

**NOTES FROM: *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor*, by Donald Robertson**

**SUMMARY: This is one of the better modern Stoicism books, almost like a philosophical biography of Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and I came away with a ton of insight into what his *actual life* was like - details that I rarely see mentioned anywhere else.**

**More generally, *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor* is a book detailing the basic tenets of Stoicism, taught through the personal history of, arguably, the most famous Stoic: Marcus. He was the “final” Stoic philosopher of the ancient world, and his famous book, *Meditations*, is one of the most-read classics of all time. And for great reason!**

**Robertson’s book gives you a *vivid* picture of what Marcus’s actual life was like, what misfortunes he had to endure, and the hardships that came to test his willpower, patience, and resolve. At the end of the day, Stoicism is meant to be *used*. It’s meant to help you enjoy and find *peace* in this life, rather than speculate about the existence of some *other* one.**

**Marcus Aurelius is so widely-read today partly because *his* troubles are so close to our own. The names and faces are different, sure, but *he* had to deal with rude people too; hostile people, deadly diseases and threats, war and chaos. He had to confront his own mortality and that of his friends and family. He had to run the whole freakin’ *Roman Empire* FFS, and his shining example proves that human beings *do* in fact possess the power to overcome *all of that* and more.**

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“From the moment we’re born we’re constantly dying, not only with each stage of life but also one day at a time. Our bodies are no longer the ones to which our mothers gave birth, as Marcus put it. Nobody is the same person he was yesterday. Realizing this makes it easier to let go: we can no more hold on to life than grasp the waters of a rushing stream.”

“To learn how to die, according to the Stoics, is to unlearn how to be a slave.”

“Since death is the most certain, it should be the least feared.”

“There's no virtue in enduring what we don't feel hurt by in the first place.”

MK: We often use rhetoric against ourselves, like when we say "It's a catastrophe," or "She's a complete idiot!" Whereas the truth is a little more nuanced, and possibly something different altogether.

MK: When not *everyone* views something as a catastrophe, that means that the judgment is in yourself alone. It's up to *you* to view it as a catastrophe or not.

MK: Learn to see where your present trajectory will take you. When split between two actions, one "good," and the other "bad," examine the possible future attached to both of them, and see the gulf which *separates* those two futures.

MK: The fact that we're still *here* means that we can endure much worse.

“Even the Stoic wise man, therefore, may tremble in the face of danger. What matters is what he does next. He exhibits courage and self-control precisely by accepting these feelings, rising above them, and asserting his capacity for reason.”

“Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be; just be one.”

“Lameness is an impediment to the leg, but not to the mind.”

“If I’m going to see this as trivial twenty years from now, why can’t I shift to seeing it as trivial today?”

MK: We have a tendency when dealing with anxiety to focus on what is *outside* our control, but ignore completely what we can actually *do*.

“You can start training yourself in this Stoic practice of objective representation right now by writing down a description of an upsetting or problematic event in plain language. Phrase things as accurately as possible and view them from a more philosophical perspective, with studied indifference. Once you’ve mastered this art, take it a step further by following the example of Paconius Agrippinus and look for positive opportunities. Write how you could exercise strength of character and cope wisely with the situation. Ask yourself how someone you admire might cope with the same situation or what that person might advise you to do. Treat the event like a sparring partner in the gym, giving you an opportunity to strengthen your emotional resilience and coping skills.”

MK: If someone does something you don't like, examine honestly whether it was right or wrong. If it was *right*, accept it. If it was *wrong*, assume that it was because they didn't know any better.

MK: Recognize that sometimes you only refrain from doing bad things because of their consequences. So, the inclination is present within you, as well as within other people.

“No one can harm your character except you.”

“The Stoic Sage, or wise man, needs nothing but uses everything well; the fool believes himself to ‘need’ countless things, but he uses them all badly.”

“Your anger is a bigger threat to you than whatever it is that you’re angry about.”

One of Aesop’s Fables: Each of us is born with two sacks suspended from our neck: one filled with the faults of others that hangs within our view, and one hidden behind our back filled with our own faults. In other words, we see the flaws of others quite clearly, but we have a blind spot for our own.

“What’s required first is a more general openness to criticism: we should give everyone we meet permission to tell us what our faults are, according to Galen, and resolve not to be angry with any of them. Indeed, Marcus tells himself both to enter into every man’s mind, to study their judgments and values, and to let every man enter into his.”

MK: It's just as crazy to get upset by the fact that nobody will remember your name after you die, as it is to get upset by the fact that nobody knew your name before you were born.

“As long as we fear death, we'll never be alive.”

“Our fear of death does us more harm than death itself.”

“We’re told that Plato’s saying was always on Marcus’s lips: those states prospered where the philosophers were kings or the kings philosophers.”