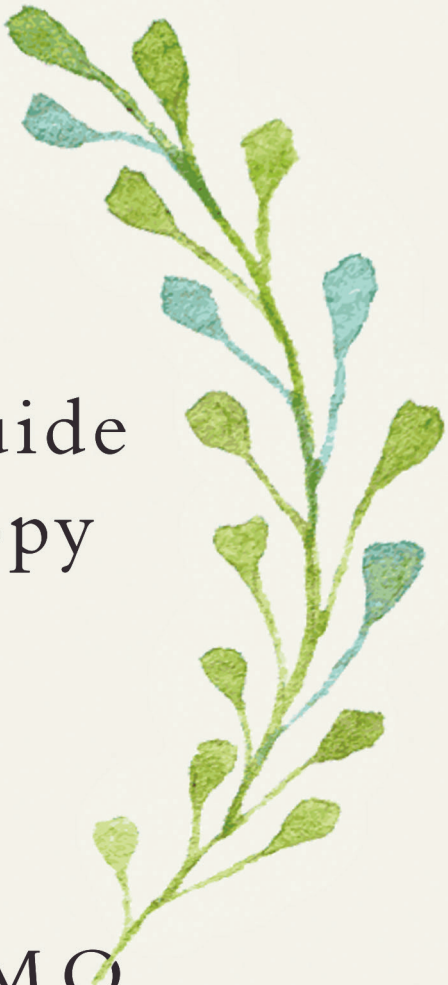
'Bursting with practical wisdom and engaging stories. A Stoicism 2.0 for twenty-first century happiness'
Skye Cleary



The Stoic Guide to a Happy Life

53 Brief Lessons for Living

MASSIMO PIGLIUCCI

PRAISE FOR *THE STOIC GUIDE TO A HAPPY LIFE*

"A wonderfully fun introduction to Stoic philosophy, bursting with practical wisdom and engaging stories. I particularly admire how Pigliucci revisits and reinterprets Epictetus's *Enchiridion* while showing why we need a 'Stoicism 2.0' for twenty-first century happiness, and clearly illustrating how his version differs from the original. It's an excellent book, written in Pigliucci's splendidly lucid and accessible style"

—Skye Cleary, author of *Existentialism and Romantic Love*

"This is a bold, contemporary updating of Stoicism for the present day. Taking the ancient Stoic Epictetus as his inspiration, Pigliucci has rewritten Epictetus's *Handbook* in order to update it, make it more relevant to a modern

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audience, but also to ensure that the core Stoic ideas shine through. The result is what Pigliucci calls Stoicism 2.0. This is a manual for living for those who approach the ancient Stoics as guides, not masters"

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"An engaging introduction to the Stoic life through an updated version of Epictetus's *Handbook*. An unusual and helpful feature is an appendix in which Pigliucci highlights his modifications of the original Stoic text to take account of modern thinking"

—Christopher Gill, author of *Greek Thought*

"A user-friendly manual for applying Stoicism to daily life in the twenty-first century"

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To my wife, Jennifer, whose love and support are making it easy to live a happy life.

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PART I

BETTING ON THE PHILOSOPHER-SLAVE

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I.1

EPICTETUS AND ME

My life changed instantly, and for the better, in the fall of 2014.[1] At least, an important, impactful, and positive change began then, and is continuing now. The trigger was my first reading of a philosopher I had never heard of, despite the fact that he was a household name for eighteen centuries or thereabout: Epictetus. The words in questions were,

> I have to die. If it is now, well then I die now; if later, then now I will take my lunch, since the hour for lunch has arrived—and dying I will tend to later.[2]

It blew my mind. Who the heck was this first-century guy who in two sentences displayed both a delightful sense of

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humor and a no-nonsense attitude toward life, and death? We don't really know much about him. Not even his real name. "Epíktetos" (ἐπίκτητος) in Greek simply means "acquired," since he was a slave, born around the year 55 in Hierapolis (modern-day Pamukkale, in western Turkey). He was bought by Epaphroditos, a wealthy freedman and secretary to the emperor Nero.

Sometime after moving to Rome, Epictetus began to study Stoic philosophy with the most prestigious teacher of the time, Musonius Rufus. That may have helped him on the occasion of a defining episode in his life, when he became crippled. Origen tells us how Epictetus handled it:

> Might you not, then, take Epictetus, who, when his master was twisting his leg, said, smiling and unmoved, "You will break my leg;" and when it was broken, he added, "Did I not tell you that you would break it?"[3]

Eventually Epictetus obtained his freedom and began to teach philosophy in Rome. At first, it didn't go too well. Referring to an episode that happened to him while he was expounding philosophy in the streets of the imperial capital, he recounted to one of his students,

> You run the risk of [someone] saying, "What business is that of yours, sir? What are you to me?" Pester him further,

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> and he is liable to punch you in the nose. I myself was once keen for this sort of discourse, until I met with just such a reception.[4]

Apparently, he wasn't annoying just to people in the street. Like many other Stoics before and after him, he had a dangerous tendency to speak truth to power, so the emperor Domitian exiled him in the year 93. Undaunted, he moved to Nicopolis, in northwestern Greece, and established a school there. It became the most renowned place to learn philosophy in the entire Mediterranean, and a later emperor, Hadrian, stopped by to visit and pay his regards to the famous teacher.

Epictetus, just like his role model, Socrates, did not write anything down, focusing instead on teaching and talking to his many students. Thankfully, one of them was Arrian of Nicomedia, who later became a public servant, military commander, historian, and philosopher in his own right. The only two sets of teachings we have from Epictetus are Arrian's notes, collected in four books of *Discourses* (half of which are unfortunately lost) and a short handbook, or manual, known as the *Enchiridion*.

Epictetus lived a simple life, unmarried and owning few things. In his old age he adopted a friend's child, who would have otherwise been "exposed" to death, and raised him with the help of a woman. He died around 135 CE, approximately

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eighty years old—a remarkable age for the time, or any time, really.[5]

Back to my own discovery of Epictetus. I was positively stunned. Why had I never come across his writings before? Or even his name (such as it is)? I was fairly well acquainted with the other major Stoics, particularly Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, but Epictetus didn't come up even during my graduate studies in philosophy! His star may have been eclipsed among modern professional philosophers, occupied as they too often are in precisely the sort of logical hairsplitting that the sage from Hierapolis disdained.[6] But his influence has been constant throughout the centuries, and continues to grow.

Not only did the writings and teachings of Epictetus, and in particular his handbook, influence the last of the Roman Stoics, the emperor Marcus Aurelius, but the *Enchiridion* was translated and updated by Christians throughout the Middle Ages, and used as a manual of spiritual exercises by monks in monasteries. The first printed edition, translated in Latin, was the work of Angelo Poliziano in 1479, who dedicated it to the Medici of Florence. The book arguably reached its popular height in the period 1550 to 1750, between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The first English translation (based on a French original) was by James Sandford in 1567. The Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci translated it in Chinese in the early seventeenth century. John Harvard

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bequeathed a copy to his newly founded college in 1638, and Adam Smith, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson all had copies in their personal libraries.

But Epictetus's manual appears in unexpected places throughout history. Shakespeare has Hamlet declaim, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (Act 2, Scene 2), which is a slight paraphrase of *Enchiridion* 5. Epictetus is also mentioned in François Rabelais's *Pantagruel*; in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* by Laurence Sterne; in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce; and he is paraphrased by John Milton.

More recently, David Mamet and William H. Macy, who introduced the acting method known as practical aesthetics, list Epictetus among their sources. And so does Albert Ellis, the founder of rational emotive behavior therapy, the forerunner of cognitive behavioral therapy, the most successful evidence-based modern type of psychotherapy.

The 1998 novel *A Man in Full*, by Tom Wolfe, features a character whose life (in prison) is turned around by reading the *Enchiridion*. James (Bond) Stockdale, a fighter pilot who served and was captured in Vietnam, received the Medal of Honor, and later ran as vice president of the United States in 1992, tells us in his memoir that Epictetus saved his life during his years of imprisonment, torture, and solitary confinement in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton."

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