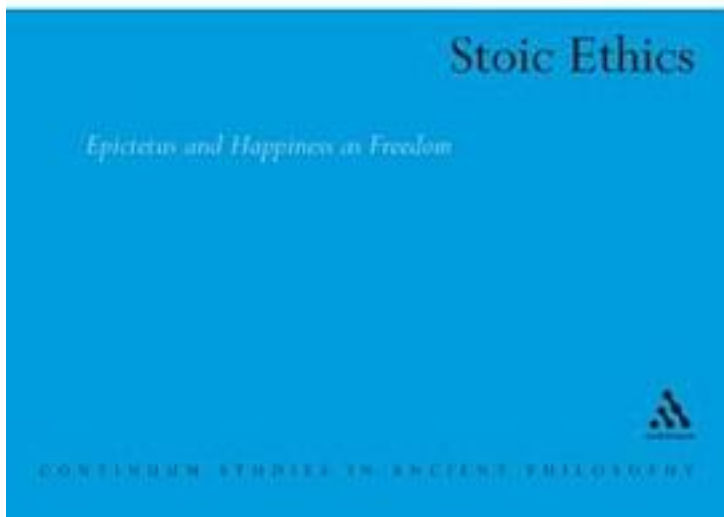


Stoic Ethics

William O. Stephens



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Shortly after Aristotle's death, ancient philosophy shifted away from abstract technical issues and focused on the more practical moral question of how to be happy. While many schools of thought arose on the subject, Stoicism and Epicureanism dominated the philosophical landscape for nearly 500 years, often locked in bitter rivalry with each other. Epicureanism advised pursuing pleasure as a means to happiness, and Stoicism held that true happiness could only be achieved by accepting one's assigned lot in life. The lasting impact of these philosophies is seen from that fact that even today 'Stoic' and 'Epicurean' are household words. Although the founder of Stoicism was an obscure Greek philosopher who wrote nothing on the subject, his school consistently attracted more followers than its Epicurean counterpart. Little, in fact, survives of early Stoicism, and our knowledge of it comes largely from a few later Stoics. In this unique book, William O. Stephens explores the moral philosophy of Epictetus, a former Roman slave and dynamic Stoic teacher whose writings are the most compelling defence of ancient Stoicism that exists. Epictetus' philosophy dramatically captures the spirit of Stoicism by examining our greatest human disappointments, such as the death of a loved one. Stephens shows how, for Epictetus, happiness results from focusing our concern on what is up to us while not worrying about what is beyond our control. He concludes that the strength of Epictetus' philosophy lies in his conception of happiness as freedom from fear, worry, grief, and dependence upon luck.

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