

Chatterbox #322 – The Stoicism explosion (Ad free)

Episode description

Have you heard people talking about Stoicism and wondered what it means? In this Chatterbox episode, Andrew and Anna take a look at the philosophy of Stoicism and consider why it might have become so popular recently. They cover what Stoicism is, explore the difference between the adjective stoic and the meaning of Stoicism, and discuss how the ideas behind this philosophy can be useful in everyday life. You'll learn its key principles such as managing your emotions and seeing challenges as chances to grow.

Fun fact

One of Stoicism's most famous practitioners, the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, wrote his personal reflections on Stoic philosophy in a series of journals that were never intended to be published. These writings, known today as "Meditations," have become one of the most significant works of Stoic literature.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To take a crack at something
- Knee-jerk reaction
- Full-blown
- Silver lining
- To bookend something
- Echo chamber



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Chatterbox number 322, "The Stoicism explosion," featuring Andrew and Anna. And now I'm joined by my cohost, Anna, and we're gonna be talking about Stoicism with you guys in more detail. Anna, hello, how's it going?

Anna: Hi, Andrew, I'm very good, how are you?

Andrew: I'm doing well, and I'm excited to jump into this topic in more detail here. Anna, to be honest, it's not one that I know a lot about, but I have been seeing Stoicism talked about all over the place online, and I know that you've had the same reaction. You've seen it all over the place online as well. So, we thought here in this conversation, we could get into it in a bit more detail and learn about what Stoicism is, and mostly focus our conversation around why Stoicism has exploded in the last, I guess I would say about five years, I've noticed it online. Anna, would that be about the same timeline for you?

Anna: Definitely, huge comeback. Well, maybe not a comeback for some people that have followed it for a lifetime, but a big resurgence of the idea of Stoicism in popular culture. I would say you've hit the nail on the head, yeah. Five years, I would say.

Andrew: Yeah, probably just like right around the COVID pandemic time, there's been a renaissance of this ancient philosophy, Stoicism. So maybe that's a good place to start. We should explain what it is to the best of our ability. Anna, do you wanna **take a crack at it**? Do you wanna try and explain what Stoicism is for me and for our listeners as well?

Anna: Of course. And just before I start, guys, I'm not an expert, OK? But I'm gonna give you a high-level overview of what it's about. Stoicism is an ancient Greek philosophy, and

it essentially teaches the development of self-control and fortitude as a means to overcome destructive emotions, like anger, for example, maybe jealousy, irritability, that type of thing. Those emotions that we all feel all the time. You know, we're not robots. Everybody feels angry sometimes, but it offers a way to manage those types of situations. So, Stoicism emphasizes the importance of virtue, i.e., essentially moral excellence and wisdom. And it suggests that a good life is one lived in accordance with nature and reason. And probably you may have heard of a famous student of this philosophy, which is Marcus Aurelius, who has a book. It wasn't actually a book that he ever intended to release. They're like his personal notes. Those notes are called "Meditations." So that probably is one of the most famous, I would say, things that people recognize with Stoicism is that character of Marcus Aurelius, who was a student of the philosophy, and then that book, "Meditations," as well.

Andrew: Yeah, I think him, and also, I hear about Seneca. Seneca, another guy from way, way back in the day, in ancient, I don't know if he was a Greek or a Roman, but I hear his name referenced often in terms of Stoicism. It is Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. I wonder how Marcus Aurelius would feel that his private journal is now read by many, many people around the world each and every year. I think I would be horrified.

Anna: Yeah, a little bit weird, isn't it? I've read some of it. It's quite a short book, and you can get different versions depending on the translation that you have. So, there are slightly different translations of that book. If you guys are interested in going into that and diving into that further, it could be something interesting to start reading as well. I'm sure it's been translated into many, many different languages.

Andrew: Yeah, for sure. So, to get into Stoicism a little bit more here, Anna, and we should mention the spelling perhaps because you did talk about the pronunciation. So, the spelling of this word is S-T-O-I-C-I-S-M, Stoicism. And be careful, everybody, because there are two different ways that we can use this word. The first we call "capital S

Stoicism", and that is what we're talking about today, capital S Stoicism. That is about the philosophy. Now, if you spell this word with a lowercase s, and usually we use it as the adjective "stoic." Now, if you are stoic, if you're a stoic person, it means that you don't display much emotion. It's like almost like you look like a statue. So, something could be like really exciting right in front of you, and you have no reaction at all, no smile, no emotion on your face. That is called being stoic. So just be careful. The words, the spelling is the same, but the meaning is different, and it depends if you're talking about the philosophy, then you'll spell it with an uppercase S, and if you're just using the adjective, lowercase s. Yeah, just a word of warning about the different forms of this word.

But, Anna, I watched an introduction to Stoicism video on YouTube, and it was created by a guy named Ryan Holiday, who I think is one of the big online teachers who teaches through his YouTube channel, and I believe he has some books and online classes as well. He's a big proponent of this philosophy. And so, I watched his short introduction YouTube video on Stoicism, and some of the key principles that he talked about in this video I thought were really interesting, so I wanted to break them down here just so everybody can get a better sense of what this philosophy is about. So the first key principle is to focus on what you can control, and he went into a lot of detail about that, like saying that if something is outside of your control, why worry about it, and you should spend as little effort, as little worry, as little stress, and burn as few calories as humanly possible about something that you can't control, because otherwise you're just sort of wasting your life and wasting your energy. So that is one of the main ideas behind Stoicism.

The second one is that virtue is the highest good, something that you mentioned as well, Anna, is about virtue, and there are four subcategories of virtue, which breaks down to being wise, being just, so just is fairness. Being courageous, and also being temperate, and that means knowing when to say no, so not overindulging in addictive activities, right,

whether it's like using your phone too much or drinking too much or any addictive behavior, just knowing how to say no to that so that you can control those activities.

The third key principle is viewing challenges as opportunities, so it's a mindset shift, right? If you think about everything, you know, if you have a difficult time in your life, if you think, "Oh, I can't be successful anymore" or "How am I gonna solve this problem?" If you have a kind of negative outlook, it's going to hinder you from actually being successful. Instead, you should look at challenges with excitement and you can be like, "OK, how am I gonna solve this? I can do it!" And there's a lot of talk about that in the video.

And then finally, it was the fourth principle about mindfulness and presence and reflecting and really understanding your own mindset, what you're thinking, and there's a big aspect of journaling involved in Stoicism as well and doing that kind of self-reflection activity. So, what I took away from that introduction video are those four key principles, and we'll put the link to that video in the description for this episode. So, if anybody would like to watch that on their own, the presenter in the video, Ryan Holiday, goes into a lot more detail than I do, but I think he does a good job at kind of breaking down and summarizing what Stoicism is. So, Anna, with that being said, I think that gives us just a very quick overview about Stoicism, but I'm more interested in talking about the why. Why has Stoicism become so popular over the last five years? And I think there are probably a lot of factors at play, and that's what I'd like to discuss with you now. So, I'll throw it over to you, Anna. Why do you think Stoicism has exploded in the last little while?

Anna: Well, I've got a couple of ideas, see what you think. And I don't know whether you agree with me, guys, but for me, I think one of the biggest reasons is that we live in a world now where we are bombarded with information all the time. A lot of people use social media, and a lot of this content can make us feel quite reactionary. So, it almost elicits an angry response maybe, or a shocked response. And I think that people are almost looking to an antidote for this, this feeling of like, you know, always feeling a little bit angry or

stressed, maybe at work, for example, because it's true that our lives are very stressful. People have a lot of stuff on their plate. And I think that this offers a way to deal with that, particularly when you came back to those pillars there, Andrew, the first one, which is about controlling your emotions. For me, that's one of the most useful parts of this philosophy is focus on what you can control. A typical example being, OK, you missed the train. You go to work, you missed the train for whatever reason. Well, you've got a couple of options, right? You could be super angry. You could try and blame everybody else, or blame yourself, or whatever, or swear, or, you know, the typical things. Or you could say, "Well, there's nothing I can do about it now. So, I may as well either enjoy my wait to the next train. I don't know, read a book, maybe try and get to work a different way." Because ultimately, you don't really help the situation at all by getting angry. You don't benefit it in any way.

But I think even though that's the case, and it sounds great, I do think it's easier said than done sometimes. And we're not robots, right? Humans have emotions, and we have this kind of spectrum of being angry, and being relaxed, and whatever. So, for me, I think that's one of the reasons why is coming back to your original question, because we just have so much stuff all the time. It's super stressful. And I think this just offers us a way to deal with it. What do you think, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, I think that's definitely part of it. It's like a roadmap for how to live a better life, right? If I look at those principles, and I look just on the surface, what Stoicism is about, there's no arguments for me. Like all of these seem like really nice principles and nice practices to do in your life. I don't think any of them would harm you. And I think there's probably a lot of benefits to all of these things. So definitely for people who are looking for some way to benefit their life and to improve their life, yeah, then these could be really great principles to apply. I don't know if that's the full story though. Like I'm still thinking that there's gotta be something deeper about why people are turning to it and why it's exploded. I think maybe social media, Anna, like, going back to what you were talking

about earlier, has a part because that's how I learned about stoicism is through social media and through podcasts actually. Tim Ferriss is a very, very famous podcaster. I'm sure Anna, you're familiar with Tim Ferriss. And he talks about Stoicism a lot and Seneca and reading books by Seneca. So that's how I heard about it. But I think there must be so many other people out there as well that learned about what Stoicism is through social media itself. So, it's kind of interesting. It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy where it's like people are using social media maybe and feeling stressed about using it too much. But then at the same time through social media, they find about this method for reducing stress and bringing clarity and calmness to their life. So, it's kind of ironic how that maybe happened, at least in my case, like that's how I learned about it. Anna, did you find out about Stoicism for the first time through social media as well?

Anna: I heard about it for a number of years, but yes. I think one of the main reasons why it's had a big surge and comeback is just because of the accessibility. So, you mentioned Ryan Holiday before and he's a very famous character in that space. And so, I think he and other people have made it much more accessible. So, I think that's also another factor is that they've just been putting out a lot more content that has reached a lot more people. And I've got one of his books here actually, which is "The Obstacle is the Way." He's written a lot of different books now actually. They're really, really good. You know, guys, if you're interested in this type of philosophy, I would really recommend them. So, I think it is a mixture of they're just putting out more content. So, it's natural that more people would see that content. Do you think that, Andrew, you said there, maybe there's something deeper at play here. Do you think it has something to do with perhaps a decline of traditional religion perhaps, especially in the Western world, for example?

Andrew: I think that is definitely a factor because although this is called a philosophy, when I started reading about it, I got some religious vibes from it. Like, I don't know if it's just the way that it's presented but yeah, when I was reading about it online and watching some YouTube videos, it seemed almost like it was being presented as a religion. I guess

there's no, kind of, deity figure. There's no god that's worshiped or anything like that, but it does have many, many parallels to religion, in my opinion. Like there are these principles that you can follow to lead a fulfilling life and a virtuous life. And I think that those principles are shared by many religions from around the world. So, you know, I'm not familiar with too many different religions but the ones that I'm familiar with, they seem to have these principles as core beliefs in them as well. So, I think that is a similarity.

Also, you know, there's a community aspect to religion. My folks go to church every Sunday and they go to church partially because they're religious but also, they enjoy the social activity of it. They can meet with their friends there and there's always some kind of social activity every Sunday afternoon that they participate in with other members of their church. And I think that with Stoicism, maybe there's also a community, like the community online, the Reddit forum, different social media pages, the YouTube channels. There's like this online community based around Stoicism where people can discuss it and practice together. So that also seems like a parallel to me. And yeah, I think maybe, I mean, I don't have any numbers to back this up but just my gut feeling tells me that Western religions in maybe Europe and North America are a little bit on the decline. And I know that, you know, traditionally some countries like Canada and England were maybe very religious countries. And now these days, not as much, especially with younger people. And so, I'm wondering if maybe this kind of Stoic philosophy is replacing that desire for a religious experience that some people feel. Anna, would you say that you agree or disagree with that?

Anna: I think it's a really valid point, definitely. I think people are always in a way, again, coming back to that word you said before, ironic, because some people will say, I'm not religious or I don't want to follow a religion, but then will be very devoted to something like Stoicism. Like you said, has some elements of a religion. So, it's really interesting. I think people are always looking for essentially a way to figure out what's going on in the world. How do I operate in this really weird space, this sort of spinning rock in the middle of space? You know, I think people are always trying to figure out like how do I actually live

my life? And I think maybe coming back to what I said before, that's intensified because the world that we live in now is just so stressful. There's so many things we have to deal with. There's so many things on our plate that I think all of these factors combined that we've mentioned today are probably some of the main factors as to why it's had a really big comeback.

But I mean, in my personal opinion, I think it's great. I think it's really useful. I wouldn't say that I'm like a Stoic and I follow everything to the T. And actually, I think I wanted to add something in here as well, Andrew. It does have a bit of a bad rep sometimes, because like you said in the introduction, if you call somebody "stoic," it can have that negative connotation of somebody that never reacts. They seem a little bit cold, maybe a little bit heartless. This is one of the criticisms of Stoicism is that, it's like, well, sometimes it's OK to express happiness or maybe to be really excited about something or to get angry about something. You're a human being, you're not a robot. You'll have to be angry or whatever. So, there are some criticisms of that. And also, that it can be quite selfish, because maybe one of the things that Stoics will say, "Well, I can't do anything about it. So, I'm, you know, it's not within my control. So, I'm not gonna do anything." And maybe one criticism would be, well, maybe there is something you could do. So, it's not perfect like anything. There are some criticisms of Stoicism, definitely. But I think on the whole, it can be a really useful tool that you can add into your toolbox. If you have a very stressful life, you find that you're reacting a lot all the time. I think it could be really useful, 'cause it was useful for me in that respect.

Andrew: Yeah, another thing that strikes me as interesting, and maybe this could account for some of the reason why it's become so popular, is that the key principles are pretty black and white. And they're also pretty straightforward. There are only really four of them, and we went over them earlier. And it's just like, do those, and you're a Stoic, right? Now, the principles are easy, but actually following them to the T perfectly is very difficult. And that almost strikes me as similar to a religion as well, right? Think of maybe, I don't know,

Buddhism or something. Right? It's like some principles to do, but if you wanna become enlightened, well, that is very, very difficult to do. So, it's like an easy start, but a difficult finish. And for some people, and I think maybe I'm one of these people to an extent, is like the challenge of trying to do that is really attractive in itself. So, it's like you have these... I think about running, for example, my hobby. It's like running is easy, right? You just like move your feet. But actually, becoming very good at it takes a lot of discipline and effort and time. And so, I think maybe Stoicism is something that shares a lot in common with that. So, the principles are easy, but perfecting them and living them is a lifelong effort.

Anna: Absolutely, and I'm gonna share an expression here, guys, which is "practice what you preach." Practice what you preach just essentially means to do what you say you will do. So, if you say you're a Stoic, always behaving according to those principles might be a little bit difficult. So, I totally agree with you, Andrew. It's like the rules are, well, I shouldn't say rules. The guidelines are there and they're easy to understand, but actually doing it in real life, well, that's the really tricky part, which is why for me, it's a tool that you can use, but it is also OK to be angry sometimes, in my opinion, as well. We're not robots. And sometimes anger makes you do stuff. It's like a motivating force. There's a lot of, like, energy with anger. So, I think the principles are really useful, but I would say there are some elements that I don't 100% agree with. Nothing's perfect, right?

Andrew: So maybe we could transition our conversation a little bit into talking about how we have applied some of these Stoic principles to our daily lifestyle. As I've said before, I haven't really set out to be a Stoic or anything like that, but when I read these principles and the practices that you should follow, I'm like, "Ooh, I've done that, I've done that, I do that." So, it kind of seems like to an extent, I am a Stoic without trying to be one. I'm an accidental Stoic, I suppose. But Anna, I mean, you've read a little bit more about this than I have. So maybe you could share some of the ways that you apply this philosophy to your daily life.

Anna: Well, the first thing to know about me, guys, is I'm not the most Stoic person. So, I find it really easy to get angry. I find it really easy to get annoyed. So, one of the things that I have really tried to apply is this idea of, like, not overreacting, like the miss the train example. It's like in the past, if that happened to me, I'd get super angry, I'd be really nasty to everybody, I'd be really irritable. And so, when I've had those types of situations where something's gone wrong or I don't know, whatever, I try to just think, OK, it's not gonna get any better if I'm angry about this. It's not gonna help the situation in any way. So that's one real example that I've tried really hard to improve is how I react when things go wrong if it's outside of my control. So that's a massive one.

Andrew: And how do you do that? Like that must be something that's really difficult to change. Is it just kind of stepping back and trying to look at yourself from an outside perspective almost, and just realizing that you can't change anything in the moment, so why be angry? Or are there some certain techniques that have helped you to achieve not becoming so angry when something doesn't go the right way?

Anna: I'm a big fan of breathing, and the breath, the breath is really, really powerful. So, one thing that I do is if I ever feel really like angry and you can feel it boiling up inside you, right? You're like, "Oh my God, I'm gonna explode!" I just take a breath, just a deep breath. I know people hear this and they think, "Oh, breathing, like there's nothing that you can change by breathing," but trust me, it's such a powerful tool. So, I take a breath and I just try to remind myself of some of those words. You know, it's like, there's no point getting angry. There's nothing you can do about it. So, you might as well just try and find something else to do or try and see if there's some way that you could fix the situation that you have now. I'm not always perfect at doing that, but I've definitely improved that significantly than when I was in, for example, my early twenties, where I was quite reactionary, or I would get really angry about things. So that's definitely one of the practical ways that I do it. Just take a breath, remind yourself, kind of repeat those things back to

yourself in your head and then react rather than that kind of initial sort of **knee-jerk reaction** that you have when things go wrong. So that's one of the biggest things for me.

And the second thing I would say is his books, I've read two of his books. "The Obstacle is the Way," which is essentially how can you find something good out of something bad? I think that's kind of quite a universal truth that we all know is that if you have a challenge, you have to face it, not run away from it. I think that's a really nice book in order to give you the confidence to face some of those challenges and see the good in the bad, essentially. And then the other book I would say that's really good, and this, I thought, really changed my perspective, is his book about "Ego is the Enemy." This is really interesting 'cause it talks a lot about how, of course, our egos are our own worst enemies, you know, how we think we're more important often than we are or how we should be careful if people give us a lot of praise, or we think we're very successful. Be careful because you don't wanna get too complacent with things and almost like don't believe the praise that people tell you because you're not as important as you think you are. And that's not a criticism of you. That doesn't mean that you're not worthy of anything or you're not valuable, but it's like, you're not as important as you think you are, so get over yourself. And I think that's also a really important message to remind all of ourselves of every now and again, you know?

Andrew: Right. In the video that I watched earlier on YouTube where it was an overview of Stoicism, the speaker mentioned several times, like, "You're gonna die. Nothing is important." Like this kind of memento mori idea where it's like, yeah, you're gonna die, so it doesn't really matter, which, I mean, I don't know how I feel about that. I think, yeah, it's true that we are very insignificant. We are just little specks of dust here on the planet, right? We're only gonna live for a short time and then we'll die, and we can't take anything with us, and we'll all be forgotten eventually. But at the same time, that's not like super comforting in the now when we have real stresses and real problems in our life. But I do like that about, like, dealing with our ego, right? That can be a very humbling reminder

when we're dealing with problems with our ego or inflated self-value or self-worth, right? I think then that idea can be a really sobering reminder. But, you know, if you're, like, stressed out because you don't have enough money to pay your rent and you're gonna get kicked out of your apartment and you're really just stressed out and you're like, "Oh, I'm just gonna die one day, so it doesn't matter anyways," that doesn't really help you solve the problem at all in that moment, so.

Anna: Yeah, it might even make it worse, actually, 'cause you might think, "OK, well, maybe I should just end it all now then." So, it might have a backwards effect maybe on that one. That's a really valid point is, again, it comes back to the point of it's not perfect and we certainly don't experience the world, even though we are basically insignificant, we don't experience the world like that. We are the main character, right? So, it's quite hard to think, like you said, "Oh, we're all gonna die," or in that old phrase, everybody says, "Don't care what anybody thinks," which I always just think is so simplistic because it's so hard to feel like that in the moment. So again, nothing's perfect, right? And these are some of the valid sort of criticisms or critiques about Stoicism and how, maybe it can't help absolutely everything. But yeah, really, a really valid point.

Andrew: All right, Anna, so we're gonna keep our conversation going for a little bit longer in the ad-free, "boco", (bonus content) here for our paid Culips members. So, let's continue. And we have three rapid fire conversation questions that we are going to discuss. So, I'll throw the first question out there, Anna. It is, would you try practicing stoicism? You've read some books about it, and you've incorporated some aspects of it into your life, but do you think you could ever go and be a **full-blown** Stoic and be like, this is my guiding philosophy, I'm a Stoic?

Anna: I'm always nervous about doing stuff like that 'cause I think it, again, like I said before, it's like practicing what you preach. So, if you kind of pin your flag and you're like, I'm a Stoic, it kind of puts a lot of pressure on you to then follow every element in every

part of your life. So, I think for me, it's a tool that I can use, but I'm nervous about saying I'm this and I'm that because ultimately, I think I'm many things. And I honestly just don't think I would be able to do it in all cases all the time. I just don't think it matches 100% with my personality. And you? Well, you said you already are a Stoic. You're an accidental Stoic.

Andrew: Accidental Stoic in some aspects, in some aspects. I think there were a few of those key principles that I really liked, like focus on what you can control, things that are out of your control to not worry about those so much. I really like that. And of course, that's something that's hard to do. It's natural to worry about things that we can't control, but why do it, right? So as much as possible, trying to reduce the amount of time that you spend just stressing about things that really you have no control over. There's no, it's just reducing that seems like a great idea. So, I love that one. Viewing challenges as opportunities. I love this one. And there's this really famous Warren Buffett quote, and guys, I'll be completely honest, and I'll say that I had to Google it because I couldn't remember it exactly, but I just Googled it. And the quote is, "Be fearful when others are greedy and be greedy when others are fearful." And what I like about that is like, when things seem bad, you can try and find some opportunity. There's some **silver lining**. So, if you have a challenge, maybe everybody around you is being like, "There's no way we can succeed in this." Try and think outside of the box and find some solution because I think at least in my life, every big challenge that I've had, there's always been some kind of solution and there's always a way. So yeah, I really like that part of Stoicism. That might be my favorite aspect of it.

And I also enjoy like the meditation and the self-reflection part as well. I haven't been super consistent with meditation for like my whole life, but I've gone in and out of big time periods where I have done a lot of like mindfulness practice. And I think just doing that can really shift your perspective on how you view challenges and how you just see the world in general. And so, I've found that to be really a helpful tool to add to my toolkit of problem-

solving methods for life. So yeah, I think there are a lot of things about Stoicism that I really like, but I think your point is an excellent one, Anna. Like whenever you label yourself as something, then you're opening yourself up to criticism if you can't maintain it. And so, yeah, I don't think I would ever consider myself to be a Stoic, but I do sympathize with many of the ideas that are within it.

Anna: OK, Andrew, I'm gonna ask you the next rapid-fire question then. Journaling is highly regarded by the Stoics as a means of reflection and introspection, like you mentioned earlier. Have you ever kept a journal?

Andrew: Not really, I haven't ever journaled before. I've tried it a little bit like in Korean as a way to practice my Korean. I did that, not so much these days, but I have before, writing about your day in Korean. And I think it would be different doing it in English. I know that there have to be many benefits. Like so many people say that it's really beneficial. And even my wife has encouraged me because sometimes I have problems sleeping and I get a little bit of insomnia. And she said like, "Oh, what you should do is try emptying your mind onto a page before you go to sleep so that those things are off of your mind and then you can focus on sleeping." And yeah, I know these things are all good and dandy. And sometimes it's just hard to put them into practice. There are only so many hours in the day. How about you, Anna? Are you a journaler?

Anna: I am. So, I started journaling about a year ago, I would say at the end of 2022. And I've done it consistently pretty much every day, not every single day, but I have a specific journal, which is called the 6-Minute Journal. And it essentially is a quick journaling technique because one of the things with journaling for me was probably the same as with you and you guys listening as well. It's like, I don't have time to sit there and write 500 words about my day. Also, that doesn't really interest me. Whereas this one is like, OK, when you wake up, you do three things you're grateful for, how you're gonna make the day a good day, and sort of an affirmation. And then when you go to bed, it's one thing that you

could improve, one good deed that you did, and then three things that made the day great. And it could be something really silly like, oh, I saw the sun this morning, or there was a nice sunset or something like this. It doesn't have to be anything major. And I have to say, honestly, doing that consistently for nearly every day for about the past year, year and a half, it has made a difference in terms of lower anxiety, just feeling a little bit more at peace with things. So, there's definitely something in it, I think.

Andrew: That's excellent. When I, this is my cynical perspective, because I'm kind of a cynical guy, unfortunately, which is something that's not a good quality. But when I think about doing that kind of journaling, I think I would just be writing the same thing over and over again. Like I wake up in the morning, I'm grateful for having a roof over my head. I'm grateful for my wife. Do you find that you write like the same things day in and day out or?

Anna: It's a really, really good question. So yes, sometimes you find that you end up writing the same things and it kind of gives you a little bit of guidance at the beginning of the diary to say, if you find you're always writing the same thing, try to kind of think outside the box. And also, it's things that, I don't know, it doesn't have to be anything major, like a roof over your head. It could just be like, I'm really grateful that, for example, the porter that works in my building, he brings a newspaper into the building every day. And so, we can read the newspaper, which is like really nice. He doesn't have to do that. Nobody asks him to do that. He doesn't get paid for doing it. So, it's like little things like that that maybe you don't normally think about rather than the big stuff of, of course, having a roof over your head, running water, food in the fridge. So yeah, you're right. Sometimes it can be a little bit repetitive, but I think the idea is just to get you focused on something at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day that just helps, that like **bookends**, start the day well, end the day well. And that can help you have a good day and also sleep better, I think.

Andrew: Hmm, OK. You've almost convinced me. I should give it a try and see how it goes. I mean, it can't be one of those things that hurts, right? I think it's definitely gotta be

a beneficial practice. Let's move on to rapid fire question number three. This is the one that I'm really interested to ask you about, Anna, because I do feel like Stoicism is a really, well, it's like a guy philosophy. Everything that I've seen online, all of the YouTubers, the Instagram accounts, even like when I'm reading about it on Instagram or something, it seems like all the people leaving comments, they're all guys. So, I'm wondering like, why does this appeal, in your opinion, 'cause just your opinion, but like, why does it appeal so much to men and not so much to women?

Anna: It's a really, really interesting question, I was saying to you before we started the episode. I had never really thought about that before. In a way, it doesn't really make any sense because women are scientifically more neurotic than men. And what that means is on average, women have more negative emotions than men, which makes you think that actually, it would probably be more useful for women perhaps, because maybe women in general, remember I'm using in general terms here, experience more negative emotion. So, in a way, it's strange, but it could be, for example, just that this content is being pushed out to men and less so to women. So, it's kind of like that **echo chamber** of like, it just gets pushed out to the people that have a look at it. So maybe it's just that women, it doesn't access that many women's accounts, for example. I don't know, maybe that could be a part of it. I really don't know, but you're right. It is a massively male-dominated field in that sense. All the main voices are from men, but I think for me, it can help anyone, whether they're men, women, or whatever. And I actually think for women, it could be a really useful philosophy because women and men, we all have different types of stresses. Everybody has stresses, doesn't matter what gender you are. So, for me, I think it can be beneficial for everyone, but you're right, there does seem to be a little bit of an imbalance. So, I'm not really sure if that's an answer, but I don't know, maybe it's more like Stoicism appeals to like men being strong and the idea of like, I'm a tough guy and I'm the protector and I look after the family. So maybe that appeals to that element in men.

Andrew: Yeah, Anna, I am not exactly sure either, but I feel like this is like, stoicism is really closely connected with the manosphere. And the manosphere is like dude internet, where it's like hyper masculine and macho and like tough guy. Maybe it's because of his like ancient Greek roots and like Marcus Aurelius and like this idea of like, I don't know, Roman warriors or something. I don't know what it is, but a lot of the branding around it as well, if you look at like the covers of the books, they'll have like this ancient statue on it and just the coloring and the way the text is, like, I don't know, it's definitely very masculine in the way that these writers are branding their classes and their YouTube videos and their books. So, I don't know, to me personally, I think that's a little bit of a red flag whenever I see something that's like only dominated by one kind of people. And I go, ah, why isn't this like more universal? If it's supposed to be so universal, then why isn't the audience more universal? But I just thought that was an interesting observation. And yeah, if any listeners out there have an opinion to share as well, I'd be all ears because I do think that is interesting.

But I think for now we'll leave it at here. Anna, thank you for this conversation. That was a fun one. And everybody, thank you for listening and we'll continue the conversation on Discord. So please join us over there and we'll talk to you in the next episode. Goodbye.

Anna: Bye.

Andrew: That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time. Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To take a crack at something

Idiomatic verb

In the beginning of their discussion, Andrew asks Anna, "Anna, do you **wanna take a crack at it**? Do you wanna try and explain what Stoicism is for me and for our listeners as well?" This means he is asking Anna to try and take on the challenge of explaining Stoicism.

To take a crack at something means to try to do something, especially if it is difficult or you are not sure if you will succeed. It can be a task, a problem, or any activity. You might not know if you can do it well, but you will try. For example, let's say your friend is struggling with her math homework. You might not be very good at math, either, but you can offer to help by saying, "Let me take a crack at that math problem." By using the expression take a crack at it, you're emphasizing that it seems tricky and you might not succeed, but you're willing to try.

To remember this phrase, think of taking a crack at a problem or difficult task like trying to "crack" open a nut. You take a crack at it to open it and see what's inside.

Remember - don't use "crack" alone. Always say "take a crack at" followed by the activity or task. For example, "I'll take a crack at fixing the car," is correct, NOT "I'll crack the car" or "I'll take a crack fixing the car."

Similar expressions include "give it a shot," "take a stab at it," and "have a go at it."

Here are a few more examples with **to take a crack at something**:

Raymond: I can't figure out this puzzle. It's really hard.

Josie: Let me **take a crack at** it. Maybe I can help.

Raymond: Sure, give it a try!

Heather: I tried to write a poem for class, but it doesn't sound good.

Larry: I'm no poet, but I'll **take a crack at** giving you some ideas.

Heather: Okay. Thanks for your help!

Knee-jerk reaction

Noun

Neither Anna nor Andrew consider themselves to be Stoics, but they both try to apply some of the elements of this philosophy to their lives. For example, Anna says she is someone who gets angry or irritated easily. In these situations, she tries her best to take a breath and take a step back from the situation instead of having a **knee-jerk reaction** to things going wrong.

A **knee-jerk reaction** is a quick, automatic response to something without thinking about it first. We use knee-jerk reaction to describe when someone responds immediately to something, often based on emotions rather than careful thought. For example, if someone cuts you off in traffic and you immediately honk your horn at them, that's a knee-jerk reaction. If your friend accidentally spills coffee on your new shirt and you respond with anger and yell at him, that's a knee-jerk reaction.

The origin of the phrase comes from the physical reaction of your knee moving when it is hit in a certain spot by a doctor. Just like your knee moves without thinking, a knee-jerk reaction is an immediate response without thinking. To remember this expression, think about the doctor's test. When your knee is tapped, it moves right away. When you have a knee-jerk reaction, you respond and express emotion right away.

Here are a few more examples with **knee-jerk reaction**:

Emily: I saw you left the group chat right after the argument yesterday. What happened?

Tristan: It was a **knee-jerk reaction**. I felt attacked and thought leaving would avoid more conflict.

Emily: I understand, but leaving made things more confusing for everyone. I think you should re-join and explain how you felt.

Kylie: How do you manage to stay so calm under pressure, Jack?

Jack: I wasn't always so good at keeping cool. I used to have a lot of **knee-jerk reactions** whenever things went wrong.

Kylie: That's hard to believe! How did you change the way you responded to things?

Jack: I realized that reacting instantly usually just made things worse, so I started practicing taking a deep breath and thinking things through before taking any action or making any decisions.

Full-blown Adjective

In the episode, Andrew asks Anna, "Would you try practicing stoicism? You've read some books about it and you've incorporated some aspects of it into your life, but do you think you could ever go and be a **full-blown** Stoic?" Here, Andrew is asking if Anna could completely adopt Stoicism as her main philosophy.

The adjective **full-blown** means fully developed or complete. When something is full-blown, it has reached its highest level or most intense form. For instance, if someone says they have a full-blown cold, it means their cold has become very severe, not just mild sniffing or achiness. Another example is if someone has a full-blown argument, it means the argument was very intense and not just a small disagreement.

The phrase can also apply to positive situations, like a full-blown celebration, which would be a very large and complete party with all the decorations, food, and entertainment you would want.

To help remember full-blown, think of a balloon. It doesn't look like much when you start blowing air into it or when it's only half-filled. However, when it has been fully blown up, it has taken shape and is ready to go! In the same way, when something is full-blown, it has reached its complete and fullest state.

Here are a couple more examples with **full-blown**:

Zoey: Ryan, your backyard looks incredible! Did you plant all of these flowers yourself?

Ryan: Yes, I did!

Zoey: I didn't know you were such an avid gardener.

Ryan: It was just a hobby before, but ever since I started working remote and have more time on my hands, it's become a **full-blown** passion. I want to plant a vegetable garden next.

Bob: Oh god, my head hurts so bad.

Isabella: Bob, you look terrible. You should get in bed right away. I think your cold has turned into a **full-blown** case of the flu.

Bob: I think you're right. I haven't felt this sick in years.

Silver lining

Noun

Andrew talks about a Warren Buffett quote he likes about finding opportunities in difficult situations. Andrew says, "when things seem bad, you can try and find some opportunity. There's some **silver lining**."

The expression **silver lining** refers to the idea that even in dark or difficult times, there is something positive or hopeful. You use silver lining when you want to say that there is a good side to a bad situation. For example, let's say you lose your job. The silver lining of losing your job might be that you get to spend more time with your kids and focus on your hobbies. The COVID-19 pandemic was a terrible time for everyone in 2020, but the silver lining may be the lasting rise in remote work opportunities. Focusing on the silver lining helps you stay positive even when things are not going well.

The origin of this comes from the saying, "Every cloud has a silver lining." This means that the sun is always shining behind the clouds on stormy days and will return eventually. This visual image helps people remember that there is always some light or hope, even in dark times.

Similar expressions include "blessing in disguise" and "bright side."

Here are a couple more examples with **silver lining**:

Aaron: I lost my job today. I don't know what to do.

Nancy: I'm really sorry to hear that. But look on the bright side! Maybe the **silver lining** is that you can now find a job that makes you happier.

Aaron: That's true, I have been wanting to explore new career paths.

Nancy: Exactly! This could be the perfect opportunity to start something new.

Rebecca: I can't believe our flight got delayed by ten hours. This is so frustrating.

Oliver: I know, it sucks, but listen. **Every cloud has a silver lining**. We're gonna get home way later than we wanted, but now we can spend another afternoon exploring Chicago!

Rebecca: I guess you're right. Let's go check out Lakeshore Drive since we didn't get to see it earlier this week!

To bookend something

Verb

Anna explains her journaling practice to Andrew. She says that she writes a short entry in the morning about three things she's grateful for and how she's going to make the day a good day. When she goes to bed, she writes one thing she could have improved, one good deed she did, and then three things that made the day great. This journaling practice **bookends** her day with positivity and sense of completion.

The verb to bookend something means to mark the beginning and/or the end of an activity, time period, or event. For example, you might start and end your day with a short walk. The first walk signifies the start of the day, and the second walk signifies the end of the day. You're bookending your day with short walks, giving it a sense of structure and completion.

Another example could be bookending your workout with stretches. Incorporating slow warm-ups and cool-downs at the beginning and end of your high-intensity exercise will give it a natural sense of flow, as opposed to jumping right into difficult exercise and immediately stopping.

The origin of the phrase comes from objects called bookends, which are supports placed at either end of a row of books to keep them in place. Just like bookends provide structure and support to a row of books, bookending a period of time or activity makes it have definitive structure and feel balanced.

Here are a few more examples with **to bookend something**:

Jennifer: I'm not getting any engagement on my blog. I don't know what I'm doing wrong! How can I make my blog posts more engaging?

Carl: You should try **bookending** your posts with a strong hook at the beginning and a call to action at the end. That way you can grab your readers' attention and encourage them to interact.

Barry: Sometimes I feel really awkward ending lessons with my students and I don't know how to conclude our session together.

Diana: My strategy to make starting and ending class feel less abrupt is **bookending** my lessons with recaps and previews. At the beginning, I summarize what we went over last time. At the end, I recap today's lesson content and give a preview of what we'll learn next time.

Echo chamber

Noun

At the end of the episode, Andrew and Anna ponder why Stoicism seems to be such a male-dominated philosophy. Anna suggests that it might be because of the way social media works as an **echo chamber** – she hypothesizes that maybe Stoic content gets pushed to guys who look it up or click on related content once, but it rarely gets shown to women as a potential target audience in the first place.

An **echo chamber** is a situation where people only hear or see opinions that match their own, which makes them believe those opinions are more common than they actually are. For example, if you only watch news channels or follow social media accounts that share your views, you are in an echo chamber. This can make you think that everyone thinks the same way you do or that your opinion is absolutely correct, even if that's not true.

The origin of the phrase comes from the idea of an echo, where a sound bounces back to you in a closed space. In the same way, an echo chamber in media or social circles means hearing your own ideas repeated back to you. To remember this expression, think of shouting into a cave and hearing your voice echo back. Just like the cave repeats your voice, an echo chamber repeats your ideas.

Similar expressions include "closed loop," "bubble," and "feedback loop."

Here are a couple more examples with **echo chamber**:

Nicholas: Our marketing team thinks our campaign idea is perfect, but I'm worried we might be too confident.

Teresa: We should avoid becoming an **echo chamber**. Let's get feedback from other departments and some external consultants.

Nicholas: Good plan. We need to ensure we're considering all potential flaws and improvements.

Violet: The media keeps talking about Trump and Biden's age and that everyone is concerned about it. But sometimes I wonder if it's just the result of being in an **echo chamber** and it's not actually that big of a concern for most Americans.

Zack: That's an interesting thought. I get the impression that it's a big issue for voters, but maybe that's just because I keep seeing headlines and memes about it. Maybe we should see if there are any reliable polls about it.

Quiz

- 1. When someone talks about a "silver lining," what are they referring to?**
 - a) A type of jewelry
 - b) A positive aspect to a negative situation
 - c) A situation where only similar opinions are shared and repeated
 - d) A type of fabric

- 2. If you have a knee-jerk reaction to criticism, what might you do?**
 - a) Immediately defend yourself without thinking
 - b) Think carefully before responding
 - c) Stay silent and consider the feedback
 - d) Ignore the criticism completely

- 3. Which of the following best illustrates a "full-blown" scenario?**
 - a) A minor disagreement
 - b) A newly started hobby
 - c) A partially completed project
 - d) A big and dangerous hurricane

- 4. What does it mean if your vacation is bookended by stays in the same city?**
 - a) You visit the city only in the middle of your vacation
 - b) You start and end your vacation in that city
 - c) You avoid the city completely
 - d) You only pass through the city quickly

- 5. Which of the following is a good synonym for "take a crack at something?"**
 - a) To ignore
 - b) To give up
 - c) To make an attempt
 - d) To complete easily

Listening Comprehension Quiz

- 6) What does a “stoic person” mean?
- 7) What are the four key principles of the philosophy of Stoicism?
- 8) What parallels does Andrew notice between Stoicism and organized religion?
- 9) What technique does Anna use to help her not become so angry when things go wrong?
- 10) What is the Warren Buffett quote that Andrew shares toward the end of the episode?

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe in any of the principles of Stoicism? Which aspects of Stoicism do you find most appealing after listening to this episode?
2. Can you think of a time when you had a **knee-jerk reaction**? How did it affect the situation, and what did you learn from it?
3. Are you someone who always tries to find the **silver lining** to a situation? Do you think this is a good way to look at difficult situations and get through them?
4. Do you agree with the idea that viewing challenges as opportunities can lead to personal growth? Can you share an experience where this mindset helped you?
5. How do you think we should try to avoid getting stuck in an **echo chamber** on social media and in our social lives?

Quiz Answers

1.b 2.a 3.d 4.b 5.c

6. A stoic person is someone who doesn't display much emotion. It's like almost like they look like a statue. Something could be exciting right for this person, but they have no reaction at all - no smile and no emotion on their face.

7. Focus on what you can control, virtue is the highest good, view challenges as opportunities, and be mindful and focus on self-reflection.

8. Andrew thinks they both share principles you can follow to lead a fulfilling and virtuous life. He also thinks there is an element of community – with church, for example, there's always a social activity every Sunday afternoon and you attend church and see your friends and neighbors regularly. With Stoicism, there's also an online community, like on Reddit forum, different social media pages, and YouTube channels where people can discuss it and practice together.

9. Anna's go-to technique is taking deep breaths. She takes a breath and reminds herself that there's no point getting angry. There's nothing she can do about it. She might as well try and find something else to do or try and see if there's some way that she could fix the situation instead of getting angry.

10. "Be fearful when others are greedy and be greedy when others are fearful."

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