

BOOK REVIEW

Musonius Rufus: That One Should Disdain Hardships: The Teachings of a Roman Stoic. By, CORA E. LUTZ, trans. and intro. by GRETCHEN REYDAMS-SCHILS. New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2020. Pp. xxix + 124. Hardback, \$22.00. ISBN: 978-0-300-22603-4.

This book is a reprint of Cora E. Lutz's classic translation of the extant recorded teachings of Musonius Rufus, an enigmatic first-century CE Roman Stoic philosopher, sometimes called the "Roman Socrates."¹ As I do not have substantive criticisms of this volume, but instead celebrate its arrival, I will divide my review thus: first, I will lay out the features and strengths of this edition; then, I will say a bit more about Musonius more broadly (as he is still less well-known) and gesture to what I think makes him a unique and timely figure for classroom study of Stoicism.

In an impressive achievement, the 1947 Lutz translation still remains standard, and so an inexpensive reprint such as this is much welcomed. This edition also contains a new (and excellent) introduction by Gretchen Reydams-Schils.

It arrives not only during a decades-long resurgence of interest in Hellenistic philosophy among both academics and laypeople, but now amid the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. As in times past, some readers will look to the ancient philosophical traditions which specialize in "therapy" for guidance in uncertain times: accordingly, Musonius is well-positioned for a comeback.²

But *what* is the text presented here and *who* is Musonius?

¹The collection of his teachings comes to us principally through the Stobaeus *Anthology*, with further fragments contained in Plutarch, Epictetus, Aulus Gellius and Aelius Aristides. Lutz's translation and introductory essay originally appeared in *Yale Classical Studies* (Vol. 10). Her translation works primarily from Otto Hense's 1905 Teubner edition of the teachings and fragments of Musonius.

²Consult Martha Nussbaum's *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton UP 1996) for a good introduction into the resurging academic interest in the therapeutic dimension of the practically-minded Hellenistic philosophical schools.

First, then: Our evidence for Musonius's thought consists in topical lectures supposedly delivered by Musonius and recorded by a certain Lucius. Musonius Rufus (ca. 30-90/100? CE) was generally praised in his lifetime, but suffered exile under Nero, before enjoying eventual reinstatement under Galba and protection under Vespasian. The eclectic collection of his teachings most resembles Xenophon's biographic portrait of Socrates (rather than Plato's intellectual one), depicting Musonius through a combination of his words, life and deeds.

In addition to being known as the teacher of Epictetus, Musonius Rufus has gained a reputation of his own. His supposed real-life incorruptibility, courage in the face of his own misfortunes and the frank, direct applications of his teaching to everyday life (titles for some of his sayings and teachings include, for example, "That Women Too Should Study Philosophy," "Should Daughters Receive the Same Education as Sons?," "Will the Philosopher Prosecute Anyone for Personal Injury?," "On Sexual Indulgence," "Should Every Child That Is Born Be Raised?," "On Food," "On Cutting the Hair") have earned him occasional recognition, but usually among specialists.

He is deserving of more. Indeed, even for an ancient Stoic, Musonius has a particularly well-reasoned, concise doctrine regarding the necessity that one's theory (in the lectures, the Greek word is usually *logos*) be put into practice (*ethos*)—in other words, that one's philosophical beliefs about the good life ought to have recognizable, sensible evidence in one's own daily life and behaviors. Musonius even describes a sort of exercise program for achieving this sort of enacted reason (i.e., virtuous activity), distinguishing and describing two sorts of virtue training and exercise: those for the soul and those for the soul and body together (helpfully summarized by Reydams-Schils x-xi).

The conclusions at which Musonius arrives in this process—of his putting his theory into practice—give him a progressive dimension with respect to his contemporaries. As the titles above suggest, Musonius held (partially) forward-thinking views with regard to women and also advanced a surprisingly egalitarian, modern model for (monogamous, heterosexual) marriage. Despite the initial direction of these reflections, however, Musonius still thinks the everyday role of women should remain largely conventional according to Roman cultural practice: women should learn philosophy, he says at one point, to better endure their characteristic activities in the home.³

³ *Musonius* 3-4. Musonius has been termed, memorably, an "incomplete feminist." For discussion around Musonius' views on women see Martha Nussbaum, "The Incomplete Feminism of

The complex portrait we get of Musonius Rufus in this volume accounts for his being an enduring figure, one ripe for rereading and reappraisal in a troubled, solitary time. For though reading Musonius Rufus is not as consistently therapeutic as is reading Marcus Aurelius, Seneca or Epictetus, his enigmatic incompleteness—his inquisitiveness, his humor, his exhortation to *live* one's beliefs, at all costs—can make him seem decidedly more human.

His contemporary appeal lies in precisely this: Unlike some other Stoics (like Seneca), he practiced what he preached (even if he wasn't always right), becoming that exceedingly rare sort of person.⁴

That Musonius lives again in an inexpensive, classroom-friendly edition at this precise moment seems, to use Stoic reasoning, to have an almost providential explanation.

EVAN DUTMER

Culver Academics, evan.dutmer@culver.org

Musonius Rufus, Platonist, Stoic, Roman” in *The Sleep of Reason* (UChicago Press 2002) and Gretchen Reydam-Schils, *The Roman Stoics* (UChicago Press 2005).

⁴ Origen, a Christian, lists only three peers for Musonius: Heracles, Odysseus and Socrates (*Contra Celsum* 3.66).