

Stoic Mindfulness & Resilience Training (SMRT) 2014

Report by Donald Robertson

Summary

This report provides a brief description of the Stoic Mindfulness and Resilience Training (SMRT) online course, which started on 19th May 2014 and ran for four weeks. Just over 500 people took part in the course, which involved reading lessons, listening to audio recordings, practising daily meditation techniques, and online discussion of concepts derived from ancient Stoic literature. Preliminary data are reported without tests of statistical significance, based on comparisons between the means for all participants pre-study and means for completers post-study. Completion rate was 31%. Improvements were found on the Satisfaction with Life Scale (27%), scale of *positive* emotions (SPANE_P, 16%), scale of *negative* emotions (SPANE_N, -22.7%), and Flourishing Scale (17%). These all show improvements over Stoic Week 2012 and 2013, which is probably to be expected as this study was four weeks long, as opposed to one week, and participation was more carefully controlled.

Description of Course

The course was designed and maintained by Donald Robertson, based in Canada, who wrote the content, developed the website, and acted as facilitator during the course, on behalf of the Stoicism Today group led by Prof. Chris Gill at Exeter University. The course was intended as a more carefully-controlled follow-up to the work done in Stoic Week 2013. Stoic Week consisted of a PDF handbook containing psychological exercises that anyone could download. This led to very high numbers of participants ($n > 2,400$) but also high attrition rates, which is unfortunately to be expected in elearning. The Modern Stoicism site was created to provide a more controlled environment for elearning, which would allow us to track the progress of participants more carefully and reduce drop-out rates, as well as providing more features for course construction. These two approaches arguably fulfil two distinct but important roles:

1. **Ebook (PDF or EPUB).** A very open course that doesn't require a login and mainly takes the form of a downloadable ebook (PDF) can be used to engage a very large number of people very easily. Ebooks are also usable more easily on a wider range of devices, and can simply be circulated by email.
2. **Elearning website.** A structured elearning course, placed behind a login, provides more control and is probably better for producing statistical research on the *effects* of training - it will attract smaller numbers but achieve higher completion rates because participants are typically more committed and can be screened to some extent for suitability.

At the moment, our research would best be described as consisting of several "pilot studies", which lack the rigor of a fully-fledged empirical research study in the field of psychology. However, we do appear to have achieved the following:

1. We've established the *feasibility* of carrying out research on the *effects* of Stoic psychological practices in this way, as well as measuring *correlations* between Stoic attitudes and other traits.
2. We've built the *foundation* of future studies by developing suitable resources.
3. Our pilot studies do provide data which, within its limitations, can be taken as suggesting that Stoic practices have a, perhaps substantial, *statistically quantifiable effect* on established measures of mood and wellbeing.
4. We've also been exceptionally successful in terms of our goal of public engagement, as this and prior events have introduced thousands of people in the UK and around the world to the Stoic literature and its potential value as a philosophy of life in the modern world.

What is Stoicism?

Stoicism is an ancient school of philosophy, founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium around 300BC. It flourished in Rome, particularly during the Imperial period, and the last famous Stoic we know much about is the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who died in 180AD. So we can describe it as a living philosophical tradition that spanned nearly 500 years. Stoicism was renowned for its emphasis on philosophy as a way of life and hence the word “stoical” (with a small s) has become a synonym for emotional resilience. Indeed, the Stoics provided many concepts and techniques, integrated within a coherent philosophical system, which claim to be capable of contributing to psychological wellbeing. Stoic philosophy has been cited, by its two main pioneers Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis, as the main philosophical inspiration for the dominant modality of modern evidence-based psychological therapy: cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). The similarity in concepts and techniques between ancient Stoicism and modern CBT has been explored in detail in a number of recent publications and in the work of the Stoicism Today team. Although CBT is a psychological therapy, focused on the treatment of mental health conditions, it is also widely applied with the non-clinical population, e.g., in the form of stress management and psychological resilience-training programmes. Ancient Stoicism, in fact, was predominantly used in a more *preventative* fashion, as a means of building psychological resilience. Nevertheless, it was also used *therapeutically*, as a means of coping with adversity, or a remedy for suffering. Examples can be found in the Stoic consolation letters of Seneca and others, which typically seek to assuage the distress caused by bereavement and other stressful life events, *after* they have happened and individuals have fallen into anxiety or depression as a result.

Psychological resilience-building, typically based on CBT, has often been viewed as closely-related to positive psychology and the development of improved mood and wellbeing in the general population. Our research focused on the use of Stoicism as a short-term intervention with a non-clinical population, and is therefore best viewed in terms of its post-study effect upon measures of mood and wellbeing. However, it’s possible that a positive effect in this regard may also have an impact on general psychological resilience and long-term follow-up measures of psychological wellbeing.

Technical Specifications

The Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) was used to provide a web-based platform for the course. Moodle is a free software platform, widely used in education to provide online courses. A new Moodle site using the domain name modernstoicism.com was created for this project, and is retained as an asset of the Stoicism Today group. The site can host other elearning courses and is likely to be re-used in the future in various ways.

The elearning website approach is somewhat closer to the requirements of a conventional psychological treatment outcome study, for example. The web address for the Modern Stoicism website is:

<http://modernstoicism.com>

The main website for the Stoicism Today group, and its programme of events and research is a blog hosted by Exeter University:

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/>

The lesson content has subsequently been made available as a downloadable PDF file from the Stoicism Today blog.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using the network of contacts built up during previous Stoicism Today projects. These include social media networks and other resources. For example, the team own and manage the following social networking groups and websites:

- Stoicism Facebook Group: 3,225 members
- @Stoicweek on Twitter: 2,440 followers
- Stoicism Google+ group: 518 members
- Stoicism Today blog: 899 subscribers
- Modern Stoicism Moodle site: 1,056 users

There appears to be considerable overlap between these groups. Nevertheless, it's likely that collectively they provide access to approximately 5,000 individuals who have an interest in the Stoicism Today group and its activities. These numbers are continually increasing and provide a convenient way to recruit participants for future research studies and events.

An obvious criticism of this method of recruitment is that the sample are not random or representative of the general population, having already expressed an interest in Stoicism. It's possible that Stoicism may be of value only to people who are open to embracing its concepts and values. However, there appear to be a reasonably large number of people who are interested in adopting Stoicism as a philosophy of life. What this project sought to show was that a course could be constructed which encouraged participants to adopt an open-minded and experimental attitude to Stoic ideas and practices. For example, they were encouraged to engage in a process of "values clarification" or reflecting on their own core values, and to compare these to traditional Stoic Ethics, rather than simply being *prescribed* Stoic values to adopt. Feedback from the study suggests this is a feasible approach and that a similar method could perhaps be employed with a random sample of people who are not necessarily familiar with Stoic philosophy or in prior agreement with its principles. Future research could potentially be carried out in this area.

Course Structure

The course consisted of four main sections, containing lessons on different themes, to be read at the start of the corresponding weeks. There were also brief "preliminary" and "postscript" sections, holding information about registering for the course, and what to do next, after it had finished. The course sections on the web site read as follows:

1. Preliminary
2. Week 1: Orientation and basics
3. Week 2: Stoic Virtues
4. Week 3: Stoic Mindfulness
5. Week 4: Stoic Resilience
6. Postscript: What Next?

Each lesson consisted of text to be read on the first day of the week, with questions to be contemplated and discussed and descriptions of exercises to be practised daily during the rest of the week. There were also audio recordings to be listened to daily, containing Stoic-themed meditation exercises. Participants were required to take part in an online discussion forum with a separate topic for each week. There were 1,099 posts to the discussion forum in total, during the course, demonstrating a good level of engagement by participants. Weekly live chat sessions were arranged, partly for troubleshooting and to gather feedback during the course. We used Google Hangouts but this struggled with the volume of activity from up to 100 participants

at the same time. An alternative live chat platform should be identified for the future, perhaps. Transcripts of the live discussions with participants were automatically generated and published as PDF files on the course web page, for those unable to attend to download and read later.

Findings

Response-Rate Statistics

Approximately, 580 people enrolled on the course. A few people (<10) enrolled and then removed themselves toward the start of the course. However, it's unlikely, as with most online courses, that all the enrolled participants actually took part in the course. It's common for people to self-enrol out of curiosity and then to leave a course if they don't feel they have time to complete it.

A much better indication of the number of participants can be derived from the number of people who completed the initial questionnaires, which were required as the first stage of participation. The number of people completing each form at the start of the course was as follows:

Pre-Study Responses

Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours Scale (SABS): 526

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS): 510

Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE): 504

Flourishing Scale (FS): 516

These figures exclude a small number of participants (<6) who contacted me to explain that they had submitted the initial forms and immediately withdrew, for various reasons, without participating in any of the course. As can be seen from the figures, some participants completed some but not all of the forms, perhaps out of curiosity. I've excluded participants who did not submit a complete set of pre-study questionnaires. So these figures suggest that approximately 504 people actually participated in the course, which would be approximately 87% of those who initially enrolled.

Completion rates for end-of-study questionnaires in online courses are normally considerably lower because of the common problem with attrition rates in this type of activity. Some online courses report completion rates of as low as 10-20%. We put considerable effort into trying to reduce drop-outs, though, by emphasising the commitment required from the outset very clearly and encouraging students to stay in touch via the forums and live chats, or to contact the facilitator for support. As a result, completion rates were better than might have been expected for a course of this kind, judged by the number of people submitting end-of-study questionnaires, as follows:

Post-Study Responses

Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours Scale (SABS): 175 (33.26%)

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS): 161 (31.57%)

Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE): 162 (32.14%)

Flourishing Scale (FS): 165 (31.98%)

So if we count only those who completed all four questionnaires, the completion rate appears to be 31.5%. Almost a third of participants completed the course and submitted a full set of pre and post-study questionnaires, in other words.

Data from Measures

A large volume of data was collected which may be analysed in more detail at a future date, e.g., using tests for statistical significance. However, for the time being we're able to report some basic observations on the data.

SABS

526 initial responses were received. These following statistics have been extracted from these questionnaires:

Gender

Female: 106

Male: 414

Other / prefer not to say: 6

Age group

20 years or younger: 20

21-30 years old: 160

31-40 years old: 140

41-50: 118

51-60: 57

61-70: 20

71+: 5

Prefer not to say: 6

That means 79% of participants this time were male and only 20% female. By comparison, 51.5% of participants in Stoic Week 2013 were male, and 48.5% were female. It's not clear why there were fewer female participants this time.

The following were the mean scores from all participants (in brackets) in response to specific questions about Stoic attitudes and behaviours, before and after the course (before / after).

Responses range from 1 Strongly disagree to 7 Strongly agree.

6. As long as you have the right attitude, you can lead a good life even in the worst of conditions, such as being tortured or being held prisoner. (5.3 / 6.0)
7. It doesn't really matter what other people think about me as long as I do the right thing. (5.7 / 6.3)
8. It can sometimes be a good thing to get angry when people are really rude, selfish or inconsiderate. (3.7 / 2.7)
9. It's more important to feel good than to do good. (2.6 / 2.2)
10. Peace of mind comes from abandoning fears and desires about things outside our control. (6.2 / 6.5)
11. If bad things happen to you, you are bound to feel upset. (3.9 / 2.9)
12. The only things truly under our control in life are our judgements and voluntary actions. (6.0 / 6.5)
13. Virtue (or human excellence) consists in perfecting our rational nature, through cultivating wisdom. (5.6 / 6.2)
14. There's no overall plan to the universe. (4.8 / 4.6)
15. To flourish as a human being all you need is rationality and a good character; things like money, status, health and good luck are not essential. (5.0 / 6.0)
16. I consider myself to be a part of the human race, in the same way that a limb is a part of the human body. It is my duty to contribute to its welfare. (5.4 / 6.0)
17. The cosmos is a single, wise, living thing. (3.8 / 4.4)
18. I try to anticipate future misfortunes and rehearse rising above them. (4.6 / 5.7)
19. I often contemplate the smallness and transience of human life in relation to the totality of space and time. (5.2 / 5.8)
20. If I was honest I'd have to admit that I often do what is enjoyable and comfortable rather than what I believe to be the right thing. (4.8 / 4.1)

21. I try to contemplate what the ideal wise and good person would do when faced with various misfortunes in life. (4.7 / 5.8)
22. I make an effort to pay continual attention to the nature of my judgments and actions. (5.0 / 6.1)
23. I spend quite a lot of time dwelling on what's gone wrong in the past or worrying about the future. (4.7 / 3.2)
24. When an upsetting thought enters my mind the first thing I do is remind myself it's just an impression in my mind and not the thing it claims to represent. (3.9 / 5.6)
25. I know quite a lot about Stoicism. (4.0 / 5.3)
26. My way of looking at life is very Stoic. (4.2 / 5.5)
27. I act like a good Stoic would most of the time. (3.5 / 4.8)

What these data suggest is that among those completing the course, attitudes and behaviours were generally more in alignment with those traditionally associated with Stoicism, than they were among the larger sample who enrolled on the study. These figures don't tell us the direction of causation. It may be that people with certain attitudes or behaviours were more likely to complete the course, or that completing the course affected their scores.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

Responses range from 1 Strongly disagree to 7 Strongly agree. Scores are shown in brackets (before / after) the course.

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal. (3.8 / 4.9) [Difference: 1.1 or 29%]
2. The conditions of my life are excellent. (4.5 / 5.4) [Difference: 0.9 or 20%]
3. So far I have got the important things I want in life. (4.4 / 5.3) [Difference: 0.9 or 20%]
4. I am satisfied with my life. (4.1 / 5.3) [Difference: 1.2 or 29%]
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. (3.4 / 4.6) [Difference: 1.2 or 35%]

Overall, total scores on this measure can range from 7 to 35 the mean total score for all respondents prior to the study was 20.1, and after the study this increased to 25.5. That equates, approximately, to a 27% increase in Satisfaction with Life, following the study. Stoic Week 2013, by comparison, reported a 17% increase on this measure, and Stoic Week 2012 reported a 15% increase, although those figures excluded non-completers.

The three items (two tied) which appear to show the biggest increase were:

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal. (+29%)
4. I am satisfied with my life. (+29%)
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. (+35%)

In both Stoic Week 2012 and 2013, by comparison, the following two items showed the largest increase on this measure:

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal. (+18%)
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. (+17%)

In all three sets of data, therefore, item five ("If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.") was consistently one of the items on this scale most impacted by the training. This may be linked to the Stoic emphasis on accepting the past as beyond our control to change.

Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE)

Scores range from 1 to 5. Scores shown in brackets (before / after) the course. There were 504 questionnaires returned prior to the course, and 162 after the course.

2. Positive (3.6 / 4.2) [Difference: 0.6]
3. Negative (3.1 / 2.3) [Difference: -0.8]
4. Good (3.7 / 4.2) [Difference: 0.5]
5. Bad (2.6 / 2.1) [Difference: -0.5]
6. Pleasant (3.7 / 4.1) [Difference: 0.4]
7. Unpleasant (2.7 / 2.1) [Difference: -0.6]
8. Happy (3.5 / 4.0) [Difference: 0.5]
9. Sad (2.8 / 2.0) [Difference: -0.8]

10. Afraid (2.6 / 2.0) [Difference: -0.6]
11. Joyful (3.1 / 3.6) [Difference: 0.5]
12. Angry (2.6 / 2.0) [Difference: -0.6]
13. Contented (3.2 / 4.0) [Difference: 0.8]

SPANE_P: (20.7 / 24.1)
SPANE_N: (16.3 / 12.6)
SPANE_B: (4.4 / 11.6)
Total: (30.7 / 36.7)

SPANE_B provides a measure of the balance of positive and negative experiences. Higher is better. The mean of the pre-study measures was 4.4, which increased to 11.6 among those completing the study. That's an increase of 160%.

On SPANE_P, which shows the change in positive emotions, Stoic Week 2013 reported a 9% *increase*, whereas there was a 5% increase found in Stoic Week 2012. The current data, by comparison, suggest a 16% increase on this measure.

On SPANE_N, which shows the change in negative emotions, Stoic Week 2013 reported an 11% *decrease*, similar to the 12% decrease found in Stoic Week 2012. The current data, by comparison, suggest a 22.7% decrease on this measure.

The emotions which appear to have *increased* most in this study were feelings of being "Positive" and "Contented". The emotions which *decreased* most were those labelled as feeling "Negative" and "Sad".

Flourishing Scale (FS)

Scores range from 1 to 7. Scores shown in brackets (before / after) the course. There were 516 questionnaires returned prior to the course, and 165 after the course.

1. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life. (4.5 / 5.6) [Difference: 1.1 or 24%]
2. My social relationships are supportive and rewarding. (4.6 / 5.4) [Difference: 0.8 or 17%]
3. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities. (4.8 / 5.7) [Difference: 0.9 or 19%]
4. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others. (4.7 / 5.7) [Difference: 1.0 or 21%]
5. I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me. (5.3 / 5.8) [Difference: 0.5 or 9%]
6. I am a good person and live a good life. (5.0 / 5.7) [Difference: 0.7 or 14%]
7. I am optimistic about my future. (4.9 / 5.8) [Difference: 0.9 or 18%]
8. People respect me. (4.9 / 5.5) [Difference: 0.6 or 12%]

Total: (38.7 / 45.2)

The mean total score increased from 38.7 among the pre-study group to 45.2 among those completing the course. That's an increase of approximately 17%. Stoic Week 2013 reported a 9% increase on this measure, and Stoic Week 2012 reported a 10% increase.

The two individual items that changed most were:

4. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others. (+21%)
1. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life (+24%)

By comparison, Stoic Week 2013 reported the biggest impact (increase) on these items on the same measure:

7. I am optimistic about my future (+18%)
1. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life (+10%)

Course Evaluation

Participants were asked to complete an overall evaluation form, providing their feedback on the experience, at the end of the course. This was kept brief because the participants had so many other forms to complete and

we wanted to maximise the response rate. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with three statements on a Likert scale from 1=Complete Disagree to 5=Completely Agree. They were also asked for general comments

Quantitative Data

A typical format for evaluation of elearning course was employed that asked students to rate their level of agreement across three areas: clarity, impact, and feasibility of the training materials. The questions are shown below, along with the mean scores from all respondents (n=128).

1. **(Clarity)** The course material was clearly-worded and easy to understand.
Mean: 4.6, Range: 3-5
2. **(Impact)** This course material seems helpful as a way of developing Stoic attitudes and behaviours.
Mean: 4.6, Range: 1-5
3. **(Feasibility)** The course material worked on my computer and I was able to access it properly.
Mean: 4.7, Range: 2-5

Qualitative Feedback

General feedback and comments were elicited with the question: "What do you think the main strengths and weaknesses of the course are?" A complete record of participant responses is provided in the appendix. Some of the feedback showed that individual participants found the course to be of great personal value. For example:

I am in my mid seventies, therefore, come late in my life to this way of thinking. All i can say that it is a life-changing experience. and i like to thank in particular Donald Robertson, and whoever else was involved in putting this Course together, to give us this marvellous opportunity to be introduced to Stoicism, which i will continue to learn from.

The most frequently-mentioned themes extracted from the feedback (with the approximate number of times explicitly mentioned) were as follows:

1. Overall, the most frequently-mentioned piece of feedback (n=18) was that people found the audio recordings beneficial or enjoyable, and valued their inclusion.
2. Some participants found the large volume of posts from others in the discussion forums to be overwhelming, or too unfocused, or that they were uncomfortable engaging in online discussion themselves (n=16). Although, others reported finding the forums helpful. Eight people mentioned the possibility of splitting participants into smaller sub-groups for discussion, which was something we discussed at the start of the course but did not have time to implement.
3. Some participants (n=6) reported struggling to find time to follow the course reading or exercises, either due to challenging life events or other ongoing commitments. This is very common feedback with online courses in general.
4. Some participants (n=8) said they would have liked the course to last longer than four weeks. Perhaps related to this, some said they felt it would probably take more time for the full benefits to become apparent (n=5).
5. Several participants (n=8) mentioned finding the course material helpful in coping with specific life events that arose during the course itself.
6. Although a bullet-point summary of the exercises to be done was included at the start of each week's lesson, and a reminder was sent out to all participants by email, some (n=5) said they needed more guidance in the form of a summary. (These participants may simply have overlooked the summary in the course contents or possibly didn't receive the email reminders.)

7. Several participants (n=6) said they felt it would be better if the “week” started on Sunday rather than Monday, to give them more time to complete preparatory reading before going to work, etc. (That makes sense and would be easy to implement.)
8. Some participants (n=8) mention technical issues such as having difficulty navigating the Moodle site, or downloading media files on an iPad, viewing the site on a tablet, or being logged out too soon due to inactivity on the site.

Some of the problems mentioned are due to participants’ life events, or to technical or practical limitations of elearning platforms in general, and probably can’t be easily rectified. However, others can easily be addressed. Some recommendations I would make based on the qualitative feedback are as follows:

1. Future courses should begin on Sunday morning, to give participants time to prepare before they begin work on Monday.
2. Participants should be divided into groups of 100 with structured questions and a separate forum for introductions. It’s normal to find that in elearning courses only a fraction of participants actually post on forums, and this number tends to decrease toward the end of the course so we wouldn’t expect 100 individual posts from a group that size.
3. The course materials could perhaps be simplified even further, and additional audio recordings introduced. Perhaps a whole course could be constructed using video content.

Appendix

Responses to Brief Evaluation Form

Q: What do you think the main strengths and weaknesses of the course are?

15/06/2014 21:43:32 I found the course helpful, practical and informative. I enjoyed the interaction of the live chats although I thought the group size a little large to communicate effectively.

15/06/2014 23:25:25 I did not follow the course as rigorously as many others because I found it difficult to manage the reading (texts and forum posts) and listen to the audios with all the other demands on my time, both inside and outside of work. At the beginning, this made me anxious, but I decided I would persevere in a less intense way and try not to worry. In fact, I found Stoic principles and habits were in my head throughout the four weeks (it was hard for me not to talk to colleagues and friends about it, because it was, literally, on my mind all the time!). Indeed, the strength of the course, for me, was the way it provided constant reminders about the fundamental tenets of Stoicism (and the wonderful language they used) - and the helpful and reassuring presence of Donald Robertson. I found some forum posts interesting, and eventually posted a couple of comments (connected to the importance of dance in my life) in response to comments by others. But no one responded to me by name, so I didn’t really get to a point where I felt particularly connected to the community of participants. Sometimes, wading through all the comments just seemed more burdensome than helpful but I liked the posting of quotes.

16/06/2014 00:51:26 I think it was fantastic as an introduction to Stoicism, but I think a lot of the individual habits, techniques, and ways of thinking that make up the totality of Stoicism need time to sink in, and thus, that it would be best to focus on building these things into your day one at a time, letting them sink in over the course of months. I will be attempting to do this myself, maintaining what was already easy for me to absorb, but giving myself more time with some of the techniques that were more difficult (for me, the self monitoring was very tricky). Thank you very much for creating and hosting this course, look forward to more from you on the subject.

16/06/2014 02:16:19 May have been longer.

16/06/2014 04:04:16 Pros: It is a very interesting way of introducing Stoic ideas and practice as involvement is required. I liked the morning and evening meditations best, and the premeditation. I found the exercises helpful towards a productive day, Cons: Probably because of the source material it is all very masculine and "reasonable" - I think I'm growing a long white beard now. The stream meditation offended my principles against littering! At first it was not clear how many of the exercises one should be doing per week.

16/06/2014 04:44:39 It was pretty good and had practical advice for easily applying the different stoic techniques in modern day life and most of the research was backed by CBT too so it was pretty easy to absorb the new info and try to apply it to daily life.

16/06/2014 04:48:22 I have enjoyed the course and have found it very interesting and enlightening. I will carry on using the material - 4 weeks is not enough to fully absorb all the information. (As I would expect)

16/06/2014 04:51:20 Strengths: I thought this was a very good introduction to the practice of Stoicism in everyday life. I liked the fact that there were daily exercises, and the guided audio meditations were very helpful for setting the correct mood for those of us who had never done this before. Also, the activity of the course community in discussing progress, obstacles, and solutions was invaluable. Weaknesses: I had a few stumbling blocks in this course that others didn't seem to share, and therefore didn't seem to care much about. So, as good as the community was, it would be nice to have a teacher to talk to one-on-one in these situations like Epictetus' students had. I know that's asking a lot for an online course though, so overall I thought it was great!

16/06/2014 04:55:56 It is very accessible and can be used and studied when it is convenient to do so. The on line forums are no substitute for face to face interaction, but of course are the best that can be achieved given the form of the course. Thank you very much. The insights and skills I have learned during the past four weeks will be very valuable to me in the future.

16/06/2014 05:31:45 This was an excellent course and to my limited knowledge a first of its kind anywhere. The strengths in my opinion were as follows; the course was very practical and with a primary therapeutic focus (one can study Stoicism for many other reasons e.g. Prof Long's book does not have a therapeutic focus). That therapeutic focus was very well achieved through the provision of training and the emphasis on training rather than theory. It was perfect for those who know about Stoicism (such as myself!) but not how to practise it. As such I think it was fully in line with Epictetus' intention to train his students for their "contests" in life. I really cannot think of any weaknesses except maybe that there was a great deal of material to get through and maybe it could have been improved by self rating scale each week on how people were making progress. Overall though it was superb and thank you very much for this.

16/06/2014 05:51:58 It was a good way to focus, and good to compare my experiences with others. However, it caught me at an exceptionally busy time, so was hard to fit in.

16/06/2014 06:17:26 Strengths: very accessible and applicable to daily life, really helped me manage my emotional life and my thoughts so that I really feel I can cope with life better. I have printed off the coursework and plan to use it every day long term. Very interesting and thought provoking. Weaknesses: for me personally the amount of daily monitoring, audio work etc and discussion boards were overwhelming and I couldn't keep up so many changes at once, but I have a chronic illness so more able-bodied people might not have found that a problem.

16/06/2014 07:10:25 The main strengths: preparation, subject matter - focusing on the most fundamental skills, practical orientation, encouraging discussion among participants, providing bonus material weaknesses: material / instructions could be a bit more clear - there was lots of information in the course materials and sometimes it was a bit overwhelming, I didn't know exactly what to do quickly enough and I had to re-read the materials several times - it would be good to have a brief summary of expected outcomes / exercises Overall: great course! I was both impressed and enlightened

16/06/2014 07:46:33 Generally I liked the meditation exercises, but at times the text seemed very over done. When I thought closely about the values of stoicism, sometimes I didn't feel as if the meditation text was leading me as stoicism as much as attempting to be a general meditation text. I just think they could be shortened or the key sentences repeated instead of adding "fluff" text.

16/06/2014 07:47:20 Plus: The audio and net power point sections, exercises Min: Maybe this is only my problem- I found it difficult to navigate the site, to find what I was looking for

16/06/2014 07:48:15 The course was an excellent introduction to practical Stoicism - that is its main strength. For me its weakness is Stoicism itself, which relies far too heavily on the use of the intellect to achieve goals which in my experience are attainable through the practice of mindfulness alone.

16/06/2014 09:02:21 Strengths: activities helped me form better habits in daily life Weakness: I found little help in the "discussion questions" for each week, but I rarely participate in online forums, anyway ;)

16/06/2014 09:09:12 I enjoyed week 2 as this helped put my life in perspective when you clarify what your life values are and whether you are acting in accordance with them or not. Helpul steer in living a 'Good life'. The mindfulness sections were important reminders to take pause during the day to link myself to the present. this requires more practise for me as I found that I'd lose track of doing this when getting caught up in day to day activities. I also didn't take part in the discussion forum although I read some of the posts, this would have been beneficial for me as I don't really have anyone else to talk to about this subject.

16/06/2014 09:53:50 I would have preferred the week to start on Saturday so I could get my head round the ideas and practices before starting the working week. I enjoyed the hangouts and the sense of community although a lot of the time I felt out of my depth on the forums. At times things were quite academic when I was looking toward practical applications. I would love to see the google+ community become a place to encourage each other to apply the principles learnt. I felt I only just started to scratch the surface this month ! Thanks for a great and valuable course- just what I needed in the midst of a life crisis!

16/06/2014 10:23:39 Excellent course. The presentation and content were first class. I personally found the second week the most absorbing; the Values clarification process was wonderful. The audio clips were fantastic too. I have tweaked and personalised the inventory forms, and am enjoying using them. The main weakness in my opinion was the forum; it was tedious browsing through the conversations. Maybe small working groups communicating in forum would have been better? I also found I tailed off towards the end, but this reflects more on me than the course. My test results at the end of the course may be skewed by having split with my girlfriend yesterday, but in stoic terms this was a success as it came from recognising our incompatibility at a values level. I am impressed by the course - many thanks to all, and particularly Donald.

16/06/2014 10:30:14 See also my blog <http://tipsforme.wordpress.com/category/healing-approaches/stoicism/> I think there is a lot of potential for people with chronic illness, especially if they find CBT a bit too superficial. I found the recorded content helpful and the written content a little difficult but I am in an unusual situation. Thank you for providing such good quality free content.

16/06/2014 10:39:51 I would have also liked a transcript of the audio lesson.

16/06/2014 11:54:09 I loved the course even though I was very busy during week 3 and 4 and had limited time to spend on it. I will go over the material as soon as time permits.

16/06/2014 12:48:15 fortalezas: dominio del tema, excelente disposición del coordinador del curso, excelente material (meditaciones y texto). debilidades: El tiempo, la duración del curso. 4 semanas son suficientes como una introducción al tema , pero es difícil captar, entender y poner en práctica conceptos que son totalmente nuevos para mi en tan poco tiempo, es necesario una practica continua guiada (desde mi punto de vista). Considero que seria adecuado un seguimiento posterior al curso, como una especie de educación continua para reforzar y mantener lo que aprendí. Seria mas fácil aplicar la teoria si se expusieran ejemplos de la vida diaria, de la rutina, y como afrontarlos estoicamente, situaciones comunes del dia a dia. Dividir en grupos mas pequeños donde sea mas facil o menos intimidante interactuar con los demas participantes. Gracias por todo!
[Translation by Google: strengths: mastery of the subject, excellent disposition of the course coordinator, excellent material (meditations and text).

Weaknesses: The time duration of the course. Four weeks is sufficient as an introduction to the subject, but it is difficult to grasp, understand and implement concepts that are completely new to me so quickly, guided practice continued (from my perspective) is required.

I think it would be appropriate to further ongoing monitoring, as a sort of continuing education to reinforce and maintain what I learned.

It would be easier if the theory applied examples from daily life, routine were exposed, and as stoically face them, common every day situations.

Split into smaller groups where less intimidating and easier to interact with other participants.

Thanks for everything!]

16/06/2014 12:54:11 Strength is the level of organization and knowledge of the course administrator.

Weakness is perhaps the same for any online course, in that it relies on self direction / motivation.

16/06/2014 12:55:35 Strengths: 1. well planned and organized 2. great supplemental materials (audio and readings) 3. community - the forums and chats were very helpful Weaknesses: 1. Week 2 (Stoic virtue) was tough for me to assimilate in one week. I was trying to rate myself on virtue before I had actually defined my core values. Perhaps splitting it into two weeks, "Defining Virtue" and "Living with Virtue" would have helped. 2. Starting weekly lessons on Monday was less than ideal for me. For students who work weekdays, starting during the weekend would allow more time to read and contemplate the lesson for the upcoming week. Perhaps my above suggestion for lengthening the course would be unnecessary if the first lesson for each week were to begin on Sunday. Thank you again for putting this course together. I stumbled into the project (literally, using the StumbleUpon app on my iPad), and feel like your efforts have set me on a path to a more effective and productive life.

16/06/2014 12:56:45 There were some problems accessing some of the materials with my ipad, specifically some of the PDFs were .php URLs, which made it difficult to bring them into my ipad PDF reader app for when I was offline.

16/06/2014 13:31:24 Strengths: 1) Huge boost in peace of mind and confidence about ability to cope with possible future adversity 2) New relations with other people interested in Stoicism Weaknesses: Tough to read through all material for a new week Monday morning. Course material for a new week should be available Sunday evening

16/06/2014 13:48:16 Strengths: the audio component, the weekly guides, and the overall level of support
Weaknesses: the forums I think could use more or different organization and more encouragement for participation like maybe smaller breakout groups. The chats were great but google chat a little glitchy.

16/06/2014 13:49:12 Strengths: excellent material Weaknesses: I'm not a fan of the software the site runs on

16/06/2014 14:10:25 Good, clear, focused. Good notes and materials.

16/06/2014 15:01:28 Size of the group may have lead to a high percentage of lurkers and limited the percentage of participants in the chat sessions

16/06/2014 15:08:52 The course was fine. My situation is that I've been bedridden for going on 3 years and ill for many years before that with no support. I may stay this way forever. I like Stoicism and this course as it does help me how to think about my situation without falling into complete despair, but as far as the questionnaires at the end, they look very bad when I do them because of my health situation. I'm wondering if serious chronic illness should be an option to check on those so you can understand when you're doing your data.

16/06/2014 15:26:06 Strengths: * The Material * The feeling of support Weaknesses: * The main technical weakness I saw was that the forum could've looked a little better/been easier to use. Moodle doesn't do a great job of it. Might I suggest another free/open source alternative like <https://askbot.com/>. * While studying it would've been useful to see percentage completeness of the lesson. * Having more of an overall "view" of the practice during the day. I ended up creating bunch of versioned index cards, just so I could remember a) the set of exercises to choose from as time went on b) the set of virtues to strive for c) the on-going logging/daily habits to cultivate. I myself found it useful also to link a with b, so for example today I will focus on philanthropy and an exercise that supports this is "View from Above". Other than that, everything was pretty great. Thanks again!
Shane

16/06/2014 15:33:30 I would like to have seen more sharing on the discussion forums... and more encouragement for people to share their experiences.

16/06/2014 15:35:11 Strengths: The audio materials meant to be listed to daily which reinforced stoic attitudes in the listener. Weaknesses: n/a

16/06/2014 15:35:36 Strengths : being the first online course about stoicism... with exercises, audio meditations, a fairly good introduction to stoic philosophy (especially ethics)... Weaknesses : I'm not fond of the interface (not very intuitive...)

16/06/2014 16:10:15 The contents itself, especially the meditations. The extras are also very handy. I cannot speak to the forum, as I didn't have a chance to participate there as much as I would have liked. The past month has been intense, including the final stages of recruitment for a new job, and the start of a move for a relocation, and an intense workload at the company I'm leaving. I'm not sure i would have handled everything as gracefully as I did - even though I had my moments. The applicability of the material in my everyday life. Including key phrases in meditation (for instance it's not the events, it's how I judge them) is its major strength. I'm a bit old school, so I printed the course material. that was a bit tricky to do, as the way the pages are laid out, sometimes bits would be missing during the printing. The sheer number of emails caused me to unsubscribe to all notifications. It was just too much. It's possible I missed on good interactions because of that, but I wouldn't have had the time to do any of the exercises had I taken the time to read all the emails. Perhaps

an enrolment limit would be a good thing? The availability of the course commentator is also to be commended.

16/06/2014 16:22:05 Strengths: There was a lot of good material, texts, and exercises, and it was nice to be able to read forum post from the other participants. The whole course seemed very well prepared! The live chat was a great idea - though I didn't really get there in time - it's something I would consider participating in, if future courses like this come up! Weaknesses: A little bit hard to digest all the material, and informations available. But on the other hand, we can get back to the lessons in the future, and read and try out the things we didn't get time to do during these four weeks. Nice to read the forum posts, but would have been nice with more discussions forth and back on the matters. I posted very little myself - never really got familiar with it, it takes some courage to write a comment in a forum like that. But thats my own weakness too - and a little bit because English is not my first language. I didn't have too much problems understanding the other posts though. Thank you very much for an overall great course!

16/06/2014 16:37:11 I would like to start with a big thank you for the obvious effort and time you have put in to produce the course. I really liked the course and felt the information it gave was very valuable. I would actually say that this sort of course should be required for school leavers. I know personally that I could have done with this information during those "wonderful" teen years. The structure was nice with short and to the point lessons. Though I haven't been active on the forum I have been pondering its lessons in private. It is very interesting how many things I unconsciously reacted to in a knee jerk reaction. Being more aware and a set of acceptable rules is actually personally rewarding. Now for the critique: I felt some lessons assumed some prior knowledge. In particular stoic values which could have done with a simple table maybe breaking down Good,Bad,Preferred,dispreffered & indifferent. I don't think more reading is ever a bad thing. But the course would have felt much more complete if it was a little longer and self contained. I am a technical trainer and I have found that diagrams can help convey concepts. I know my area is technical but philosophy can easily be on par or harder than engineering when trying to get your head around a concept. More recently I have found 5 minute microteach videos hugely effective in conveying/confirming or introducing concepts quickly. Combined with the current audio and notes with simple flow diagrams this course would be epic and fit many more of the learning styles opening it up for the less academic. I hope your study has been a success and I would gladly be involved in the future.

16/06/2014 16:44:32 It has made me so much more tranquil, especially as this has been a stressful few weeks. The only change I would like is to start the weeks on a Sunday. I will keep this up so keep us informed of any new events! Oh and thank you for all the effort that must have gone into this!

16/06/2014 16:58:58 Strength - bringing the idea of stoicism to people, empowering them to take charge of their own lives, their ownselves. Weaknesses - seemed a little too much information. Seemed that the basic ideas do not take a lot of words. Reflect three times a day. Read Epictetus or Aurelius or Seneca or Spinoza or ... for a focus for each day's reflections. The rest will come! That is, the content seems more suited to people that have been reflecting for some time.

16/06/2014 17:07:33 Strengths: the material is excellent, Donald is a credible and authoritative leader who clearly understands Stoicism. The length of time is good and the range of topics is very suitable for practical application. A really useful 4 weeks which I feel has strengthened my practice. Weaknesses: Personally, I'm not a huge fan of forums, but I do understand the aim of the idea here. Overall, it did seem pretty focussed. Not much to complain about!

16/06/2014 17:17:29 I thought it was altogether helpful and insightful.

16/06/2014 17:29:52 I think it was very well presented, I have engaged in many discussions with my Stoic friends in the past, and then this opportunity came up and one of my friends suggested I take it. I enjoyed it but one of the weaknesses I found was timing. I would have liked to have been able to dedicated more time during the four weeks to all the forums, emails and chats but it came at a time where I have two major federal work projects going and I travelled and could not dedicate as much as I would have liked, I am already going back and re reading my material as I have more time this week. Thank you.

16/06/2014 17:49:24 Strengths: The practical advice to strengthen the mind is invaluable. For me this course changed how I was thinking throughout the day. It felt like I got myself back, before I could spend time doing "nothing" in front of the computer, now I am more aware of my thoughts and is more focused on what's important to me. The fantastic thing is that this change is almost magical, the exercises really instead of taking time they free time. Weakness: In the first lesson virtue was mentioned without defining it formally. This was later done in lesson two with a big part being finding your own virtues. I think more examples of virtues could be mentioned in lesson 1 to make it more concrete. I understand that it is good to have the exercise to find your own virtues in lesson 2 but I still feel like it would be nice to be more concrete in lesson 1.

16/06/2014 18:01:44 The course offered excellent and practical attributes of Stoicism and concrete ways to apply them. For me it would have been helpful to see a calendar at the front end showing what was on offer each day; I had a little trouble keeping up with all the assignments (due to my own busy-ness). Thank you for this opportunity!

16/06/2014 18:19:52 Strengths - the clear focus, week by week; the consistent structure and range of exercises; the forum dialogue. Weaknesses - I found the volume of correspondence on the forum overwhelming - I wanted to participate but felt lost amongst all the voices. I would have liked to be part of a smaller group where we could have more of a conversation and get to know each other. Generally though - excellent and helpful! Thank you very much, Donald!

16/06/2014 18:35:42 I can't identify any weaknesses in the course relative to it's content. The main strengths of the course were it's flexibility, accessibility and achievability.

16/06/2014 20:23:14 I thought that the course had a lot of great exercises, and I have been trying to do several of them per day, but it's a lot more difficult to follow the stoic doctrine under the face of real adversity than it is when everything is going well in your life. I thought that the first stoic meditation exercise was just amazing with Donald's audio. I honestly think that he should record more of them because that one in particular had a real impact on me. The other exercises without his 30 minute audio do not have near as much of an impact on me. On the other hand, some of the other exercises such as the leaves on a stream didn't do much for me at all. It just creeped me out a bit to try and decipher if my thoughts are automatic or if I am thinking them manually. Once I started to think about what a thought really might mean, it was just too much. At the end of the day, I cannot attest to the strength of this course right away -- I will need some more time -- maybe around one year to see if it's really been effective or not. Right away, the exercises were quite effective, but there was definitely diminishing returns later on for me, and they aren't quite as effective at the moment, but that may change again soon. Thank you for the wonderful opportunity to grow as a person and learn a great philosophy of life.

16/06/2014 23:21:03 Strengths: -Material was excellent. -Instructor very knowledgeable and engaging. The latter is not always the case with online courses. Weaknesses: -I personally was not a fan of the forums/emails because it was too much noise in my head trying to sort out other's thoughts and opinions. Donald suggested early in the course the possibility of breaking people into small groups and that personally would have been a lot better for me. I did not make any meaningful contact with anyone in this course (my fault), but still unfortunate.

16/06/2014 23:25:26 Strengths - accessibility, mindfulness content, audio downloads Weaknesses - impossible to rectify in this format, but 'one on one' feedback and engagement over the philosophical basis of this course. I was frustrated by the off topic feedback from most participants

17/06/2014 01:27:17 I used the exercise for noticing things in the present a lot. I found of all the recordings, I gained the most from the Stoic Mindfulness exercise. I liked the hypnosis aspect of it. As I was participating in this course, I also read Epictetus' Discourses. I believe the course and book helped me glean better meaning from the other. I've been diagnosed with moderate depression. At the beginning of this course my doctor increased the dose of my antidepressant. I believe this helped. However, my self-talk and more logical thinking was increased through this course. I found myself taking a step back in situations and really using logic to better deal with stress and sadness.

17/06/2014 01:31:07 I did not feel comfortable participating in the online discussion, because I am not comfortable discussing personal matters (including personal philosophy) in a public (or semi-public) forum like this, at least not under my own name. I would've been okay with a moderator having my real name, but not the wide audience of all the participants in the course.

17/06/2014 01:47:51 Strengths online based - allowed a greater variety of participants and more options for access well structured - course was organised and the material provided was excellent Weaknesses Nothing major

17/06/2014 01:53:38 Strengths: the practical aspects of it that covered a broad range of practicable techniques which, when practiced, allowed me to see which worked well for me and which didn't. Weaknesses: partially the organization of the website and forum; it can be difficult to navigate to a degree, the log-out time is way too brief for the website, and the forum is poorly-designed. Also, it would be nice to have a summary of what one's "Stoic day" would look like for each week as a short summary of what one's actually practicing (e.g. "Listen to audio in morning, practice mindfulness throughout the day, end with a review of when you exercised virtue and when you didn't")

17/06/2014 01:55:26 I really appreciate and respect the time and effort you put into making this course. Everything was very well done. I think the course's strengths are its clear organization and explanation of the contents and exercises. No particular weakness comes to mind. The only comment, which is probably personal, and I can imagine others disagreeing with me, but I found the recordings to be interesting and incredibly useful the first time that I listened to them, but not necessarily something I found necessary to continually listen to day after day (though the advice contained within them were good to repeat each day). Generally though, the exercises are all endlessly repeatable and useful. I just have to evaluate myself and try to make sure that I put them into regular practice. I think you've designed the course as well as possible to support students in our application of Stoic principles.

17/06/2014 05:45:42 Main strengths: very good stoic psychology training (basically). Very clear, very nuanced, detailed, great exercises that really make a big difference in one's daily life. A good community. Main weaknesses: not enough focus on the ancient stoics and on *how to deal with things you do prefer* actually happening.

17/06/2014 06:44:10 The strengths of the course are that it is accessible to the beginner like myself and not overly academic. The practical benefits become apparent early on. The weakness of the course (which is no real fault of the course) is the time required to feel the benefits of its application in what is for most people fairly hectic family and work life. I enjoyed taking part in any case so thank you.

17/06/2014 09:08:16 The main strength of the course was the course facilitator's (Donald) availability and interaction with the group. I also enjoyed the separation of course material topics by week. There were so many participants at varying levels, that in my opinion, breaking the materials (and group) out by levels (beginner - advanced) and developing course material based on that would have been helpful. Also, more chat sessions throughout the week would have been good as well. This might have allowed more participants to join/interact. (Or having a utility on the site where chat is open all of the time and people can join whenever and chat with whomever is also online).

17/06/2014 10:50:55 Strengths: clarity of methods and applicability of stoic practices.

17/06/2014 11:58:42 Four weeks appeared a bit too short. To my regret I had'nt enough time to participate in the forum discussions.

17/06/2014 12:03:43 I mentioned in my last post that while my time was limited I used it effectively and the course changed my thinking. I can now put what I learned into action by reiewing the material constantly. I hope the post are left open at least for a while. Thank you!

17/06/2014 13:51:13 I think the course is well-intentioned, and I enjoyed week 3 the most. With week 4, I got bogged down with too many meditations. (Being aware every waking hour is really hard) I think it's a good idea to do a few things, but do them well, rather than too many activities. Doing a few things well builds confidence, whereas doing too many things can sometimes make you miss a few of the activities, which lowers your confidence and makes you less likely to follow the meditations.

17/06/2014 17:07:19 I thought that the course had a good balance between being short enough to complete easily each week and having enough practical strategies to use each day as well. Thanks for putting it together, I found it really enjoyable and useful in my daily life

17/06/2014 17:26:48 Well explained and informative. The use of different formats, downloads, mp3 etc made very accessible. Definitely had a lasting effect.

17/06/2014 17:57:24 Amazing insight into stocism. Great excersise for each week. Very benefi ial course.

17/06/2014 18:26:07 Material well structured - liked the focus on daily practice. Thought the CBT elements were constructive. Negatives. Would have been nice to be allocated to a smaller group for discussions than the large forum. Felt less easy to engage in a big group though contributions by many were informative and helpful.

17/06/2014 22:42:28 Simplicity.

17/06/2014 23:01:03 A wonderful course, very informative and well constructed. As a point of constructive feedback, perhaps putting participants into groups in the discussion form might take the weight off the number of comments in the forums. They forums were very helpful but having so many posts was difficult to keep track off. The mp3 recordings were a really really nice touch and it was helpful to listen to them on the way to work in the morning. Many thanks for putting this course together.

18/06/2014 03:26:12 Having studied Stoicism academically, I was thoroughly impressed by how well Donald made it accessible to those with varied experiences and interests in Stoicism. I didn't have a chance to post every week but I did read every daily forum as well as the lessons and carry out the meditations. The BIG

QUESTIONS I will come back to formulate my own view. Many thanks to Donald and his team for this inspiring course.

18/06/2014 08:29:49 S: accessibility W: evaluation instruments

18/06/2014 11:51:32 I'm glad taking part in this course

18/06/2014 11:58:23 Strength, practicality in terms of application. Weakness, course is a little too short.

18/06/2014 12:13:40 Beginning was too much fluff and didn't have enough scientific appeal and feel to it. The first mp3 made me lose interest.

18/06/2014 12:37:58 The course gives people a very good grounding in the principles and attitudes of Stoic life; to that end it has been a great success. I have to say that I actually felt quite overwhelmed with the amount of content! I feel very silly for saying this as a negative but I personally felt that trying to squeeze a lot of important ideas into 4 weeks makes it a little intense. I wouldn't try to sprint a marathon, but I certainly understand why it was necessary to have an 'end' to the course. I think there should be a greater focus on reading the stoics - Meditations and the Enchiridion would be my required reading choices. I think I would recommend that participants in the course try to interact directly with these texts as often as possible, as well as incorporating their favorite exercises into daily life. I take any difficult situations I find myself in as opportunities to behave in a stoic way. I am still trying to get the 'automatic emotional reactions' under control. So feeling suddenly very angry, I am still seeing the proverbial red mist. I am calming down much fast, however.

18/06/2014 12:39:07 I thought that the Week 1 meditation was exceptional. I listen to it all the time.

18/06/2014 12:40:34 Good reminders. Content was practical.

18/06/2014 13:09:00 -Strengths- On the Clarity, I was able to understand all the unusual concepts, or rather, those used in a different sense from the one of colloquial language, because they were explained in the lessons, and that is a strength that should be kept, as it enables accessibility to the materials. Regarding the Impact, The tally exercise was very useful in some stressful moments I had, but I don't understand where it's based from, and I did read the Enchiridion of Epictetus and don't recall the suggestion being made there. I'd like to know :) The questions made weekly put the issues in a pragmatic perspective, which I am thankful for. -Weaknesses- Related to the Feasibility, I'd like to have direct links to the documents/study materials, instead of having them be hosted inside a frame of a webpage, so I could click around less and gather the study materials faster. I'd also like the course directors to keep in mind that not all the course students are economically-comfortable-middle-class-already-working-in-stable-jobs middle-aged-adults, and so by telling us to prepare for even worse times than the ones we are living now demonstrates an inherent bias that assumes we are living comfortably at the moment. I am not, and although I know Stoicism prepares me for it, and that the comfort is something I feel and thus control, that I should use it for personal growth and all that, the arguments shown relating to this issue fail with me, and I have to make my own. I do not see my own voice or perspective there, and I believe it would help having it where things are told to us in case we are in either situation, of comfort or struggling. I didn't read the forums very often, but I did read the hangout chat on sundays, and I feel it was greatly underdeveloped. There were questions by the course facilitator about how to better create/develop the course, but there was no direct way to help us in exercises we were struggling with. The chat also had a lot of people talking just to agree with each other, drop names and recommend authors, which I find unstoic, as it was unnecessary and an outright attempt to make profit out of us. It could have been curbed, and should have, but it wasn't. I don't know if it's the lure of the atmosphere of reading philosophy, but

the conversation didn't feel any different from the ones at Wittgenstein and Marx reading groups I've participated in on 4chan, who happened to be just as polite as these ones. There was prideful quoting and eagerness to impress. I'll probably go with Seneca's advice to avoid groups altogether, or just read without participating as I did here, as it seems that even Stoics, when joined in the group, fall into the vices of stulti. I know it helps empathy and creates a feeling of togetherness and those are good for having more courses, but those interests go beyond Stoicism, which requires virtue under any company, including our own. In short, the manner in which the course is taught should also be Stoic. -Conclusion- I didn't have time to do all the exercises or keep up with the complementary reading, but I plan to complete the course at my own pace in the near future. If anything, the course helped put the exercises in a more simple and practical manner; prompted me to read Seneca through the quotes posted on the forum, which by itself has been a rewarding experience, and also a stoic activity since I do it to learn how to become more virtuous; and the tally exercise made me visualize the toll my thoughts had on me, which is also very useful to transmit the message. As an aside, I understand some people are willing to pay for the course, but as a poor working and indebted student, I wouldn't have enrolled if it had required a tuition. Like me, and in the context of the ongoing economical crisis, and in other countries who also aren't booming, more people will probably be in this situation. I acknowledge that some financing for these activities might be needed, so I ask you to please consider models of financing that don't exclude the economically impaired, like donation systems. It would also be Stoic in itself, for it would allow modern slaves to be wise! I am very thankful for the course, and did enjoy clarifying some things I hadn't fully grasped yet. Thank you for everything, and keep up the good work!

18/06/2014 14:12:18 This course was simply fantastic. I am so pleased I took the plunge. As a newcomer I felt welcomed and part of the group. I have gained so much and know I will continue on the Stoic journey because in 4 weeks it has changed my life. No my attitude to life. Strengths It was easy to follow the weekly lessons, the audios were great, the forums got us together as a group and the weekly online chats were wonderful Weakness Would prefer Sunday for the start of the week day

18/06/2014 14:23:37 Strengths: length of materials multiple formats of materials practical focus encouragement to interact Weaknesses: too many forum posts in too few threads too many people in Google+ chat

18/06/2014 14:42:26 The website could use some improvement to make finding materials easier.

18/06/2014 14:47:37 Weakness : I did not participate in the discussion forum. That is my weakness...discussion online with an overwhelming number of people did not work for me although I read or scanned everyone's stuff. I did no background reading and it was clear I needed to. Not really course weaknesses but connected to effective learning. Strengths: Course material and instructions were great. It was challenging!! Thankyou, Donald and the team

18/06/2014 15:57:34 I really loved the course. It's totally right for a beginner like me! The only problem I've felt is that I'm glad it has changed but it kinda did in a way that I don't interact as aloof as I was before with my mates.. but cheers! I found clarity in philosophy!

18/06/2014 16:27:32 I really enjoyed the course and found the course materials valuable. I found reading through the discussion forum very time consuming (interesting though it was...) so I got behind and didn't participate much in discussions. Thanks for the hard work in putting the course together!

18/06/2014 17:52:51 Thank you for offering this course. I liked the audio meditations which I found most beneficial in cementing Stoic principles in my daily life. I listened to them daily. It was a challenge just to keep my mind focused on the meditations let alone the rest of the day. The pdf lecture notes worked well and I could

read them on my tablet. I do appreciate your efforts in developing this course. I will continue to develop my Stoic practice.

18/06/2014 18:37:42 Weakness: chat transcripts extremely hard to follow, very low yield (lots of hi's and small talk)

18/06/2014 20:27:19 Great as a an introduction or refresher course. Worked really well in conjunction with reading 'Stoicism and the Art of Happiness'. Loved the audio recordings.

18/06/2014 20:58:43 The extraordinary opportunity to get in touch with all this material on my own time and online. The experience of getting in touch and to read the different ideas and perspectives of other participants. A minor weakness is the large amount of e-mails that sometimes made it difficult to follow the thread of a comment. Thank you for this experience

18/06/2014 22:30:24 Overall I thought this was an enjoyable and effective course. I thought the audio recordings were a great idea, however the quality of the audio itself could have been better. I found them a little muddy, as if they had been recorded in someone's room on a computer mic rather than in an actual sound studio, or incorrectly post produced to attain the proper fidelity and compression. Second, I felt a little lost in the online shuffle. Perhaps in the future you could make smaller, voluntary discussion groups of maybe 3 - 10 people who can interact with one another rather than just the forum, where comments felt easily lost in the cloud. Thank you again for your work!

18/06/2014 23:56:46 nice blend of real stoic original doctrine with modern psychological approach, which makes the old material more concrete and feasible to apply the theory.

19/06/2014 02:55:38 Strengths : a lot of valuable content Weakness: difficulty on my part to follow discussion forums

19/06/2014 03:03:57 For me, week 2 was difficult. I didn't know how to answer the questions of value clarification so I procrastinated on them a bit. Perhaps you can make break them down to make them easier? Other than that, I really liked the course. I think I have learned much. I liked the guided audio meditations.

19/06/2014 09:16:44 Overall the course seemed helpful! Thanks to Donald and all else who helped! The course load was manageable, and the material easy to understand.

19/06/2014 10:21:39 I thoroughly enjoyed this course and would recommend it to others if it were open to the public. My only 'gripe' would be the time-scale. I feel that maybe the 4 weeks is too quick for many people to feel the full benefit of the course. Each week should, in my opinion, be focused on for a long period of time and perhaps in greater detail.

19/06/2014 10:51:23 Strengths: very good course material, possibility of discussion with other participants, a strong commitment on behalf of the organizer of the course. Weaknesses or possibilities for improvement: video lectures if possible and some short quizzes to check the understanding of course material. My suggestion would be to offer course on Stoicism through Coursera. I highly appreciate the effort done by the organizers of this course. I assume that it took them a lot of time but I am sure that there are many of us who really enjoyed the course and are looking forward to some kind of continuation. I wish all the best to all of you.

19/06/2014 12:08:26 Overall good course but a bit fast paced for me. Works great on PC but difficult to view on tablets.

19/06/2014 12:10:57 Thank you!

19/06/2014 14:02:56 It was a well thought out course with both theory and practice included.

19/06/2014 16:47:40 The course built on the taster week At the end of last year. For me the strengths were the wonderful audios that captured the key points in a easy access user friendly way that we can continue to draw upon. The weakness were the daily digest and Sunday chat - they did not work for me. Could not make the Sunday's and realise we were a really big group from all over the world but I would have loved to have been able to meet up with fellow students in the UK. I believe there is a day planned in London at the end of the year. Thank you Donald for sharing your expertise and time free of charge.

19/06/2014 17:24:10 I think it is well laid out and the course is easy to follow and practice. Improvements could be made to the timing of chat sessions.

19/06/2014 19:08:52 This course is great. It is a way to spread sanity around the world. My main problem with the course are with the exercises (like the two column exercise Week 1, or Values Clarification Exercise week 2). Thi is because they tend to generate some level of anxiety (to examine ones life might not be, indeed in my case it is not, an easy thing to do) or because I needed more time--peaceful time-- to reflect these exercises took a lot of time to do, so the week course was more like 9-10 days rather than seven. I liked very much the way Donald Robertson managed the course and the chat sessions (however, there were many issues with getting into the chat something that needs to improve for future courses.) And I thus thank him for his efforts. I am very happy to have been able to take part in this course. It will be nice If when all your research project is done (and the papers published) if you could send al least a notice with the publication and its abstract. Strength: free, online, powerful meditations. Weakness: (1) Chat sessions because of access problems, (2) Too short time to do the exercises: I suggest that reading material be separated from the exercises (with participants being instructed to do the exercise at a later time after the readings).

20/06/2014 04:11:39 -

20/06/2014 07:07:05 I am in my mid seventies, therefore, come late in my life to this way of thinking. All i can say that it is a life-changing experience. and i like to thank in particular Donald Robertson, and whoever else was involved in putting this Course together, to give us this marvellous opportunity to be introduced to Stoicism, which i will continue to learn from. Although, i was a Student of Stoicism behind the scenes, in other words dide not take part on the Forum, but read many of the comments of the Partisipants, which helped so much to understand this Course, I say thank you here as well, With my very best wishes to everyone. Elisabeth

20/06/2014 13:49:48 The forum posting in general were too chaotic and unorganized to get much benefit from, just seemed like reading other peoples diaries to themselves. I would have liked more individual activities that leveraged the discussion topics.

20/06/2014 20:04:23 As a person who didn't know much about Stoicism before the Stoic Week 2013, I've found the content of this course very enlightening. But, a positive but, I can now see how little I really know about Stoicism. Unfortunately, I had problems attending the Hangouts; I don't know if the reason is the OS I use (Ubuntu 14.04 LTS) or something else. Also, before the 4th week started, we lost the access to the Internet due to some ISP problems, so I'm one week behind everyone else. (I don't think that pertains to the course though, of course). I think the format of the course is good, although I would love it if the Stoic REsilience were developed into a longer and broader course in the future. All in all, thank you for all the hard work you have put into preparing something so refreshing - especially for somebody who suffers from depression and anxiety.

21/06/2014 08:37:15 .

21/06/2014 12:04:33 New material should be available on Sunday. More quotations to provide example and good summaries of the ideas and wisdom

21/06/2014 22:36:17 Strengths: Logical layout. Each week built on the preceding. Weaknesses: Repetitive in content. Too many people in forums, so little connection built amongst members (perhaps dividing the total participants into groups would have been helpful).

21/06/2014 22:43:14 Would love the ability to access through a mobile device. I had no idea what CBT is and so other than learning it had something to do with psychology I skimmed those references. I realise that this is research and linked to gaining grants so I'm not complaining about it, just commenting that they were not relevant to me. I didn't participate in the forums, although I agree my experience would have been enhanced if I had. I found that by the time I'd done the readings and meditations and thought about it all, there was neither time in the day nor energy to read/comprehend all the interactions in the forum. Perhaps I felt daunted by the number of people. I remember thinking that the weekly questions sounded a bit too much like a tutorial, which is fair enough given your purposes but as I'm no longer in the academic world they didn't address what I wanted to spend my limited time contemplating and so I didn't spend too much time on them. Certainly the four weeks provided an excellent introduction/sampler and I would be interested in participating again. I'm glad that you have the G+ and Facebook groups available. There is plenty yet in the material provided for further thought and practice - it was/is a very full curriculum. Many thanks and I'm glad to have found it at just the right time.

22/06/2014 06:20:20 Strengths: The practical exercises and audio mediations were very effective and interesting to engage with. Really enjoyed the material. Weaknesses: Perhaps too much to absorb in 4 weeks. Online participation has its limitations, it would be ideal if the group could meet and discuss in person.

22/06/2014 07:41:58 Content was great. Format could be better if it wasn't all the material for the week on a single day, then a full week until the next material- more of an even flow of materials would be more effective. Also a summary of what the exercises are, not just the new ones for the week but including those from the past weeks that we should still be doing. But overall a great and helpful course, thanks!!!

23/06/2014 00:44:39 Week two mp3 would not play

23/06/2014 00:44:50 Week two mp3 would not play

23/06/2014 06:31:24 The strength of this course was in its practicality. Each week, seemed to me to flow from one to the next rather seamlessly and built on perfectly from what was practiced the week before. Minimal investment of time was also a plus.

24/06/2014 17:12:42 Really worked well although I felt I could not get to all the material I would have liked in the time.

25/06/2014 08:55:31 The readings, exercises and audios are very clear and helpful. I found the online forums a bit overwhelming, not being used to an online course.

25/06/2014 13:10:28 It had a good series of items relating stoicism to modern life and practical ways to get at the core mindsets quickly. For me personally the only challenge was that of time. I happened to have a lot

going on that month so the 1-week periods were a little hard to keep up with. Also I would have loved to get more in depth. If it was a 4-month course with each lesson lasting for 2 weeks, for example, it would allow more time for each lesson to settle and become habitual, as well as cover more material.

26/06/2014 05:32:29 I would have enjoyed more guided and graded activities - like coursework. Although I'm improving in this area, when things get tough I'm often motivated by deadlines and having a finished product. In order to keep people motivated by deadlines engaged in the course, you could offer check-ins, assignments, quizzes, and other activities like Coursera. Thanks for the course! I've learned quite a bit about Stoicism.

26/06/2014 09:50:29

26/06/2014 23:56:17 I could not participate fully due to sudden illness and death of a close family member as well as illness of another and myself over the duration of the course. Sometimes it pours... Still, I tried to follow. The guided meditations were not helpful - never have been, in fact. Real-life examples of Stoicism in action are helpful, more of which I've found in Marcus (and Seneca) despite the difficulty of some passages. The large number of messages was overwhelming. I didn't have the energy to read them all, much less follow and reply. The course turned out to be "too large," so to speak. Also, there was too much material to cover in four weeks. The pace was too fast, but that impression may be based on having no ability to concentrate for some time. On the other hand, the quality of the material was excellent. You clearly dedicated a lot of time and effort into the course. It's possible you might have been a bit over-ambitious, but a fine job nevertheless. I do want to join others in expressing thanks and appreciation for this. Perhaps in future a smaller scope might work better, possibly by limiting enrollment or splitting the material into two independent courses. I'm sure you've no shortage of suggestions.

27/06/2014 07:39:52 The material was straightforward and easy to follow. The chats were generally helpful. I would say that the feedback on the questionnaires might not reflect true states of being -- for instance, my 4 might easily be another person's 5 or 3.

29/06/2014 06:27:04 Main strengths - accessible, clear language and instructions. Warm friendly facilitation. Attention to detail. Reliable delivery. Good responses. Generous time donated by Donald Robertson in forum management. Weaknesses - would have preferred delivery of each week's lesson on a Sunday morning so I could read and absorb before my very busy working week. This would have allowed me to get into grips with what was required before working on the content and responding. As it was I was always behind and felt I was not doing the content justice. Trying to absorb some of the complex requirements of the course was difficult for me on a Monday and other weekday nights and by mid-way through the course I had started to put off the work until the following Saturday. Would have been fabulous though, had I not been working, or a part-timer.

30/06/2014 20:19:21 I thought the communal aspect was both a strength and a weakness. I would have appreciated a more personal contact, perhaps a smaller group with which to interact.

01/07/2014 14:13:28 I did have some trouble getting the audio portions to download, but that an issue with my PC. The course strengths are how relevant the topics being raised are for people who are interested in self-introspection. I liked that the material was compact and concise, and presented with specific tasks to complete in order to internalize the ideas (I have found this to be missing from the hard copy texts I have read, though they were valuable in their own way as well). The only weakness I can identify is that it was a little difficult to figure out what to click on and where to start on the home page, but that was solved through repetitive use of the page.

06/07/2014 00:05:31 Strengths: material and focus on how to apply Stoic teachings to everyday life
Weaknesses: technical execution, specifically the system logging me out after a set amount of time

07/07/2014 19:51:08 Great course. Thank you.

09/07/2014 10:40:17 Many thanks for a fine course! The exercises are especially valuable, not least for the purpose of simply creating habits. A "schedule" of some kind, enumerating exercises and making the progress & overall structure a bit clearer might be helpful -- as it was, the upcoming lesson was a bit of a secret treasure box, suddenly opening on Monday morning. I think the forum (just like the stoic communities in social media generally) tend to become unfocused and filled with general opinions, which can be interesting and thought-provoking but not always connected with the course. The questions could perhaps be more text-centered, taking the form of exegesis of stoic passages pertaining to the week's theme in order to keep the discussion on track.