

THE STOICS

4. Epictetus

HOW
TO BE A
STOIC

MASSIMO
PIGLIUCCI



Hi, I'm Epictetus, your relationship counselor. So tell me, why did you come in today?

Well, it seems like we are always fighting.

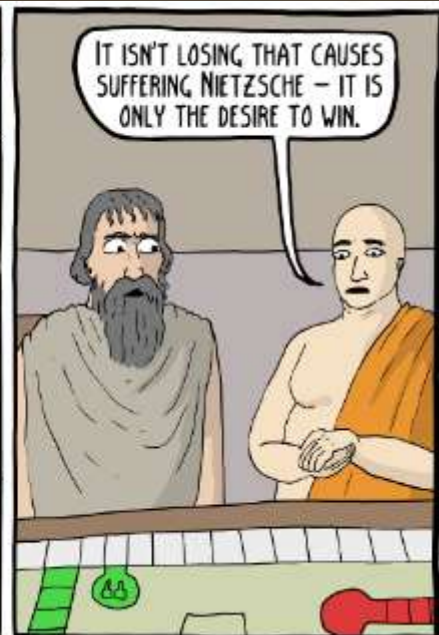
The problem is, he is just so lazy.

Remember that we can't control the virtue of others, only our own virtue.
That makes sense.

Here's another tip: if you kiss your wife, say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if she dies. After all, it is only humans in general that you love.

Wait...what? That seems horrible, I love my wife in particular, I would be devastated if she died!


You love your wife? Well, you wouldn't be a very good stoic then, would you?



AGENDA

1. Introducing Epictetus
2. What is up to us
3. Stoic Training
4. Resignation or resistance?
5. Legacy





1. INTRODUCING EPICTETUS



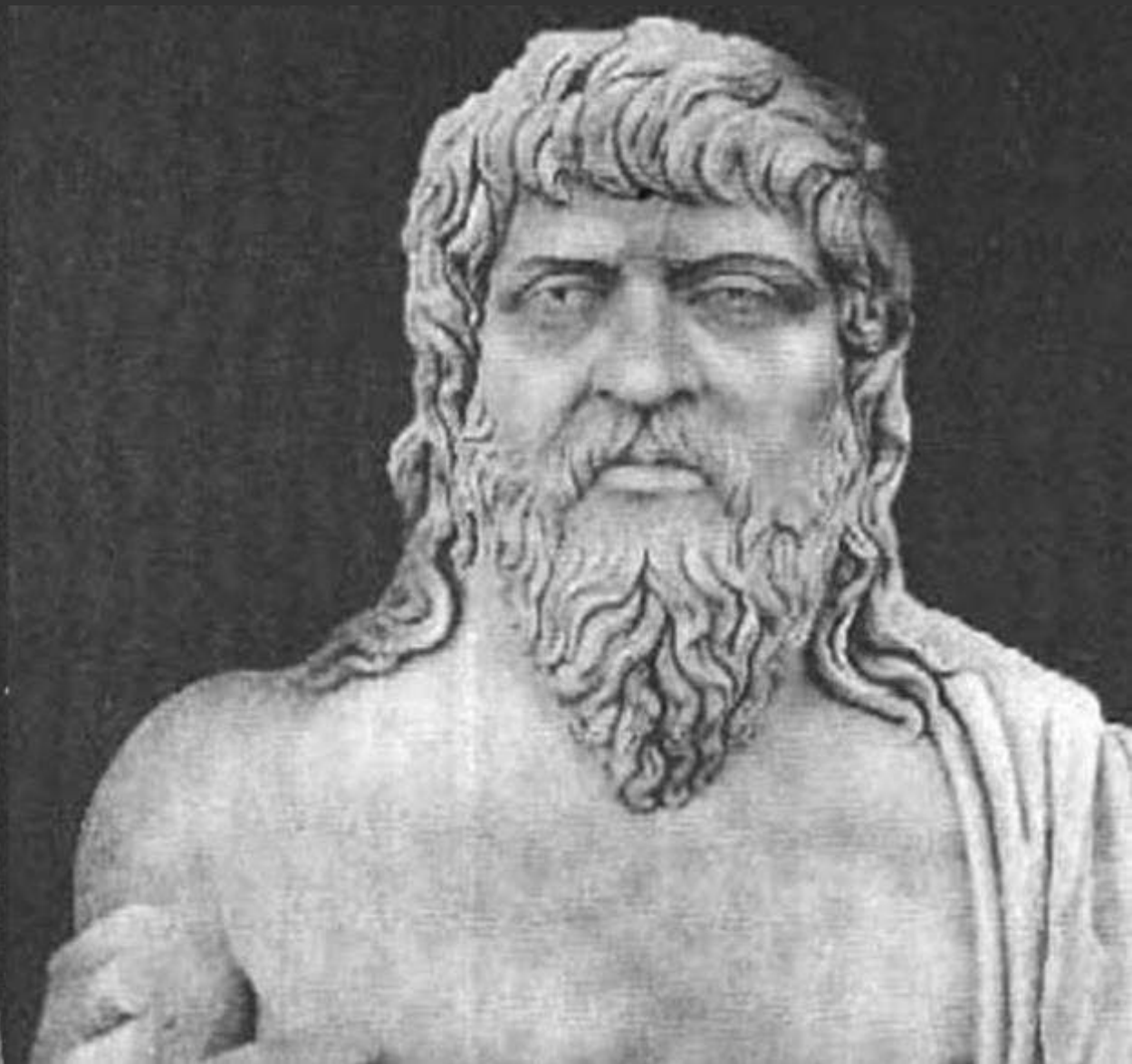
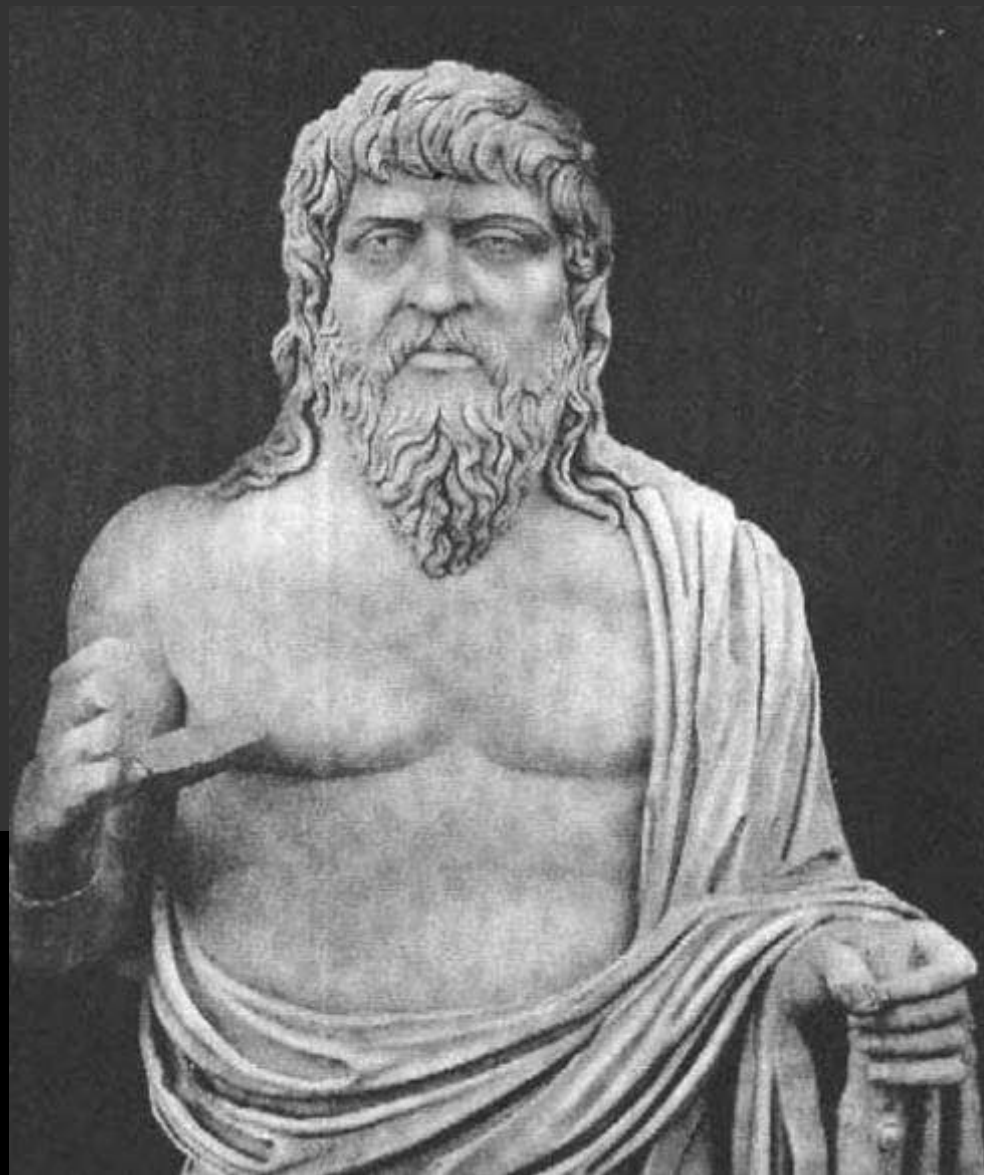
Ἐπίκτητος ἡρώδης αὐτῷ ἀνέμπερος,
καὶ πάλιν λέγει, ὅτι φίλος ἂν ταῖς τοῖς.
NB fecit











THE LIFE OF EPICTETUS

Born a slave in Phrygia, Anatolia, 50 CE

Epiktetos – gained, acquired

A slave to Epaphroditus, secretary to Nero
(and himself a former slave)

... Who denounced Seneca and Lucan and
ordered their suicides...

From his teens, is allowed to study under
Musonius Rufus

Acquires freedom in 68 CE after Nero's
death

Teaches philosophy in Rome up to 93 CE
when...









THE LIFE OF EPICTETUS

Domitian expels all philosophers from Italy in 93 CE

Epictetus sets up a school in Nicopolis, North-west Epirus

Teaches the sons of wealthy Romans...

Including Arrian, who transcribes him

Also met Hadrian

A frugal, ascetic life

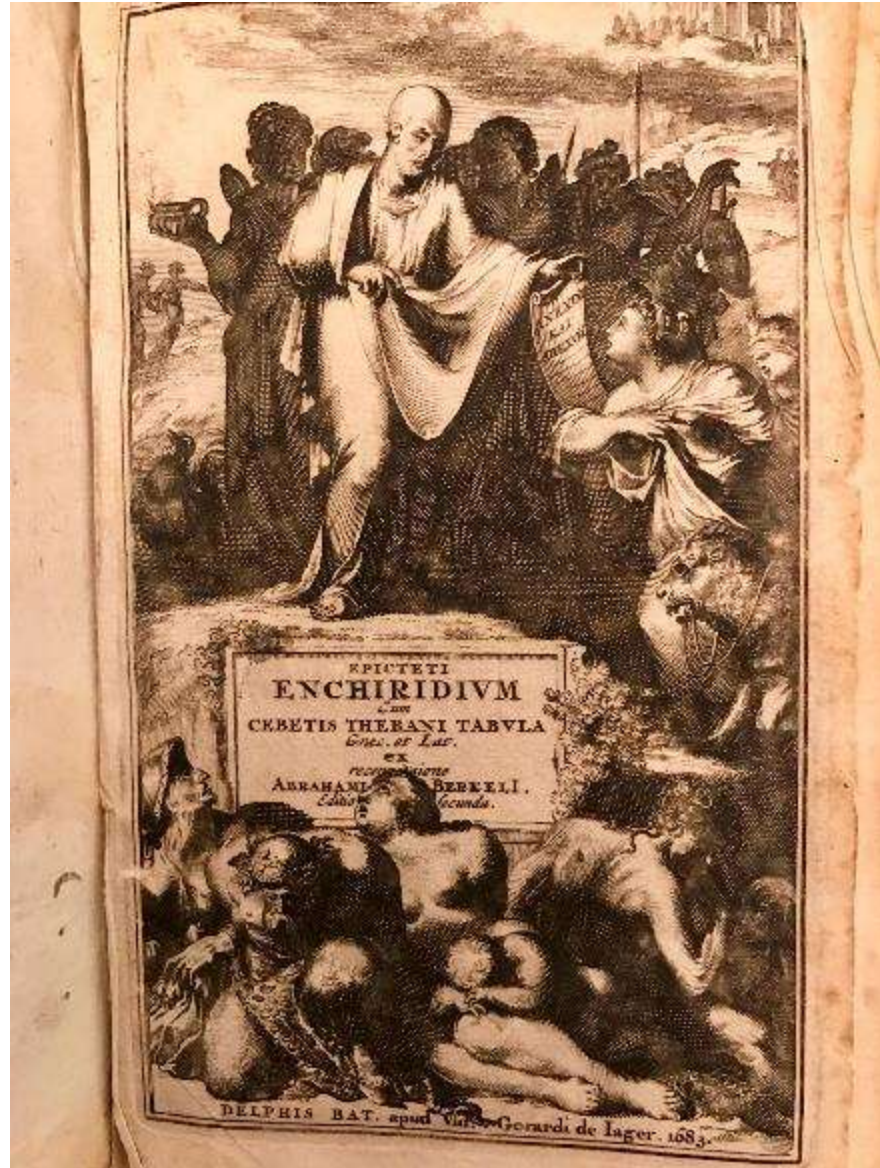
Adopts a child who had been abandoned in later years, with the help of an unnamed woman (possibly wife)

Dies in 113 CE



2. WHAT IS UP TO US







‘whatever I heard him say I used to write down, word for word, as best I could, endeavouring to preserve it as a memorial, for my own future use, of his way of thinking and the frankness of his speech.’
(Arrian)

Meaning of *Encheiridion* — a little thing to carry in the hand

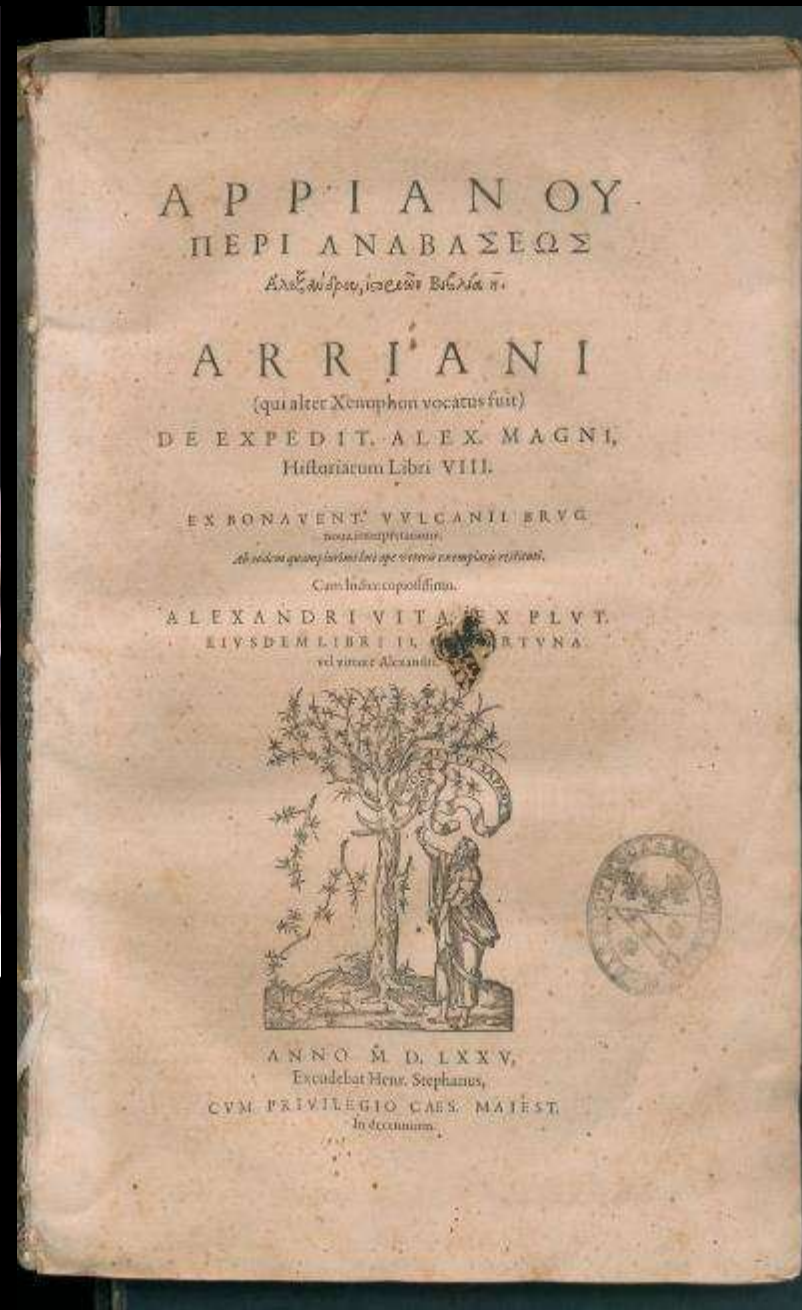
HANDBOOK



PENGUIN CLASSICS

ARRIAN

The Campaigns of Alexander



THE ARGUMENT

Identify what is up to us

Keep our will in harmony with nature (*prohairesis*)

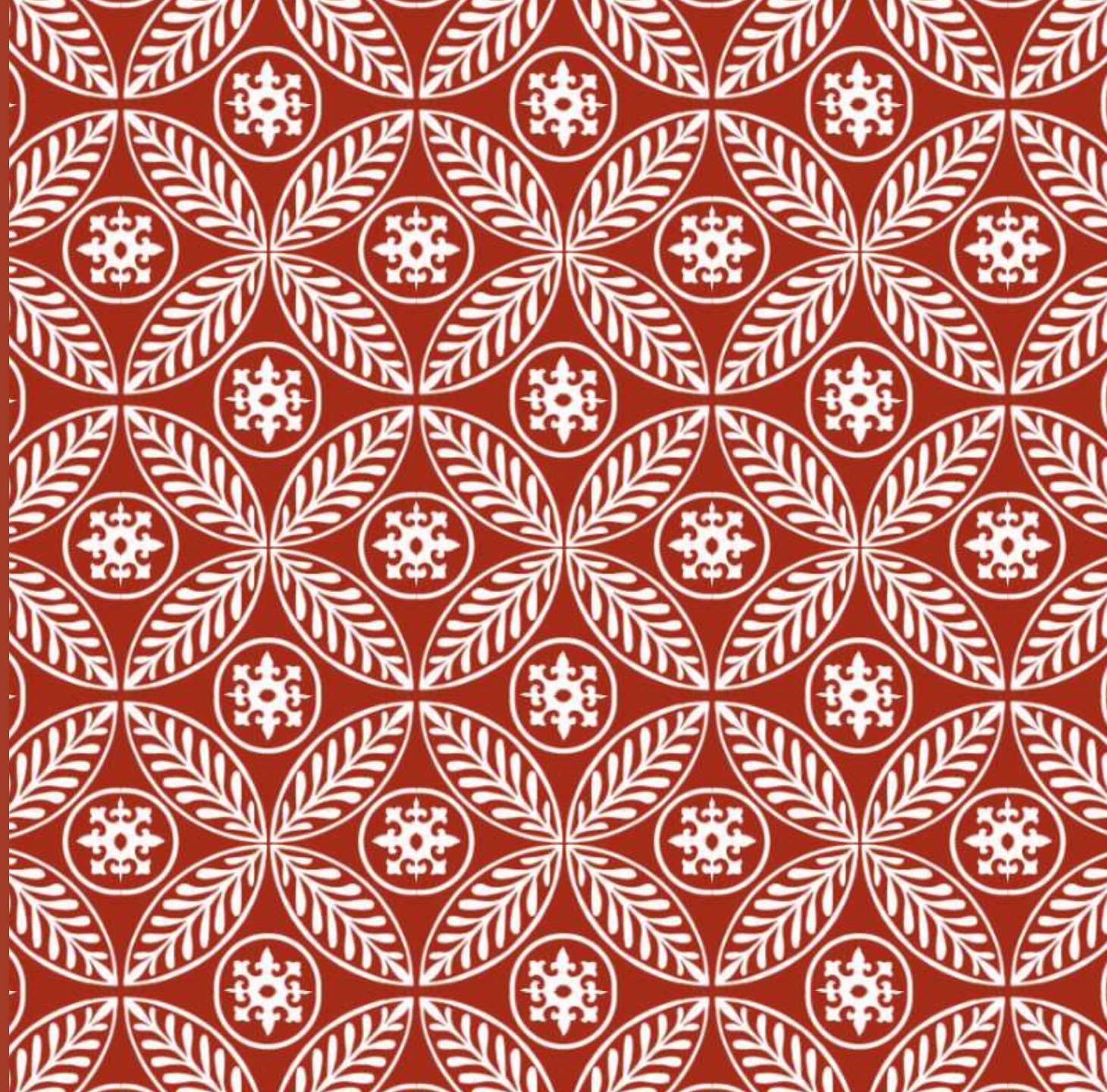
Live accordingly

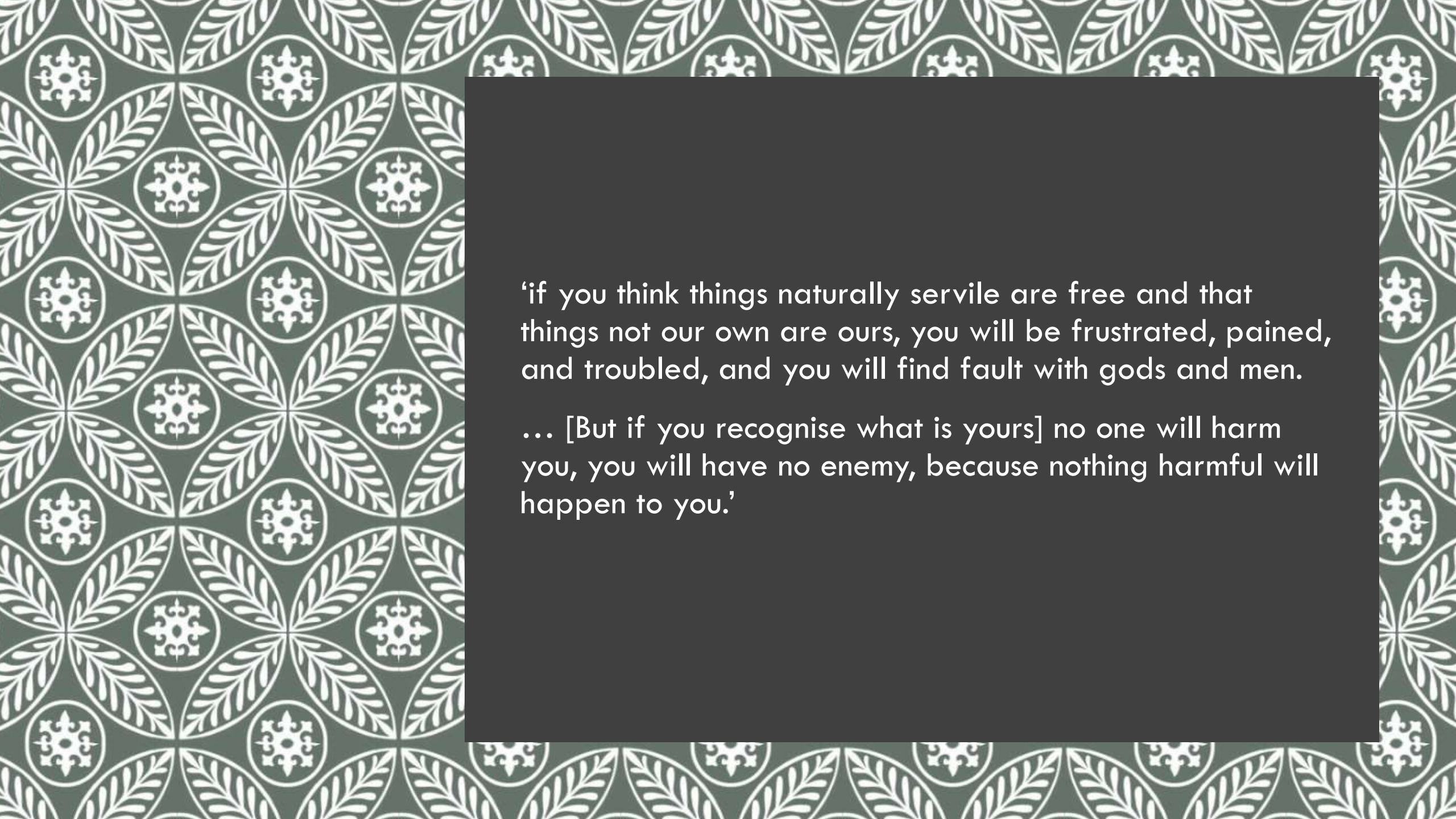
Eleutheria - freedom

Some things in the world are up to us, while others are not.

Up to us are our faculties of judgment, motivation, desire, and aversion—in short, everything that is our own doing.

Not up to us are our body and property, our reputations, and our official positions—in short, everything that is not our own doing.





‘if you think things naturally servile are free and that things not our own are ours, you will be frustrated, pained, and troubled, and you will find fault with gods and men.

... [But if you recognise what is yours] no one will harm you, you will have no enemy, because nothing harmful will happen to you.’



PROHAIRESIS

“I want to bathe, and I also want to keep my will in harmony with nature.” ... “Well, this was not the only thing I wanted; I also wanted to keep my will in harmony with nature. I shall not do that if I get angry about what is happening.” (4)

= 1. managing our impressions (phantasiai)

‘What, then, is your own? The management of impressions.’ (6)

= 2. Recognising things for what they are, not what we’d like them to be:

‘Don’t ask for things to happen as you would like them to, but wish them to happen as they actually do, and you will be all right.’ (8)

JUDGEMENTS

‘It is not things themselves that trouble people, but their opinions about things.’ (5)







‘There is nothing either good or bad,
but thinking makes it so.’ (Shakespeare,
Hamlet)

John Milton: ‘The mind is its own place,
and in itself can make a heaven of hell,
a hell of heaven’

Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury,
the ‘sovereign principle’ of Stoicism:
separating judgements from events

JUDGEMENTS

‘Death, for instance, is nothing terrible (otherwise, it would have appeared that way to Socrates as well), but the terrible thing is the opinion that death is terrible.

So whenever we are frustrated, or troubled, or pained, let us never hold anyone responsible except ourselves, meaning our own opinions.

Uneducated people blame others when they are doing badly. Those whose education is underway blame themselves. But a fully educated person blames no one, neither himself nor anyone else.’ (5)



TRANQUILITY

‘It is better to starve to death in a calm and confident state of mind than to live anxiously amidst abundance.’ (12)

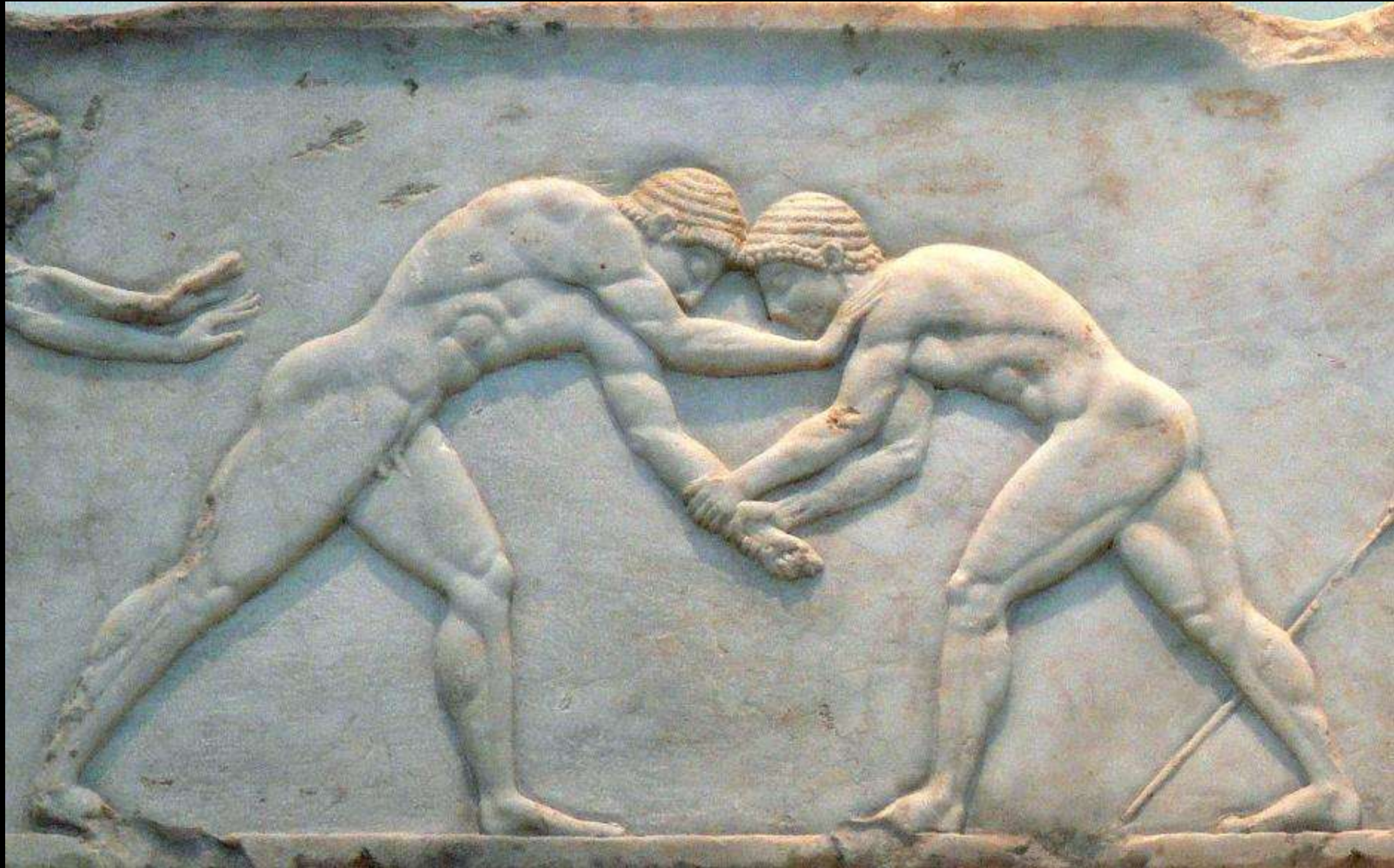
... Which achieves autonomy

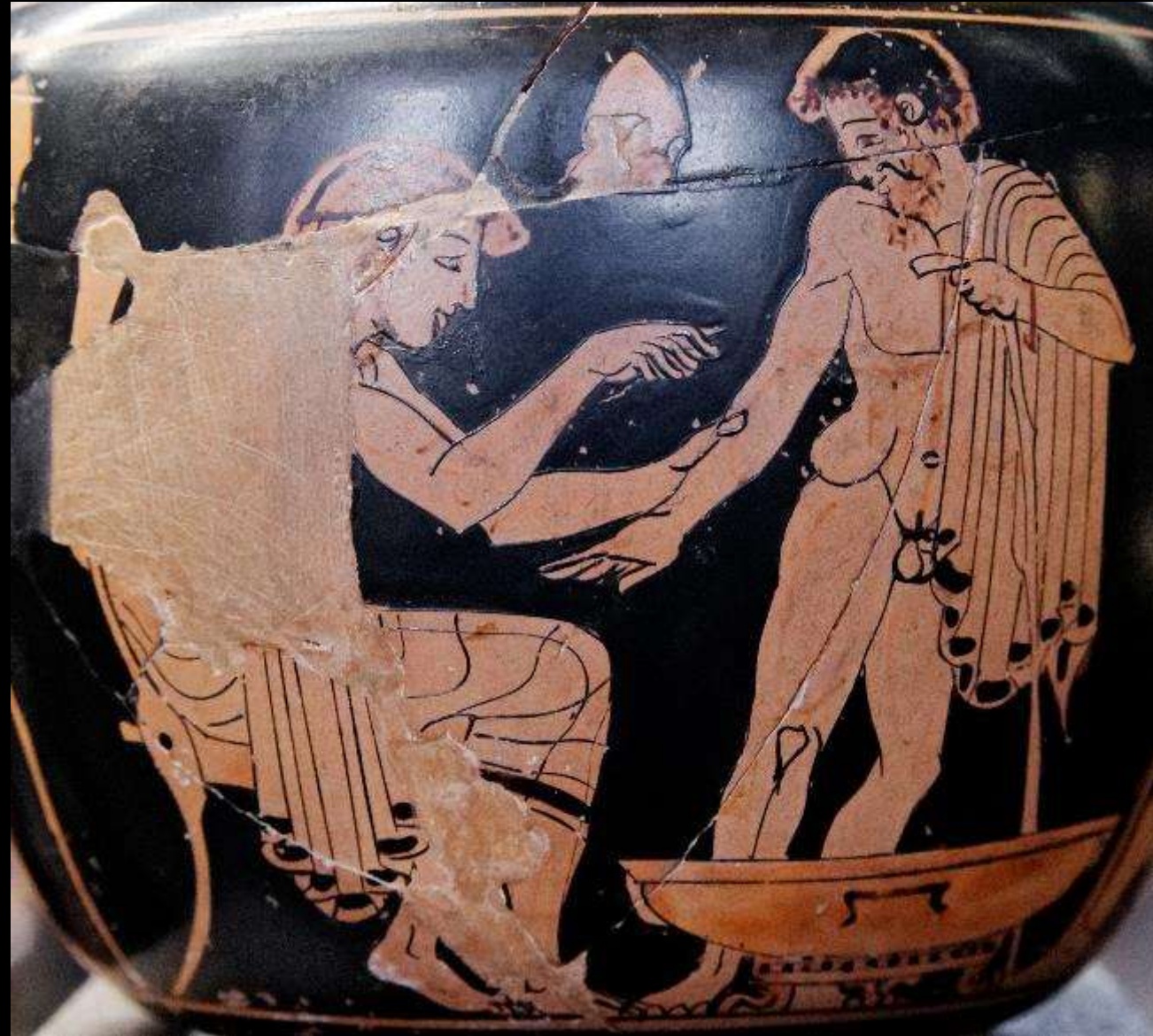
‘But to myself all predictions are favorable if I wish them to be, since it is up to me to benefit from the outcome, whatever it may be.’ (18)

‘For if the essence of goodness consists in things that are up to us, there is room for neither envy nor jealousy, and you yourself will not want to be a praetor or a senator or a consul, but to be free.

The only way to achieve this is by despising the things that are not up to us.’ (19)

3. STOIC TRAINING





‘Right now, then, make it your habit to tell every jarring thought or impression: “You are just an appearance and in no way the real thing.”

Next, examine it and test it by these rules that you have.

First and foremost: does it involve the things up to us, or the things not up to us?

And if it involves one of the things not up to us, have the following response to hand: “Not my business.” (2)



CULTIVATE DETACHMENT

‘If you are fond of a jug, say: “I am fond of a jug.” Then, if it is broken, you will not be troubled. When you kiss your little child or your wife, say that you are kissing a human being. Then, if one of them dies, you will not be troubled.’

Later, 11: ‘Never say about anything, “I have lost it”; but say, “I have returned it.” Has your little child died? “It has been returned.” Has your wife died? “She has been returned.”’

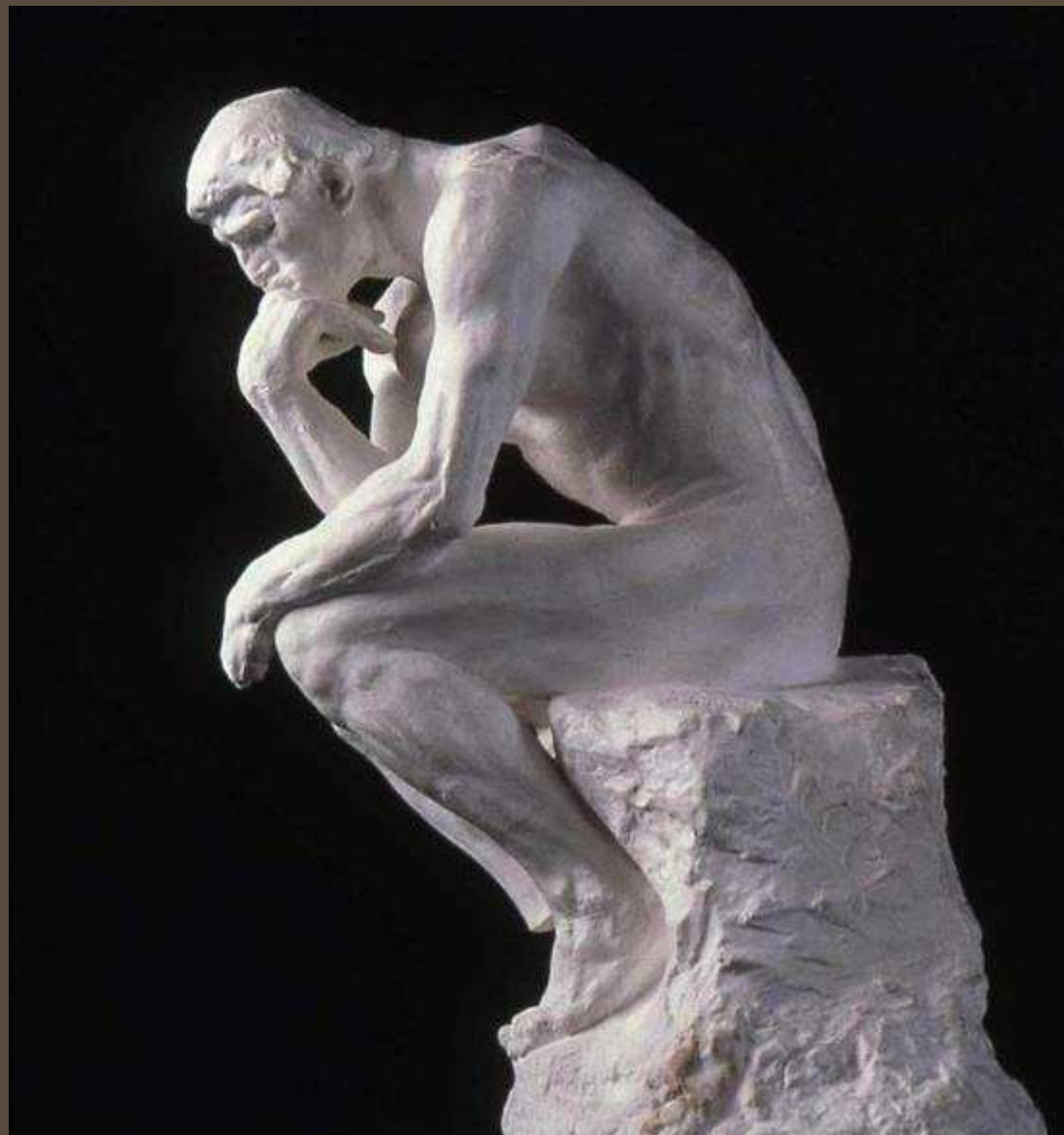
14: ‘If you want your children and your wife and friends to survive no matter what, you are silly; for you are wanting things to be up to you that are not up to you, and things to be your own that are not your own.’

Or when viewing others who grieve, 16: ‘at once have the following thought available: “What is crushing these people is not the event (since there are other people it does not crush) but their opinion about it.”’



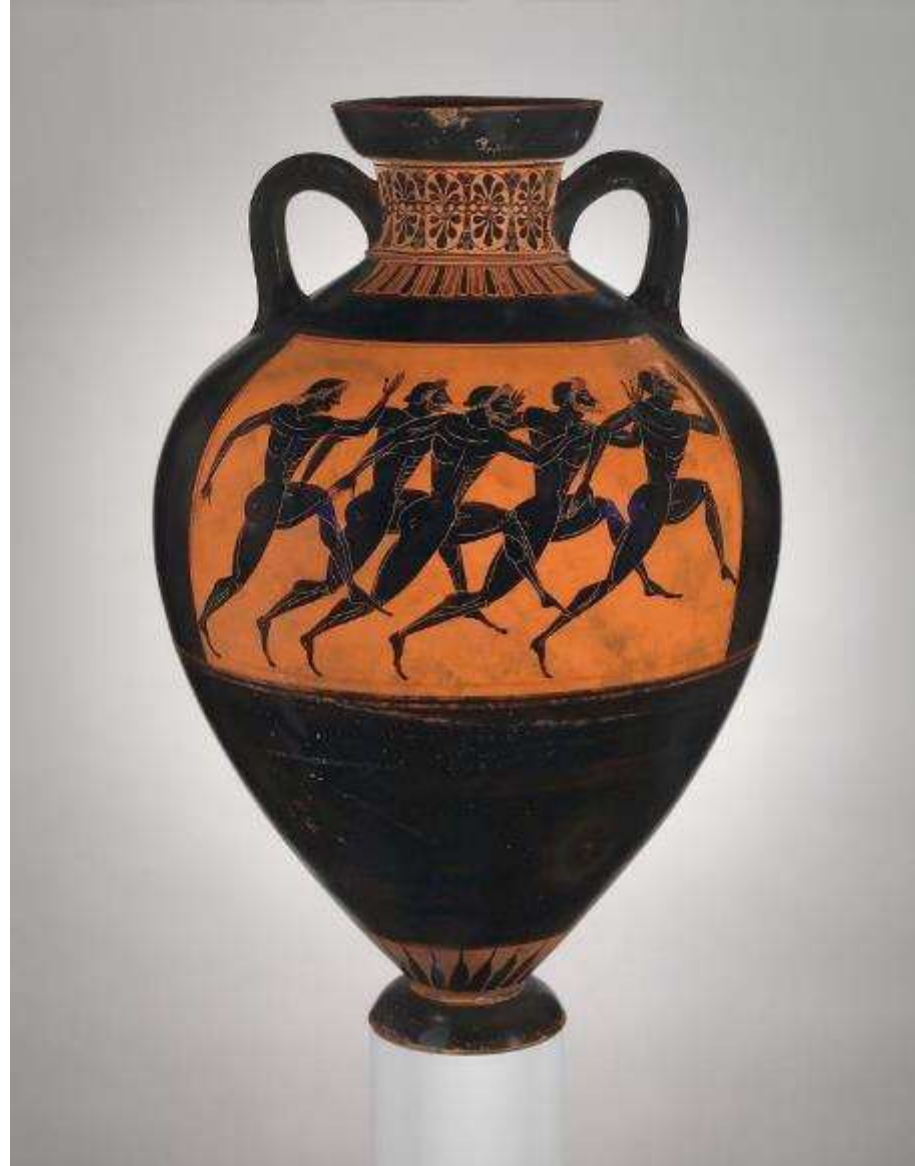












‘And whatever you encounter that is painful or pleasant or popular or unpopular, keep in mind that now is the contest, and here right now are the Olympic games, and that postponement is no longer an option, and that your progress is saved or ruined by a single day and a single action.

That’s how Socrates perfected himself, by attending to nothing except reason in everything he encountered.’ (51)



4. RESIGNATION OR RESISTANCE?





What are the social and political consequences of adhering to the philosophy of Epictetus?









EPICETUS THE SLAVE

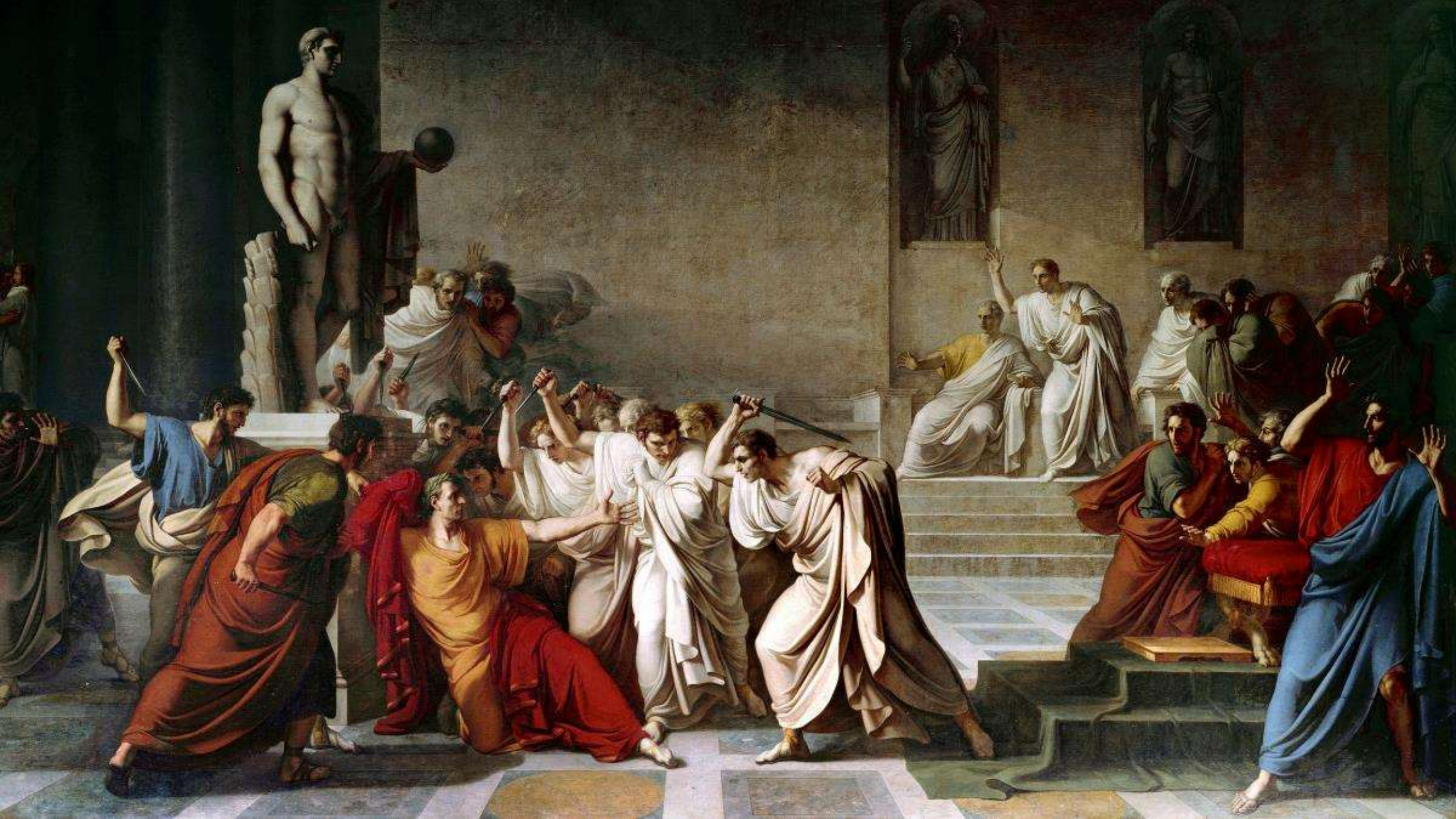
FREEDOM

Not a legal status, but an internal condition of self-sufficiency

‘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)

Likewise, you can be free legally but enslaved to certain desires and passions.

Freedom is ethical and psychological. It is inner, not outer.







‘Do you think you have a natural affinity only to a good father? “No, just to a father.”’

No one else, in fact, will harm you without your consent; you will be harmed only when you think you are being harmed.’

‘The essence of reverence concerning the gods is, first, to hold correct beliefs concerning their existence and their fine and just administration of the universe, and, second, to position yourself to obey them and accept whatever happens, complying with it willingly, on the understanding that what comes to pass has been ordained by their most excellent decision.

QUIETISM?







‘Some things are good, some bad, some indifferent. The good things are virtues and what participates in them, the bad things are vices and what participates in them, and the indifferents are those in between, such as wealth, health, life, death, pleasure, and pain.’

Where did you learn that? ‘Hellanicus says it in his Egyptian Tales .’

For how is it any better to say this than to say that Diogenes said it in his Ethics or Chrysippus or Cleanthes? Have you put any of these things to the test and come to your own view?’

PHILOSOPHER OR SCHOLAR?

5. LEGACY

John Adams

EPICTETI

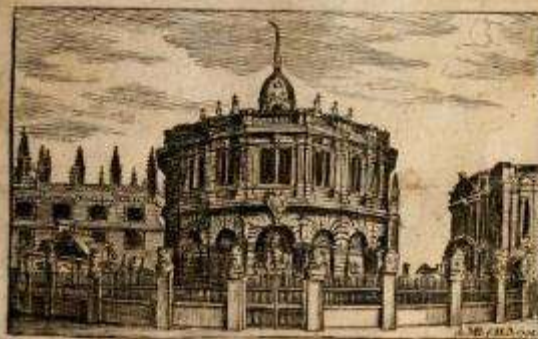
ENCHIRIDION

LATINIS VERSIBUS

ADUMBRATUM.

Per EDVARDUM IVIE A. M. *Ædis Christi* Alumn.
& Rev. Dom. Episc. *Bristol.* à Sacris domesticis.

Sunt Verba & Voces, quibus hunc lenire dolorem
Possis, & magnam morbi deponere partem. Hor.



6597

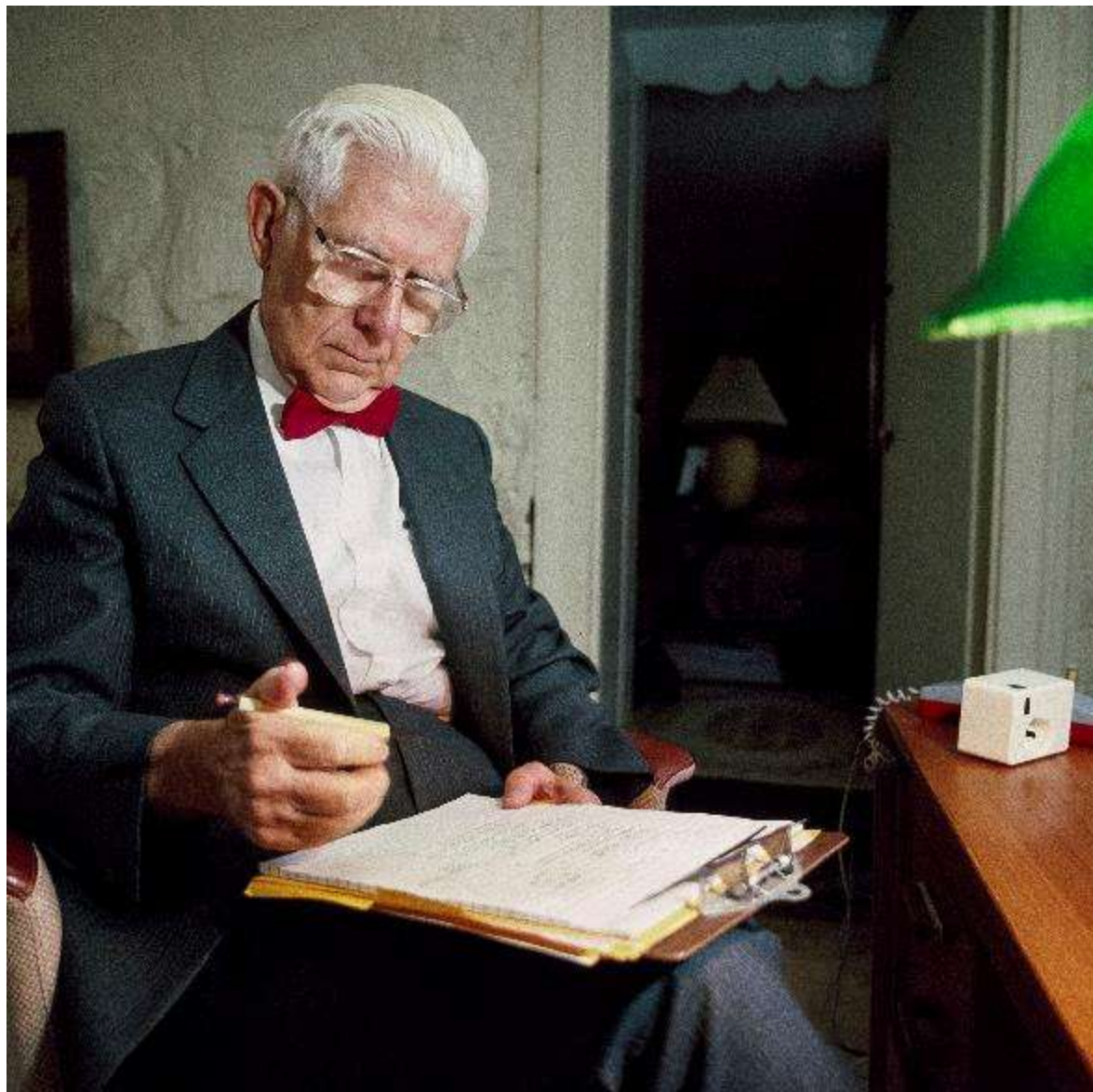
OXONIÆ,
THEATRO SHELDONIANO, MDCCXV.
Impenſis H. Clementi, ad Inſigne *Lunæ Falcatæ* in
Cœmeterio D. Pauli, Londini.

2









TOM
A Man
in Full
WOLFE
A novel

FSG





‘If he wants you to act the part of a beggar, see that you play it skillfully; and similarly if the part is to be a cripple, or an official, or a private person. Your job is to put on a splendid performance of the role you have been given’.

‘If you always bear in mind what belongs to you and what belongs to others you will never be upset.’

FOR DISCUSSION ON MONDAY

1. What is the central teaching of Epictetus's philosophy?
2. What exactly is up to us, and what is not up to us?
3. What are the political and social consequences?

Discussion: 1pm-3pm. You can use the same Zoom link from last week. It's also up on Moodle

WEEK 5: MARCUS AURELIUS

Our final of the Late Stoa – Emperor Marcus Aurelius

The Meditations

You may already have this book – any translation is fine, but I will circulate one next week.

For anything, email Dan.Taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk