

# Stoicism 101 on 10% Happier podcast

Post by “Don” of September 28, 2021 at 7:56 AM

<https://www.tenpercent.com/podcast-episode/nancy-sherman-382>

In the interests of keeping up with our rivals, I started to listen to this 10% Happier episode with Dr. Nancy Sherman (wasn't aware of her) who just published a book on Stoicism. I haven't finished the episode yet, so if anyone also listens, feel free to share your thoughts.

I think there are practices that are or could be common to Epicureans and Stoics from a shared Greek culture. So I'm interested to hear her take on those.

However, she lost my sympathetic ear early on when she talked about Stoicism helps deal with tragedy and she used the example of Agamemnon \*having\* to sacrifice his child to sail. Just in passing, you might miss it if you're not paying attention, but... What, what?! I immediately thought of the Epicurean response to the murder of Iphigenia: *Tantum religio potuit suadare malorum!* So, yeah, if that's the Stoic response to that scene in Greek myth, no thank you.

They also talk briefly about Stoicism's embrace by the "Manosphere". I hadn't heard about that until recently, but I've also read a little stuff from Donna Zuckerberg and her research. If interested, just search online for her name and Stoicism or "red pill." You'll get results.

The thing that gets me with modern Stoics is their lack of "source" for their virtue. The originals were convinced they were cogs in the wheel of the universe, put in their position by Zeus or some Power, and what happened to them was part of a divine plan. That is muted or absent in much of what I've seen of the moderns. And if they throw that away, why be resigned with what just happens to you by chance?

Dan Harris is a good interviewer and comes at his guests with curiosity. There could be some good stuff in there, but, shall we say, approach the Stoa with caution.

---

Post by “Cassius” of September 28, 2021 at 10:09 AM

I haven't even clicked the link but I expect all of your observations are right on point Don. You've already cited examples but I am sure there will be lots more. The only thing that would be surprising would be for those observations NOT to be true:

(1) The sacrifice of Iphegenia -- There you have it right off the bat - Stoicism is immersed in religion and/or virtue-ethics and everything takes second place to that. They choose their god - either divine (religion) or human (which trades under humanism) and EVERYTHING is made subsidiary to that goal. Well for the sake of consistency that is what they should do - choose their priority - but they choose things that Epicurus taught are simple mental inventions of mankind, rather than the faculties nature gave us. It would be hard to find a better way of focusing on the extreme and irreconcilable differences between Stoics and Epicurus, because to give up their false gods would be the end of stoicism. My god, they are almost "Christian" in their focus on sacrifice and pain as what they see as the meaning of life.

(2) Yes I observe the same embrace by the manosphere. Being one myself (a man) I don't have a problem with men having an understanding of the differences between the sexes, but I do (as for myself) insist that it be based on biology, on nature, on "the truth" - and not on invented gods and humanistic \*virtue\* ideals that have no foundation but arbitrary assertion. A truly effective "men's club" in the modern world would be an "Epicurean Men's Club" and I would have no more problem with that than I would with an "Epicurean Women's Club" or whatever other self-identified group thought it would be helpful to have a group devoted to their own unique circumstances of living -- "Epicurean Eskimos" etc!

(3) As to the split-personality aspect, yes there too. The majority of the moderns are focusing on cognitive behavioral therapy and similar psychological issues and they have a real schism from those who (rightly) seek consistency with the ancient Stoics. You can almost bet your life that early in their discussions the name "Martha Nussbaum" comes up, and "stoicism as therapy" is basically all they want to talk about. They seem to think that one can be happy simply by willing away the existence of pain, and not only is that wrong, but they really play games with the the definition of "happiness" because what most of the leaders mean is "meaningfulness" which for them is only a skip and a jump away from "virtue" -- and of course where they find "virtue" is in their own mix of social and political aphorisms. I would argue that Stoicism was - and is - an essentially political movement. Which is all to the good if you happen to share their "political" interpretation of life, but not very helpful (for YOU) if you don't happen to agree with them.

---

**Post by “Don” of September 28, 2021 at 10:51 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

A truly effective "men's club" in the modern world would be an "Epicurean Men's Club" and I would have no more problem with that than I would with an "Epicurean Women's

Club" or whatever other self-identified group thought it would be helpful to have a group devoted to their own unique circumstances of living -

Hmmm. My first response is to push back on your assertion there. Epicurus's Garden sets the paradigm for Epicurean communities in that they are/should welcome all. Having a sectarian (in any form) group goes against the ecumenical, open, welcoming nature of the original Gardens.

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of September 28, 2021 at 12:12 PM**

I am not advocating those referenced but more expanding the point from geography to any other group of friends that makes sense to the people involved.

I certainly agree that Epicurean philosophy is for everyone every bit as much as any truth is for everyone. But there are natural divisions of geography, language, etc that may make sense to the people involved under their individual circumstances.

For example I would never want to see this forum limited by sex or race or geography or anything else, because we are working on the core truths that have the widest application. But we have subject forums and sections for geographic area, etc, and I wouldn't want to push away from here any group that sincerely wanted to study Epicurean philosophy.

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of September 28, 2021 at 3:39 PM**

I got cut off and didn't really finish the last post.

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus's Garden sets the paradigm for Epicurean communities in that they are/should welcome all. Having a sectarian (in any form) group goes against the ecumenical, open, welcoming nature of the original Gardens.

I'm not really disagreeing with that as much as drilling down on the details. Just like over at the Facebook group, and even more so here, we do have rules about who and who isn't welcome, primarily related to the fact that if we're going to do our job / reach our target we can't allow constant disruptions and monopolizing of time or resources by people who are committed to

opposing viewpoints. There's no evidence I am aware of that Epicurus or any other Epicurean group ever had "Stoic Week" or invited opposing groups into their homes for regular debating either.

A worldwide forum like this can and should, I think, have virtually no limitations other than those of doctrine such as referenced above. However I don't know that we can predict how local groups will develop in the future, and I would expect them to spring up based on location as much as anything else.

I think the interesting point you're raising is probably more a question of what the purpose of the group we're talking about would be. I agree that an "Epicurean Group" would first and foremost focus on Epicurus, so I'm probably being too broad in my language in that post you questioned. The context of discussing how stoicism has been brought into the "manosphere" groups also had me thinking about that. An "Epicurean Philosophy Night" at a local men's or women's club or children's club is probably more consistent with what I was thinking rather than something named and focused the other way around. Good catch.

---

### **Post by “Don” of September 28, 2021 at 7:13 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

An "Epicurean Philosophy Night" at a local men's or women's club or children's club is probably more consistent with what I was thinking rather than something named and focused the other way around. Good catch.

Okay, I think we're on the same page. That whole "red pill" "Manosphere" is alarming, misogynistic stuff from what I can see. I don't usually express sympathy for Stoics but it is a shame if Greco-Roman literature/culture etc gets co-opted by that "community." I'll end there before going down a political path

---

### **Post by “Joshua” of September 28, 2021 at 7:29 PM**

I was reading through r/AskReddit the other day and there was a thread titled something like "What was the closest you've ever come to suicide, and what was it that brought you back?" I clicked on it for the human interest angle, and read a post that said that 'studying stoicism

really helped.'

Hey, if you're at that terrible point in your life, and stoicism is the one thing that pulls you through, that's great. I'm not going to argue or judge.

But is that the advice I would give to a friend? Sadly, no. Surely we can do better than to tell a suffering fellow human that the way to move beyond suicide ideation is to realize that life and its experiences are 'indifferent.'

I hope everyone in that thread is doing ok.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of September 28, 2021 at 7:54 PM**

I know you probably didn't intend that as a joke but I almost put a "ha" icon. The very idea that sending someone in that condition to Stoicism is in my view a prescription for disaster. When someone faces that kind of condition my instinct is to emphasize to them at a gut level how much life is worth living. Anesthesia has its uses and I won't say that stoicism might not serve that role, but returning to health requires the will to improve, and Stoicism deadens that will as much as anything else.