Handbook

EPICTETUS

c. AD 50–135

Handbook

Ἐγχειρίδιον

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



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Handbook · Epictetus (c. AD 50–135)

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/epictetus/handbook

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INTRODUCTION

Epictetus was born a slave around AD 50, became a free man, and taught Stoic philosophy until his death. He wrote nothing himself. His student Arrian took notes, and later condensed the core of the teaching into this short *Handbook*.

It opens with the distinction everything else depends on: some things are up to us, and some are not.

Handbook

Epictetus teaches that only our own judgments and choices are up to us, and how to live by that.

[1] Of all the things there are, some are up to us and some are not up to us. Up to us are opinion, impulse, desire, aversion—in a word, whatever is our own doing. Not up to us are the body, property, reputation, public office—in a word, whatever is not our own doing. The things that are up to us are by nature free, unhindered, unimpeded; the things that are not up to us are weak, slavish, hindered, not our own. So remember: if you think that what is by nature slavish is free, and that what belongs to others is your own, you'll be thwarted, you'll grieve, you'll be upset, and you'll blame both gods and human beings. But if you think that only what is yours is yours, and that what belongs to others belongs to others, as it really does, no one will ever compel you, no one will hinder you, you'll blame no one, you'll accuse no one, you won't do a single thing against your will, no one will harm you, you won't have an enemy—for you won't suffer anything harmful at all. Since you're aiming at things this great, remember that you mustn't go after them with only moderate effort. Some things you must give up entirely, and others you must put off for the present. But if you want these things too—to hold office and to be rich—then you may well not get even these, because you're also aiming at the others; and you'll certainly miss out on the things through which alone freedom and happiness come. So practice saying straightaway to every harsh impression: "You're an impression, and not at all what you appear to be." Then examine it and test it by the rules you have—

first and above all by this one: whether it concerns what is up to us or what is not up to us. And if it concerns something that is not up to us, have the answer ready: "It's nothing to me."

[2] Remember that desire promises you'll get what you desire, and aversion promises you won't fall into what you're averse to. Whoever fails to get what he desires is unlucky, and whoever falls into what he's averse to is unfortunate. So if you're averse only to what is contrary to nature among the things up to you, you'll never fall into anything you're averse to. But if you're averse to sickness, or death, or poverty, you'll be unfortunate. Take your aversion away, then, from everything that is not up to us, and transfer it to what is contrary to nature among the things that are up to us. As for desire, do away with it completely for now. For if you desire something that is not up to us, you're bound to be unlucky; and of the things that are up to us, the ones it would be fine to desire, none is within your reach yet. Use only impulse toward things and away from them—but lightly, with reservation, and without straining.

[3] With everything that charms you, or is useful to you, or that you love, remember to tell yourself what kind of thing it is, beginning with the smallest things. If you love a jug, say, "I love a jug"—then when it breaks you won't be upset. If you kiss your child or your wife, tell yourself that you're kissing a human being—then when one of them dies you won't be upset.

[4] Whenever you're about to undertake some activity, remind yourself what kind of activity it is. If you're going out to bathe, picture to yourself what goes on at a bathhouse: people splashing you, people shoving, people hurling insults, people stealing. You'll undertake the activity more securely if you tell yourself straightaway, "I want to bathe, and to keep my choice in accord with nature." Do the same with every activity. That way, if anything gets in the way of your bath, you'll have this ready: "But this isn't all I wanted. I also wanted to keep my choice in accord with nature—and I won't keep it if I get annoyed at what happens."

[5] What disturbs people isn't things but their judgments about things. Death, for example, is nothing terrible—otherwise it would have seemed so to Socrates too. No, it's the judgment about death, that it is terrible: that is what's terrible. So when we're thwarted, or disturbed, or distressed, let's never blame anyone else, but ourselves—that is, our own judgments. It's the mark of an uneducated person to accuse others when things go badly for him; of someone whose education has begun, to accuse himself; and of someone whose education is complete, to accuse neither anyone else nor himself.

[6] Don't pride yourself on any advantage that belongs to someone else. If a horse were proud and said, "I'm beautiful," that would be bearable. But when you say proudly, "I have a beautiful horse," understand that you're proud of something good that belongs to the horse. What, then, is yours? The use of impressions. So when you're in accord with nature in your use of impressions, then be proud; for then you'll be proud of something good that is your own.

[7] When you're on a voyage and the ship has put in at harbor, if you go ashore to fetch water you may pick up a little shellfish or a bulb along the way, as a sideline. But your mind has to stay fixed on the ship, and you have to keep turning around in case the captain calls; and if he does call, you have to let all those things go, so you're not thrown on board tied up like the sheep. So it is in life too. If instead of a bulb and a shellfish you're given a little wife and a child, nothing stops you. But if the captain calls, run to the ship, leaving all those things behind, and don't even look back. And if you're old, never go far from the ship at all, or you may not be there when he calls.

[8] Don't ask for things to happen as you want them to; instead, want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will flow smoothly.

[9] Sickness is a hindrance to the body, but not to your choice, unless your choice itself wants it to be. Lameness is a hindrance to the leg, but not to your choice. Say this to yourself about

everything that befalls you, and you'll find that it hinders something else, but not you.

10 With everything that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and ask what capacity you have for dealing with it. If you see a good-looking man or woman, you'll find you have the capacity of self-control for that. If hard toil comes your way, you'll find endurance; if abuse, you'll find patience. And once you get into this habit, your impressions won't carry you away.

11 Never say about anything, "I've lost it," but, "I've given it back." Has your child died? It has been given back. Has your wife died? She has been given back. "My land has been taken from me." Well, that too has been given back. "But the man who took it is a scoundrel." What does it matter to you through whom the giver asked for it back? For as long as he lets you have it, take care of it as something that isn't yours, as travelers treat an inn.

12 If you want to make progress, give up reasonings like these: "If I neglect my affairs, I won't have anything to live on"; "If I don't punish my slave, he'll turn out bad." For it's better to die of hunger free of distress and fear than to live in plenty and be upset. And it's better for your slave to be bad than for you to be miserable. So begin with little things. A drop of oil is spilled, a little wine is stolen: tell yourself, "This is the price of freedom from passion; this is the price of tranquility." Nothing comes free. And when you call your slave, bear in mind that he may not respond, or, if he does, may not do any of the things you want. But he isn't in such a fine position that whether you're upset should be up to him.

13 If you want to make progress, put up with being thought foolish and stupid about external things. Don't want to seem to know anything. And if some people think you're somebody, distrust yourself. For understand that it isn't easy to keep both your choice in accord with nature and external things as well; if you attend to the one, you're bound to neglect the other.

14 If you want your children and your wife and your friends to live forever, you're a fool; for you want what is not up to you to

be up to you, and what belongs to others to be yours. In the same way, if you want your slave never to do wrong, you're an idiot; for you want badness not to be badness but something else. But if you want never to fail to get what you desire, that you can do. So practice this—what you can do. Each person's master is whoever has power over what that person wants or doesn't want, to secure it or take it away. So whoever wants to be free, let him neither want nor avoid anything that is up to others. Otherwise he's bound to be a slave.

15 Remember that you should behave as you would at a banquet. Something that is being passed around has reached you: reach out your hand and take a share politely. It goes past you: don't hold it back. It hasn't reached you yet: don't cast your desire ahead toward it, but wait until it comes to you. Do the same with children, with a wife, with public office, with wealth, and one day you'll be a worthy guest at the banquet of the gods. And if you don't even take what is set before you, but look past it, then you'll not only share the gods' banquet but share their rule. For by doing this Diogenes and Heraclitus and people like them were deservedly divine, and were called so.[1]

16 When you see someone weeping in grief because a child has gone abroad, or because he's lost his property, take care that the impression doesn't carry you away into thinking that he's in a bad way because of external things. Have this ready straightaway: "What distresses him isn't what has happened—for it doesn't distress someone else—but his judgment about it." Still, don't hesitate to go along with him as far as words go, and even, if it comes to that, to groan along with him. But take care not to groan inwardly as well.

17 Remember that you're an actor in a play, and the play is whatever the director wants it to be: if he wants it short, it's short; if long, it's long. If he wants you to play a beggar, see that you play even this part skillfully; and the same if he wants you to play a lame man, a ruler, or a private citizen. For this is yours:

1 Diogenes the Cynic and the early philosopher Heraclitus were both famous for disregarding wealth and status.

to play well the role you are given. Choosing the role belongs to someone else.

18 When a raven croaks an unfavorable omen, don't let the impression carry you away. Make a distinction in your own mind straightaway and say: "None of this signifies anything for me, but only for my poor body, or my bit of property, or my little reputation, or my children, or my wife. For me every sign is favorable, if I want it to be; for whatever comes of these things, it's up to me to benefit from it."

19 You can be invincible if you never enter a contest that it isn't up to you to win. When you see someone honored above others, or very powerful, or highly esteemed in some other way, take care that the impression never carries you away into thinking him blessed. For if the essence of the good lies in what is up to us, there's no room for envy or jealousy. And you yourself won't want to be a general or a magistrate or a consul, but free. There's one road to that: contempt for what is not up to us.

20 Remember that it isn't the person who abuses you or hits you who insults you, but your judgment that these people are insulting you. So when someone provokes you, understand that it's your own opinion that has provoked you. Above all, then, try not to be carried away by the impression; for once you gain time and a pause, you'll master yourself more easily.

21 Keep death and exile and everything that seems terrible before your eyes every day, and death most of all. Then you'll never think anything mean, nor desire anything too much.

TAKING UP PHILOSOPHY

Epictetus warns that a beginner in philosophy will be mocked and must give up outward show and status.

22 If you long for philosophy, prepare yourself right from the start to be laughed at, to have lots of people jeer at you and say, "Suddenly he's come back to us a philosopher!" and "Where did he get that lofty brow?" But don't you put on a lofty brow. Hold fast to what seems best to you, as someone stationed at this post

by God. And remember that if you stick to the same course, the very people who laughed at you before will admire you later; but if you let them get the better of you, you'll be laughed at twice over.

[23] If you ever find yourself turning outward because you want to please someone, understand that you've lost your footing. So be content in everything simply to be a philosopher. And if you want to seem one as well, seem so to yourself, and that will be enough.

[24] Don't let reasonings like these distress you: "I'll live without honor, a nobody anywhere." If lack of honor is an evil, you can't be in an evil through someone else, any more than you can be in disgrace through someone else. Is it your doing, then, to get public office, or to be invited to a dinner? Not at all. How, then, is it still dishonor? And how will you be a nobody anywhere, when you need to be somebody only in the things that are up to you—where you can be worth the most? "But my friends will go without help." What do you mean, "without help"? They won't get pocket money from you, and you won't make them Roman citizens. Well, who told you that these things are among the things up to us, and not other people's business? And who can give someone else what he doesn't have himself? "Then get it," someone says, "so that we can have it." If I can get it while keeping myself self-respecting, trustworthy, and high-minded, show me the way and I'll get it. But if you ask me to lose the goods that are mine so that you can acquire things that aren't good, see for yourselves how unfair and inconsiderate you're being. And which would you rather have—money, or a trustworthy and self-respecting friend? Then help me toward that instead, and don't ask me to do things that will make me throw away these very qualities. "But my country," he says, "will go without help, as far as I'm concerned." Again, what sort of help do you mean? It won't have colonnades or bathhouses thanks to you. So what? It doesn't get shoes from the blacksmith or weapons from the shoemaker either. It's enough if each person fulfills his own function. And if you provided it with another citizen who was

trustworthy and self-respecting, wouldn't you be doing it some good? "Yes." Then you yourself wouldn't be useless to it either. "What place, then," he says, "will I have in the city?" Whatever place you can hold while keeping yourself trustworthy and self-respecting. But if you throw those qualities away in your wish to benefit it, what use would you be to it once you've turned out shameless and untrustworthy?

25 Has someone been preferred to you at a dinner, or in being greeted, or in being called in for advice? If these things are good, you should be glad that he got them; if they're bad, don't be upset that you didn't get them. And remember that if you don't do the same things to get what is not up to us, you can't expect an equal share of it. How can someone who doesn't haunt a man's doorstep get an equal share with someone who does? Or someone who doesn't escort him with someone who does? Or someone who doesn't praise him with someone who does? So you'll be unjust and greedy if you want to get these things for nothing, without paying the price they're sold for. Well, how much are lettuces sold for? An obol, say. So if someone pays his obol and gets lettuces, and you don't pay and don't get any, don't think you have less than the one who got them.[2] For just as he has his lettuces, so you have the obol you didn't hand over. It's the same here. You weren't invited to someone's dinner? That's because you didn't pay the host the price he sells the dinner for. He sells it for praise; he sells it for attentiveness. So pay the price it sells for, if it's worth it to you. But if you want to get the one without paying the other, you're greedy and a fool. Do you have nothing, then, in place of the dinner? Of course you do: you haven't had to praise someone you didn't want to praise, or to put up with the people at his door.

26 We can learn the will of nature from the things on which we don't differ from one another. For example, when someone else's slave breaks his cup, we're ready to say at once, "These things happen." Understand, then, that when your own cup gets broken, you should react just as you did when the other man's

2 The obol was a small coin, a sixth of a drachma.

was broken. Carry this over to greater things too. Has someone else's child or wife died? There's no one who wouldn't say, "That's the human lot." But when one's own dies, straightaway it's "Oh, poor me, how wretched I am!" We ought to remember how we feel when we hear the same thing about others.

[27] Just as a target isn't set up to be missed, so nothing that is by nature evil comes to be in the world.

[28] If someone handed your body over to anyone who happened along, you'd be indignant. But you hand your own mind over to whoever happens along, so that if he abuses you it's upset and thrown into confusion—and aren't you ashamed of that?

[29] With each undertaking, consider what leads up to it and what follows from it, and only then take it on. Otherwise you'll start out eagerly, since you haven't thought about any of the consequences, but later, when some difficulties show up, you'll give up in disgrace. You want to win at Olympia? So do I, by the gods—it's a fine thing. But consider what leads up to it and what follows from it, and only then take the thing on. You have to keep to a regimen, eat to order, stay away from pastries, train on schedule at a fixed hour, in heat and in cold; you can't drink cold water, or wine whenever you like. In short, you have to hand yourself over to your trainer as you would to a doctor. Then, in the contest, you have to dig in, and sometimes dislocate your wrist, twist your ankle, swallow a lot of sand, sometimes be flogged—and after all that, lose. Think all this over, and if you still want to, go in for athletics.[3] Otherwise you'll behave like children, who play at wrestlers one moment and gladiators the next, then blow trumpets, then act out tragedies. So you too will be an athlete one moment and a gladiator the next, then an orator, then a philosopher—and with your whole soul, nothing. Like a monkey, you imitate every show you see, and one thing after another takes your fancy. For you haven't approached anything after careful thought, or after looking it over from every side, but at random and with a lukewarm desire. That's how

3 In ancient games, officials could flog competitors who broke the rules.

some people, when they've seen a philosopher and heard someone speaking as Euphrates speaks—though who can speak as he does?—want to be philosophers themselves. Man, first consider what sort of thing it is; then study your own nature too, to see whether you can bear it. You want to be a pentathlete, or a wrestler? Look at your arms, your thighs; study your lower back.[4] For different people are made for different things. Do you think you can do this and eat as you do now, drink as you do now, have the same desires and the same dislikes? You'll have to go without sleep, work hard, leave your family, be looked down on by a slave boy, be laughed at by everyone you meet, and come off worse in everything—in honor, in office, in the courts, in every little bit of business. Think these things over: are you willing to take freedom from passion, freedom, and tranquility in exchange for them? If not, don't come near. Don't be like children—a philosopher now, later a tax collector, then an orator, then an agent of Caesar. These things don't go together. You must be one person, either good or bad. You must work either on your own ruling faculty or on external things; you must lavish your skill either on what is inside or on what is outside—that is, you must take up the position either of a philosopher or of a layman.[5]

DUTIES, THE GODS, AND DIVINATION

Epictetus explains duties owed to family and others, correct beliefs about the gods, and the right use of divination.

30 Duties are, for the most part, measured by relationships. He's your father: you're called on to take care of him, to give way to him in everything, to put up with him when he abuses you or hits you. "But he's a bad father." Well, was it to a good father that nature bound you? No—to a father. "My brother wrongs me." Then keep your own position toward him, and don't look at what

4 Euphrates was a Stoic philosopher of Epictetus' time, famous for his eloquence.
5 The "ruling faculty" (hēgemonikon) is the Stoic term for the mind as the command center of the soul.

he's doing, but at what you must do for your choice to be in accord with nature. For no one else will harm you unless you want it; you'll be harmed only when you think you're being harmed. In the same way, then, you'll discover what duty you owe to a neighbor, to a fellow citizen, to a general, if you get into the habit of looking at relationships.

31 As for piety toward the gods, understand that the most important thing is this: to have correct opinions about them—that they exist and govern the universe well and justly—and to have set yourself to obey them, to yield to everything that happens, and to follow it willingly, as brought about by the best mind. That way you'll never blame the gods, or accuse them of neglecting you. And this can't happen unless you take the good and the bad away from what is not up to us and place them only in what is up to us. For if you take any of those other things to be good or bad, then when you fail to get what you want and fall into what you don't want, you're bound to blame and hate those responsible. For every living creature is made by nature to flee and turn away from things that seem harmful, and from their causes, and to pursue and admire things that are beneficial, and their causes. So it's impossible for someone who thinks he's being harmed to take pleasure in what he thinks is harming him, just as it's impossible to take pleasure in the harm itself. That's why even a father is abused by his son, when he doesn't give the boy a share of things that seem good; and this is what made Polynices and Eteocles enemies—thinking that kingship was a good. That's why the farmer abuses the gods, and the sailor, and the merchant, and those who lose their wives and children. For where people's advantage lies, there their piety lies too. So whoever takes care to desire and to be averse as he should is, by the same token, taking care of his piety.[6] It's always proper to pour libations, offer sacrifices, and give first fruits according to ancestral custom, with purity, and not sloppily or

6 Polynices and Eteocles, sons of Oedipus, killed each other fighting over the throne of Thebes.

carelessly—nor, for that matter, stingily, nor beyond your means.

32 When you consult a diviner, remember that you don't know what will happen—you've come to find that out from the diviner—but you've come already knowing what kind of thing it is, if you really are a philosopher. For if it's one of the things not up to us, it must necessarily be neither good nor bad. So don't bring desire or aversion to the diviner, and don't approach him trembling. Go knowing that everything that will happen is indifferent and nothing to you, and that whatever it turns out to be, you'll be able to make good use of it—and no one will prevent that. So go to the gods with confidence, as to advisers. And afterward, when some advice has been given you, remember whose advice you've taken, and whom you'll be ignoring if you disobey. Go to divination, as Socrates thought one should, only in cases where the whole inquiry turns on the outcome, and where neither reason nor any other skill offers a way of seeing what the matter is. So when you have to share a danger with a friend or with your country, don't consult a diviner about whether you should share it. For if the diviner tells you the sacrifices have turned out badly, clearly death is signified, or the maiming of some part of your body, or exile. But reason requires that even with these in prospect you stand by your friend and share your country's danger. So pay attention to the greater diviner, the Pythian god, who threw out of his temple the man who failed to help his friend when he was being murdered.[7]

RULES FOR EVERYDAY CONDUCT

Epictetus gives rules on speech, company, pleasure, criticism from others, and practicing philosophy without display.

33 Set yourself a certain character and pattern now, and keep to it both when you're by yourself and when you're with other people. Be silent for the most part, or say only what's necessary, and in few words. Rarely, when the occasion calls for it, do

7 The Pythian god is Apollo, whose oracle was at Delphi.

speak, but not about just anything—not about gladiators, not about horse races, not about athletes, not about food or drink, the usual topics everywhere—and above all not about people, blaming or praising or comparing them. If you can, steer the conversation of your companions toward what is fitting by the way you yourself talk. But if you happen to find yourself cut off among strangers, keep silent. Don't laugh much, or at many things, or without restraint. Refuse to swear oaths—altogether, if you can; if not, as far as circumstances allow. Avoid dinners given by outsiders and laymen. But if the occasion ever arises, keep your attention alert, so you don't slip into vulgar ways without noticing. For understand that if your companion is dirty, whoever rubs up against him is bound to get dirty too, even if he happens to be clean himself. Take what concerns the body—food, drink, clothing, house, household slaves—only as far as bare need requires; cut out entirely whatever is for show or luxury. As for sex, stay pure before marriage as far as you can; and if you do engage in it, take part only in what is lawful. But don't be offensive or censorious toward those who do indulge, and don't keep bringing up the fact that you yourself don't. If someone reports to you that so-and-so is speaking badly of you, don't defend yourself against what was said, but reply, "He must not have known my other faults, or he wouldn't have mentioned only these." There's no need to go to the theater often. But if the occasion ever arises, don't show yourself partisan for anyone but yourself—that is, want only what happens to happen, and only the winner to win; that way you won't be thwarted. Refrain entirely from shouting, from laughing at anyone, and from getting very worked up. And after you've left, don't talk a lot about what happened, beyond what contributes to your own improvement; for that sort of talk shows that you were impressed by the spectacle. Don't go to people's public readings casually or readily; but if you do go, keep your dignity and composure, while not being disagreeable. When you're about to meet someone, especially someone who seems to be of high standing, ask yourself what Socrates or Zeno would have

done in this situation, and you won't be at a loss for how to deal fittingly with what comes up. When you go to call on someone powerful, tell yourself in advance that you won't find him at home, that you'll be shut out, that the door will be slammed in your face, that he'll pay no attention to you. And if, with all this, it's still right to go, go and bear what happens, and never say to yourself, "It wasn't worth it." That's the mark of a layman, of someone at odds with external things. In conversation, avoid mentioning your own deeds or dangers at great length and without measure. For however pleasant it is for you to recall your dangers, it isn't equally pleasant for others to hear about what happened to you.[8] Avoid, too, trying to raise a laugh; it's a habit that slides easily into vulgarity, and it's apt to lessen the respect your neighbors have for you. It's risky, too, to drift into obscene talk. So when anything like that happens, if the moment is right, go so far as to rebuke the one who has drifted into it; if not, at least make it clear that you dislike the talk by falling silent, blushing, and frowning.

34 When you get an impression of some pleasure, guard yourself, as with other impressions, against being carried away by it. Let the thing wait for you, and grant yourself some delay. Then call to mind both times: the time when you'll enjoy the pleasure, and the later time when, having enjoyed it, you'll regret it and reproach yourself. And set against these how glad you'll be if you refrain, and how you'll praise yourself. But if the right moment seems to have come to act on it, take care that its charm, sweetness, and allure don't overcome you. Set against them how much better it is to be conscious of having won this victory.

35 When you do something because you've determined that it ought to be done, never avoid being seen doing it, even if most people are going to think badly of it. For if you're not doing right, avoid the deed itself; but if you are doing right, why fear those who will wrongly rebuke you?

[36] Just as "It is day" and "It is night" are of great value in a disjunction but of no value in a conjunction, so too taking the larger portion may have value with respect to the body, but it has no value with respect to keeping up the fellowship one should at a dinner. So when you eat with someone else, remember not only to look at the value of what's set before you for your body, but also to keep up your respect for your host.[9]

[37] If you take on a role beyond your powers, you both disgrace yourself in it and neglect the role you could have fulfilled.

[38] Just as, when you walk, you take care not to step on a nail or twist your ankle, so take care not to harm your ruling faculty as well. And if we watch out for this in every activity, we'll undertake the activity more securely.

[39] Each person's body is the measure of his property, as the foot is of the shoe. If you stand by this, you'll keep to the measure; but if you go beyond it, you're bound from then on to be swept along as if over a cliff. It's the same with the shoe: if you go beyond the foot, you get a gilded shoe, then a purple one, then an embroidered one. For once you go beyond the measure, there's no limit.

[40] As soon as women reach fourteen, men start calling them "ladies." So when they see that nothing else is in store for them but to sleep with men, they begin to beautify themselves and put all their hopes in that. It's worth taking pains, then, to make them realize that they are honored for nothing other than appearing modest and self-respecting.

[41] It's a sign of a lack of natural talent to spend a lot of time on bodily things—exercising a lot, eating a lot, drinking a lot, defecating a lot, having sex. These things should be done in passing; all your attention should be devoted to your mind.

[42] When someone treats you badly or speaks badly of you, remember that he does or says it because he thinks it's the right thing for him to do. He can't follow what seems right to you,

8 Zeno of Citium founded the Stoic school in Athens around 300 BC.
9 In Stoic logic, "Either it is day or it is night" is true, while "It is day and it is night" is false.

only what seems right to him. So if he sees things wrongly, he is the one harmed, since he is the one deceived. After all, if someone takes a true conjunction to be false, it isn't the conjunction that's harmed but the person who's deceived. If you start from these considerations, you'll be gentle toward the person who abuses you. Say to yourself each time, "That's how it seemed to him."

43 Everything has two handles, one by which it can be carried and one by which it can't. If your brother wrongs you, don't take hold of the matter by that handle, the fact that he wrongs you—for that's the handle by which it can't be carried—but rather by the other, that he's your brother, that you were brought up together. Then you'll take hold of it by the handle by which it can be carried.

44 These arguments don't follow: "I'm richer than you, so I'm better than you"; "I'm more eloquent than you, so I'm better than you." These follow better: "I'm richer than you, so my property is better than yours"; "I'm more eloquent than you, so my speech is better than yours." But you are neither property nor speech.

45 Someone bathes quickly: don't say that he bathes badly, but quickly. Someone drinks a lot of wine: don't say that he drinks badly, but a lot. For until you've made out his judgment, how do you know whether he's doing badly? That way you won't end up receiving cognitive impressions of some things but giving your assent to others.[10]

46 Never call yourself a philosopher, and don't talk much among laymen about principles; instead, do what follows from the principles. At a banquet, for example, don't say how one ought to eat, but eat as one ought. For remember that Socrates had so completely got rid of showing off that people would come to him wanting him to introduce them to philosophers, and he would take them along. That's how well he put up with being overlooked. And if among laymen the talk turns to some prin-

10 In Stoic theory, a "cognitive" impression is one so clear it guarantees its own truth; only such impressions deserve assent.

ciple, keep silent for the most part; for there's a great danger that you'll straightaway vomit up what you haven't digested. And when someone tells you that you know nothing and you aren't stung, then know that you've begun the work. Sheep, after all, don't bring their fodder to the shepherds to show how much they've eaten; they digest their pasture inside and produce wool and milk outside. So you too: don't show off your principles to laymen, but show them the actions that come from the principles once they're digested.

47 When you've adapted your body to plain living, don't preen yourself on it; and if you drink water, don't say at every opportunity that you drink water. And if you ever want to train yourself for hardship, do it for yourself and not for outsiders. Don't go embracing statues. But sometime when you're terribly thirsty, take a mouthful of cold water, spit it out, and tell no one.[11]

SIGNS OF PROGRESS

Epictetus contrasts the layman and the philosopher, lists signs of progress, and ends with sayings to keep at hand.

48 The stance and character of a layman: he never expects benefit or harm from himself, but from external things. The stance and character of a philosopher: he expects all benefit and harm from himself. Signs of someone making progress: he criticizes no one, praises no one, blames no one, accuses no one, says nothing about himself as though he were somebody or knew something. When he's thwarted or prevented in something, he accuses himself. If someone praises him, he laughs to himself at the one praising him; if someone criticizes him, he doesn't defend himself. He goes about like an invalid, careful not to disturb any part that is mending before it has set firmly. He has removed all desire from himself, and has transferred his aversion only to what is contrary to nature among the things up to

11 Embracing statues in winter was a showy endurance exercise associated with Diogenes the Cynic.

us. He uses a relaxed impulse toward everything. If he seems foolish or ignorant, he doesn't care. In a word, he keeps watch over himself as over an enemy lying in wait.

49 When someone gives himself airs because he can understand and explain the books of Chrysippus, say to yourself: "If Chrysippus hadn't written obscurely, this man would have nothing to give himself airs about." But what do I want? To understand nature and to follow it. So I look for someone who explains it, and hearing that Chrysippus does, I go to him. But I don't understand what he's written, so I look for someone to explain it. So far, there's nothing to be proud of. When I find the explainer, what remains is to put the instructions into practice; that alone is something to be proud of. But if I admire the explaining itself, what have I become but a literary scholar instead of a philosopher—except that I'm explaining Chrysippus instead of Homer? So when someone says to me, "Read Chrysippus with me," I blush instead, when I can't show deeds that match his words and are in harmony with them.[12]

50 Whatever rules are set before you, stand by them as laws, as if you'd be committing an impiety by breaking them. And whatever anyone says about you, pay no attention; for that is no longer yours.

51 How much longer will you put off thinking yourself worthy of the best things, and never overstepping the distinctions of reason? You've received the principles you ought to accept, and you've accepted them. What sort of teacher are you still waiting for, then, so that you can put off your own improvement until he comes? You're no longer a boy, but already a grown man. If you're careless and lazy now, and keep making one postponement after another, and setting one day after another as the day you'll start paying attention to yourself, you won't notice that you're making no progress, and you'll go on being a layman in life and in death. So think yourself worthy, right now, of living as a grown man who is making progress. And let everything that

12 Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoic school, was its great systematizer and a notoriously difficult writer.

seems best be an inviolable law for you. And when anything painful or pleasant, glorious or inglorious, comes your way, remember that the contest is now, the Olympic Games are already here, you can't put them off any longer, and progress is lost or saved by a single day and a single deed. That's how Socrates reached perfection: in everything that came his way, he paid attention to nothing but reason. And you, even if you're not yet Socrates, ought to live as someone who wants to be Socrates.

52 The first and most necessary area in philosophy is the application of principles—for example, not lying. The second is that of proofs—for example, why it is that we ought not to lie. The third is the one that confirms and articulates these—for example, why it is that this is a proof. For what is a proof, what is logical consequence, what is contradiction, what is true, what is false? So the third area is necessary because of the second, and the second because of the first; but the most necessary, and the one where we should come to rest, is the first. But we do the opposite. We spend our time on the third area, and all our effort goes into that; the first we neglect completely. So we lie—but we have ready to hand how to prove that we ought not to lie.

53 On every occasion we should have these thoughts ready to hand: "Lead me, Zeus, and you too, Destiny,
wherever you have assigned me to go.
I'll follow without flinching; and if I'm unwilling,
I'll turn coward, and follow all the same." "Whoever has yielded well to necessity
we count as wise; he understands the divine." "Well, Crito, if this is what pleases the gods, so be it." "Anytus and Meletus can kill me, but they cannot harm me."[13]

13 The quotations are from the Stoic Cleanthes, from Euripides, and from Plato's *Crito* and *Apology*; Anytus and Meletus prosecuted Socrates.