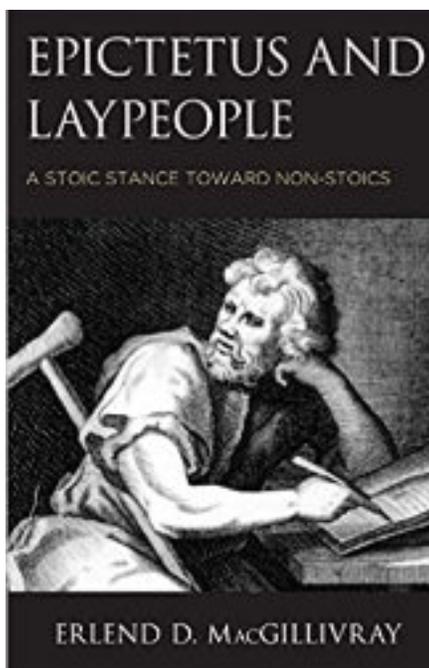


# RECENT BOOKS ON STOICISM



**Erlend D. MacGillivray. *Epictetus and Laypeople*. Lexington 2020. 254pp.**

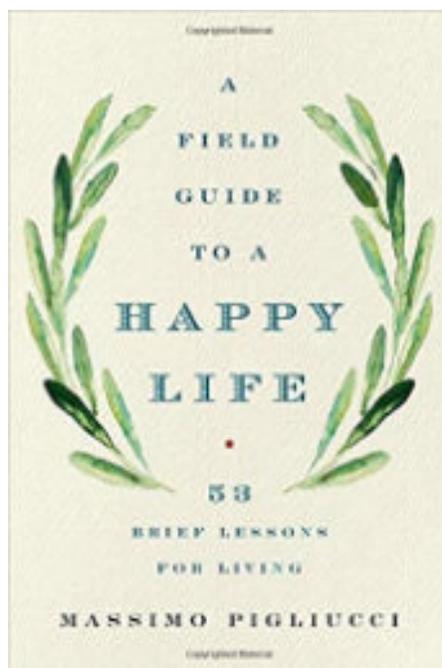
What understanding did the ancient Stoics have of the vast majority of the people in their time? Erlend MacGillivray explores this question in his new book *Epictetus and Laypeople: A Stoic Stance*.

MacGillivray first starts examining how philosophical identity was established in antiquity. He then focuses on Epictetus, who often talked about laypeople. According to Epictetus, most of humanity is inclined to act in line with virtuous principles depending on their preconceptions, civic law, popular religion, etc. Yet there exists a small and distinguishable group of philosophically aware individuals.

This book also highlights other Stoics to show that the means of lay reform that MacGillivray explores were not just implicitly understood in antiquity. It is a well-developed system of thought.

**Massimo Pigliucci. *A Field Guide to a Happy Life*. Basic Books 2020. 160pp.**

*A Field Guide to a Happy Life* by Massimo Pigliucci is a rewrite of

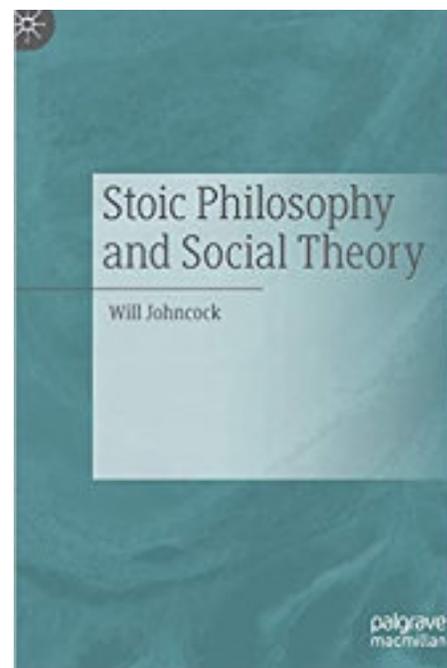


*Epictetus' Enchiridion*, in an attempt to modernize it, making it compatible with modern science.

There have been several attempts to modernize Stoicism. They all fall into one of two categories: fundamental and cosmetic. Larry Becker's scholarly *New Stoicism* is probably the best-known attempt to fundamentally re-think Stoicism. Most other attempts (such as *Reformed Stoicism* and *Stoic Minimalism*) fall into the cosmetic category, as does this book. I call it cosmetic because I believe that these approaches retain the essentials of Stoic ethics but change the emphasis and adapts the concepts and language to conform to modern sensibilities. This, however, does not diminish the usefulness of cosmetic retelling, since some may find it appealing.

*A Field Guide* follows the structure of *Enchiridion's* 53 chapters. Each chapter is a paraphrasing of the original where the parts deemed 'unscientific' or outdated is reworded to make it palatable to the modern reader.

Another feature of this book is a table at the end which identifies the themes on which the retold passages in differ from the original.



**Will Johncock. *Stoic Philosophy and Social Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan 2020, 352pp.**

How do we reconcile ancient Stoic philosophy with modern social theory and sociology? What is the relationship between an individual and their environment? These are the main themes of Will Johncock's new book *Stoic Philosophy and Social Theory*.

By pairing thirteen ancient Stoic thoughts with that of thirteen modern social theorists (such as Epictetus and Émile Durkheim, Zeno and Pierre Bourdieu, and Marcus Aurelius and George Herbert Mead) Johncock explores how to position individualism within our socialized existence.

Will Johncock believes that by integrating modern perspectives with ancient Stoic philosophies we can question how internally separate from our social environment we ever are. This tandem analysis identifies new orientations for established ideas in Stoicism and social theory about the mind, being present, self-preservation, knowledge, travel, climate change, the body, kinship, gender, education, and emotions.

*Chuck Chakrapani*