

# Would There Be Benefit In Adapting the "Benjamin Franklin Journaling Model" To Our Discussion of Practical Exercises?

Post by "Cassius" of July 8, 2021 at 11:07 AM

I am not particularly familiar with the details of Benjamin Franklin's life, but I suspect there is more than a little compatibility between his "Poor Richard's Almanac" sayings and Epicurean philosophy. That's a topic in itself, but for the moment as we talk about Practical Exercises, I wonder if there is any use in adapting Franklin's journaling method:

<https://standardebooks.org/ebooks/benjami.../text/chapter-9>

Two graphics:

Form of the pages:  
I made a little book, in which I allotted a page for each of the virtues.<sup>10</sup> I ruled each page with red ink, so as to have seven columns, one for each day of the week, marking each column with a letter for the day. I crossed these columns with thirteen red lines, making the beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues, on which line, and in its proper column, I might mark, by a little black spot, every fault I found upon examiners to have been committed respecting that virtue upon that day.

Form of the pages:

Temperance							
But not to dullness							
Dine not to abstemion							
	S.	M.	T.	W.	T.	F.	S.
T.							
W.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q.	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
R.							
E.							
L.							
S.							
J.							
M.							
C.							
T.							

The purpose of this requiring that every part of the business should have its allotment, one page in my little book contained the following scheme of employment for the twenty-four hours of a winter day.

The Morning	6	Rise, wash, and address Powerful
Question: What good shall I do this day?	7	Go to work, continue my business, and take the resolution of the day previous to the present study, and breakfast.
	8	
	9	
	10	Walk.
	11	
Noon	12	Feed, or overlook my accounts, and dine.
	1	
	2	
	3	Walk.
	4	
	5	
	6	
	7	Put things in their places, Supper, Music or diversion, or conversation Examination of done today?
	8	
	9	
	10	
	11	
	12	
Night	1	Sleep.
	2	

This may be some useful commentary: <https://www.journalinghabit.com/journal-tips-b...ck>YourProgress>

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## **Post by “Cassius” of July 8, 2021 at 1:11 PM**

Definitely have to rewrite many of these, especially THIRTEEN! Also - did he leave number 12 without illustration?

1. Temperance.
    1. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
  2. Silence.
    1. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
  3. Order.
    1. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
  4. Resolution.
    1. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
  5. Frugality.
    1. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
  6. Industry.
    1. Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
  7. Sincerity.
    1. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
  8. Justice.
    1. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
  9. Moderation.
    1. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
  10. Cleanliness.
    1. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.
  11. Tranquillity.
    1. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
  12. Chastity.
  13. Humility.
    1. Imitate Jesus and Socrates.
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## **Post by “Joshua” of July 9, 2021 at 1:10 PM**

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2086-would-there-be-benefit-in-adapting-the-benjamin-franklin-journaling-model-to-our/>

When I was in high school I had his 12 precepts tacked to my wall.

Ironically number 13 that you cite is not original. He added it, if I recall, in response to a reader complaint. I remember an illustration for 12 ☐☐...something about not bringing ill-repute on yourself or your partner? I'll have to look into it later.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2021 at 2:08 PM**

Yes that link I posted in the first thread contains the statement that he added it after a Quaker friend reminded him that he was too stubborn and obnoxious or something like that.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of July 9, 2021 at 4:53 PM**

This list would definitely require a re-do for an Epicurean! Not just the descriptions but many of the headings, the ones that jump out to me being at least: frugality, industry, tranquility and chastity.

An interesting idea though and one that wouldn't have occurred to me as I tend to have a more loosey goosey approach to life 😊

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2021 at 5:53 PM**

Yes definitely. I have not read enough of Franklin to know whether he had anything much to say about Stoicism or Epicurus, but there's definitely a stoic tinge to some - but not all - of the material. I do think the way he organizes it is an interesting thought for those who are into organizing their self-improvement, and I tend to think that many people who come looking for that approach would also appreciate a structured presentation of it.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 9, 2021 at 7:37 PM**

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2086-would-there-be-benefit-in-adapting-the-benjamin-franklin-journaling-model-to-our/>

Haven't looked at the results yet but thought y'all might find these interesting:

<https://founders.archives.gov/index.xqy?q=Pr...=1511211111&r=1>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2021 at 8:19 PM**

That is very helpful! I switched the search to Epicurus and find very little. No doubt we are going to find a blend, with a tendency toward stoicism perhaps like Aurelius, but I don't yet have a feel for the mix because Franklin seems practical above all and that would seemingly out the brakes on "virtue" in and for itself.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2021 at 8:22 PM**

I do think that it would probably be a very useful exercise to rewrite Franklin's list in Epicurean terms, then prepare a chart to serve as a weekly reminder checklist. The methodology probably appeals to a certain type of person who likes outlines and checklists, and the comparison of the content of the two would be enlightening in itself.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of July 10, 2021 at 4:40 PM**

Franklin referred to this list as a list of "virtues". Since the greatest good to an Epicurean is pleasure and not virtue, might this be a problem with the list?

Joshua referred to the items as "precepts;" another possibility is to call them *instrumental* virtues, as in instrumental to pleasure. It seems necessary to clarify this in order to avoid any confusion with Stoicism and the like. Offhand it seems like PD5 would be a guide, probably other doctrines as well. Also DeWitt has a chapter on The New Virtues although to me it's just a start and needs further thought.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 10, 2021 at 4:48 PM**

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2086-would-there-be-benefit-in-adapting-the-benjamin-franklin-journaling-model-to-our/>

Well that raises a good question Godfrey - as to whether Franklin considered this "list of virtues" to be goals in themselves, or whether he realized that they were instrumental. You're definitely right that any list has to be clearly denominated as instrumental only and always subject to change. With that in mind maybe it shouldn't be a list of "virtues" at all, but a list of precepts as Joshua is saying that we remind ourselves to apply every day.

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### **Post by "Don" of July 10, 2021 at 11:04 PM**

It's important to remember that the word often translated as "virtue" in the Greek is ἀρετή aretē [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...7:entry=a\)reth/](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...7:entry=a)reth/) St-Andre (and others) sometimes use the word "excellence" because to him "virtue" had a Victorian air about it. Wikipedia has a nice intro: This excerpt especially is interesting: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arete?wprov=sfla1> "this notion of excellence was ultimately bound up with the notion of the fulfillment of purpose or function: the act of living up to one's full potential." Anyway, "virtue" can be misleading although it gets complicated with all the Greek philosophers using ἀρετή ... However, maybe they were talking about the same thing and different perspectives.

All that being said, I am fine with considering Epicurean "excellences" of:

Frugality (living within one's means)

Tranquility (ataraxia is a pleasure, too)

Frankness (honest speech, sincerity?)

Justice (neither harm nor being harmed)

And others, but for now, consider that my contribution to this conversation.

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of July 11, 2021 at 1:36 AM**

To me, there should be better words for frugality and tranquility, based on previous forum discussions. I understand what you're saying though, [Don](#) .

I would add prudence, friendship and gratitude to the list. I think prudence could replace frugality....

As for PD5, prudence (or wisdom) and justice are pretty clear but I'm not sure what to make of "honor." It seems like there may be a better word for that. Maybe "honesty?" It's obviously a good thing to live honorably, at least the way I understand it in the context of PD5. But it could be interpreted in terms of "honor culture" which I think is the opposite of what is Instrumental to pleasure.

<http://psychology.iresearchnet.com/social-psychol...lture-of-honor/>

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2021 at 5:51 AM**

Further on the implications of the word "virtue" is not the Latin form grounded in the implications of "strength"? Since we have to deal with modern associations, maybe "strength" has less victorian implication even then excellences, and more clearly conveys the issue that it is necessary to answer the question "strength toward what purpose?"

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### **Post by "Don" of July 11, 2021 at 10:49 AM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

As for PD5, prudence (or wisdom) and justice are pretty clear but I'm not sure what to make of "honor." It seems like there may be a better word for that.

One of the difficulties with PD5 is that the word used is καλώς, the adverbial form of καλός (kalos). Two give an idea of the wide -although positive - concept conveyed by that word, here are some viable translations:

admirable, artistic, auspicious, beautiful, buxom, comely, creditable, elegant, estimable, excellent, exquisite, fair, favourable, fine, fortunate, good, goodly, handsome, happy, high-principled, honourable, hopeful, lovely, lucky, noble, ornamental, picturesque, plausible, principled, promising, propitious, reputable, righteous, skilful, virtuous, well-favoured

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<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2086-would-there-be-benefit-in-adapting-the-benjamin-franklin-journaling-model-to-our/>

## Post by “Don” of July 11, 2021 at 1:47 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Further on the implications of the word "virtue" is not the Latin form grounded in the implications of "strength"?

I don't know who this person is that posted this, but I thought this was interesting:  
<http://www.john-uebersax.com/plato/words/arete.htm>

You're right about the Latin "virtus"

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...59:entry=virtus>

It's related to "vir" meaning man.

Trivia: it's pronounced [wir] which is where werewolf comes from.

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## Post by “A\_Gardner” of July 12, 2021 at 12:26 PM

I'm all for it!

As a fan of practical philosophy, Franklin's Virtues are quite the model for self-development, and can be adapted to most any philosophical or religious outlook, or lack thereof.

Don't get so caught up in the semantics of his original list. He could be a bit cheeky at times (he in fact was joking about himself in number 13, as he knew believed even imitating Jesus and Socrates would be impossible. He had a good sense of humor on him.)

For number 12 regarding chastity, it originally read as "Rarely use venery but for health or offspring; never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation."

Honestly considering the times, this is a rather progressive view on sexual relations, as rather than condemn or deny, he seemed to acknowledge that's just what people do.

Honestly I find his parameters for it to be quite in line with traditional Epicureanism.

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