

# EPICETETUS: A STOIC AND SOCRATIC GUIDE TO LIFE

## Introduction section

- His principal project is to assure his listeners that nothing lies completely in their power except their judgments and desires and goals.
- Happiness and a praiseworthy life require us to monitor our mental selves at every waking moment, making them and nothing external or material responsible for all the goodness or badness we experience. In the final analysis, everything that affects us for good or ill depends on our own judgments and on how we respond to the circumstances that befall us.

## Chapter 1

- Only the wise man is free.
- *You will say: Meeting Epictetus was like meeting a stone or a statue. I agree – You took one look at me, that’s all. But the person who really encounters another is one who gets to know the other’s judgments and reveals his own in turn. Get to know my judgments, show me your own, and then say you have met me. Let’s examine one another, and if I have a bad judgment, remove it; if you have one, bring it out into the open. That’s meeting a philosopher. But that’s not your way: We’re passing by and while we’re renting the boat we can also look in on Epictetus; let’s take a look at what he’s saying. Then you leave: Epictetus was zero; his language was quite ungrammatical and unidiomatic. What else could you assess when you came with that attitude?*
- He diagnoses unhappiness as subservience to persons, happenings, values and bodily conditions, all of which involve the individual subject in surrendering autonomy and becoming a victim to debilitating emotions. Happiness, by contrast, is unimpededness, doing and experiencing only what you want to do and experience, serenity, absence of any sense that things might be better for you than you find them to be.

- Epictetus constantly insists that what disturbs people is not an event as such – death or illness, for instance – but rather their judgment about this event, or the way they describe it and its bearing on themselves. [...] This rationalistic analysis of emotions and evaluations implies that they themselves, and the judgments on which they depend, are completely in our power, up to us, within the control of our will.
- We, our essential selves, are our volitions. In that domain, and only in that domain, we have the possibility of freedom.
- What is required of anyone who wants genuine freedom is to transfer all wants, values, and attachments away from externals and situate them within the scope of one's volition.
- *It is impossible to be free from error. What is possible is to be constantly on the alert with a view to not erring; for we should be content if we avoid a few errors by never relaxing our attention to this objective.*
- Stoicism is a philosophy for persons who are fallible but completely committed to doing the best they can to live as free, thoughtful, self-respecting, and devoted family members and citizens.

## Chapter 2

- The introspection Epictetus calls for invokes his Socratic insistence that awareness of one's confusion or ignorance is the fundamental precondition of any genuine progress.
- *The person who can show each individual the conflict responsible for his error, and clearly make him see how he is not doing what he wants to do and is doing what he does not want to do – that is the person who combines expertise in argument, exhortation [protreptikos] and refutation [elenktikos]*
- *O people, where are you bound for? You act in ignorance of everything you should know, giving all your attention to securing wealth, and as far as your sons, your heirs, are concerned, you fail to find moral tutors so that they may learn how to use it justly*
- *What should we have ready at hand in [difficult] situations? Simply the knowledge of what is mine and what is not, and of*

*what is possible for me and what is not. I have to die. Do I also have to die groaning? I have to be fettered. While moaning too? I have to go into exile. Does anyone prevent me from going with a smile, cheerful and serene. Tell your secrets. I refuse because that is up to me. Then I will fetter you. What do you mean, fellow? Fetter me? You can fetter my leg, but not even Zeus can overcome my volition. I will throw you into gaol. No, my little body, rather. I will behead you. Well, when did I tell you that mine was the only neck that could not be severed? These are what persons studying philosophy should practice, and write down each day, and train themselves in.*

### **Chapter 3**

- The Stoics' hardest and most distinctive thesis was that genuine and complete happiness requires nothing except moral virtue.
- *In the case of theory it is easy to examine and refute an ignorant person, but in the business of life no one submits to such testing and we hate the one who puts us through it. But Socrates used to say that the unexamined life is not worth living.*
- *Nothing is worse than false beliefs about goodness and justice.*
- *Every action is motivated by a desire for the good*
- *Untended diseases of the soul leave ineradicable imprints.*
- *What kind of man am I? One of those who would be pleased to be refuted if I say something untrue, and pleased to refute if someone else does, yet not at all less pleased to be refuted than to refute. For I think that being refuted is a greater good, in so far as it is a greater good for a man to get rid of the greatest badness in himself than to rid someone else of it; for I think there is no badness for a man as great as a false belief about the things which our discussion is about now.*
- Human beings are innately equipped with the motivation to seek their own good, i.e. happiness, and to choose whatever means they think will promote that good.

- *Can't people think that something is advantageous to themselves, and not choose it? They cannot. What about the woman [Medea] who says: 'I understand the harmful things I intend to do, but passion rules my decisions'. The exact point is: she thinks that gratifying her passion and avenging herself on her husband are more advantageous than saving her children. Yes; but she is deceived. Show her clearly that she is deceived and she will not do it. But until you point it out to her, what can she follow except what appears to her [to be more advantageous]?*
- Persons suffering from conflicting beliefs will abandon the conflict only when it is convincingly pointed out to them.
- Epictetus believed that our basic evaluative and moral propensities are hardwired and genetically programmed, as we would say today: they are not, in their general content, a cultural accretion.
- We need Stoic doctrine in order to learn that conventional goods such as health or wealth are not strictly good nor their opposites strictly bad because they are not unequivocally profitable or harmful respectively, or to learn that happiness does not consist in a succession of pleasurable sensations and an absence of painful ones.
- *Just as Socrates used to say we should not live an unexamined life, so we should not accept an unexamined impression, but should say: 'Wait, let me see who you are and where you are coming from . . . Do you have your guarantee from nature, which every impression that is to be accepted should have?*
- *Give any of us a layman as our interlocutor, and we are at a loss in dealing with that person. Having stirred him a little . . . we are unable to handle him further, and either we abuse him or mock him, saying: He's a layman; it's impossible to deal with him. Yet, when a real guide finds someone going astray, he leads him to the right path instead of mocking or abusing him and going away. You yourself, then, should show him the truth, and you will see that he does follow; but as long as you don't show him, don't mock him, but rather be aware of your own incapacity. How did Socrates act? He made a habit of compelling his interlocutor to be his witness, and did not need another witness . . . because he exposed the implications of that person's concepts so clearly that whoever it was became aware of its inconsistency and gave it up.*

- Epictetus' purpose was to get his students to see for themselves, first that they have all the resources they need for a good and fulfilling life, and secondly, that their own reasoning, self-scrutiny, and discipline are necessary to activate these resources
- *My friend, you have a volition (prohairesis) that is by nature unimpeded and unconstrained. I will prove it to you, first in the sphere of assent. Can anyone prevent you from assenting to a truth? No one can. Can anyone compel you to accept a falsehood? No one can. Do you see that in this sphere you have a faculty of volition that is unimpeded, unconstrained, unhindered. Come now, is it different in the sphere of desire and impulse? What can overcome an impulse except another impulse? What can overcome a desire or an aversion except another desire or aversion? Yet if someone threatens me with fear of death, he does constrain me. What constrains you is not the threat but your decision that it is better to do something else rather than die.*

## Chapter 4

- *What is the reason for our assenting to anything? The fact that it appears to be the case. Therefore, it is impossible to assent to what appears not to be the case. Why? Because it is the mind's nature to assent to truths, to dislike falsehoods, and to suspend judgment in relation to uncertainties. What is the proof of this? Experience at this moment, if you can, that it is night. I can't. Reject your experience that it is day. I can't. Have the experience that the stars are even in number, or that they are not. I can't. You can be sure, then, that whenever someone assents to a falsehood, he doesn't wish to do so; (for, as Plato says, every soul is unwillingly deprived of the truth) but the falsehood appeared to him to be true.*
- *Do you grasp the fact that you are awake? No (he says); for even in dreams I have the impression that I am awake. Do these impressions not differ at all? No. Am I still talking to this fellow? What fire or steel should I apply to him to make him aware that he is deadened? He is aware, but he pretends not to be; he is even worse than a corpse. One man doesn't notice the conflict; he is in a bad way. Another fellow is conscious of it, but he isn't moved and makes no progress; his state is still more wretched. His conscience and integrity have*

*been amputated, and his rationality, though not amputated, has been brutalized.*

- *Tell me, you men (addressing his students), do you wish to live in error? We do not. That's right; no one is free who is in error. Do you wish to live in fear and distress and confusion? Certainly not. So, no one who is in fear, distress and confusion is free.*
- *Consider which of the things you proposed initially you have mastered, and which you have not, and how it gives you pleasure to remember some of them and pain to remember others, and if possible recover the things you have let slip. Those competing in the greatest contest should not fade out, but take the blows too. For our competition is not to do with wrestling or the pancration, where success or failure can make all the difference to a man's standing – and indeed make him [in his and the world's eyes] supremely fortunate or unfortunate – but over real good fortune and happiness. What then? Even if we fail here and now, no one stops us from competing again; we don't have to wait another four years for the next Olympics, but as soon as a man has picked himself up and renewed his grip on himself and shown the same enthusiasm he is allowed to compete. And if you give in again, you can compete again, and if you once win, you are like someone who never gave in. Only, don't let sheer habit make you give in readily and end up like a bad athlete going around beaten in the whole circuit like quails that run away.*
- *I am willing to let everything else go. I am content if I shall be able to live unimpeded and undistressed, and to hold up my head to face things like a free man, and to look to heaven as the friend of God, fearing nothing that could happen.*
- *Being educated is precisely learning to will each thing just as it happens.*
- *The would-be philosopher needs to satisfy certain prerequisites, including awareness of inability to live as he wants to, readiness to discover and internalize correct standards for making value judgments, and understanding what the commitment to living a properly rational life entails.*
- *His pedagogical stance shows that what really counts in his interpretation of the Stoic art of life is not achievement but*

the minute-by-minute aspiration to shape oneself, irrespective of one's natural gifts, into an excellent person.

## Chapter 5

- We are all equipped with an assayer's resource, as it were, but, instead of focusing them on the contents of our mind – the only location of genuine goodness and badness – we squander them on assessments of things like money that have no bearing on what is really good or bad for us.
- *Whenever you see someone holding political power, set against it the fact that you yourself have no need of power. Whenever you see someone wealthy, observe what you have instead of that. For if you have nothing in its place, you are in a miserable state; but if you have the absence of the need to have wealth, realize that you have something greater and much more valuable. One man has a beautiful wife; you have the absence for longing for a beautiful wife. Do you think these are little things? How much would these very people – the wealthy, the powerful, the ones who live with beautiful women – pay for the ability to look down on wealth and power and those very women who they adore and get? Are you aware of what a feverish person's thirst is like? It is quite different from a healthy person's. The latter drinks and he's over it; but the former after a moment's gratification is nauseous, turns the water into bile, vomits, has belly ache, and gets even thirstier than before. It's just the same when wealth and power and sleeping with a beautiful woman are each combined with longing for these things. There is an increment of jealousy, fear of loss, foul talk, foul thoughts, ugly actions.*
- *Look, you have been shaken out [of your former disposition], but by yourself, not by anyone else. Fight against yourself, claim yourself for decency, integrity and freedom. If anyone had ever told you this about me – that someone was forcing me to commit adultery, to wear clothes like yours, to put perfume on, wouldn't you have gone out and murdered the person for abusing me this way? So aren't you willing now to help yourself? How much easier this help is! You don't have to kill someone, or fetter him, or assault him, or appear in court; all you have to do is converse with yourself, who are the best person to be persuaded and to whom no one is more persuasive than yourself.*
- Epictetus' point is not that there is anything inherently bad about material possessions, holding powerful offices, and so

forth. Such things, taken by themselves, are quite neutral in value. His point is that when having them is combined with longing for them, the outcome is tantamount to an incurable fever.

- *To begin with, decide against what has been going on. Next, having done that, don't despair of yourself or be like the feeble people who, once they have given in, completely give up on themselves and are swept off, by the current as it were. Instead learn from the sports trainers. The boy falls down. Get up (he says); wrestle again until you have made yourself strong. That's the sort of attitude you should have. For you can be sure that there is nothing more susceptible to influence than the human mind. You need only will something, and it happens; the correction is made. Conversely, you need only nod off, and things are ruined. For both ruin and salvation have their source within you.*
- *What good am I going to get after that? What are you looking for that is greater than this? You will pass from being shameless to being a person with self-respect, from being a mess to being in good shape, from lacking integrity to having it, from being out of control to self-controlled. If you are looking for anything greater than this, stick to what you are doing now. Even a god won't be able to save you.*

## Chapter 6

- *Zeus, bring whatever circumstance you like; for I have the equipment and resources, given to me by you, to make a cosmos of myself by means of everything that happens.*
- *Consider how we apply the concept of freedom in the case of animals. People rear tame lions in cages and feed them and some even take them around with them. Yet who will call such a lion free? Isn't it true that the more softly the lion lives, the more slavishly he lives? And what lion, if he acquired consciousness and reason, would wish to be one of those lions? Or consider the birds over there and what, when they are caught and brought up in cages, they are ready to suffer in their attempts to escape. Some of them starve to death rather than endure such a life, while those that survive barely do so and pine away, and escape if ever they find any opening. Such is their desire for natural freedom and to be independent and unrestrained.*



## Chapter 7

- Properly rational persons will make it their policy always to have the right (that is to say, rational) intentions, and they will identify their happiness with these intentions, irrespective of what events outside their control do to promote or frustrate them.
- *What is the divine law? To cherish your own, not to lay claim to what doesn't belong to you, but to use what is given and not to long for what is not given. And when something is removed, to give it up easily and immediately, grateful for the time you had the use of it – unless you would rather cry for your nurse and your mummy!*
- The hardest lesson of Stoic ethics, as I have said is the ultimate indifference of everything except rational (which is also to say moral) excellence.
- *What is it that every human being seeks? To be in robust condition, to be happy, to do everything as he wants, not to be impeded, not to be subject to compulsion.*
- For him, as for his Stoic predecessors, the official formulae for happiness and its opposite are absolute: either you are in condition where your desires for the good are fulfilled, or you are not. You cannot be genuinely in the former condition, if your state of mind and character include the possibility of disruption and frustration.
- There are strong cultural and linguistic differences here between our modern selves and the ancients. The happiness of the Greek philosophical ideal is not an everyday state of mind, which comes and goes like moods and feelings as one's reactions to circumstances changes, and it has nothing in common with our modern interests in excitement, ecstasy, or simple domestic comfort. Philosophical eudaimonia is a condition in which a person of excellent character is living optimally well, flourishing, doing admirably, and steadily enjoying the best mindset that is available to human beings. The Stoics in particular took the complete attainment of such a condition to be well-nigh impossible, yet so worth striving for that no human being who grasped its attractions would wish to settle for less.

- He is not suggesting that happiness is a prize over which we are engaged in a contest with other people. Rather, the competition is with our individual selves, where what is at stake is our capacity to make the best use of every circumstance and to turn even unfavorable situations to good and robust effect. Conventionally negative situations are to be interpreted, via the contest metaphor, as opportunities for training and for enabling happiness to prevail. Equally noteworthy is his insistence that, should we achieve happiness, that achievement cancels out all previous failures. [...] It should now be clear that, while Epictetus' conception of happiness is radically Stoic in its indifference to the favourable circumstance that any normal person, including Stoics, would in principle prefer for themselves, it does involve constituents of happiness that any normal person prizes: contentment, freedom, strength, making the best of oneself, fulfilling one's desires, and emotional stability are all central to the disposition that he calls eudaimonia.
- *It is a universal fact that every creature is appropriated to nothing so strongly as it is to its own interest. Whatever appears to it to be an obstacle to that interest, whether this be a brother or a father or a child or a beloved or a lover, the creature hates, rejects, and curses it. For its nature is to love nothing so much as its own interest.*
- Epictetus argues that our identity is so irreducibly social, both globally and locally, that we cannot achieve our own goods unless we see ourselves as integral parts of the world in general and of society in particular. [...] The implication is that, if you isolate your own interest to these social 'wholes', you turn yourself into the equivalent of a detached limb, and therefore cease to be a functioning person with any genuinely human interests as such.
- Each member of the team focuses on his own role in the collaborative performance, using his turn with the ball well, and not interfering with the other players' turn. Athletic skill requires concentration on the game's essentials; focus on the right moment, and expert anticipation. None of these is compatible with anxiety or concerns about the state of the ball.
- *Imprisonment, exile, drinking poison, loss of wife, leaving orphaned children. These were the context of his game, but none the less he deftly played and handled the ball. So too we*

*should deploy the ball player's consummate skill, but also his indifference as to its object, a mere ball. For it is unconditionally incumbent on us to be skillful in our handling of any external material, but rather than making it part of ourselves we should treat it, whatever it is, as the context for displaying our skill.*

## Chapter 8

- *You are not flesh or hair but volition; if you keep that beautiful, then you will be beautiful.*
- *Where is progress? If any of you, withdrawing from external things has turned to concentrate on his prohairesis, working and toiling at it, to make it harmonious with nature, elevated, free, unimpeded, trustworthy, and respectful; and if he has learnt that no one who desires or shuns things that are up to him can be trustworthy or free, but is inevitably changed and tossed about with them, and inevitably subjects himself to other people who have the power to provide or withhold those things; and if, lastly, when he gets up in the morning he secures and keeps a watch on these principles, taking his bath and dining like a trustworthy and respectful person, and similarly working at these fundamentals in every material circumstance, as a runner or a voice trainer does in his sphere of activity. This is one who is making genuine progress, the one who has not travelled in vain.*
- Epictetus associates with prohairesis his cardinal rule – the requirement to make correct use of our impressions. How we use them is up to us, because it falls within the purely internal domain of judgment, assent, and impulse.
- Aristotle proposes that we act or should act only after we have first deliberated about the best way to fulfill our desires..
- It is not things that disturb people but their judgments about things.
- We cannot, he is saying, take responsibility for every impression that is presented to us; for impressions are typically generated by external conditions over which we have only limited control. What we are always in a position to do is to decide what to make of any impression, and whether or not to give it our assent.

- *Once you have a passion for money [i.e. have the impression that money is extremely valuable], if reasoning is brought to bear to make you aware of the harm, the passion abates and our governing faculty is restored to its original authority. But if you bring nothing to bear by way of remedy, it will no longer return to that state, but when it is next inflamed by the corresponding impression it is kindled with passion more quickly than before. And if this happens regularly, the next stage is a hardening of the skin, as it were, and that ailment confirms the avarice. For the person who has had a fever and then recovered is not in the same state as he was before the fever unless he has been completely cured. Something like this occurs with the soul's passions. Certain traces and weals are left within it, and unless one erases them well, the next flogging in the same place generates wounds rather than weals. So if you wish to be free from passion, don't feed your habit, and present it with nothing to make it grow. . .*
- Prohairesis is what makes us agents or beings capable of formulating objectives and trying to put them into practice.
- Epictetus claims that the essence of the self is our decision-making, purposive, and evaluative disposition.
- *Each thing is augmented and preserved by the corresponding actions, the carpenter by carpentry, the grammarian by grammar. But if someone gets the habit of writing ungrammatically, his craft must be undermined and destroyed. In the same way the respectful person is preserved by respectful actions, and destroyed by disrespectful ones.*

## Chapter 9

- He is not advising his students to be emotional in their human relationships, but he is telling them to be open enough to other persons to be affected by the relationships in which one stands in to them – not to be stony or impervious.
- *If you are alone, you call it isolation, and if you are in company, you call people plotters and robbers, and you find fault with your parents and children and brothers and neighbours. Yet when you are alone, you should call it peace and liberty and regard yourself as like the gods; when you are in a group, you should not call it a crowd and a throng and an*

*unpleasantness, but a festival and a gathering, and so accept everything cheerfully.*

- *Persons should make an assessment of their qualifications and potentials and adopt the corresponding role: You are a calf; when a lion appears, do your own thing; otherwise you will be sorry. You are a bull: go out and fight; for that befits you and you are capable of doing that. You have the ability to lead the army against Troy: be Agamemnon.*
- *I have an inclination for pleasure. I will throw myself in the opposite direction, beyond the intermediate point, for the sake of training. I have a disinclination for work. I will focus and train my impressions on this objective, with a view to eliminating my aversion to everything of the kind. . . And so some people must practice more on some things, and other people on other things.*
- *What reveals persons is not their appearance and the station in life they happen to occupy, but entirely how they perform and speak in these roles.*
- *Those who have merely ingested the principles want to spew them out immediately, as people with a weak stomach do this with their food. First, digest them, and then you will not do this. Otherwise, what was decent matter really becomes vomit and inedible. But after having absorbed them, show us some resulting change of your governing faculty, in the way that athletes display their shoulders, as a result of their training and diet, and those who have absorbed crafts the results of their learning. The builder does not come and say: Listen to me lecturing on building. He gets his contract for a house, builds it, and shows that he has the craft. You should act in the same sort of way: Eat like a human being, drink like a human being, and so too, dress, and marry, and father children, and play your roles as a citizen; put up with abuse, and an inconsiderate brother, father, son, neighbor, fellow-traveller. Show all this to us, so that we can see what you have really learnt from the philosophers.*
- *The unimpassioned mentality (apatheia) of the ideal Stoic is not equivalent to a complete absence of emotion. It signifies a mind that is free from 'irrational' passions such as lust, craving, anger, dread, jealousy, envy, irritability, and worry. The Stoics set against these 'morbid' emotions a category of attitudes that they called 'good feelings' (eupatheiai),*

classifying these under three broad headings – joy, caution, and well-wishing. Under these headings they include such attitudes as cheerfulness, sociability, respectfulness, kindness, and affection.

- *If we see someone grieving, we say: He's done for; a consul and we say: The happy man; an exile and we say: The unfortunate one; a beggar and we say: Poor person, he has no means of eating. These are the bad judgments we need to eliminate and to concentrate on. For what are weeping and sighing? A judgment. What is misfortune? A judgment. What are strife, quarrelling, blaming, accusing, impiety, fooling around? They are all judgments, nothing more; judgments, moreover, that treat things falling outside volition as being good and bad. If only someone transfers his judgments to the domain of his own volition, I guarantee that he will be in a good and firm condition, howsoever things are around him.*
- His essential point is that affection requires us to be consistently positive in our attitude to those we love, to regard ourselves as 'fortunate' in having them, for as long as that is vouchsafed, but not to repine if and when they are taken away, and even to prepare oneself for such eventualities: *Whenever you are devoted to something, don't regard it as irremovable but as belonging to the class of things like a jar or a drinking glass so that when it is broken you remember what it was and are not disturbed. So in the case of love, if you kiss your child or your brother or your friend, never let your thoughts about them go all the way, and don't allow yourself to be as elated as your feeling wants, but check it and restrain it, like those who stand behind triumphing generals and remind them that they are human. Just so, remind yourself that what you love is mortal and not something that you own. It has been given to you for the present, not as something irremovable and permanent, but like a fig or a grape, at the appointed time of the year. If you long for it in winter, you are foolish. So too, if you long for your son or your friend, at a time they are not granted to you, be sure that you are longing for a fig in winter. For the relation of winter to a fig is the relation that every event in the world has to the things that the same event takes away. Furthermore, at the very moment you are taking joy in something, present yourself with the opposite impressions. What harm is it, just when you are kissing your little child to say: Tomorrow you will die, or to your friend similarly: Tomorrow one of us will go away, and we shall not see one another any more? When reading this*

numerous other ‘consolatory’ texts from classical antiquity, we need to acknowledge the radical differences between modern life expectancy and health care and the conditions in Epictetus’ day. I take this passage to recommend not a restriction of affection but an admittedly stark appreciation of the vulnerability of what one loves; we should not expect more of it than is reasonable and thereby misuse it in the present and be emotionally unprepared in the future. It remains true of course, that Epictetus’ recommendations are chiefly grounded in his providential theology.

- To act at all is to be motivated, however mistakenly, by a desire for good or an aversion to bad where good and bad are construed as beneficial and harmful to oneself.
- *Shouldn't this brigand and this adulterer be executed? Don't ask this but rather: 'Shouldn't that person be executed who has gone astray and erred over the most important things, blinded not in vision, which discriminates between black and white, but in the intelligence, which discriminates between good and bad? If you make your point like this, you will recognize how inhumane it is, just as if you were saying: 'This blind man or deaf man should be executed'. For if loss of the most important things is the greatest harm, and what is most important in each person is correct volition, and someone is deprived of this, why are you still angry with him? My friend, if you must go against nature in your response to the plight of another person, pity him rather than hate him. Give up this retaliation and hostility.*

## Epilogue

- The often repeated criticism that Stoicism is a philosophy only for the strong is hard to rebut. What I propose, as the most promising response on Epictetus’ behalf, is that he offers all of us, as individual persons, an extraordinary challenge. His discourses are an invitation to ask whether we have mental and emotional and ethical resources that we have not properly grasped – untapped and perhaps unconscious resources that can equip us to become more self-aware and more determined to make the best of ourselves, whether in mundane situations or ones that are severely testing. Some of us may find that we have these resources, others may or may not to a limited extent. About this difference between persons he is ruthlessly frank. He does not presume that his Stoicism will work well for everyone,

but he is convinced that it is worth everyone's while to respond to his challenges and to see what each can do with them.

- As Henry James wrote, 'Let us take Epictetus as we take all things in these critical days, eclectically', as I have presented him in this book, appropriating what we find helpful and effective, and discarding what fails to fit our preconceptions – but only after we have given him the chance to help us rethink our priorities and possibilities.
- *How long are you going to wait before you demand the best for yourself and in no instance bypass the discriminations of reason? You have been given the principles that you ought to endorse, and you have endorsed them. What kind of teacher, then, are you still waiting for in order to refer your self-improvement to him? You are no longer a boy but a full-grown man. If you are careless and lazy now and keep putting things off and always deferring the day after which you will attend to yourself, you will not notice that you are making no progress but you will live and die as someone quite ordinary. From now on, then, resolve to live as a grown-up who is making progress, and make whatever you think best a law that you never set aside. And whenever you encounter anything that is difficult or pleasurable or highly or lowly regarded, remember that the contest is now, you are at the Olympic games, you cannot wait any longer, and that your progress is wrecked or preserved by a single day and a single event. This is how Socrates fulfilled himself by attending to nothing except reason in everything he encountered. And you, although you are not yet Socrates, should live as someone who at least wants to be Socrates.*