



Stoicism and the Art of Happiness (Teach Yourself)

Donald J. Robertson

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This new guide to finding a happier way of life draws on the ancient wisdom of the stoics to reveal lasting truths and proven strategies for enhanced wellbeing. By learning what stoicism is, you can revolutionise your life, learning how to - properly - 'seize the day', how to cope in the face of adversity, and how to come to terms with whatever situation you're in.

Stoicism and the Art of Happiness (Teach Yourself) Details

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From Reader Review Stoicism and the Art of Happiness (Teach Yourself) for online ebook

Arthur says

Complete mind opener. Good intro to reading harder books book.

Chris Paxton says

Great breakdown:

My only complaint is that the book continually pushed CBT and got more into the modern psychological implications of stoicism than how to actually live the stoic ideal. However, that was only a minor nuisance compared to the overall text and the quality job it did in outlining stoic philosophy. I did find the self examination sections at the beginning of each chapter to be excellent lead ins for the reading. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who has experience with stoic philosophy or someone who is just introducing themselves to one of the most profound schools of the ancient world.

Shalyn says

The content seemed very repetitive; that was my primary reaction to this book. I also disagree with much of the advice the book provides. The author makes frequent references to psychology's Cognitive Behavioral Therapy as if that should lend some credibility to this work, but it is my understanding from a couple of therapists that CBT is not for everyone and can be easily misapplied even by therapists who (theoretically) know what they're doing. Hence, CBT is not something to DIY.

The author advocates not expressing elevations of joy or sadness, and while stoics do tend to keep their emotions in check, that practice is over-emphasized both in this book and in stereotyping stoicism. Eliminating expression of elevations of emotion prevents a person from both fully experiencing life as well as from connecting with other people. Humans are built for connection, and we are more likely to connect on an emotional level, so it would be counterproductive to our mental and emotional health to limit our expression and experience of emotions.

The author advocates imagining a negative situation so that you can be emotionally prepared for it. Such a practice is in fact not at all helpful and can even be hurtful. A therapist friend of mine calls this "borrowing trouble from the future." It doesn't make the coming trouble any easier emotionally or mentally; it just makes the here-and-now sadder and more difficult. This is the problem with worry also: worrying about what might happen in the future doesn't make the future easier to manage, but only makes the present more stressful.

The author says people get stage fright because they value other people's opinions higher than they value their own. While valuing someone else's opinion more highly than your own is not usually healthy, if you're a performer trying to make a living from your art, the audience's opinion is absolutely worthy of consideration. If you want to be invited to perform again -- especially if you want to get paid for performing

-- the audience has to like what you do.

The author says it's not the thing that bothers you but your impression of it, and he uses the example of: it's not death that bothers you, it's your fear of death that bothers you. Well...maybe. Personally, I don't like snakes because I find them unpredictable, so maybe there is an argument to be made that my dislike is not of snakes but my perception of snakes as being unpredictable. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, I still don't like snakes, I still find them unpredictable, and I still don't like their unpredictability; hence, I do not like snakes. The author's argument in this regard is not effective. Perhaps it is the pragmatist rather than the stoic in me, but one's perception of a thing is reality for that person, and fears are not something we "get over" through rational practice.

The author also makes constant references to things being "good" and "bad." A better practice would be to avoid those terms all together because they are so vague. What is "good" or "bad" to one person may not be "good" or "bad" to another. His overuse of "good" and "bad" took away from the value of his arguments for a stoic approach to life.

The one thing I really liked about this book was the author's advice on meditation. Meditation can be difficult for someone whose mind is constantly active with thought, and quieting the mind and dismissing thoughts can seem impossible sometimes. The author suggests imagining yourself by a stream with leaves gently falling on the water and floating by you. As thoughts pop into your mind, imagine yourself putting each thought on a leaf in the stream and letting it float away. I have found this practice helpful. However, this one piece of helpful advice does not make up for all the other shortcomings this book has. (And now that I've shared this bit of advice with you, I dare say there's little need to read the book -- ha! ha!)

Scott says

Very good explanation if Stoicism

Excellent book. I got this book as an introduction to Stoicism. It has provided a nice modern take on an ancient philosophy.

Euan Semple says

This is an excellent grounding in the ideas of the Stoics. Lots of clear explanation of their ideas and translated into our modern situation. I have also read William Irvine's "A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy", which is also worth reading, but a bit more interpretative of the original texts and less practical than this. I am currently reading a lot about Stoic philosophy, along with translations of the original writing by Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, and finding the combination of practical advice for living a good life with fascinating insights into how little the things that worry humans have changed over millennia, really enthralling.

Gaelle1947 says

This is the BEST overall presentation that I've read so far of stoic principles with practical advice and questions to ponder in order to implement these in one's everyday life. Very well organized by relevant

topics. I love the "textbook" approach whereby each chapter starts with a bulleted list of main points, then has "Remember this" boxes to highlight important take-aways and also "Try it now" boxes for useful exercises and techniques. At the end of each chapter there is a clear and concise summary of the lessons. The author also provides a lot of good reference material, a historical account of stoic philosophy and a modern day approach. I would give it "ten stars" if such a rating were available!! I also recommend checking out this author's website and YouTube presentations.

MR DP STORRAR says

Excellent

I suffer from anxiety and stumbled across stoicism. This book had a perfect balance of the stoic philosophy and practical exercises that I am starting to embed in my daily routine.

Michael A says

Much like William Irvine's book, this book, too, is more of a self-help book than a book on the actual philosophy. Some aspects of Stoicism are covered in synopsis form, but a lot of it is simplified and, even so, a lot of the original Stoic principles leave me a bit baffled. Why is rationality to be so prized? Why are virtue and this exalted sense of "happiness" living in accordance to nature so valuable? Why should anyone take a straw-man concept like the Stoic Sage seriously? These are just a couple of examples, but there are many more.

When Stoicism first appeared whole under Chrysippus, it was an entirely different beast from what it became later under the pen of a Seneca or a Marcus Aurelius. Marcus, Seneca, and, to some extent, Epictetus took it and made a heavy ethical practice out of it focused on a correct view of self in regard to one's own nature, the externalities of the world around one, and a sense of duty to the community of like-minded people in the world. Or at least this is what I've come to understand. Prior to this, except for maybe Zeno's Republic, it seemed very different. In the case of Chrysippus, he developed an intricate mess of logic and a new system of psychology that tied into a larger world-view of fate. There was not a strong sense of social duty to it, only an emphasis on trying to live a life according to nature and fate. The social duty seemed to come later, after a couple of generations of thinkers had died and been replaced by new thinkers, inspired in part by Plato.

So I think books on Stoicism tend to take a couple of differing paths of how they represent Stoicism as a whole. Academic sources try for a reconstruction or overall analysis of the whole as well as it can be understood -- some readers complain these are too dry or boring or impractical to be worth reading. Despite these flaws, I think they are valuable for providing general information. Other books like this cherry-pick psychological strategies and quotes out of the whole, putting it all together as a form of self-help for today's reader.

Some of this is good advice, of course. I have found it so, too, else I would not have picked this book up in the first place. And since the author is a psychologist, he does a good job of describing relevant strategies and how to implement them in one's life. He has written about a couple of strategies here I especially like -- the view from above and the need to meditate and self-evaluate, in addition to the usual emotional control strategies and a sense of duty to fellow human beings. However, a part of me wanting to know MORE about Stoicism itself is disappointed. As this book uses the heavily ethical view of later Stoicism, a lot of its earlier

aspects are ignored. For a book supposed to explain Stoicism first, I find that a big flaw. The other problem is its repetitiveness. Some strategies seem to be re-packaged several times under different names -- that of evaluating things beyond one's control and in one's control, for instance, becomes disciplining action, desire, and judgement.

I'd recommend this to you if you're looking for strategies to deal with stress and unwanted emotions and perhaps a sense of direction in life.. I wouldn't recommend it so much as a source of information on Stoicism as a philosophical system.

Iram says

This was a phenomenal book that can help the reader understand the basis of modern cognitive behavioral therapy. This book serves as an excellent introduction to stoicism and it contrasts this philosophy with primarily Cynicism and Epicureanism. Stoicism as a philosophy seems to adopt an attitude of indifferent humility to most things that are deemed to be valuable in life. It is this attitude that allows Stoics to view tragedy as a temporary moment, allowing one to face it with mental resolution and inner peace. Stoicism is what I believe most folks aspire towards but don't have a label for yet. This book is accessible to most readers who are willing to challenge their beliefs and are open to ideas that are essentially life-changing.

Brett says

This book was so hard to read. It is written from the perspective of picking it up and flipping to any section to read in short bursts. Due to this, it is really repetitive.

Henry Manampiring says

A systematic and structured introduction to Stoicism.

GoodBeer says

Kind of redundant; I think the book could have been trimmed down to a 1/4 of its current size. The author says things like "The Stoics believed..." but doesn't necessarily give a logical argument for those beliefs.

Overall a good read besides those two things.

Nazrul Buang says

Just finished reading 'Teach Yourself Stoicism and the Art of Happiness' (2013) by Donald J. Robertson. I decided to borrow a copy to learn and understand more about Stoicism, the ancient philosophy that is the

main opponent of Epicureanism, thus serving as a good contrast book after 'Travels with Epicurus' which I read earlier this year.

Unlike Klein's 'Travels with Epicurus' which reads like a journal/diary, Robertson's 'Teach Yourself Stoicism' reads more like an academic philosophy/self-help handbook, explaining in great detail the history of Stoicism and the beliefs of its founder Zeno. Yet, in a few ways like 'Travels with Epicurus', it also clarifies the difference between the original (and true) definition of being a Stoic and the contemporary (often mistranslated) definition, the word often misunderstood as being unemotional or passive. It explains how its teachings draw parallel to Buddhism due to its support for self-discipline and mindfulness.

It's interesting to understand that Stoicism is about living up to virtue above everything else, and the differences between what is desired, undesired and 'indifferent', thereby standing on opposite sides with Epicureanism. Whilst the book explains the main differences between Stoicism and other schools of thoughts, it also explain some similarities at the same time, such as Epicureanism's 'seize the moment', Nietzsche's 'what doesn't kill us makes us stronger', Bertrand Russell's 'worst-case scenarios' and Pareto's '80/20' rule on responses to adversities.

As appreciative as I am about learning Stoicism and the takeaway lessons, I struggled for several parts of Robertson's book. The content is very heavy for certain parts, where it tries to unravel the philosophical aspects of Zeno's teachings, and here only fans of philosophy would come to appreciate whereas readers like myself would find it dry and uninterested. It also lacks any narrative or story to make the book more interesting or relatable, making it feel like I'm reading a textbook for academicians rather than a nonfiction for general readers. The heavy historical parts are mostly for history fans, and readers who are interested in the takeaway lessons would simply skip to the summaries.

As a follower of Epicureanism, I was quite interested to learn a few things about Stoicism, especially about the clarifications and deeper understandings of the ancient school of thought. Personally I'm not sure if I can ever live in the same way as Zeno literally or figuratively, nor do I necessarily agree with some of this ideas, but he imparted timeless teachings that anyone, including myself, can appreciate and apply in their daily lives. EDIT: 3.5/5 stars.

Marcus Norberg says

I have read the three classic Stoic philosophers (Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus and Seneca) before this book, but I had not really grasped all the Stoic theories and thoughts. This book really got the Stoic message through. It had a lot of quotations from ancient philosophers aswell as modern uses of the philosophy in life and in therapy. It had stuff I really will consider and use in my everyday life.

Although I really enjoyed the book it was kind of repetitive at times, which made for a slow reading. But as my high school teacher always said: 'repetition is the mother of knowledge', so I'll let it pass. I would like to give it 4,5/5 stars, but as you're only able to give full stars, five will do :)

Michael says

Excellent Introduction to Stoicism

I found myself highlighting something almost every page. It took me a few years to read. There is much to

contemplate and practice, but even as a beginner it has brought increased peace to my life.

"But all excellent things are as difficult as they are rare." (Spinoza, Ethica, 5.42n)
