

Anthony Long, Berkeley Book Chats, March 13, 2019

Announcer: From the Townsend Center for the Humanities at U.C. Berkeley.

Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, Director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities. Berkeley Book Chats showcase a Berkeley faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community. Today's conversation features Anthony Long of the Classics department discussing his book, *How to be Free: An Ancient Guide to the Stoic Life*. He is joined by me, Timothy Hampton, of the Comparative Literature and French Departments.

Timothy Hampton: It's a great pleasure to welcome Anthony Long, here to talk about his newest publication. I should say I'm here not as an ancient Greek, nor as a classicist, nor as a philosopher, but as someone who really enjoys reading what is often called wisdom literature, or practical moral philosophy. This book is called *How to be Free*. It's a translation and bilingual edition with notes of the *Enchiridion*, which is a kind of handbook of the first century philosopher, Epictetus, along with some selections from Epictetus' discourses. And as you can see, I think this is a real selling point, it's a perfect book to put in your pocket and take with you as you go through life. And I've been carrying it around in my pocket, so I recommend it for its presentation as well as for its content.

Timothy Hampton: And as I was saying, I'm someone who likes reading this kind of stuff. I'm a big fan of the *Hand Oracle* of the 17th century Spanish Jesuit, Baltasar Gracián, who teaches you how to survive at court, which is a book I always recommend to department chairs; and I'm a reader of Montaigne's essays. But I have to confess that this book took me by surprise. It seems quite unique in many ways and it seemed quite different from most of the ancient philosophy and moral philosophy that I've read; not only marquee names like Plato, but also texts like Seneca's letters and Cicero's *De Officiis*, and even Marcus Aurelius' meditations in a way, so I'm wondering if we could begin by asking you, Tony, just to tell us a bit about the context for this book, and what it is as a genre, and where it comes from.

Anthony Long: Thank you very much, Tim, and thank you also for having me here. Compared with all the great books that are being talked about this semester, this is a tiny book and I'm not really its author at all. Epictetus is the author, except that in a certain sense he isn't, too, so I don't just explain a little bit about that.

Anthony Long: Epictetus was born in what we call central Turkey in about the year 50 or so of our era, and who was probably a slave from birth. He made his way to Rome, or others made him go to Rome because he hardly had much of an autonomy movement at that stage. He was in the household of the very bad emperor, Nero, and became the house slave of a man called Epaphroditus, who himself was an emancipated slave, and realized that Epictetus was very smart and made sure that he got a good education. And while he was in Rome this early life, he came under the influence of another eminent Roman called Musonius Rufus, who was also a Stoic philosopher and highly critical of Nero and other emperors. And in due course, Epictetus got his own freedom and then was exiled along with some

other dissidents, we could call them dissidents, under another very bad emperor called Domitian.

Anthony Long: I think he came back to Rome briefly, then went back out again and set up a school in northwestern Greece in a little city called Nicopolis, which had become quite a fashionable watering hole in this period, and then became a very celebrated teacher. One of his perhaps greatest students, if not in person but certainly through reading about him, was Marcus Aurelius. And so, one of the great, almost romantic thing about these characters is that here you have the most powerful man in the world, Marcus Aurelius, Emperor, learning from the ex-slave, and this has always captured people's imagination.

Anthony Long: Epictetus lectured. He lectured to young men, and I think it's important when we read his teaching to realize that his audience, they're not middle-aged fogeys; they're young men. And by young, we probably mean late teenage people who are on the brink of maybe going to the Army or having some other career; kids of wealthy parents, and we've heard a bit about how wealthy parents get their kids into schools. I think it clearly was quite something to become his student.

Anthony Long: Now one of his great students is the man who, in some ways, is the kind of author or at least editor of this work. He was a Roman, an eminent Roman called Arrian, a young man himself at the time. And then he went on to become a very major figure; became the provincial governor and a very accomplished author. And interesting, he wrote the most detailed history that we have of Alexander the Great, and Alexander the Great is about as remote as you might think of from that sort of backwoods Stoic.

Anthony Long: So Arrian then heard Epictetus and made an enormously detailed, it seems like almost a stenographic record of his teaching, and we have four of the eight books of discourses. And then he wrote a synopsis of these, and that's what we call the Manual. Enchiridion is a Greek word meaning handbook. That part of what's in here is this little set of 53, sometimes they're almost like haikus; these little to-dos, very punchy, and no doubt we'll talk about that. And that then became very celebrated, and so it was translated into Latin in the end of the 15th century, and then became very much part a of European. And then eventually in the New World, in America, apparently Thomas Jefferson had some idea of actually translating Epictetus, and he comes up quite often in 19th century American literature where Walt Whitman said of his teachings so much needed in a materialistic and affluent age.

Anthony Long: And I think another thing we might, it would be interesting to talk` about a bit is similarities as well as differences between the Roman epoch, which Epictetus was teaching and which was probably as affluent an era, what Gibbon described as the era of the emperors of this time is perhaps the happiest period of human history. One can obviously challenge that, but that was Gibbon's 17th century judgment on this period of time, and it would be interesting I think to see how we think that this fit.

Anthony Long: And the other in just a moment, one of the reasons I was quite eager to have you as an audience for this little book is because Stoicism, as many of you may know, ancient Stoicism is having a rather extraordinary cultural moment. If you go online, if you just Google Stoicism you'll find the most extraordinary things; Stoicism for Businessmen, Stoicism for Mums. It's an extraordinary moment in what we think of that, and just why this in many ways a highly austere regimen that Epictetus tells us we should try to practice. What is it that's giving it this cachet of the moment?

- Timothy Hampton: Fantastic. In university parlance, I see an opportunity for revenue generation here.
- Anthony Long: Absolutely.
- Timothy Hampton: One of the things that struck me in reading the text is the emphasis on the theme of self-possession. That seems to be central to Epictetus. Can you talk a little bit about what that is and where it comes from?
- Anthony Long: Absolutely. The very first of these little, in the manual starts off with by saying that there's some things that are up to us, and there are other things that are not up to us. The things that are not up to us are even your body; certainly your career, your possessions. So what is up to you, and he characterizes it as we would say in modern English I think simply your mind, your mental states, your emotions; those he thinks are up to you. And when he says these other things are not up to us, that's of course obviously hyperbolic in some sense. Your body doesn't simply disobey you every moment, but clearly there is a moment and sense in which our bodies are partly dependent on forces outside our own control.
- Anthony Long: So this idea of what you might call self-possession probably goes back at least in the history of early Greek philosophy to Socrates, Plato's Socrates; the Socrates of the apology who said apparently according to Plato that no harm can come to the good man in life or in death; this idea that somehow it's your soul, as Socrates put it, which is your special possession. And yes, you can be put in prison, you can be condemned to death, as Socrates was. Epictetus loves to take the Socratic example and say Socrates was not in prison because he was there by his own choice. And that famously Socrates supposedly could have actually escaped the sentence of death and been whisked out of Athens. So in other words, when Epictetus says he's in prison by his own choice, but he's not in prison because he's not mentally in prison, and that's one of his standard tropes.
- Timothy Hampton: But do you think that, that seems to me one of the things that we in some way have, we moderns in some way have lost the sense of. Because one of the things that we study increasingly, or we're increasingly taught in our own modern critical discourses is the extent to which we don't have control over who we are; that we are structured by language, or we're structured by class, or structured by race or whatever, which is one of the reasons why people are so interested in the question of agency. What is left after the signifier and everything else?
- Anthony Long: I think that especially now in the internet age, the sense in which media and messages are taking control of our lives. I've noticed just in the last few months how when you Google, or go with Safari or whatever your system is, all kinds of stuff comes up that you don't want, and you can't ... I mean now I'm trying to get Oski Catalog, and the screen keeps changing and I get something I don't want, and that's happening all the time. So I think that the sense in which we're being imperceptibly controlled by it, all this stuff about secrecy and interferences is another example of that. But yes, I think there are certain areas in which our lives are much less directly under our control than we would have thought they were.
- Timothy Hampton: So that's where the question of self-possession becomes in some ways even more crucial, it would seem to be ...
- Anthony Long: Yes, yes. But I think also there are so many other aspects to this which we think of, and it's perhaps quite fashionable and gorgeous to think that we don't really have any autonomy; that we're genetically determined, or we're determined

culturally and genetically. And so whatever we may think of our own ability to influence our lives is perhaps simply it's a brain function which is not actual. We think we're determining our own future, but we're not.

Anthony Long: And so people who have a brain identity theory of the mind are I think very much seen as pushing in that direction. And then there's the cultural determinism; where you're raised has somehow shaped you irrevocably. So I think the idea, and who knows the extent to which we are as free as Epictetus might want us to think, but the extent to which we perhaps can feel trapped and that we don't somehow have, can take charge of our own lives. I think this is where this material can be quite challenging.

Timothy Hampton: My comments are mostly expressions of pleasure. There's a beautiful moment in the 33rd, the thing where he says, and I'm quoting here, "It's not things that trouble people, it's their opinions about things." Montaigne says that about death.

Anthony Long: Yes. Whether Shakespeare was influenced already by Epictetus might be a little early, but there's nothing in ... you know the famous saying, there's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so ...

Timothy Hampton: Thinking makes it so.

Anthony Long: ... is a sort of reflection of this. And it isn't only Epictetus who had these thoughts. Seneca, whom you've mentioned, was a favorite author for the people of the 16th-17th century. And so this idea that actually whenever we deliberately take some action, we form some kind of judgment, it doesn't mean we've said to ourselves I want to go and do this, and you do it. But there's a sense in which if you step back somebody could say to you, "Why are you doing this?" And a simpler answer might be, "I thought it was a good thing to do. It's what I wanted to do."

Anthony Long: And then you could be asked, "Yes, but what do you mean by saying you wanted to do it? Did you think that it was going to be actually good for you?" And these are the sort of challenges that Epictetus puts with his own intellect. So you can kind of keep interrogating yourself, not to the extent of making your day a burden, but there is always this option of stepping back and saying, "Why am I doing this? Did I really want to buy this new car?"

Timothy Hampton: I want to ask you a bit about the language of the text. I'm just going to read a brief passage, this is on page 63. He says, and I'm quoting now, "As for sex, abstain as far as possible before marriage. And if you do go in for it, do nothing that is socially unacceptable. But don't interfere with other people on account of their sex lives or criticize them, and don't broadcast your own abstinence." It's a great passage, but it's also kind of amazingly straightforward and down to earth and colloquial. And your translation, when you use phrases like 'sex lives' and 'broadcast,' that's really contemporary American language. Can you talk a bit about the kind of linguistic, the outbreak of the text and what it was like to work with that?

Anthony Long: Epictetus, he writes in the sort of Greek that the New Testament is written in. It's what we call the Koine. It was the Greek that was spoken all over the eastern Mediterranean in his time. It was probably more of the vernacular than Latin; short sentences, very simple syntax, but that doesn't mean there are not interesting challenges for the translator.

Anthony Long: One of them at the very beginning is this phrase that you picked up and that where you say things are up to us, someone has translated as 'things are in our power.' But it seems to me the connotations of saying there are certain things in one's power is a very different connotation from saying it's up to me; because that 'up to me' it means also I'm responsible for it, but it doesn't actually mean that I have some kind of power that I can always bring it about. It's up to me, I won't be able to drink the glass unless I stretch out my hand. It's up to me whether I pick up the glass, but that doesn't mean that I was actually in a position not to pick up the glass. I could still be determined by my antecedents and all kinds of other things. So that's one word. The trickiest word I think to translate here is actually the word I've translated by 'will.'

Timothy Hampton: You have a footnote, you have a note about that.

Anthony Long: I do. And the Greek work, a rather cumbersome word, the Greek word is *prohairesis*, which is a rather elaborate word which might often be translated as 'choice.' And sometimes it is translated by 'moral choice.' Actually, I think there's very little about what we might think of as morality in this work. It's much less, very little moralizing to it. I translated it as 'will' because it seemed to me that was exactly really what he was talking about. So there are these little, not so little, but I mean a number of words and phrases which you can interpret in different ways. As a translator, what I really wanted to do was to say what's the most natural English for what he's trying to talk about here. I'm not worried too much if somebody says what kind of a concept of the will does he have because that's a big thought area in philosophy. It's the everyday expression I think that's the right one for it.

Timothy Hampton: I like very much this idea that there's very little moralizing. There is very little moralizing and it seems like a kind of technical manual, if its anything; techniques for controlling the self.

Anthony Long: He's saying if you want to put yourself at risk all the time, that's up to you. It's kind of conditional. You have a choice. If you want to be free in the way I'm suggesting, then this is what you would be advised to do. But maybe you don't want to be. Maybe you want to be controlled by circumstances. Well, fine, that's up to you. So there's a sort of take it or leave it there.

Timothy Hampton: But there is also a kind of ethics in a certain sense. There was a passage, I'm jumping ahead in my questions that I've written down, there's a moment that's quite wonderful where he's talking about criticizing others. This is in number 45. And he says, and I'm quoting here, "If people bathe in a hurry, don't criticize them for bathing but for doing it quickly. If they drink too much, don't criticize them for drinking, but for doing too much of it. Until you know their reasons, how do you know they acted wrongly?" So there's a kind of judgment that's also not judgment at the same time in a particular kind of way.

Anthony Long: That's exactly right. Epictetus, part of his regimen is to be very careful about language. He says you're in a crowd, you say what a nuisance, how horrible all these people are. Well, change your language. It's a festival. It's a nice day. But I think it sounds sort of hokey when just put it that way. And he's deliberately I would say hokey because what I think what he's trying to say is there are things we can do to transform our outlook which are very simple, and our language colors so much of our feelings. So as soon as you say to this person, "You've been extremely rude to me" once in a confrontational situation, and two things he would say to that, I think is, well, that was how he wanted to be, but how you respond is up to you. If he wants to be rude, fine; that's his business, but you

don't have to respond in a certain way. And so I think, and again whether you call it rude or not would be again after your choice.

Timothy Hampton: One of the longest sections and what I found one of the most interesting ones, is section number 29, where he talks about the nature of action. And you just now mentioned the idea of antecedents. And he says that before you act, you should first study the kind of antecedent to every action, and you should study the potential consequences, and then you should decide whether you want to act. And his example is do you want to win a medal in the Olympics. Do you want to be an Olympic champion?

Timothy Hampton: So first you have to consider what's upstream, then you have to say what is it going to involve; I'm going to have to work out, I'm going to have to lose some weight, I'm going to have to do all this stuff. And then if you want to do it, do it. So far, so good. But what surprised me in that same section was then he segues into a second problem, which is if you want to be a philosopher ...

Timothy Hampton: He goes from if you want to be an Olympic champion to if you want to be a philosopher, and he says if you want to be a philosopher, you've got to think about what you're going to do, who are the antecedents, what are the consequences, and so on and so forth. Then he says and then you can be a philosopher. What struck me about that was it seemed to me that if I wanted to be a philosopher, you don't know what being a philosopher is until you're actually a philosopher. You can kind of imagine what being an Olympic champion would be because you've seen other people, but there's a certain difference between being a ...

Timothy Hampton: And what if I decide now I want to be a philosopher and I'm really unhappy in the philosophy department? First of all, could you just say a few things about the amazing juxtaposition ... It was amazing to me maybe because I'm out of the context of Olympics and philosophy. That seems like an interesting juxtaposition. And then also this idea that maybe you go in and then when you get in halfway, you say uh oh, big mistake.

Anthony Long: There were a lot of philosophers, or at least people who claimed to be philosophers; people had a certain sort of beard and some other kind of accoutrements that would make me think that they were a philosopher. And so in these later parts of the manual, he's extremely coy about that. If you are really trying to be a philosopher, keep quiet about it. Don't say anything about it. Don't show off about it.

Anthony Long: I think that in the longer discourse, there's a great deal and emphasis on how people think they've mugged up all their Stoic textbooks and they're going to get a straight A or A-plus in their Stoic exam, and that's not actually what's involved in trying to be a philosopher. Trying to be a philosopher is actually trying very hard to live a certain kind of life, and whether you know you've passed the exam or not is not the most important thing. So it's a rather coy joke I think at the expense of the would-be professional philosopher.

Timothy Hampton: And he says at one point, there's a wonderful little reflection on silence where he says if you go to a party, and everybody's making fun of philosophers and you don't say anything, then you're being a philosopher.

Anthony Long: Exactly. Yes. That's very good.

- Timothy Hampton: That's the first step into the philosophical life, is to let everybody humiliate philosophers at a party and not say anything.
- Anthony Long: Just to come back to the point you mentioned before about where he's saying don't go on about your own sex life, and don't worry about other people's, I think that one way in fact people perhaps always appreciate when you read Epictetus, he has this mordant, sometimes rather grim, but I think a certain sense of humor in almost every one of these little passages. They're not all to be taken at straight value. In fact, very few of them I think you have to take without some sort of sense of, oh yes, that's a bit extreme. Well, of course it is. I want to catch your attention. So it's in some sense a kind of an attention grabbing book, challenging you all the time.
- Timothy Hampton: This is just a question of information. Is he siding ... I'm thinking, reading this I was always thinking of Seneca's letters which we read together a few years ago, where Seneca always ends his letters by quoting usually something from Epicurus or somebody. He'll say let's have a little aphorism here at the end of this letter. He doesn't seem to be citing people at all, or is he citing people without saying that he's citing them?
- Anthony Long: No, I think very little of that. What we think was happening was when Arrian was his student, what happened in the morning was that Epictetus really put on his philosophical garb as it were, and really lectured on technical points of Stoic philosophy, and would say Chrysippus had said this and Zeno had said that, and this challenge came. And in the afternoon, as it were, when they'd done the formal teaching, that was when he applied the teaching to everyday situations.
- Anthony Long: There's a wonderful example; I didn't put it in this little book because I had to be very selective. But there's an example of where Epictetus, a friend of his has come by and said, "My daughter was terribly sick and I couldn't bear to see her in the bedroom. I just had to leave." And Epictetus says, "You thought that's how a father should behave, did you?" "Well," the guy says, "It's natural, isn't it? I was so upset to see her in that way." "Well yes, but what do you mean by it's natural? You mean it's right to do that? Was this the kind of thing a father should do?" In other words, should we really be staying by the bedside no matter what? So that kind of everyday situation where the challenges for one might think of as a natural behavior, conventional perhaps; we can sympathize with him, yes, but what was the right thing to do?
- Timothy Hampton: That's another question that I had for you, which is partly a question about the role of custom and the extent to which custom matters. And I guess that's sort of ancillary to that is there sense that there some seems to be a kind of sense of social stability so that we would know what a father would do, or we would know what a philosopher would do, or what an Olympic champion would do. And I was thinking this reading this text against some of the early modern texts that I'm familiar with, like Montaigne for example, or Machiavelli, where the whole point seems to be that you may start to do something, but the circumstances may change so dramatically that what you started to do no longer has any significance or the conditions have changed completely. It does seem to me that he's building this upon a certain kind of social stability, or am I wrong?
- Anthony Long: No, I think that's exactly ... He has a word which I translated by 'role' 'role playing,' so social roles; you're a father, you're a university teacher, you're a soldier. He says that along with that role certain kind of norms, we can call them norms, go about that. Just as Aristotle said, if you're acting as a doctor then you don't poison somebody. Certain behavioral dispositions come as it were already colored by the title. That doesn't mean of course that there's no decision to be

taken, because typically he will say something like your brother is being so unkind to you, so how do you respond to that.

Anthony Long: And again, a bit like we said in the insult case, that's up to him but it's my job to be brotherly, in other words. So there are these norms which, yes, I'd say there isn't ... And again, with the passageway you took the sexual thing, I mean certainly as far as women are concerned, he's highly conventionalized. There's not very much reference to women. But where it does come up, it's extremely standard male behavior at the time. So yes, I think if you didn't have some of these backstops or norms, then of course people could think where do you stand within the culture.

Timothy Hampton: That's an interesting question. I just had one other question, and then we can perhaps open it to the audience where I'm sure there will be many questions and comments. One of the things that if you had said to me this is a book of Stoic philosophy, and coming at this again maybe from a later period, I immediately would have expected a lot of talk about nature and following nature. And one of the things that struck me is actually that he does have the famous phrase about wanting to follow nature that we're so familiar with in the history of Stoicism and neo-Stoicism. But in my sense, unless I'm mistaken, it really only comes in quite close to the end. It's in I think it's section 49 he does say I really want to follow nature. That seemed interesting to me that he seemed to not be interested in the abstract formula, but in the practicalities of getting through everyday life.

Anthony Long: He does several times I think early on, he does say several times, what the context is you go the bathhouse and people are jostling him and maybe somebody's trying to steal his clothes. And so his response to that was, "I didn't only want to go to the baths; I wanted to keep my will in accordance with nature, so how would we gloss that?" And I think that sense of nature, there is a norm, a standard of human behavior which the Stoics would call acting with good reason, acting in accordance with some kind of understanding of the situation. In other words, what do you expect when you go to the bathhouse? Some people are going to be that way; that's how they are. It's the way Marcus Aurelius says when you get up in the morning, say to yourself there's somebody I'm going to meet who is a thief and maybe a murderer. That's life. So keeping your will in accordance with nature is a policy of trying to, your nature here is your capacities as a grownup, would-be human, rational person trying to act with understanding of a situation rather than just acting on impulse. But the other net sense of nature is of course nature can be also used to mean everything else that happens.

Anthony Long: The other day, we had torrential rain. That was nature. The world outside of our own area; not just the human world, but the natural world we could call it, which in a rather obvious sense is a lot of it is outside our control. So part of the Stoic project which I think he does endorse even if he doesn't make it so explicit is you're trying to balance up the way you understand the way the world is outside yourself. If you live in Guerneville in a wet winter, you'd better expect your house will be flooded. That's just the way it is. That's the kind of nature ... But the norm of nature is how I can somehow bring my own disposition and values in a way that there's a kind of harmony between these two things and not being caught off balance, a lot of it is some sense of adaptation, a kind of adaptation to the way the world was working.

Timothy Hampton: Maybe we should then open it up to any questions or comments from the audience.

Speaker 1: Thank you. Are we on live?



Timothy Hampton: We're on.

Speaker 1: I'd like to hear what the Stoics have to say about ascribing motive. It's a boundary that I've found challenging in my own life; the unkindness or the person who is rude. I had the choice to be not unkind back. I had the choice not to be rude back. But for all I know, they did not see that as rude. They thought I was honest, meant no offense, or transparent or forthright. The same for the unkind. They never saw that as unkind. They thought that might be even kind to tell someone the truth, or to text and Tweet and just might say, look ... There's this 'I have agency over how I choose to respond, and just because I think they're rude, I don't need to respond rude back,' but I'm also ascribing motive to their actions.' I'd like to hear a little bit about ascribing motive from a Stoic.

Anthony Long: I think perhaps the example I offered a bit ago, the father of the sick daughter was the kind of example of how Epictetus thinks she would perhaps handle the unkind friend or whatever it was, you wouldn't just say, "That's not very nice." You would try to engage them in some way, "Do you think that was the appropriate thing to do? What was your reason for doing that?" So that you could obviously in an everyday life you wouldn't perhaps want to get so argumentative with somebody. But I think the idea would be always that people, essentially he's treating all people that we have to deal with as if they have their own dignity and they have their own reasons. They might be very bad reasons from our perspective, they might be bad reasons objectively, but at least have reasons. And this is part of what Stoicism is arguing, that once we are grown up, we do act even if it's unconsciously for reasons, and we can be asked what those reasons are.

Anthony Long: There would be the ordinary responding in a friendly or polite way, but there would also be this invitation to engage the person and ask them why they think they're behaving the way they are. I think it's this ... I would think perhaps one of the chief values of the text today is to help people to think that they actually have got powers that they may not realize they have, offering them a sense of dignity; they're not victims. There's actually something they can always do about their situation, even if they end up staying in prison. There's still a way of being in those situations, or if you're very sick. But still an appropriate way to be which maintains your dignity in some things. I think that's perhaps very important.

Speaker 2: There's something very attractive about the idea that there's a difference between the things that are up to me and the things that are not, but I think what's actually most appealing is the caste of mind that knows the difference; that has settled that difference. And it seems that much anxiety comes from situations in which we are uncertain about that difference. One could imagine many kinds of examples. I just wonder if Stoics have anything to say about that.

Anthony Long: I think the very fact that he starts the whole manual off with this disposition on the things that are up to us, and then tries to clarify exactly what he means and accepts as challenges when somebody says shouldn't I desire health. Well yes, but only with reserve. Recognize that there is going to be something that's outside your control when it comes to your health, where there isn't allegedly going to be things outside your control when it comes to your motivation.

Anthony Long: Now he probably had no experience on brainwashing and the kind of things that ... He says surely nobody can ever force you to say that something is to the left when it's to the right. And I think that that's something we now know is actually, that can happen. People can be put under such psychological pressures that they will say that up is down, or down is up. I think what's not familiar with that. So those will be extreme cases. But the general point which still perhaps stands that

we do have some kind of special charge over what we want to do, and other people can't make us want things, I mean leaving aside these special cases, against what we choose.

- Timothy Hampton: But I just wanted to follow up on Tony's point, maybe slightly tangentially. There's this moment where he says in the 33rd text, he says, "Draw up right now a definite character and identity for yourself; one that you intend to stick to whether you are by yourself or in company." First of all, I thought that was amazing. And then I thought but wait a minute, what if I don't know who I am? This would be the modern dilemma, who am I? I think my identity is I'm a graduate student, or maybe my identity is I'm a professor, and of course we're always finding out that we don't know who we think we are, or we think we're X and we turn out to be Y, or we think we're generous or we think we're honest and we turn out to be liars, and so on and so forth. So this idea that you actually can know the difference seems to me really interesting. And I guess it connects in some ways self-possession to self-knowledge in some way, which is a concept we haven't talked about.
- Anthony Long: Did we say enough in response to ...
- Speaker 2: What do we make of an instance in which I have a relative who is ill, dying; the situation's not in my control, but I don't realize, I don't know that it's not in my control? I'm in a quandary. I think something is in my possession, but it's not.
- Anthony Long: Oh, I see.
- Speaker 2: It's not that I'm being controlled. Nobody's put a chip in my brain or brainwashed me, but I think I have control over things that in fact I don't. It's a source of much anxiety.
- Anthony Long: The simple answer is that any action, even the intention to stand up, I could at this moment about to stand up, I could be smitten with terrible paralysis. So again, an extreme case. But one of the, is to the first instruction about recognizing what's up through us is ... I'm going to just read it because I think perhaps it touches your point. "Having so introduced the distinction between what's up to us and what is not," he says, "if you desire any of the things, if you desire any of the things that are not up to us, you are bound to be unfortunate. Confine yourself to motivation and disinclination." These are not full-blooded desires or aversions, but motivation and disinclination, and apply these attitudes lightly with reservation."
- Anthony Long: I think the thought is the appropriate thing for me to do is to go and look after and do all I can for this relative. But somehow I tried to have developed the kind of mental state where you were somehow without becoming pathological about it, you recognize that it may not work. There's always this little thought at the back of your mind. In a way you could say it's an incentive to do everything you can because there may be things you can't do. So the notion of effort or striving is very much present I think.
- Speaker 2: It's a work in progress. It's always a work in progress.
- Anthony Long: It's a work of progress, and it's recognized that it's difficult. You're going to fail. There are a number examples of that. You keep getting up again and striving, the athletic imagery.

- Speaker 3: This is a question at the margins of this. I'm interested in the difference between us and me. Think about something like climate change or global warming, I'm just interested if there's any place where Epictetus comes up again this issue of the complexity of ... do you know what I mean, causation stuff. I can't do anything about climate change, you know what I'm saying. There are many, even thinking about Guerneville, so I'm just wondering if that's just the one that we just don't go there, because in some ways it seems like one reason this is so killing right now is that it is, it's like it's great to feel like you can control something.
- Anthony Long: Wouldn't you agree that, there are things that we ... not perhaps as in isolated individuals, but certainly as some form of group there are things we can do about climate change?
- Speaker 3: It's something I just wondered as...
- Anthony Long: And I think it's interesting, I've been engaged with quite a lot of discussion with one or two of the modern Stoics, the question about ecology and if you think of nature, external nature as something we're incumbent on us to take care of, it's part of nature that we belong to. I think that's one way of trying to disarm the worries a lot of people have about Stoic theology. The God out there, this is not a kind of Abrahamic God; it's a God that's part of the life force of something; it's in nature. So I think the idea that living in accordance with nature could also quite easily be interpreted in a looking after the planet kind of notion.
- Anthony Long: There are always things you can try to do, and I think are incumbent on us. Often in historical periods when Epictetus and Seneca had been more widely read than they had been until recently, they're thought of as consolatory. I was just reading Robert Haas, reminded me the other day when we were having this discussion as redoing a house for Mr. Biswas, and Mr. Biswas in Trinidad is always picking up on Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, but then he puts them down again because he says they're not giving me solace.
- Anthony Long: But I think that is one thing you could try to get out of it, but I do think that's what these texts are at all about. They're not meant to be consolatory except at the limits. They're meant to give you a guidance on an action; what to do. The causation is part of our accepting it.
- Speaker 4: You might want to read the thesis of Marcus Aurelius. It seems to be an emotional pragmatism, but there's also there's fuel to the gods, like some kind of absolute value. I was wondering if you could speak about how relatively pragmatism comports with the gods and what is right to do.
- Anthony Long: As I was saying to Nelly, the idea of the divine there's natural causation; the sun rises every day, it rains in the winter. These are natural occurrences, and somehow leaving aside things like tsunamis, there are things we can live with and we need to come to terms with in order to adjust, and those are the works of the gods we could say. But it's quite true, there is a sense, Marcus Aurelius does sometimes speak in this sort of amor fati way, that whatever happens is right. I think Epictetus tends not to do that, and it's not a thought I like so much to go with because it can appear as if the pacifistic side of Stoicism; we have to just 'it's all in the hands of the gods,' kind of fatalism. I wouldn't want to defend that strand of Stoicism which speaks that way as having too much to offer us today. I think if we simply think of natural causality, whether it's to do with our own behavior and our own structure, or the world outside, the more we can understand of that, the more effectively we'll live. We obviously haven't been

realizing until the last decade or two how harmful we were behaving toward the planet. That's something we've learned. I think there's also this sense in Stoicism that we can always be learning more about the way the world is structured.

Speaker 5: It seems to me one of the consolations that's here is, that he's attesting to is the ability to step back; that if my actions with respect to climate change bring forth an unfortunate-ness in me, suffering, anxiety, distress; all these things, I need to look at that and there's a place where I can step back and assess. That seems to be the consolation here and the work in progress.

Anthony Long: Yes. But don't we want also if this is to be a practical guide to life we want some guidance, not when things that many would say how terrible this is and we could somehow console ourselves by saying we understand why it was going to happen, but we want some guidance for action, don't we, an initiatives as well? That's what I think he's trying to offer us. In other words, the kind of emotional disabling, which all of us experience from time to time, the reason why he focuses so intensely on trying to remove fears, fears of death, fears of failure, is that they are disabling for action. The more we allow our emotions to somehow interfere with our autonomy, the less we can do.

Speaker 6: Thank you. So one of the contrasts between Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius that really strikes me is that Marcus has a much broader, more generous picture of nature, a cyclical view of nature. Nature gives us free gifts, so the things we don't have any control over are also gifts we have to be grateful for, and we cannot complain when we lose them either. This picture of nature is generous, as giving seems to be something absent in Epictetus.

Anthony Long: I think in this little collection, we've only got a sample and I was strictly focusing on the way he handles the notion freedom and how to be free. I think you may be right, but there are a number of passages in some depth in the discourses where Epictetus does say why we should think of the world in a Marcus Aurelius-like way as providential, and we should be grateful.

Anthony Long: But another thing, it may be an difference of emphasis in what you've been reading. But I think where Epictetus differs particularly from Marcus, there's a sort of I find Marcus Aurelius melancholy. There's a world weariness to him which emerges very clearly from his role. He didn't want to be Emperor. He certainly didn't want to be Generalissimo of the Roman Army. He wanted to be writing his books and reading. So he performs this task with great care, but I think he needs to console himself a great deal. Whereas Epictetus is much more the teacher.

Anthony Long: An interesting fact about Marcus Aurelius, the text Marcus Aurelius which he composed probably towards the end of his life, it doesn't seem to have got into the book trade at all. It was out of circulation it seems for about 200 years; rediscovered and then got passed down, and only one main manuscript so it was unlike Epictetus or Seneca had tons of manuscripts. And it seems that Marcus Aurelius didn't write it as a conventional book. He wrote it as a diary for himself. Whereas Epictetus is definitely, he's got an interlocutor all the time. Marcus Aurelius is himself. The actual title of the work is called Meditations, but the actual, original title is To Himself, like 'Dear Diary' I think.

Timothy Hampton: One last question if there is one?

Anthony Long: Robert.

Robert: So Tony, you mentioned that Epictetus started his life as a slave?

Anthony Long: Yes.

Robert: The sort of ultimate lack of power, lack of control. And then he goes into fairly standard stoic observations in many ways. Do you see any slave voice? Any remnant of his experience as a slave in the way that he approaches his Stoicism?

Anthony Long: I think so, much more than any of the other Stoics, whether it's the adjective which would translate as 'servile,' or even addressing his interlocutor in a somewhat preemptory way as you slave. And so in the really long discourse, which I just put some excerpts in the book, but one that's Arrian's given the title of On Freedom, there's a counterpoint going on all the time between the man who is working his way up the honor system of the Roman world, and thinks he's becoming and how he's becoming a Praetor or maybe a consul and think he's a great man, and it is totally oppressed by fears and other things. But the higher he goes up the greasy pole, so to speak, the more enslaved he is to his fears and desires.

Anthony Long: You get the same kind of thought in Seneca, too, but I think Epictetus, it's very common. Most of the discourses will mention slavery in some form or other. And so all the time the challenging being that who is the real slave. Is it chattel slavery or is it emotional and intellectual slavery? That's the kind of thing I think.

Timothy Hampton: Thank you so much, Tony.

Anthony Long: Thank you.

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat, and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs in the series.