

## Stoicism Today

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### [Intro music]

**Weber:** Welcome, everyone, to a special short edition of Philosophy Bakes Bread, which we call a breadcrumb.

**Cashio:** Crumble, crumble. Philosophy Bakes Bread is a production of SOPHIA, the Society of Philosophers in America. In our breadcrumb episodes, we include snippets from past episodes or more substantive responses to your feedback that we receive on Twitter, Facebook, or by email at PhilosophyBakesBread@gmail.com.

**Weber:** That's right. We've got another breadcrumb episode for you, this time around with Dr. Greg Sadler, who spoke with us on episode 38, where we dubbed him the YouTube Philosopher.

**Cashio:** The YouTube Philosopher. Something else Greg does, and we didn't get a chance to talk to in the episode, was is he is the editor of Stoicism Today. I really like the work that they're doing over there, so I thought it'd be great to sit down and talk with him about what is Stoicism Today.

**Sadler:** Stoicism Today used to be the name of what's now the Modern Stoicism Organization. It started out in 2012 as a bunch of philosophers and psychotherapists and few other people getting together over in England, and trying to see whether Stoicism could be adapted for a lot of modern uses. It's grown just massively over the last few years. Stoicism Today is the blog, and it's almost like a journal at this point, of the organization. We put out a post every week at least, sometimes twice a week, so over 50 a year.

**Sadler:** The Modern Stoicism Organization is kind of the umbrella under which all these things fall. Stoicism Today as the blog, the Stoic Week class, which happens in October this year. Originally, it was called Live Like a Stoic, and that's the whole purpose of the class, for people to try it out, try out some practices, some self-observation, to get together with other people. Then,

one of the other really big things that we've got going on is the Stoicon Conference, which this year is in Toronto.

**Weber:** Stoicon?

**Sadler:** Yeah.

**Weber:** That's awesome.

**Sadler:** It's the largest gathering of Stoics and people interested in Stoicism in the world. Last year, we had about 330 attendees, and I think this year, we're on track to have about 400. Then, sort of like TED has TEDx, we also sponsor Stoicon-x conferences in other places. So right now, there's three lined up. One in Brisbane, Australia, one in London, and then a follow-up in Toronto. There may be another one in Colombia that's getting put together.

**Weber:** Colombia, the city or the country?

**Cashio:** It's a big, global thing.

**Sadler:** The country.

**Cashio:** Oh, wow.

**Sadler:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. It's all over the world, people are involved with this. It's actually kind of ... One of my side projects is trying to get a handle on exactly what's being done in each country, and so I've got a giant spreadsheet of contacts and people that say they're doing this and that. It's just a massive ... Stoicism, more than any of the other ancient philosophies, has really caught on among working professionals, among ordinary people. The Stoicism Reddit, I think at this point, has over 70,000 members. The Facebook group, I think, has recently passed 30,000. So, there's a huge interest in this, and there's a lot of new literature coming out adapting this. I'm actually working on a book on the notion of life in accordance with nature and what that means. A little side project because I'm supposed to be working on a book on Stoicism and anger, but I put that on hold for a little bit.

**Weber:** Now, Greg, we've talked about Stoicism quite a few times on this show. Nevertheless, for all you know, someone might listen to this episode first among all of our episodes so far, and so the natural question we have to ask is, "Wait, wait, wait, wait. What exactly is Stoicism?"

**Sadler:** Yeah. So, Stoicism is one of the great philosophical schools coming out of Ancient Greece and Rome. There's been a number of attempts to try to encapsulate, in one sentence, what Stoicism is. So, I'll actually give you three of them. One is that notion of living in accordance with nature, but then that has to be unpacked. Another is the idea that moral virtue is the only true good and that all the other things should be made lesser priorities in accordance with that.

**Sadler:** Then, the third one would be, and this comes from Epictetus, this notion of distinguishing between what is in our control and what's not in our control and applying that consistently. All of them are oriented towards living a life of genuine freedom and flourishing, so it's a complex philosophical approach to things that takes in all aspects of the human being. It's

been reinterpreted in contemporary times to try to apply it to modern problems and to rethink some of the core notions in light of new developments that we've come across.

**Weber:** Awesome. So, when you say that the thing-

**Cashio:** That's really great.

**Weber:** ... we should focus on is virtue rather than ... other things aren't so important as virtue, what are you contrasting that with and what does virtue mean? What do you mean by this? To someone who's not very initiated. When we should focus on moral virtue instead of other things, what are the other things and what's moral virtue?

**Sadler:** Yeah, so let's start with what moral virtue is. So, the Stoics distinguish the same cardinal virtues as Plato did. Justice, which includes benevolence as well, being good to people; courage, or resilience in certain respects; temperance, or self-control over our desires for bodily pleasures; and then, practical wisdom. Those are all character traits, and those are things that we can develop. So, the Stoics viewed developing those and building the kind of character that would be able to do those consistently as what's most important in life, and is what is going to make us happy and render us free. So, what would we contrast that with? Think about consumerism, this endless desire for more and more possessions, for having the latest iPhone, for buying, buying, buying and piling up a bunch of possessions. That would be one-

**Weber:** Mansions and cars and so on?

**Sadler:** Yeah, yeah. Then, also-

**Cashio:** You gotta have the newest iPhone. What else-

**Weber:** Yeah, right.

**Sadler:** Well, I don't, but ... I'm still working with a 5. It's small, but it does the trick. I want to say one thing too. Stoicism is not simply saying, "Get rid of all of that," but it's a matter of prioritization. So, you can be a CEO over a corporation and be a Stoic. You'd live a very different way than most of the other CEOs and you would probably treat your workers a lot better, too, than many. And all the other stakeholders too. Another thing we can contrast the good of virtue against would be, say, social prestige or positions. A lot of people spend much of their time trying to pursue those sorts of things. You might say, "Well, wait. What about relationships and stuff like that?" All of those can be understood in terms of the virtues and living a full life.

**Sadler:** So, the Stoics like to contrast themselves. Back in ancient times, they didn't have all these other people that we do. They contrasted themselves primarily against the Epicureans, who taught that pleasure was the primary good. They said, "Well, pleasure's nice, but it's not as good as a life of virtue." They also contrasted themselves against the Aristotelians. I'm actually a huge fan of Aristotle, and here I waver a bit back and forth. The Aristotelians thought, "It's not just virtue and virtuous activity, but you also need some level of external goods. You can't be destitute and be happy." The Stoics said, "No, you could actually be destitute and be still fulfilling your duties, living a life that's free in the most important respects." So, they were hardliners on that. I think contemporary Stoicism is all over the map when it comes to that.

**Cashio:** Right. So, I'm a really big fan of the work you guys have been doing, and whenever I teach ancient philosophy, I always have my students, or encourage them to, participate in Stoic Week, which is ... I think it's a really great way for someone who doesn't really know much about Stoicism to not only just study what they taught, but also sort of to live and-

**Sadler:** To apply it.

**Cashio:** ... to begin to think like a Stoic. Yeah, to apply it. So, maybe, could you say a few words to our listeners about what that is and maybe how they could participate in it?

**Sadler:** Sure, yeah. It's coming up this year, in October, from the 16th, which is a Monday, to the 22nd, which is a Sunday. Each day, there's some readings, some exercises, there's actually a class that you can enroll in. If you look in Meetup, you'll often find a lot of Stoic meetups in major cities, so you can do it with other people. A lot of colleges and universities will be doing it as well. That communal aspect is kind of nice. So, the way to sign up for it ... I mean, just watch Stoicism Today and we'll have the links for it. We're hosting it now in Teachable, most likely. We're actually getting the prep ready for it.

**Weber:** What's that?

**Sadler:** It's a platform for hosting online classes. People can create accounts very easily, you just enter an email. We've hosted it using other things in the past, so we change every so often. I should mention, when I say we, I mean the Modern Stoicism steering committee, which consists of 10 of us. Donald Robertson, who's written a few books on Stoicism and on cognitive behavior therapy, he's the one who actually takes the lead on the Stoic Week class and on a class he's got running right now, the four-week Stoic Mindfulness and Resilience Training class. But the rest of us all contribute in one way or another.

**Weber:** That's awesome, Greg. Listen, is there a website where people can go learn more?

**Sadler:** Yeah. ModernStoicism.com, that's the umbrella for all the other things that we're doing.

**Weber:** Awesome. Check it out, folks.

**Weber:** One more thing worth mentioning is that in the recording of our episode, we had a moment in which I didn't want to get Greg's title wrong, and so I got a little playful with it, and afterwards, we had a few chuckles. So, I'll play it for you, the exit where I mention Greg and his title, and then I'll play for you the part that got cut out, which was us laughing a little bit about the way I was being playful.

**Weber:** Thanks everyone for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Eric Weber with my cohost Anthony Cashio, and we've been talking with Greg Sadler, the YouTube Philosopher and the President, CEO, and Chief Lord over ReasonIO.com. Go check it out, it's really awesome. We're gonna come back with one more segment after a short break.

**Weber:** I didn't want to mess up your title, so I thought I'd just-

**Cashio:** [crosstalk 00:12:12] just reciting, chief-

**Sadler:** Did you say Chief Lord?

**Cashio:** CEO, Chief Lord. CEO, CL. When someone asks you, you just say, "Chief Lord. What else would it be?"

**Weber:** I didn't want to get your title wrong, so I thought I'd just be playful with it.

**Cashio:** All right. Well, I've enjoyed this. I hope everyone has also enjoyed this little breadcrumb. Little breadcrumb. Crumble, crumble.

**Weber:** Yeah, thank you so much for joining us again, Greg.

**Sadler:** Sure, yeah. I'm always happy to talk about the modern Stoic movement.

**Weber:** Awesome. Well, remember everyone, that you can call us and leave a short recorded message with a question or a comment that we may be able to play on the show at 859-257-1849, 859-257-1849. You can also reach us on Twitter, Facebook, or by email. For any of that information, visit us online at [PhilosophyBakesBread.com](http://PhilosophyBakesBread.com).

**Cashio:** This has been Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber speaking today with Greg Sadler. This has been Philosophy Bakes Bread, food for thought about life and leadership.

**[Outro music]**

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