



EGXEIRIDION

or

THE MANUAL

BY: EPIKTETOS¹

Translation by:

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*Additions, corrections, and footnotes
by Barry F. Vaughan²*

1. Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions.

1.1. The things in our control are by nature free, unrestrained, unhindered; but those not in our control are weak, slavish, restrained, belonging to others. Remember, then, that if you suppose that things which are slavish by nature are also free, and that what belongs to others is your own, then you will be hindered. You will [cry], you will be disturbed, and you will find fault both with gods and men. But if you suppose that only to be your own which is your own, and what belongs to others such as it really is, then no one will ever compel you or restrain you. Further, you will find fault with no one or accuse no one. You will do nothing against your will. No one will hurt you, you will have no enemies, and you will not be harmed.

¹The ideas and content of “The Manual” is that of Epiktetos (c. 50-135 CE) but was recorded by his disciple Arrian of Nicomedia (c. 86-146 CE)

² This text is adapted from *The Internet Classics Archive*, [Egxeiridion](http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html), by Epiktetos, <http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html>. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

I have changed spellings of proper names to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings which were dominant in Jowett’s time. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

1.2. Aiming, therefore, at such great things, remember that you must not allow yourself to be carried, even with a slight tendency, towards the attainment of lesser things. Instead, you must entirely [abandon] some things and for the present postpone [others]. But if you would both have these great things, along with power and riches, then you will not gain even the latter, because you aim at the former too: but you will absolutely fail of the former, by which alone happiness and freedom are achieved.

1.3. Therefore, [strive] to be able to say to every harsh appearance, "*You are but an appearance, and not absolutely the thing you appear to be.*" And then examine it by those rules which you have, and first, and chiefly, by this: whether it concerns the things *which are in our own control*, or those which are not; and, if it concerns anything not in our control, be prepared to say that it is nothing to you.

2. Remember that following desire promises the attainment of that of which you are desirous; and aversion promises the avoiding that to which you are averse. However, who[ever] fails to obtain the object of his desire is *disappointed*, and he who incurs the object of his aversion [is] *wretched*. If, then, you confine your aversion to only those objects which are contrary to the natural use of your faculties, which you have in your own control, you will never incur anything to which you are averse. But *if you are averse to sickness, or death, or poverty, you will be wretched*. Remove aversion, then, from all things that are not in our control, and transfer it to things contrary to the nature of what is in our control. But, for the present, totally *suppress desire*: for, if you desire any of the things which are not in your own control, you must necessarily be disappointed; and of those which are, and which it would be laudable to desire, nothing is yet in your possession. Use only the appropriate actions of pursuit and avoidance; and even these lightly, and with gentleness and reservation.

3. With regard to whatever [things] give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what general nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child, or your wife, say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies.

4. When you are going about any action, remind yourself [of] what nature the action is. If you are going to bathe, [imagine] the things which usually happen in the bath:³ some people splash the water, some push, some use abusive language, and others steal. Thus you will more safely go about this action if you say to yourself, "*I will now go bathe, and keep my own mind in a state conformable to nature.*" [Do this] in the same manner with regard to every other action. For thus, if any hindrance arises in bathing, you will have it ready to say, "*It was not only to bathe that I desired, but to keep my mind in a state conformable to nature; and, I will not keep it if I am bothered at things that happen.*"

5. Men are disturbed, not by *things*, but by the [circumstances] and [opinions] which they form [about] things. Death, for instance, is not terrible, else it would have appeared so to

³ Epiktetos is here referring to a *public* bath as only the very wealthiest people in the Roman world would have a bathing pool in their home.

Sokrates. But the [fear of death] consists in our [belief] that death [*ought to be feared*]. When, therefore, we are hindered, or disturbed, or grieved, let us never attribute it to others, but *to ourselves*; that is, to our own [opinions]. An un[educated] person will lay the fault of his own bad [situation] upon others. Someone just starting instruction will lay the fault on himself. Some who is perfectly instructed will place blame neither on others nor on himself.

6. Do not be prideful with any excellence that is not your own. If a horse should be prideful and say, "*I am handsome*," it would be supportable. But when you are prideful, and say, "*I have a handsome horse*," know that you are proud of what is, in fact, only the good of the horse. What, then, is your own? Only your *reaction to the appearances* of things. Thus, when you behave conformably to nature in reaction to how things appear, you will be proud with reason; for you will take pride in some good of your own.

7. Consider when, on a voyage, your ship is anchored; if you go on shore to get water you may, along the way, amuse yourself with picking up a shellfish, or an onion. However, your thoughts and [steadfast] attention ought to be bent towards the ship, waiting for the captain to call [you] on board; you must then immediately leave all these things, otherwise you will be thrown into the ship, bound neck and feet like a sheep. So it is with life. If, instead of an onion or a shellfish, you are given a wife or child, that is fine. But if the [C]aptain calls, you must run to the ship, leaving them, and regarding none of them. But if you are old, never go far from the ship: lest, when you are called, you should be unable to come in time.

8. Do not demand that things happen as you wish, but wish that they happen as they do happen, and [your life] will go well.

9. Sickness is a hindrance to the body, but not to your ability to *choose*, unless that is your choice. Lameness is a hindrance to the leg, but not to your ability to *choose*. Say this to yourself with regard to everything that happens, then you will see such obstacles as hindrances to something else, but *not to yourself*.

10. With every accident, ask yourself what abilities you have for making a proper use of it. If you see an attractive person, you will find that [temperance] is the ability you have against your desire. If you are in pain, you will find fortitude. If you hear unpleasant language, you will find patience. And thus habituated, *the appearances of things* will not [carry] you away along with them.

11. Never say of anything, "*I have lost it*;" but, "*I have returned it*." Is your child dead? "*It is returned*." Is your wife dead? "*She is returned*." Is your estate taken away? Well, is not that likewise returned? "*But he who took it away is a bad man*." What difference is it to you who the [G]iver assigns to take it back? While [H]e gives it to you to possess, take care of it; but do not view it as your own, [but] as travelers view a hotel.

12. If you want to improve, reject such reasoning's as these: "*If I neglect my affairs, I will have no income; if I do not correct my servant, he will be bad*." For it is better to die with hunger, exempt from grief and fear, than to live in affluence with perturbation; and it is better your servant should be bad, than you unhappy.

12.1. Begin, therefore, from little things. Is a little oil spilt? A little wine stolen? Say to yourself, "*This is the price paid for apathy,⁴ for tranquility,⁵ and nothing is to be had for nothing.*" When you call your servant, it is possible that he may not come; or, if he does, he may not do what you want. But he is by no means of such importance that it should be in his power to give you any [agitation].

13. If you want to improve, be content to be thought foolish and stupid with regard to external things. Do not wish to be thought to know anything; and even if you appear to be somebody important to others, distrust yourself. For, it is difficult to both keep your faculty of choice in a state conformable to nature, and at the same time acquire external things. But while you are careful about the one, you must of necessity neglect the other.

14. If you wish your children, and your wife, and your friends to live forever, *you are stupid*. You wish to *control things which you cannot*, you wish [that] things that belong to others be your[s]. So likewise, if you wish your servant to be without fault, you are a fool; for you wish vice not to be vice, but something else. But, if you wish to have your desires undisappointed, *this* is in your own control. Exercise, therefore, what is in your control. He is the master of every other person who is able to confer or remove whatever that person wishes either to have or to avoid. Whoever, then, would be free, let him wish nothing, let him decline nothing, which depends on others [otherwise] he must necessarily be a slave.

15. Remember that you must behave in life as at a dinner party. Is anything brought around to you? Put out your hand and take your share with moderation. Does it pass by you? Do not stop it. [Has] it not yet come? Do not stretch your desire towards it, but wait till it reaches you. Do this with regard to children, to a wife, to public posts, to riches, and you will eventually be a worthy partner of the feasts of the gods. And if you do not even take the things which are set before you—but are able even to reject them—then you will not only be a partner at the feasts of the gods, but also of their empire. For, by doing this, Diogenes,⁶ Heraklitos⁷ and others like them, deservedly became, and were called ["gods"].

⁴ In Greek, '*apatheia*' does not have the negative connotation that it's English transliteration carries. It literally means "lack of passion" which is the goal of the Stoic. *Pathos*—passion—is a disturbance in the soul which, according to the Stoics, leads to unhappiness.

⁵ The Greek term '*ataraxia*', here translated "tranquility" is a key concept for the Stoics. It is the negation of '*taraxē*' which means "trouble", "disorder", or "confusion". The psychological goal of Stoic philosophy is to achieve a continual state of tranquility by first becoming aware of the root cause of mental disturbance, then comprehending the proper structure of the natural order (*logos*), then practicing detachment (*apatheia*) toward the cause of the mental disturbance until it becomes an habituated state of being in the world.

⁶ Diogenes of Sinope (c. 412-323 BCE) was an Ionian-born philosopher and founder of Cynicism. He believed that human happiness was incompatible with social norms and laws which he viewed as arbitrary, and therefore relative, inventions. To achieve happiness, the Cynics taught that one must live a "dog-like" (*kunikos*) existence dictated only by human nature with no regard for the artificial social structures we have imposed on ourselves.

⁷ Heraklitos of Ephesus (c. 535-c. 475 BCE) was a pre-socratic philosopher who held that the world, at least in so far as it appears to us, is dominated by change (transition, flux, etc.). The idea of permanence is an illusion that leads to unhappiness as it is not part of the world we live in.

16. When you see anyone weeping in grief because his son has gone abroad, or is dead, or because he has suffered in his affairs, be careful that the *appearance* may not misdirect you. Instead, distinguish within your own mind, and be prepared to say, "*It is not the accident that distresses this person, because it does not distress another person; it is the **judgment** which he makes about it.*" As far as words go, however, do not reduce yourself to his level, and certainly do not moan with him. Do not moan inwardly either.

17. Remember that you are an actor in a drama, of such a kind as the [A]uthor pleases to make it. If short, of a short one; if long, of a long one. If it is [H]is pleasure you should act a poor man, a cripple, a governor, or a private person, see that you act it naturally. For this is your business, *to act well the character assigned you*; to choose it is [A]nother's.

18. When a raven happens to croak unluckily, do not allow the *appearance* to [carry] you away with it, but immediately make the distinction to yourself, and say, "*None of these things are foretold to me; but either to my paltry body, or property, or reputation, or children, or wife. But to me all omens are lucky, **if I will**. For whichever of these things happens, it is in my control to derive advantage from it.*"⁸

19. You [will] be unconquerable *if* you enter into no combat in which it is not in your own control to conquer. When, therefore, you see anyone eminent in honors, or power, or in high esteem on any other account, take heed *not to be [carried] away with the appearance*, and to pronounce him happy; for, if *the essence of good consists in things in our own control*, there will be no room for envy or emulation. But, for your part, do not wish to be a general, or a senator, or a consul, but to be *free*; and the only way to this is a contempt of things not in our own control.

20. Remember, that [it is not the person] who [uses] ill language or gives a blow that insults, but [*your opinion*] which represents these things *as* insulting. When, therefore, anyone provokes you, be assured that *it is your own opinion which provokes you*. Try, therefore, in the first place, not to be [carried] away with the appearance. For if you once gain time and respite, you will more easily command yourself.

21. Let death and exile, and all other things which *appear* terrible be daily before your eyes, but chiefly death, and you will never entertain any abject thought, nor too eagerly covet anything.

22. If you have an earnest desire of attaining to philosophy, prepare yourself from the very first to be laughed at, to be sneered at by the multitude, to hear them say, "*He is returned to us a philosopher all at once,*" and "*Whence this [haughty] look?*" Now, for your part, do not have a [haughty] look; but keep steadily to those things which *appear best* to you as one appointed by God to this station. For remember that, if you adhere to the same point, those very persons who at first ridiculed will afterwards admire you. But if you are conquered by them, you will incur a double ridicule.

⁸ It is interesting to note that Epiktetos does not deny the existence of omens but rather tells us to focus on what is in our control: our response to the *appearance* of the omen. Further, he makes clear that a person's destiny is not determined by Fate, but rather our ability to respond appropriately to the world as it appears to us.

23. If you ever happen to turn your attention to external [things in order] to please anyone, be assured that you have ruined [the course of your] life. Be contented, then, in everything with being a philosopher; and, if you wish to be thought so likewise by anyone, appear so to yourself, and it will [be sufficient].

24. Do not allow such considerations as these [to] distress you. *"I will live in dishonor, and be nobody anywhere."* For, if dishonor is an evil, you can no more be involved in any evil by the means of another, than be engaged in anything base. Is it any business of yours, then, to get power, or to be admitted to an entertainment? By no means. How, then, after all, is this a dishonor? And how is it true that you will be nobody anywhere, when you ought to be somebody in [only] *those things which are in your own control*, in which you may be of the greatest consequence? *"But my friends will be unassisted."* What do you mean by unassisted? They will not have money from you, nor will you make them Roman citizens. Who told you, then, that these are among the things in our own control, and not the affair of others? And who can give to another the things which he [does not have] himself? *"Well, but get them, then, that we too may have a share."* If I can get them with the preservation of my own honor and fidelity and greatness of mind, show me the way and I will get them; but if you require me to lose my own proper good [so] that you may gain what is not good, consider how inequitable and foolish you are. Besides, which would you rather have, a sum of money, or a friend of fidelity and honor? Rather assist me, then, to gain this character than require me to do those things by which I may lose it. But my country, say you, as far as depends on me, will be unassisted. Here again, what assistance is this you mean? *"It will not have porticoes nor baths of your providing."* And what signifies that? Why, neither does a smith provide it with shoes, or a shoemaker with arms. *It is enough if everyone fully performs his own proper business.* And were you to supply it with another citizen of honor and fidelity, would not he be of use to it? Yes. Therefore neither are you yourself useless to it. *"What place, then, do you say, I will hold in the state?"* Whatever you can hold with the preservation of your fidelity and honor. But if, by desiring to be useful to that, you lose these, of what use can you be to your country when you are become faithless and void of shame.

25. Is anyone preferred before you at an entertainment, or in a compliment, or in being admitted to a consultation? If these things are good, you ought to be glad that he has gotten them; and if they are evil, do not be [upset] that you have not gotten them. And remember that you cannot—without using the same means [which others do] to acquire things not in our own control—expect to be thought worthy of an equal share of them. For how can he who does not frequent the door of any [great] man, does not attend him, does not praise him, have an equal share with him who does? You are unjust, then, and insatiable, if you are unwilling to pay the price for which these things are sold, and would have them for nothing. For how much is lettuce sold? Fifty cents, for instance. If another, then, paying fifty cents, takes the lettuce, and you, not paying it, go without, do not imagine that he has gained any advantage over you. For as he has the lettuce, so you have the fifty cents which you did not give. So, in the present case, you have not been invited to such a person's entertainment, because you have not paid him the price for which a supper is sold. It is sold for praise; it is sold for attendance. Give him then the value, *if it is for your advantage*. But if you would, at

the same time, not pay the one and yet receive the other, you are insatiable, and a blockhead. Have you nothing, then, instead of the supper? Yes, indeed, you have: the not praising him, whom you do not like to praise; the not bearing with his behavior at coming in.

26. The will of [N]ature may be learned from those things in which we do not distinguish from each other. For example, when our neighbor's boy breaks a cup, or the like, we are presently ready to say, "*These things will happen.*" Be assured, then, that when your own cup likewise is broken, *you ought to be affected just as when another's cup was broken.* Apply this in like manner to greater things. Is the child or wife of another dead? There is no one who would not say, "*This is a human accident,*" but if anyone's own child happens to die, it is presently, "*Alas, I how wretched am I!*" But it should be remembered how we are affected in hearing the same thing concerning others.

27. As a [target] is not set up for the sake of missing the aim, so neither does the nature of evil exist in the world.

28. If a person gave your body to any stranger he met on his way, you would certainly be angry. And *do you feel no shame in handing over your own mind to be confused and mystified by anyone who happens to verbally attack you?*

29. In every affair consider what precedes and follows, and then undertake it. Otherwise you will begin with spirit; but not having thought of the consequences, when some of them appear you will shamefully desist. "*I would conquer at the Olympic games!*" But consider what precedes and follows, and then, if it is for your advantage, engage in the affair. You must conform to rules, submit to a diet, refrain from dainties; exercise your body, whether you choose it or not, at a stated hour, in heat and cold; you must drink no cold water, nor sometimes even wine. In a word, you must give yourself up to your master, as to a physician. Then, in the combat, you may be thrown into a ditch, dislocate your arm, turn your ankle, swallow dust, be whipped, and, after all, lose the victory. When you have evaluated all this, if your inclination still holds, *then* go to war. Otherwise, take notice, you will behave like children who sometimes play like wrestlers, sometimes gladiators, sometimes blow a trumpet, and sometimes act a tragedy when they have seen and admired these shows. Thus you too will be at one time a wrestler, at another a gladiator, now a philosopher, then an orator; *but with your whole soul, nothing at all.* Like an ape, you mimic all you see, and one thing after another is sure to please you, but is out of favor as soon as it becomes familiar. For you have never entered upon anything considerately, nor after having viewed the whole matter on all sides, or made any scrutiny into it, but rashly, and with a cold inclination. Thus some, when they have seen a philosopher and heard a man speaking like Euphrates⁹ (though, indeed, who can speak like him?), have a mind to be philosophers too. Consider first, man, what the matter is, and what your own nature is able to bear. If you would be a wrestler, consider your shoulders, your back, your thighs; for different persons are made for different things. Do you think that you can act as you do, and be a philosopher? That you can eat and drink, and be angry and discontented as you are now? You must watch, you must labor, you must get the better of certain appetites, must quit your acquaintance, be

⁹ Euphrates of Tyre (c. 35-118 CE) was a famous Stoic philosopher and orator.

despised by your servant, be laughed at by those you meet; come off worse than others in everything, in magistracies, in honors, in courts of judicature. When you have considered all these things round, approach, if you please; if, by parting with them, you have a mind to purchase apathy, freedom, and tranquility. If not, do not come here; do not, like children, be one while a philosopher, then a [bar tender], then an orator, and then one of Caesar's officers. These things are not consistent. You must be one man, either good or bad. You must cultivate either your own ruling faculty or externals, and apply yourself either to things within or without you; that is, *either [be] a philosopher, or one of the vulgar.*

30. Duties are universally *measured by relations*. Is anyone a father? If so, it is implied that the children should take care of him, submit to him in everything, patiently listen to his reproaches, his correction. “But he is a bad father,” [you say]. [Are] you naturally entitled, then, to a good father? No, only to a father. Is a brother unjust? Well, keep your own situation towards him. [Don't] consider what *he* does, but [rather] what you [should] do to keep your own [free will aligned with] nature. For another will not hurt you unless you [allow it]. You will then be hurt when you *think* you are hurt. In this manner, therefore, you will find, from the idea of a neighbor, a citizen, a general, the corresponding duties if you accustom yourself to contemplate the [different] relations.

31. Be assured that the **essential property of piety** towards the gods is to form right opinions concerning them: [that they exist and] govern the universe with goodness and justice. And fix yourself in this resolution, to obey them, and yield to them, and willingly follow them in all events, as produced by the most perfect understanding. For thus you will never find fault with the gods, nor accuse them [of] neglecting you. And it is not possible for this to be effected any other way than by *withdrawing yourself from things not in our own control*, and placing good or evil in those only which are. For if you suppose any of the things not in our own control to be either good or evil, when your [wishes] are disappointed, or [you suffer something] you would [rather] avoid, you must necessarily find fault with—and blame—the [A]uthors. For every animal is naturally formed to [avoid] and abhor things that appear hurtful, [as well as] the causes of them. [And on the other hand they] pursue and admire [anything] which appears beneficial, [as well as] the causes of them. It is impractical, then, that one who supposes himself to be hurt should be happy about the person who, he thinks, hurts him, just as it is impossible to be happy about the [injury] itself. Hence, also, a father is [hated] by a son when he does not [give] him the things which he [thinks are] good; [it was the belief that ruling was] good that made Polunikes and Eteokles mutually enemies.¹⁰ On this account the husbandman, the sailor, the merchant, on this account those who lose wives and children, revile the gods. For where interest is, there too is piety placed. So that, whoever is careful to regulate his desires and [fears] as he ought, is, by the very same means, careful of piety likewise. But it is also incumbent on everyone to offer libations and

¹⁰ From Sophokles' play, *Antigone*. After their father and king of Thebes, Oidipous, blinded himself for his crimes of pride and incest, Poulonekes and Eteokles were supposed to rule the city of Thebes in turn. But when Eteokles refused to give up the throne as he promised, Poulonekes raised an army from Argos to force his brother to yield. The city of Thebes had seven gates and seven heroes from each side led the attack/defense at each gate. The two brothers faced each other at one of these gates, and in the fighting mortally wounded each other.

sacrifices and first fruits, *conformably to the customs of his country*,¹¹ with purity, and not in a slovenly manner, nor negligently, nor sparingly, nor beyond his ability.

32. When you have recourse to divination, remember that you [do not] know what the event will be, and you come to learn it [from] the diviner; but of what nature it is you know before you come, at least if you are a philosopher. For if it is among the things not in our own control, it can [neither] be good or evil. Do not, therefore, bring either desire or aversion with you to the [seer] (else you will approach him trembling), but first acquire a distinct knowledge that every event is indifferent and nothing to you, of whatever sort it may be, for it will be in your power to make a right use of it, and this no one can hinder. Then come with confidence to the gods, as your counselors, and afterwards, when any counsel is given you, remember what counselors you have assumed, and whose advice you will neglect if you disobey. Come to divination, as Sokrates prescribed, in cases of which the whole consideration relates to the event, and in which no opportunities are afforded by reason, or any other art, to discover the thing proposed to be learned. When, therefore, it is our duty to share the danger of a friend or our country, we ought not to consult the oracle whether we will share it with them or not. For, though the diviner should forewarn you that the victims are unfavorable, this means no more than that either death or mutilation or exile is portended. But we have reason (*logos*) within us, and it directs, even with these hazards, to the greater diviner, the Pythian god, who cast out of the temple the person who gave no assistance to his friend while another was murdering him.

33. [Always choose a disposition] and form of conduce, which you [can maintain] both [by yourself and with others].

33.1. For the most part [be] silent, or speak [only] what is necessary, and in few words. We may, however, enter—though sparingly—into discourse sometimes when occasion calls for it. But [do not discuss] common subjects [like] gladiators, or horse races, or athletic champions, or feasts, the vulgar topics of conversation. [Most importantly, do] not [talk about] men, so as either to blame, or praise, or make comparisons. If you are able, then, [direct the conversation] of your company to proper subjects; but, if you happen to be among strangers, [it is best to] be silent.

33.2. Do not [laugh too] much, nor [too often], nor [too loudly].

33.3. Avoid swearing, if possible, altogether; if not, as far as you are able.

33.4. Avoid public and vulgar entertainments. But, if ever an occasion calls you to them, keep your attention [focused], [so] that you may not [unwittingly] slide into vulgar manners. Be assured that if [one is] a [good] person, if his companions [are wicked], he will [become wicked as well].

33.5. Provide things [for] the body [but] no further than mere use: meat, drink, clothing, house, family. But [cast] off and reject everything relating to show and [decoration].

¹¹ This would indicate that religious ritual is relative while piety universal.

33.6. As far as possible, before marriage, keep yourself pure from familiarities with women, and, if you indulge them, let it be lawfully. But do not, therefore, be [boastful] and [criticize] those who use these liberties, nor boast that you yourself do not.

33.7. If anyone tells you that a person speaks ill of you, do not make excuses about what is said of you, but answer: *"He does not know my other faults, [or] he would not have only mentioned these."*

33.8. It is not necessary for you to appear public spectacles; but [when] there is a proper occasion for you to be there, do not appear more solicitous for anyone than for yourself. That is, wish things to be only just as they are, and him only to conquer who is the conqueror, thus you will meet with no hindrance. But *abstain entirely from declamations and derision and violent emotions*. And when you come away, do not [discuss] a great deal on what has passed, and what does not contribute to your own [improvement]. For it would appear by such discourse that you were immoderately struck with the [spectacle].

33.9. Do not go—[of your own will]—to the rehearsals of any (authors), nor appear [at them often]. But, if you do [go], keep your gravity and [quietness], and at the same time avoid being [gloomy].

33.10. When you are going to confer with anyone, and particularly of those in a superior station, [think about] how Sokrates or Zeno would behave in such a case, and you will not be at a loss to make a proper use of whatever may occur.

33.11. When you are going to any of the people in power, [imagine] that you will not find him at home; that you will not be admitted; that the doors will not be opened to you; that he will take no notice of you. If, with all this, it is your duty to go, bear what happens, and never say [to yourself], *"It was not worth so much."* For this is vulgar, and like a man dazed by external things.

33.12. In parties of conversation, avoid a frequent and excessive mention of your own [deeds] and dangers. For, however agreeable it may [seem] to you to mention the risks you have run, it is not equally agreeable to others to hear your adventures. Also avoid the attempt to excite laughter. For this is a slippery point, which may throw you into vulgar manners. And, besides, it may lower you in the esteem of your acquaintance. Approaches to indecent discourse are [also] dangerous. Whenever, therefore, anything of this sort happens, if there be a proper opportunity, rebuke [the one] who makes advances that way—or, at least, by silence and blushing and a forbidding look, show yourself to be displeased by such talk.

34. If you are [tempted] by the appearance of any promised pleasure, guard yourself against being [carried] away by it; let the affair wait your leisure, and procure yourself some delay. Then bring to your mind [two] points of time: [the time] in which you will enjoy the pleasure, and [the time after] in which you will repent and reproach yourself for having enjoyed it. Set before your mind [this] opposition and you will be [proud of] yourself if you

abstain. And even though it should *appear* to [be] a [reasonable] gratification, take heed that its [tempting], agreeable, and attractive force may not [overwhelm] you; but [opposed to] this how much better it is to be conscious of having gained so great a victory [over temptation].

35. When you do anything [with] a clear [mind] that it *ought* to be done, never [avoid] being seen do[ing] it, even [if others might] make a wrong [assumption] about it; if you do not act right[ly], shun the action itself; but, if you do, why [should] you [be] afraid of those who [judge] you [ignorantly]?

36. As the proposition, "*Either it is day or it is night,*" is extremely proper for a disjunctive argument, but quite improper in a conjunctive one, so, at a feast, to choose the largest share is very suitable to the bodily appetite, but utterly inconsistent with the social spirit of an entertainment. [So] when you [dine] with [others], remember not only the value of those bodily things which are set before you, but [also] the value of [your] behavior which ought to be [given to] the person who [hosts] the entertainment.

37. If you [take] any [position beyond] your [abilities], you [will] both [do that job poorly] and [at the same time have failed to do] one which you might have [done well].

38. When walking, you are careful not to step on a nail or turn your foot. So likewise be careful not to hurt [your] ruling facult[ies]. If [you] guard against this in every action, [you will always] undertake the action with greater safety.

39. [For each individual] the body is the [correct] measure of the [things it needs], just as the foot is [the correct measure for a] shoe. If, therefore, you [limit yourself to what the body needs], you will [maintain] the [appropriate] measure. [B]ut if you [exceed the correct measure], you must necessarily be carried [away—over] a cliff. Just like the case of a shoe, if you [exceed what] the foot [needs], it comes first to be gilded, then [dyed] purple, and then studded with jewels. For that which exceeds [appropriate] measure, there is no [limit].

40. [From the age of] fourteen girls are flattered by men with the title of ‘woman’.¹² Therefore, [they come to think their value only lies in sex appeal, and thus they falsely place all their hopes in appearing sexually attractive]. We should, therefore, [strive to help them understand that their true value lies in moral], modest, and discreet behavior.

41. [Spending excessive time engaged in animal functions like eating, drinking, exercising, and anything relating to the body, is an indication of limited mental capacity.] These [activities] should be done [occasionally] and [moderately], [while] our whole attention [should] be engaged in [building up our rational capacities].

¹² The Greek term *‘kurios’* used here, and its Latin equivalent *‘dominae’*, have no equivalent in contemporary English. Both the Greek and Latin terms refer to someone with real—not apparent—power, and was used of women who ran a household like a wife or matriarch. The English term ‘lady’ with its connotation of etiquette, fails to capture the actual authority denoted in *‘kurios’*. Since it is clear from the context that Epiktetos is chastising both men and women in this passage for the “power politics” of sexuality I am using the term ‘woman’ to signify a female of—supposedly—appropriate sexual age.

42. When any[one] harms you, or speaks badly [about] you, remember that he acts or speaks from a [presumption that it is the right thing to do]. [But notice that] it is not possible [for] [such a person] to follow what appears right to you, but [rather] what appears [correct to him]. Therefore, if he judges from a wrong appearance, *he* is the person hurt, since he too is the person deceived. For if anyone should suppose a true [statement] to be false, the [statement] is not [harmed], but [rather the person] who [holds the false belief]. [If you begin with] these principles, you will meekly bear a person who [chastises] you, for you will say [to yourself on these] occasions, "*It seems so to him.*"

43. Everything has two handles: one by which it may be carried, [another] by which it cannot. If your brother acts unjustly, do not "lay hold" on the action by the "handle" of his injustice, for [you cannot get a grip on that]. [Rather, get a grip on the situation by remembering that] he is your brother and that he was brought up with you. [This is the proper way to get a grip on his actions and to "carry it" properly].

44. These [inferences] are [fallacious]:

*"I am richer than you.
therefore, I am better [than you];"*

and

*"I am more eloquent than you.
therefore, I am better [than you]."*

The [correct inference] is this:

*"I am richer than you,
therefore, [I have more property than you];"*

and

*"I am more eloquent than you,
therefore, my style is better than yours."*

But, after all, *you* are neither property nor style.

45. Do [you know someone who] bathes [quickly]? Do not say that he does it "badly", but [rather that he does it quickly]. Do [you know someone who drinks a lot of wine]? Do not say that he [drinks] "badly", but [rather] that he drinks a [lot]. For, unless you *perfectly understand the principle* from which anyone acts, how [can] you *know* if he acts [well or ill]? [Acting in this way] you will not run the [risk] of [making judgments about] appearances [instead of what you actually know].

46. Never call yourself a philosopher, nor [speak] a great deal among the unlearned about theorems; [rather, conform your actions to their level of understanding]. [When you are in public], do not talk [about] how [people] *ought* to eat, but [rather] eat as you ought. Remember that this was Sokrates' way [of avoiding showing off]. And when [people] came to him and [requested that he] recommend [other] philosophers [to them], [he did not mind being overlooked], but he took [them to] and recommended [others]. So [if you] happen [to be] among the un[educated] concerning philosophic[al ideas], for the most part be silent. For there is great danger in [regurgitating] what you have not digested. If anyone tells you that

you know nothing, and you are not [bothered by] it, then [rest assured] that you have begun [the path to knowledge]. Sheep do not regurgitate grass to show the shepherds how much they have eaten; but, inwardly digesting their food, they outwardly produce wool and milk. Thus, do not [expound on philosophical ideas before] the un[educated, but rather demonstrate] the actions produced by [those ideas] after they have been digested.

47. When you have brought yourself to supply the necessities of your body at a small price, do not [be too proud of] yourself; nor, if you drink water, say [to yourself], "*I [only] drink water.*" First, consider how much more [deprived] and patient of hardship the poor are than we. But if you [seek to improve] yourself by exercise [and hard work], and bearing hard [times without complaint], do it for your own sake, and not [as a display for others]; do not grasp statues,¹³ but, when you are violently thirsty, take a little cold water in your mouth, and [spit] it out, [don't brag about it].

48. The condition and characteristic of [an ignorant] person is that he never expects either benefit or [harm] from himself, but from [others]. The condition and characteristic of a philosopher is, that he expects all [harm] and benefit from himself. The [indication of those between the two] are, that he [criticizes] no one, praises no one, blames no one, accuses no one, does not brag about himself, or his know[ledge]. When on any occasion he is hindered or restrained, he accuses himself; and, if he is praised, he secretly laughs at the person who praises him. If he is [criticized], he makes no defense. He [proceeds] with the caution of sick or injured people, dreading to move anything that is set right, before it is perfectly fixed. He suppresses all desire in himself; he [reserves] his aversion to things which thwart the proper use of the [power] of choice; the exertion of his active [will] towards anything is very gentle; if he appears stupid or ignorant, he does not care, and, in a word, he watches himself as an enemy, [as] one in ambush.

49. When anyone shows himself [too] confident in ability to understand and interpret the works of Xrusippos,¹⁴ say to yourself, "*Unless Xrusippos had written obscurely, this person would have had no subject for his vanity. What do I desire? To understand [N]ature and follow her. I ask, then, who interprets [Nature]? [F]inding Xrusippos does, I have recourse to him. I do not understand his writings. I seek, therefore, one to interpret them [for me].*" So far, there is nothing to value myself upon. And when I find an interpreter, what remains is to make use of his [insights]. This alone is the valuable thing. But, if I admire nothing but the interpretation, what do I become more than a grammarian instead of a philosopher? Except, indeed, that instead of Homer I interpret Xrusippos. When anyone, therefore, desires me to read Xrusippos to him, I blush when I cannot show my actions agreeable and consonant to his [teaching].

¹³ This idiom means something along the lines of, "don't set your aspirations too high". Late Classical (i.e., Hellenistic through Roman) statuary was dominated by hyper-idealistic realism. So the metaphor is don't hope to be like the statues or you'll be disappointed because you will always fall short.

¹⁴ Xrusippos of Soleus (c. 279-c. 206 BCE) was the third leader of the Stoic school of philosophy in Athens. He excelled in Logic, Epistemology, Ethics, and Physics.

50. Whatever moral rules you have deliberately proposed [for] yourself, abide by them as [if] they were laws, and as if you would be guilty of impiety by violating any of them.¹⁵ Do not [pay attention to] what anyone says [about] you, for this, after all, is no concern of yours.

51. How long will you put off thinking yourself worthy of the highest improvements and follow the distinctions of reason? You have received the philosophical theorems, with which you ought to be familiar, and you have been familiar with them [for a while] What other master, [are] you wait[ing] for? [Why do you] delay reforming yourself? You are no longer a [child], but a [mature person]. If, therefore, you will be negligent and slothful, and always add procrastination to procrastination, purpose to purpose, and fix day after day in which you will attend to yourself, you will continue without [progress], and, living and dying, continue being [ignorant]. This instant, then, think yourself worthy of living as a [mature person], and a [an expert]. Let whatever appears to be [right], be to you an inviolable law. And if any instance of pain or pleasure, or glory or disgrace, is set before you, remember that [*this is the struggle*], [this is your Olympic event and it] cannot be put off. By once being defeated and giving way, [expertise] is lost, [and] by the contrary preserved. Thus Sokrates became perfect, improving himself by everything, *attending to nothing but reason*. And though you are not yet a Sokrates, you ought to live as one [who desires to] become a Sokrates.

52. The first and most necessary topic in philosophy is that of the use of **moral theorems**, such as, "*We ought not to lie*;" the second is that of **demonstrations**, such as, "*What is the origin of our obligation not to lie*;" the third gives strength and articulation to the other two, such as, "*What is the origin of this is a demonstration*." For what is demonstration? What is consequence? What contradiction? What truth? What falsehood? The third topic, then, is necessary on the account of the second, and the second on the account of the first. But the most necessary, and that whereon we ought to rest, is the first. [Unfortunately, we have a tendency to] act [in a] contrary [manner]. [W]e spend all our time on the third topic, and employ all our diligence about that, and entirely neglect the first. Therefore, at the same time that we lie, we are immediately prepared to show how it is demonstrated that lying is not right.

53. Upon all occasions we ought to have these maxims ready at hand: "*Conduct me, Zeus, and you, O Destiny, Wherever your decrees have fixed my station*." (Cleanthes of Assos)

"I follow cheerfully; and, did I not, Wicked and wretched, I must follow still Whoever yields properly to Fate, is deemed Wise among men, and knows the laws of Heaven."
(Euripides, Frag. 965)

And this third: "*O Crito, if it thus pleases the gods, thus let it be. Anytus and Melitus may kill me indeed, but hurt me they cannot*." (Plato, Crito and Apology)

¹⁵ It is interesting here to note the parallel with Immanuel Kant's first articulation of the Categorical Imperative: always select a maxim you could wish to be a universal law. The obvious difference, however, is that Kant believes the moral law is knowable, while Epictetus is prescribing that we act *as if* it were known.