INTRODUCTION

How to be free!? Is it a question or an exclamation, a political manifesto or a longing to go native, an aspiration for autonomy or the route to emancipation from bondage? This book presents an ancient Greek philosopher's take on freedom—freedom construed as living in agreement with nature, owning and ruling oneself, becoming a world citizen, desiring always and only what you are assured of getting—and much more. Epictetus (c. AD 55–135), our author and guide to the Stoic life, was born a slave (his Greek name means "acquired"), and entered service as a slave in the household of Epaphroditus, a power broker in Nero's Rome, and himself a freedman. By the time Epictetus publicly delivered his thoughts on freedom, he had enjoyed many years of manumission,

but the experience of slavery left its mark on his philosophy through and through. The first lesson of the *Encheiridion*, his handbook guide to Stoicism, insists that everything that is truly our own doing is *naturally free, unimpeded, and unconstrained*.

Freedom, according to this notion, is neither legal status nor opportunity to move around at liberty. It is the mental orientation of persons who are impervious to frustration or disappointment because their wants and decisions depend on themselves and involve nothing that they cannot deliver to themselves. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius (reigned AD 161–180) took the point and reflected on it in his Stoic *Meditations*. And the novelist, Tom Wolfe, followed suit when, in his 1998 novel *A Man in Full*, he imagines his young hero escaping from both a literal and a metaphorical prison after reading and digesting the *Discourses* of Epictetus.

INTRODUCTION

The chief constraint on personal freedom in ancient Greece and Rome was what Epictetus knew at first hand, the social practice and indignity of slavery. It was slavery, the condition of being literally owned and made to serve at another's behest that gave ancient freedom its intensely positive value and emotional charge. Slaves' bodily movements during their waking lives were strictly constrained by their masters' wishes and by the menial functions they were required to perform. But slaves, like everyone else, had minds, and minds as well as bodies are subject to freedom and constraint. You can be externally free and internally a slave, controlled by psychological masters in the form of disabling desires and passions and cravings. Conversely, you could be outwardly obstructed or even in literal bondage but internally free from frustration and disharmony, so free in fact that you found yourself in charge of your own

well-being, lacking little or nothing that you could not provide for yourself. The latter, in essence, is the freedom that Epictetus, the ancient Stoic philosopher, made the central theme of his teaching.

Epictetus in His Time and Place

In the early years of the second century of our era, this ex-slave established a school for young men in the northwestern Greek city of Nicopolis, which had become a fashionable metropolitan center. One of his students was a brilliant youth called Arrian. Lucius Flavianus Arrianus, to give him his full name, was so impressed by his teacher's message that he produced eight books of *Discourses* from the lectures on Stoicism he had heard Epictetus deliver, writing them out in more or less verbatim form; and he also drafted the summary of them that we know as the *Encheiridion*, or

handbook. The work you are presently reading, "How to Be Free," contains my translations of the *Encheiridion* and of nine excerpts from the four surviving books of *Discourses*. Arrian went on to have an illustrious career in Roman administration, and he published many other books including a history of Alexander the Great. We don't know how he managed to reproduce the actual words of Epictetus, but the text that has come down to us, written in *koinē*, the colloquial Greek also used in the New Testament, is clearly the voice of his teacher and not merely Arrian's adaptation of the way the philosopher spoke.

As a guide to the Stoic life, Epictetus's philosophy, especially in the *Encheiridion* format, has been popular ever since the text was first edited and printed in the sixteenth century. Translated and retranslated into numerous languages, his words strike home because they

focus so sharply and memorably on situations that are the common lot of people at every time and place. The emotions to which he propounds remedy—fear, anxiety, envy, anger, resentment, grief—are everyone's experience, whether you live in Imperial Rome or modern America. To that extent Epictetus needs no introduction. Yet, while many of the scenarios he pictures are familiar place-fillers for our own experience, they also include his distinctive milieu and the mores of his distant time.

We find ourselves in a world that includes slaves (*Encheiridion* 12, 14, 26), public baths (ibid. 4, 45), games in the arena (ibid. 29, 33), and professional fortune tellers (ibid. 32). A hazard that Epictetus himself had experienced is exile (ibid. 21). Imperial Rome and its provinces were managed by a highly regimented and competitive system of offices and office holders (ibid. 19, 24). Jockeying for

position was endemic, and it included looking for patrons, attending banquets, and seeking to impress influential figures (ibid, 19, 24, 25, 33). Epictetus dwells on the value of maintaining one's independence, which reminds us that his young students, like Arrian his recorder, were on the threshold of making their careers in the Imperial army or civil service. It was a male-dominated culture, as he indicates with his remarks about women and female roles (ibid. 40), but the *Encheiridion* in general has no obvious gender orientation, and it is completely free from machismo. The "you" and "we" Epictetus addresses could be any of us with minimal need to register cultural difference.

The Roman world of his lifetime was an absolute autocracy, headed by the emperor or Caesar. Epictetus rarely touches on politics, mentioning Caesar only once in this book's material (*Discourses* 3) and omitting all allusion

to historical events. In the complete *Discourses* (e.g., 1.2) he does occasionally refer to historical figures who resisted imperial demands, but he stays completely silent concerning the emperors who ruled at the time of his teaching in Greece. Though freedom had been an important Stoic notion from the beginning, it owes its special importance in Epictetus not only because of his early life as a slave but also because the people he was addressing had no prospects of enjoying political autonomy.

Stoicism and Freedom

Stoic philosophy had originated in Greece at the end of the fourth century BC. Its founding fathers were eastern Mediterranean immigrants to Athens, which was no longer a vibrant democracy, as the city had been at the time of Socrates, but a client state of the kingdom of Macedonia. Loss of political autonomy was

reflected in philosophy at Athens by an inward turn in the focus of ethics. Neither Stoicism nor Epicureanism, the other leading Hellenistic school, engaged strongly in political theory, as their predecessors Plato and Aristotle had done. The main focus of the younger philosophers' societal attention was not politics and legislation but personal well-being and self-improvement. This inward turn is strikingly illustrated by the way Stoic thought from its beginning treated freedom and slavery as primarily ethical and psychological denominators rather than marks of social status. According to Zeno, the original head of the Stoic school, freedom is the exclusive prerogative of those who are wise, while inferior persons, who comprise the majority of people, are not only fools but also slaves.

A first reaction to this claim could include shock at its intellectual elitism and its

insensitivity to the plight of persons unfortunate enough to be literally enslaved. But now consider how radically Zeno's claim, in a slave-based economy, challenges the evaluation of persons in terms of the conventional servitude/freedom dichotomy. If wisdom is the true criterion of freedom, the principal burden of slavery shifts from the outer to the inner, from the physical to the mental, and philosophy not manumission becomes the source of liberty. You are enslaved, according to this uncompromising doctrine, if you set your heart on anything that is liable to impediment, whether because your body lets you down, or passions and emotions have you in their thrall, or you attach your well-being to things that depend on others—people, property, popularity, or simply luck.

In his celebrated essay "Two Concepts of Liberty," Isaiah Berlin distinguished between the "negative" notion of freedom *from* coercion (not

being interfered with by others) and the "positive" notion of freedom *to be* or *to live* as one chooses (self-mastery or self-determination). For Epictetus these two notions come together so closely that they entail one another, as we can see in the following passage:

> Our master is anyone who has the power to implement or prevent the things that we want or don't want. Whoever wants to be free, therefore, should wish for nothing or avoid nothing that is up to other people. Failing that, one is bound to be a slave. (*Encheiridion* 14)

We could rewrite the second sentence along the lines: "Whoever wants to be free from coercion should restrict their wishes and aversions to things over which they have complete control."

How can we be sure that such choice is good for us and good for those whose company we

share? Why be self-reliant rather than follow the ten commandments or some other set of time-honored principles? How can we know what to choose? The answer to these questions brings us back to Zeno's "wisdom" as the essence of freedom. His Greek word *sophia*, in its ordinary usage, can cover any kind of expertise, ranging from practical craftsmanship like carpentry to abstract knowledge such as geometry. In all cases, *sophia* signifies successful practice of a skill, and the skill that concerned Zeno and subsequent Stoic philosophers is the art of life. We can gloss this art as knowing how to live in harmony, harmony with our human nature and harmony with our social and physical environment. To achieve or try to achieve that understanding is the task of reason, and reason, according to Stoicism, is what makes human beings distinctive among animals (*Discourses* 7, 8).

Epictetus as Stoic Teacher

The texts of Epictetus that you will read here elaborate on these doctrines and explore their implications as guidance for everyday life. His contexts cover an enormous range of situations, ranging from mundane circumstances of family and professional life to challenging situations such as illness, poverty, and death. Epictetus does not distinguish sharply between morals and manners (see *Encheiridion* 33). Everything we are called on to do and think about is germane to his principal question: is this something that is up to me to decide and get started on, or should I accept it calmly and dispassionately as a situation that was brought about by things that are outside my control? A moment's reflection will show that the either/or question covers just about every imaginable situation. Someone is rude to you: that happening

is outside your control, but you have complete freedom in how you respond to it. Accidents happen, a loved one dies, you don't get the job you applied for, you fall ill. None of this was your doing or responsibility, but in each case you are presented with something else that you can do, namely, treat the situation as an opportunity for exercising your own agency and assessment as distinct from taking yourself to be a victim of forces outside yourself, or as badly done to, or as singularly unfortunate.

Epictetus's message of freedom, when reduced to succinct modern terms, might seem to fit such homely advice as "Get real," "Grow up," "Show what you are made of," "Let it go," "Mind your own business." You can find more or less exact equivalents to these slogans in some of this book's translated materials. Their familiarity has much to do with the way ancient Stoicism has influenced Western thought

and education since the time when Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius were first assimilated into European and American culture. It was these authors who gave rise to the modern sense of "philosophy" and "philosophical" as an outlook of serenity, calm, or resignation in the face of difficulties. These attitudes are not in vogue today because they don't fit the fashion for authenticity, expectation, display of feeling, and self-assertion. But in practice, as modern Stoic practitioners have found, they are timelessly relevant, and particularly applicable to our hectic world of social media, sound bites, validation, outrage, attention-seeking, and self-imposed anxiety.

"Get real" and so forth, as we use these watchwords today, have lost touch with their ancient Stoic underpinnings. As employed by Epictetus, they are advice on how persons can best organize their lives according to the

Stoic understanding of nature, psychology, and human values. Although Epictetus's voice is homely and informal, he was not himself a sloganeer. He was a popularizing presenter of an elaborate philosophical system, which relied, as any genuine philosophy must rely, on rigorous argument, internal coherence, and empirical justification.

One of his key words is nature (Greek *physis*). This term covers three interrelated areas: (1) the structure and contents of the physical world, hence the scope of our word "physics"; (2) human nature in respect to our mental faculties, aptitudes, and potentialities; and (3) the values that accord or fail to accord with human excellence and a flourishing life. As background to reading the *Encheiridion* and my selection of passages from the *Discourses*, here is a short review of these three areas of nature in Stoicism and of the way Epictetus uses them.

Living in Harmony with Nature

1 *External Nature*: Epictetus follows his Stoic authorities in treating the physical world as an entirely determinate structure of causes and effects. Nothing happens purely by chance or for no reason; and so Stoics find it absurd to complain about natural events that were bound to occur. All phenomena are providentially caused by a rational agent (the Stoic divinity) that is immanent throughout everything, animate and inanimate (*Encheiridion* 31, *Discourses* 1), "the divine law by which all events are regulated" (Seneca, *Moral Letter* 76.23). Events conform to the divine law even when, from a purely human perspective, things may appear random or upsetting to conventional notions of benefit and harm. Epictetus presupposes a strict division between happenings attributable to nature

in this external sense, and human agency or will. This internal part of nature is the part that God, as a Stoic would say, has assigned to us as our opportunity and responsibility (*Discourses* 6 and 8). Nothing attributable to external nature is bad or capable of being different from the way it is (*Encheiridion* 27). As human beings, we can try to understand external nature and conform to it intelligently in our actions and attitudes, or we can resist it and be forcibly confronted with situations we are powerless to resist because of their natural causality (*Encheiridion* 53). The latter course is irrational, frustrating, and pointless—all that a Stoic seeks to avoid.

2 *Human nature*: In the first section of the *Encheiridion*, Epictetus lays out the psychological resources that enable mature persons to live freely within nature as defined in the previous paragraph. He uses the language of

freedom to mark off the mind from everything else that we ordinarily take to be basic parts of our selves, including even our bodies and our acquired identities or standing in the world. This extreme parsimony serves him as the means to treat the mind as the one and only domain in which people can, if they so dispose themselves, be absolutely and unconditionally free, sovereign, and unimpeded. Mind, he claims—taking mind to include judgment, motivation, and volition—is entirely "up to us"; indeed it *is* us, if we focus on our powers of self-determination and do not allow things the world serves up to control our desires and aversions (*Encheiridion* 2).

Epictetus has various ways of characterizing the excellent life of a free human being. One of these expressions is the formula "keeping one's will in harmony with nature" (*Encheiridion* 4). The word I translate by

"will" (Greek *prohairesis*) can also be rendered by decision or choice. The Greek term covers both a person's general character and also the particular application of a choice and decision. Earlier Stoics called it the psychological faculty of "assent." You achieve harmony with nature and freedom by focusing your mind or will or assent on the things that you can control (desires, judgments, motivations) and accommodating yourself to the rest with the help of reason and understanding external nature.

Another favorite formula draws on the Stoic concept of impressions or appearances (Greek *phantasiai*). These are not simply thoughts due to imagination, as our derived word fantasies would suggest, but everything that comes into our minds all the time, whether we experience things that impinge on us through our senses, or thoughts that we

deliberately evoke or ideas that simply arise involuntarily (*Encheiridion* 1, *Discourses* 7). Impressions can be clear or fuzzy, true or false, as simple as the sight of one's dog, as fictional as Superman, and as complex as the thought of a black hole. The range of impressions is unlimited, but what chiefly interest Epictetus are the kinds of mental events that challenge autonomy and tranquility because they are colored by strong feelings that can lead us astray. Everyone is affected from time to time by such impressions, and those experiences, taken just by themselves, are often spontaneous and outside our immediate control—a sexual fantasy, a panic attack, a worry about one's health or one's family, anxiety over the state of the world, and so on. What Epictetus insists we should do, in order to live as effectively as possible, is confront our impressions, especially those that disturb

us, and accustom ourselves to manage them, interpret them, understand their occurrence, and thus bring them, or at least our response to them, under the control of our will and faculty of assent (*Discourses* 7, 9).

3 *Values*. Cardinal to these ideas about external nature and human nature is the Stoics' radical classification of values. To understand this feature of their philosophy, the following diagram will be of help.

Goods	**Bads**	**Indifferents**
Essentially beneficial	Essentially harmful	Neither essentially beneficial nor harmful
up to us	up to us	not up to us
virtue, wisdom, happiness	faultiness, folly, unhappiness	e.g., poverty, wealth
mind dependent	mind dependent	not mind dependent
harmony with nature	disharmony with nature	

The key to this classification of values is the notion that goodness and badness are entirely properties of people's minds, characters and actions—not properties of external nature or external events (*Encheiridion* 6, 19, 31). This doctrine restricts goodness and badness to the benefit or harm we do to ourselves by choosing and deciding to act and react as we do. Good and bad retain their basic sense of "beneficial" and "harmful" respectively, but Stoic philosophy confines the scope of benefit (goodness) and harm (badness) according to the criteria summarized in the diagram.

To qualify as good or bad, the only things that strictly count are essentially beneficial on the one hand and essentially harmful on the other hand. A good thing, for instance wisdom, is always and unconditionally beneficial to the wise person. Being beneficial is

essential to wisdom, and by the same token folly is essentially harmful. Everything else falls into the category of indifferent things (Greek *adiaphora*, *Encheiridion* 32), meaning things that are neither essentially good/beneficial nor essentially bad/harmful. Many things count as indifferent because it would make no sense to value them positively or negatively, such as the number of hairs on one's head or choosing between this pea and that one. But the Stoics extend indifference to a great many things that people *naturally* do care about such as health and wealth, and they also extend indifference to things that people *naturally* dislike, such as illness and poverty.

In withholding goodness and badness from such things the Stoics initiated a huge and unending controversy, but they knew what they were doing, and no Stoic

philosopher expressed that more trenchantly than Epictetus did (*Encheiridion* 6, 19, 24, 25, 29, 31, 32). Their linguistic and conceptual reform—for that is what it amounts to—asks us to face the following questions: (1) Are such conventional goods as health and wealth always and essentially beneficial to us? (2) Are they necessary to happiness? (3) Are they up to us? (4) Are they mind dependent? And (5) Are they harmonious with our rational nature? If unequivocal answers to all these questions are negative, as the Stoics concluded, we cannot be assured of happiness if we make it conditional on getting such things or on avoiding their opposites. Moreover, by making happiness conditional on circumstance, we surrender autonomy and equanimity, and put ourselves at risk of failure and disappointment. Conversely, by restricting goodness and benefit to the mind

dependent qualities of virtue and wisdom, we can secure the happiness that accords with our nature as rational beings; and we can adapt ourselves effectively to external nature and whatever else is outside our own control.

When expressed in these stark terms, the Stoic doctrine will likely strike those who encounter it for the first time as impractical and inattentive to normal human aspirations. But there is much more to it than I have yet indicated. The Stoics agree, first of all, that we naturally prefer to be healthy and prosperous and that our natural attitude to the opposites of these conditions is negative. They agree, secondly, that we could not live a rational and harmonious life if we ignored these natural inclinations and disinclinations. However, natural preferences and dislikes need to be sharply distinguished from

"desires" and "aversions," in which we *fully* commit our will and vest our expectations of happiness (*Encheiridion* 2). When we desire something or are averse to it, we typically treat the thing in question as a really big deal. Epictetus recommends us, then, not to "desire" health and premise our happiness on securing it, but accept it gratefully if it comes our way.

The crux of the issue then turns on the question of what is necessary and sufficient for happiness. As the Stoics see it, you *can* flourish in adverse situations and you *can* fail to live well in favorable ones. What makes for a successful human life, on this outlook, is fulfillment of one's nature as the rational animal that is one's birthright and goal (*Discourses* 8 and 9). In that endeavor what matters are not the gifts of fortune, obtaining natural preferences, and avoiding naturally

dislikable things, but "making reason our decisive principle in everything" (*Encheiridion* 51), whether we encounter adversity or prosperity.

Readers must decide whether and to what extent they endorse this classification of values. In my opinion, the Stoics performed a great service in sharply distinguishing the category of mental benefits and harms (things "up to us," as Epictetus calls them) from the value of things whose causes are external to our individual intentions and responsibilities. The sharpness of the distinction highlights the ethical importance of recognizing the benefits and harms for which we are directly answerable by our intentions and emotional responses. Open to obvious challenge, though, are the presumptions that external events can be successfully insulated from the conditions for happiness and

brought under the direct control of our will and desires. Isn't it natural and only human to think that happiness is heavily dependent on external circumstances? Is the Stoic way of life accessible to the ordinary fallible person that most of us are?

Epictetus can come across as heavy-handed and severe. But his purpose, as a teacher, was to show his students how to make *progress* (*Encheiridion* 12, 13, 48, 51) towards the Stoic goal and not settle for just being ordinary. He was well aware that acting consistently on the system of values I have outlined would be a counsel of perfection and even beyond himself. His focus is not on heroic achievement but approximating to it, trying it out on situations that typically trouble people and undermine their performance in everyday life. You don't have to endorse Stoic determinism and providential

theology as the precondition for studying his regimen. However, his reverential stance toward divinity (*Encheiridion* 31, *Discourses* 7) fits our time and place completely if we interpret it as sensitivity to the blessings of the ecosystem. I strongly encourage readers to identify the salient features of these theories in Epictetus's deployment of them, and to aid in that identification I have appended a selection of references in this review of his philosophy of nature.

Freedom and Ethics

The Stoics' theory of goodness and badness puts them in the camp of philosophers who think that the proper objects of *moral* judgment are a person's will and intention as distinct from their actions' consequences. Yet the principal aim of the theory, as Epictetus presents it in the *Encheiridion*, appears to be the agent's

own happiness and tranquility rather than that of other people. Such self-centeredness seems at odds with any deep interest in the needs of other human beings. In which case, do the *Encheiridion* and *Discourses* offer us a guide to the moral life, taking that notion to include the good of others as well as oneself, or acting entirely for their sake?

This is a question to which Epictetus has a remarkably effective response if you agree with him that "It is every creature's nature . . . to shun things that look harmful or cause harm, and to like the look of things that are beneficial or bring benefit . . . and that wherever people's interest lies, that's also the site of their reverence" (*Encheiridion* 31). Ethics according to this Stoic viewpoint starts from and must accommodate our basic human interest in our own individual benefit or good. We do not start from instincts of altruism. To make room, then,

for the good of others, Epictetus needs to show that his message of mental freedom is not a solipsistic benefit but socially advantageous and consonant with living in harmony with human nature construed quite broadly.

As individuals, we benefit hugely from not being troubled by emotions like envy, jealousy, fear, and anger, and by having the corresponding virtues of patience and self-control (*Encheiridion* 10). Tranquility is an obvious good to the tranquil, but its benefits redound no less to our families, friends, and associates because negative emotions often motivate aggressive and hurtful behavior. In contemporary life "ethics" typically enters conversation in contexts where norms of conduct are *violated*, whether in business or sexual behavior or disturbances of the peace. Epictetus's freedom regimen satisfies the moral imperative to do no harm.

How is it with positive moral imperatives, not just refraining from harm but deliberately treating others with care and consideration? Can our interest in freedom and tranquility motivate us to be friendly and philanthropic? Stoic philosophers had traditionally argued that our instincts for self-preservation are combined with powerful social instincts, starting with family life and extending to local community and beyond. Epictetus does not address this doctrine explicitly in this book's material, but his endorsement of it is evident in numerous passages. He presupposes interest in supporting friends and country on condition that one maintains an honorable character in so acting (*Encheirdion* 24, 32). He has much to say about appropriate "role-play" in family relationships, with emphasis on what is incumbent on oneself as distinct from what one can expect in return (*Encheiridion* 17, 24,

30, 32, 43). Here too his focus on freedom from disabling emotions comes forcefully into play, with the deadly quarrel between the sons of Oedipus, competing for the throne, being one of his most telling counter-examples (*Encheiridion* 31, *Discourses* 5).

His *memento mori* warnings concerning wife and children touch a bleak note (*Encheiridion* 3, 7, 11, 14)—until we reflect on the prevalence of infant mortality and premature death in his time. Rather than insensitivity, they betoken the strongest possible recommendation to care for loved ones as long as we are permitted to have them. The emotional freedom at the heart of his message has enormous ethical import in the space it provides for *us* and what *we can* do. Seneca, writing at the time of Nero, had said it memorably: "Freedom is the prize we are working for: not being a slave to anything—not to compulsion, not to chance events—making

fortune meet us on a level playing field" (*Moral Letter* 51.9).

A Free Will?

"Will," my translation of Epictetus's key term *prohairesis*, can also be translated by "choice" or "decision," as I have said before. These things are "naturally free," he says, because they are "up to us" (*Encheiridion* 1); so it follows at once that Epictetus had some notion of a free will. Does it also follow that he believed in "the freedom of the will"? That expression is notoriously vague and obscure. It is sometimes taken to imply that one and the same person in the same situation *could have* chosen to act differently from how she does decide, giving her the option of a genuinely alternative future. We can call this notion indeterminist freedom.

That is not at all what Epictetus had in mind. His passionate advocacy of autonomy (e.g.,

Discourses 9) can give the impression that there are no limits to the mental scope of freedom, but this is hyperbole. Like his Stoic predecessors, Epictetus accepted "fate" (*Encheiridion* 53), meaning that nothing happens, including our own actions, without a predetermined cause. From the god's-eye perspective, the story of everyone's life is already fixed and settled, including the specific choices and decisions people will make. What interests Epictetus is not the history and opportunity of our decision making (whether you or I could have become different persons from how we turned out) but what we aim for with the choices and wishes that we actually make, and how we exercise our power of "assent" (*Discourses* 4, 6). "Whoever wants to be free should wish for nothing or avoid nothing that is up to other people" (*Encheiridion* 14).

Most of us of course are much more prodigal in our aspirations; we blithely risk subjection

to fortune and to unachievable goals. In that way, according to Epictetus, people regularly forfeit the free will that is their natural and best potentiality. Freedom of will, on this construal—wishing for nothing that is not up to oneself—is not the general human condition, but an arduous philosophical achievement. It consists of a state of mind and character that is *free from* frustration and disappointment, and *free to do* whatever it wants to do, because it wishes for nothing that falls outside its own power to achieve.

Translating Epictetus

My goal in translating Epictetus has been to minimize the distance between his ancient Greek and contemporary English. Up to a point this is easy because his conversational manner and short sentences suit our modern idiom. He avoids complex sentence structure,

as we are taught to do, and it is not difficult to find everyday equivalents to most of his vocabulary. He does use a few technical terms drawn from philosophical jargon, as I explain in the glossary. In rendering these words, for instance *prohairesis* by "will," or *phantasia* by "impression," I explain that other translations of them are possible. What should matter to readers of this or any other version is not word-for-word correspondence but the closest possible representation of the thoughts and intention of the original. While Epictetus follows the convention of his time in using singular masculine pronouns for some of his generalizations, his use of them is not marked or specifically male in reference. Wherever possible I indicate that neutrality by translating the Greek "he" or "him" by "they" or "them."

The difficulties I have encountered in translating Epictetus are not lexical but stylistic

and rhetorical. On the surface his Greek is simple and transparent, but these qualities do not emerge in a stream of consciousness, as it were. Antithesis, balance, and rhythm are constant features of the *Encheiridion*, as also are imperatives, numerical grouping of phrases, alliteration, and internal rhyme. It is a challenge to convey all of these qualities in an idiomatic translation. My hope is to capture enough of them to ensure that you are in touch not with my mind but the mind of Epictetus.

I have benefited greatly from consulting all the previous translations that I list under *Further Reading*. Each of them is a conscientious rendering of the original. They differ in style, according to their dates, but hardly or rarely in accuracy. Since novelty for its own sake is not a translator's virtue, the words I choose sometimes coincide with a predecessor's version, and I encourage readers of this book to make

comparisons. It is fitting to recall that the first person to make a complete English translation of Epictetus was Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806; see Long 2002, 261). Her work remained standard prior to the Loeb translation by William Oldfather (1925–1928), and it forms the basis of Robin Hard's Everyman version (1995).