

A publication of the College of Stoic Philosophers



# THE STOIC PHILOSOPHER

## OLD STOIC BOOKS



### COSP: RARE BOOK COLLECTION

BY MARK STARY, FCSP

**Indiana Jones: “If You Want To Be A Good Archeologist, You Gotta Get Out Of The Library!”**

Indiana Jones (the classic 1980’s motion picture action hero portrayed by Harrison Ford) in the quote above, seems to be giving some solid Stoic advice, echoing the teaching of our beloved Epictetus. Simply stated in the title of the 2009 John Sellars influential book “The Art of Living”, Stoicism is intended to be practiced and crafted out in the turbulent world we all live in.

This last winter I was snowed in at an old lodge in northern Minnesota (USA) on the shores of Lake Superior (one of the world’s largest freshwater lakes). I am a musician and was performing at a friend’s wedding when a heavy winter storm hit and made travel back to my home in St. Paul, Minnesota, dangerous. Yet, I was grateful the universe granted me this time away from the turbulent world of life in the city, because it gave me time for the library... the online library of the College of Stoic Philosophers.

Weeks earlier, one of the faculty introduced me to “The Stacks” – a collection of dozens of scanned public domain books (Stoic in nature) published from the 1600’s to the early 1900’s. These books, while a resource, had not been recently catalogued or inspected.

I was asked (and happily accepted) to organize this book collection (title, date, publisher, description, etc.) so that it could be made more searchable and accessible on the College website Resource page. While examining these books, I came across some noteworthy items that seem especially unique and interesting.

So, while snowed in on Lake Superior, listening to the waves crash from the winter storm outside (and the ringing in my ears from the wedding performance the night before), I decided to put on my proverbial Indiana Jones hat and kick off my adventure looking for fame and fortune in the dusty catacombs of “The Stacks.”

I am confident that anyone who has an interest in old and rare books on Stoicism will find something new to discover with every visit to the College “Rare Books” collection. Here, I will highlight two texts that I discovered and which I consider to be “hidden gems.”

**Mark Stary: Musician** (Guitar, Harmonica, Singer-Songwriter), **Therapy Dog Teacher** (Canine Inspired Change), **Podcaster** (Mark Stary Music Podcast), **Portrait Artist, Interests: same as above plus family and friends, Academic Interests: Stoicism and Panpsychism/Consciousness. Stoic since 2018. SES grad (2020) MA grad (2021). I live in St Paul, MN, with my fiancée, two golden retriever dogs and a cat. I travel back and forth between Wisconsin and Minnesota performing music and teaching.**



**THE HYMN OF CLEANTHES translated and with commentary by E.H. Blakeney (1921)**

Cleanthes was the second scholarch, having taken over the School following Zeno's death. This translation of Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus is bookended by an introduction and commentary by E.H. Blakeney.

Here, I am sharing some insights drawn directly from this work:

"In Stoicism, though in some respects Cleanthes revolutionized the study of physics, which he regarded as giving the surest rule for human conduct generally, the main interest of the creed lies in its moral postulates. Physics is to be regarded as the scaffolding of ethics." (p. 3)

"What the position of Cleanthes really was, in the sphere of religion, we can never fully ascertain; we possess his teachings only in fragments, and we cannot properly judge a thinker by the disjecta membra of his philosophy. But we seem to discover in Cleanthes, when we read his hymn (was it written in early, middle, or later life?), a genuinely religious man, "bent on giving a theological interpretation of the world, and breathing a pious submission to the world-order which it is refreshing to feel and come in contact with" (p.6, quoting Davidson, The Stoic Creed).

"Cleanthes feels himself akin to the divine, and therefore worthy to hold communion with it; he expresses his admiration for, and submission to, the divine order of the world; he recognizes that the moral evil in the world is the result not of fate but of man's freewill; he prays God to free human souls from ignorance; and closes with an apostrophe in praise of God's law." (p. 9)

"The hymn is throughout inspired by the consciousness that its one spiritual power which penetrates and controls the Universe, and is the source of every work done under the sun." (p. 14)

As a traditional Stoic, I found this analytic look at Cleanthes and his "Hymn to Zeus" interesting because of its emphasis on and the importance of Stoic physics. I find Cleanthes' views of submission to the wisdom of universal consciousness and world-order fully applicable, comforting, refreshing and fundamental in my personal practice of Stoicism here in the 21st century. I subscribe to the Stoic similes used to explain the relationship between the three parts of logic, physics, and ethics. Without trees (physics), why bother with a fence (logic), and forget about fruit (ethics).

**EPICTETI ENCHIRIDION MADE ENGLISH IN A POETICAL PARAPHRASE by Ellis Walker (1692)**

As primarily a full-time musician and songwriter for the last 20 years, I found this artistic Stoic text particularly interesting. The author, visiting his uncle who shares a love of Epictetus, decides to render him in verse. That is an amazing undertaking, in my view. Not sure if I personally could put music behind this material, but I did find it thought provoking if there is a place for Stoic poetry or Stoic music in our current world or not.

The author's dedication speaks for itself: "To my Honoured Uncle Mr. Samuel Walker of York. When I fled to you for shelter, at the breaking out of the present Troubles in Ireland, I took Epictetus for my Companion; and found that both I, and my Friend were welcome ... You may remember, I then told you, that as they seem'd Such to me, so I thought they would very well take a Poetical dress: You said the attempt was bold, but withal wish's it well done. I hurry'd on with zeal for an Author belov'd by you, and admired by all, have made the Essay a grateful diversion to me, though perhaps I may have pleas'd you better in Admiring the Author, than in Translating him." (p. 5)

And so, young Ellis Walker tackled putting the Enchiridion into English

verse: "Respecting Man, things are divided thus:

Some do not, and so do belong to us.  
Some within compass of our power fall,  
And these are they, which we our own  
may call." (p. 23)

"Therefore be sure, that your aversions fall  
Only on things which you your own may call,  
But for the present all desires suspend,  
For if to things not in your power they tend,  
Folly and Grief you'll find, but lose your end." (p. 29)

I encourage you to visit the Rare Book stacks at:  
<https://collegeofstoicphilosophers.org/library-the-stacks/>

If you have any public domain books on Stoicism which you think should be part of the collection, please let us know at  
[editor@collegeofstoicphilosophers.org](mailto:editor@collegeofstoicphilosophers.org).

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