

Training book/framework for new Epicureans

Post by "Matteng" of May 17, 2023 at 5:16 AM

Coming from the Stoic camp, I tried to practice this philosophy and searched for exercises and have found this:

"[A Handbook for New Stoics](#): How to Thrive in a World Out of Your Control—52 Week-by-Week Lessons "

Is there something similar there for Epicurean Philosophy ?

The threads in this forum area are very helpful but I am searching for a more bigger "training plan" / framework or something in this direction.

If not I am thinking about to do this lessons from the book again but with the Epicurean worldview in mind.

The good thing is, that the authors have a more naturalistic worldview than the Stoic physic and scientific reference.

What would be a comprehensive Epicurean learning/training plan ?

Maybe curriculum like from the Stoics (desire, action, judgment)

Or the fields of philosophy:

(learn basics of canonics scientific epistemology/

naturalistic worldview science /

ethics (desire, pleasure/pain, virtue, attention/meditation, hedonic calculus, friendship, value clarification,

positiv psychology...)

But maybe I should question the whole project and it makes more sense to be more attentive/prudent in the everyday life.

But would be motivating to have something like the path to become an Epicurean Sage 😄🧘

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2023 at 7:01 AM

That is a great suggestion and we talk about it frequently. Several of us are working on something similar but unfortunately nothing I am aware of is ready for production. But this is a goal that is very high on our list.

Aside from the forum posts you mentioned, I would also recommend the Lucretius podcast. We'll incorporate that in whatever written materials we come up with, but I think an important part of any curriculum is personal participation and discussion with other like-minded people, and the podcast can help simulate that until we have more programs available.

I expect us to want to track Lucretius very closely (at least in the big picture) as we do this. If you have not spent quality time with Lucretius I think finding a good annotated translation (the Martin F. Smith version for instance) would be a good idea. Lucretius was presenting to Memmius pretty much exactly what you are looking for - a step by step introduction to the philosophy.

And here is an important point: Lucretius' focus on the physics is a feature, not a bug. I think Lucretius starts and emphasizes exactly where the philosophy presentation needs to start, and he goes over these big picture in a logical order. Here's a summary I've been working on recently:

- **Nature:** Everything that exists has a physical basis, and there is nothing that is supernatural. [Nothing can be created from nothing.](#)
- **Gods:** No supernatural gods exist, but it is useful to remember that intelligent life with physical bodies exists elsewhere in the universe, and to think about and seek to emulate those which have achieved perfectly pleasurable lives without any pain.
- **Death:** The soul is physical like everything else and cannot exist without the body. There is no life after death, and therefore no punishment or reward after death.
- **Anti-Determinism:** Human life is neither fated nor determined by forces outside itself.
- **Knowledge:** The five senses, the feelings of pleasure and pain, and the pattern-recognition faculty of anticipations provide a reliable basis for knowledge.
- **Pleasure:** The feeling of pleasure is the guide to a life of pleasure which is the goal of human life. Pleasure is a wide term that includes everything mentally and physically desirable in life. In contrast, "virtue" is a label that describes not an end in itself but whatever is an effective tool for the obtaining of a life of pleasure.

Lucretius mentions pleasure throughout, and he incorporates it into the opening of the poem and the interesting starting points of each book, but he starts the deep discussions with the fundamentals of how nature works, how death is the end, how humans have free will, and how knowledge is based on the senses.

This sets the stage properly from the beginning, and when you establish these fundamentals - such as how short life is and yet how pleasure is the driving force of all life - it seems to me you are much less likely to fall into the trap of thinking that "running from pain" is the focus of what life should be all about.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2023 at 7:07 AM

I would be interested to see that handbook.

Another thought that I had was to bring up Emily Austin's article:

[Are the Modern Stoics Really Epicureans? | History News Network](#)

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2023 at 7:12 AM

Ha - I see that has a subtitle - "How To Thrive In A World Out Of Your Control." I know we all feel that way at times but I'd like to think that an Epicurean alternative book would have a very different "feel" to it. And it's also interesting that they chose not to include their "trademark word" - virtue.

The Emily Austin article you mentioned is a good reference for any Stoic and we need to highlight it more here.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2023 at 7:20 AM

Let's workshop some "Epicurean Handbook" subtitles... I'll start...

- Feel, Think, Thrive
- How to Listen to Your Feelings to Make Better Choices
- Pleasure is not a Four-Letter Word
- How Pleasure Points the Way

Those are just a few off the top of my head.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2023 at 7:59 AM

One last thought for now, with the caveat that I only flirted with Stoicism for a short time before finding Epicurus, so I'm not steeped in the philosophy.

It seems to me that Stoics want to say "In situation A, one will always do X."

The paradigm of virtue ethics seems to want absolutes: ex., Lying is **always** wrong.

Epicureanism seems more nuanced. Personal responsibility for one's choices and actions is front and center in Epicurus's philosophy, but virtuous, noble, and just actions and choices are governed by each individual situation. There is no "If A, then X" formula to apply. It's more keeping one's eye on the end/goal/"highest good" which is pleasure. What choices will lead to a pleasurable life?

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2023 at 7:59 AM

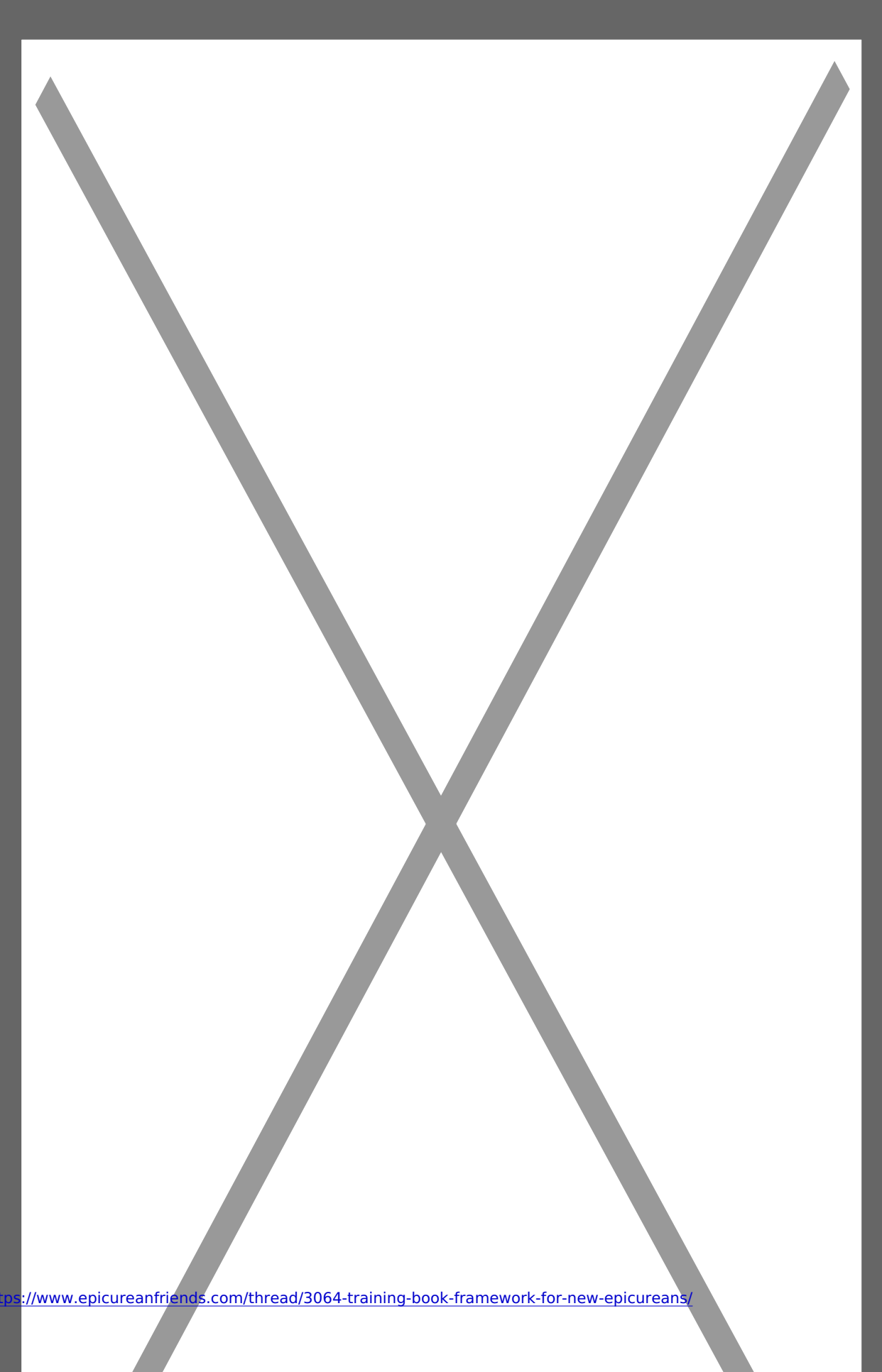
Those are good.

I have to admit also that I've been impressed with it since I first heard it - Rolfe Humphries' title "The Way Things Are"

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2023 at 9:29 AM

I don't know how I missed this one:

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[Emily Austin on Stoicism's Rival](#)

A discussion on the Epicurean life.
stoameditation.com

Dr. Austin's conversation with the Stoic podcast!

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 17, 2023 at 10:22 AM

[Quote from Matteng](#)

Coming from the Stoic camp, I tried to practice this philosophy and searched for exercises and have found this:

"A Handbook for New Stoics: How to Thrive in a World Out of Your Control—52 Week-by-Week Lessons "

Is there something similar there for Epicurean Philosophy ?

I noticed the Stoic book title says "...in a World Out of Your Control" -- and that is a very key difference -- In Epicureanism we see that there are things under our control and some things which aren't. And we need to employ wisdom to be clear about what is and isn't under our control, and considering our choices when we take action: What will happen if I do this, and what will happen if I don't do this. Okay, that can be Week 1 of the 52 week by week lessons



Perhaps some of us here ([Cassius](#), [Don](#), [Joshua](#), [Godfrey](#)) can collaborate on writing it.

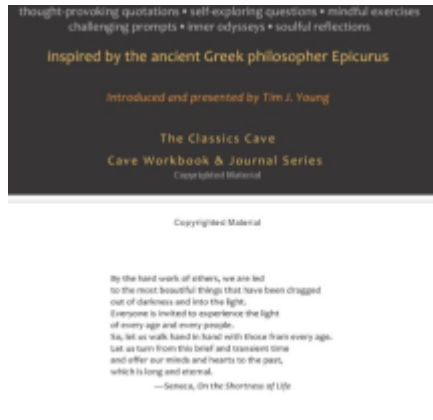
Post by “Titus” of May 17, 2023 at 5:15 PM

I own a "Epicurus workbook and journal" which I bought via amazon. I haven't checked the contents yet, but the first glimpse looked good.

I also wrote a 12 months workbook approximately 10 years ago. But I would have to 1.) actualize it and 2.) do a translation (which nowadays thanks to advanced translation tools isn't that kind of problem).

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2023 at 5:18 PM

Thank Titus I had not heard of that. Interesting how it starts with a quote from Seneca 😊 Hope it gets better but I can't view a table of contents on Amazon:



As for the one you did, posting a translation might be very helpful for those working to make something similar.

Post by “Titus” of May 17, 2023 at 5:22 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

In Epicureanism we see that there are things under our control and some things which aren't.

Your statement is quite amazing. Indirectly, I agree with you, but distinguishing between what's within and what's beyond our control is known as a key point of Stoic philosophy. "*...in a World Out of Your Control*" seems to be rather aiming to attract people who might think this world is out of control and Stoicism shows the methods how to get back in control.

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2023 at 5:46 PM

[Quote from Titus](#)

seems to be rather aiming to attract people who might think this world is out of control and Stoicism shows the methods how to get back in control.

Yes - but what they will find in Stoicism is not a prescription to reach out and embrace the world and change those things that can be changed so as to create more pleasure, but an invitation to reject all pleasure and emotion in favor of retreating into mind games about "virtue" as ultimately that is all they care about as under their control.

And that's a vastly different approach to which many who come looking for help in "gaining control" to be worse than their current situation.

Post by “TauPhi” of May 17, 2023 at 7:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And that's a vastly different approach to which many who come looking for help in "gaining control" to be worse than their current situation.

I'm not an expert on Stoicism so I may have it completely wrong but aren't you a bit harsh here? I don't think Stoics wanted to gain control over things out of control. They rather focused on how to deal best (in their understanding of the word) with things in control and not to care too much about things out of control.

Trying to gain control over things out of control would make Stoics look like Don Quixote fighting the windmills. They were already busy enough fighting vices so I doubt they had time for windmills as well.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2023 at 8:20 PM

I have to agree with [TauPhi](#) in post #14 above.

To "Thrive in a World Out of Your Control" strikes me as an invitation to understand what is and is not out of one's control, and to learn to control what is... Or as [TauPhi](#) says:

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

I don't think Stoics wanted to gain control over things out of control. They rather focused on how to deal best (in their understanding of the word) with things in control and not to care too much about things out of control.

That said, the Stoics and Epicureans had very different ways of defining that concept and how to deal with it.

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2023 at 9:19 PM

Yes I can definitely be harsh on the Stoics on occasion, but in reading a little more into Emily Austin's book tonight I came across a couple of relevant paragraphs from Chapter 15 that remind me to keep the pressure on due to the different approaches to dealing with what is and what is not in our control:

- "Epicurus, unlike the Stoics, suggests strategies for coping with and counteracting grief rather than encouraging its elimination. The Stoics seek to eliminate grief because they think it arises from a false judgment that something bad has happened. Epicureans, by contrast, manage grief, and they recommend distracting ourselves by replaying pleasant memories, expressing gratitude for past and present pleasures, and engaging with close and caring friends. Taken together, we have three Epicurean points about misfortune: some losses are genuine misfortunes that merit grief, we should cope with our grief rather than seek to eliminate it, and the most effective strategies involve cultivating gratitude and caring friendships.
- The Stoics generally advocated a providential account of the universe, according to which the gods structure the cosmos for the best and to the benefit of human beings. As such, most of the Stoics thought that everything under the control of the gods happens for a good reason, even things which might at first appear to be serious misfortunes. In contemporary religious discourse, endorsement of complete providence secured by an all-powerful and beneficent God might" express itself in phrases like "the Lord works in mysterious ways.
- Seneca captures this Stoic attitude toward loss with the story of Stilbo, cast as a model of Stoic virtue. Stilbo survived the destruction of his country and the death of his wife and children. When the man responsible for Stilbo's misfortunes asked how he was holding up, Stilbo responded, "I have lost nothing!"³ While Stilbo's response does seem admittedly badass, it depends on the underlying assumption that none of the things he lost contributed to his happiness, so their loss cannot diminish his happiness. His children were "nothing." Whether by a providential or non-providential account, Stoic doctrine leads to the conclusion that grief is irrational because nothing bad or harmful has

happened."

Post by "Don" of May 18, 2023 at 5:04 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes I can definitely be harsh on the Stoics on occasion, but in reading a little more into Emily Austin's book tonight I came across a couple of relevant paragraphs from Chapter 15 that remind me to keep the pressure on due to the different approaches to dealing with what is and what is not in our control

Oh, I agree with your sentiment there, [Cassius](#) . We certainly have precedent for forcefully engaging with "our rivals" from the earliest students (and founder) of the Garden. The only caveat I'd offer is to make sure we're sticking to facts about their philosophy and not engaging in stereotyping. Not that you were doing that in #13 necessarily, but we have to be sure we're being frank about the real tenets of their philosophy so they can't accuse us of "not understanding" it. That's why Dr. Austin's regularly bringing up specifics is important. The Epicurean fact of "the way things are" that bad things that happen are just bad and painful and not part of a providential plan is so important. To a Stoic, the death of a loved one (if Stoics can even use that term), including a child, is of no consequence to one's happiness. Epicureans understand the "bite" of grief and provide ways to cope. Dr. Austin also brings up the Stoic idea that friends are there to allow the Stoic to practice virtue, but friends are just a "preferred indifferent" and aren't necessary to one's well-being. Those are the kind of specific "practices" and ideas that make Stoicism unsatisfactory and unsatisfying to me. She does a great job of laying those kinds of things out in that podcast episode... Right on the Stoics' own turf!