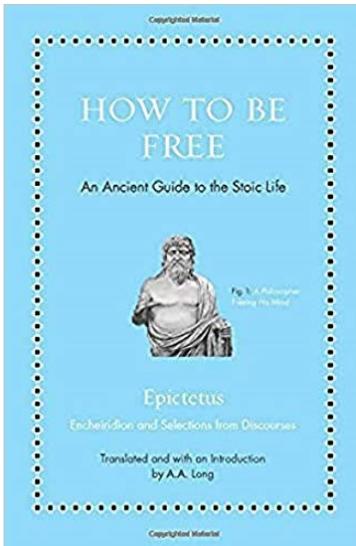


BOOK REVIEW

How to be Free



A.A. Long, *How to be Free*.
Princeton University Press,
2018. 232 pages.

<https://amzn.to/2TRWEQA>

This is an impressive new edition of Epictetus' guide to the good life, 'Enchiridion'. I have read several translations of Enchiridion, from Elizabeth Carter's to Robin Hard's. Although some older translations are more cumbersome to follow, most of them are excellent. I did not expect anything less from the eminent A.A. Long, but this edition is even more lucid and contemporary than I expected. To achieve this level of lucidity, Long uses a thought-for-thought rather than a word-for-word approach to translation while remaining true to the original. The words and idioms he uses are modern.

Even more impressive is Long's introduction. In a few short pages, Long summarizes the philosophy of Epictetus with great clarity. To my pleasant surprise, Long covers two aspects of Stoic thought that always surprised me but are generally ignored by Stoic scholars: The first is Stoicism's seemingly self-centered approach to happiness. For example, the Stoic virtue of justice is not based on altruism, but on a premise like 'what is not good for the beehive cannot be good for the bee' (Marcus Aurelius) or Hierocles Circles. The second is the ancient Stoics' seeming unconcern about human cruelty – violent emperors, arbitrary punishments, blood sports for the sake of entertainment, slavery and the like. (Yes, I know, I know, if we dig deeply, ancient Stoics did say in fine print about some of these things –

not very noticeable.) Long provides a nice discussion of these as well.

I own about a dozen versions of Enchiridion, many of them very good. I even have published my own version of the book. I didn't expect to find anything new in yet another translation. I was wrong. This translation is amazing. The rendition is clear and modern. The prose is fresh and lively.

In addition, *How to be Free* includes excerpts from Epictetus' *Discourses*. But they are reproductions of William Oldfather's (another brilliant translator) translation. On a sad note, I also incidentally learned from the book that Rob Dobbin, a lucid translator of Epictetus, had passed way.

Rarely does one expect to read an introductory book and come away with advanced insights. I have been fortunate enough to read not one, but two such books in 2018. (The other one is *Stoicism: A Very Brief Introduction* by Brad Inwood., reviewed in the last issue of THE STOIC.)

If you are already familiar with Stoicism, you will find this book a delightful new addition to your library. If you are someone who knows nothing about Stoicism or Epictetus, you would be hard put to find a better book than this on how to be free. I cannot recommend this translation of *Enchiridion* strongly enough.

Chuck Chakrapani

Disclosure

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