



In-Class Workshop and Module 7 Activity #1 “My Stoic Enchiridion”

The Set-up

The stoic knows that, man, life can be hard. When we’re faced with real-time suffering, real-time challenge, we don’t always have time to go to our shelves to find the nugget of wisdom from the pages of a book. So, like the Epicureans, Epictetus and other Stoics pre-prepared for life’s unknowns by engaging in a series of “**intellectual exercises**”—like **reading, investigation, listening**—so that they would be prepared when “stuff” hit the fan.

In other words, the whole idea of Epictetus’s Enchiridion—the “little handbook”—was to pull together some of the most important Stoic Sayings, so that they could be practiced, memorized, recalled, and repeated to ourselves when we find ourselves in the thick of trying situations.

Instructions

For this in-class workshop, and at-home Module Activity, **we are going to create our own Mini-Enchiridions**. The idea here is to condense our most-valued of Epictetus’s sayings down into nugget-sized mantras that we can “carry with us” “at-hand” and repeat to ourselves in troubling times.

For example: In our last class, we reflected on Marcus Aurelius’s morning meditation about how during the day he knew he was going to encounter annoying and difficult people, but that he wanted to remember that, even so, we are all in this together: we work together (like feet). I cannot hate him, or be angry. In short, we are connected as humans.

Upon reflection, and particularly in light of the Stoic emphasis on being a “citizen of the world” and cultivating tolerance, it seemed here that, at bottom, Aurelius’s point might be nicely and succinctly stated by reference to the words of the ancient Roman playwright, Terence:

Nothing Human is Alien

This then is the first Stoic saying that I, for one, want to include on My Mini-Enchiridion, so that I can repeat it to myself when encountering people who at first feel so foreign to me! How about you?

In-class, in small groups:

- 1) We will work to whittle our favorite passages down to short, easily memorizable sayings that capture Epictetus’s basic point. (see the other side of this page for a good set of passages, but feel free to add more)

At-home, for your Module 7 Activity, each of you, individually, will:

- 2) Select 4 or 5 of those sayings that you would want to “carry” in your own Mini-Enchiridion.
- 3) Design a **3x5 Stoic-Sayings-Card** (using a blank PPT slide, perhaps, or similar). Spend some time on making it look visually appealing.
- 4) **Write-up a 1-page overview** of why you selected the ones you did...including, what each passage actually says (the quote), what it means, why you think it would be helpful to you.
- 5) Submit an electronic copy (screenshot, pdf, jpg) of your 3x5 card, and your write-up, by **Tuesday, Nov 6**

After that, I will:

- 6) Print out and laminate the cards of anyone who wants me to. (that’s why they are 3x5 cards...so you can carry them around easily!)

Key Passages from Epictetus's Enchiridion

(try to whittle these down to shorter sayings.)

(Your whittled-down version might use a lot of the same words and phrases from the original, or you might decide to use completely different, more efficient, or personally-meaningful phrasings.)

1. *Some things are up to us, some are not up to us. Up to us are perception, intention, desire, aversion and in sum, whatever are our own doings; not up to us are body, property, reputation, political office and in sum, whatever are not of our own doings. (#1)*
2. *It is not things that upset people but rather the ideas about things...So whenever we are frustrated or upset or grieved, let us not blame others, but ourselves—that is, our ideas. (#5)*
3. *Illness is an impediment of the body, but not of the will...Lameness is an impediment of the leg, not of the will. (#9)*
4. *Never say about anything that you have “lost it,” but that you have “given it back.” (#11)*
5. *[on letting things go]. Begin with little things: A little oil has been spilled, a little wine has been stolen: say to yourself, “this is the price of peace, that of serenity.” Nothing is free. (#12)*
6. *Remember that you ought to conduct yourself as you do at a banquet. When something passed around reaches you, extend your hand and take it politely. If it is passing you by, don't grab. If it has not reached you, don't crave for it, but wait until it gets to you (#15)*
7. *If ever it happens that you turn to externals because you want to please someone, realize that you have lost your bearings. (#23)*
8. *If someone were to hand over your body to just whomever happened along, you would be outraged. Why aren't you outraged at the fact that you turn over your own mind to whomever happens along—if he insults you and you let it upset or trouble you.? (#28)*
9. *If someone tells you that somebody else is saying awful things about you, don't defend yourself against the accusations, but reply, “he must not know about all the other faults I have, if there are the only ones he mentioned.” (#33)*
10. *Everything has two handles, one by which it may be borne, one by which it cannot be borne. If you brother has done wrong, don't grasp this by the “wrongdoing” handle—it can't be borne by that one—but the “brother,” the “brought-up-together” handles, and thereby you will be able to bear it. (#43)*
11. *These sorts of arguments are invalid: “I am richer than you are, therefore I am better than you”; “I am more eloquent than you are, therefore I am better than you.” But these are valid: “I am richer than you are, therefore my possessions are better than yours”; “I am more eloquent than you are, therefore my speech is better than yours.” You, however, are neither your possessions or your speech. (#44)*
12. *So what sort of teacher are you still waiting for, that you put off your own reformation until he gets here? You are no longer a child, but a grown man. If now you take no care and loaf and always keep putting things off...you will lose yourself. Right now, then, deem yourself worthy of living as an adult making progress. (#51)*
13. *If some task is set for you, whether pleasant or glorious or inglorious, remember, that right now you are the contestant and here are the Olympic Games, and there's can't be any more delay, and that one day and one deed will determine whether progress is lost or saved. (#51)*