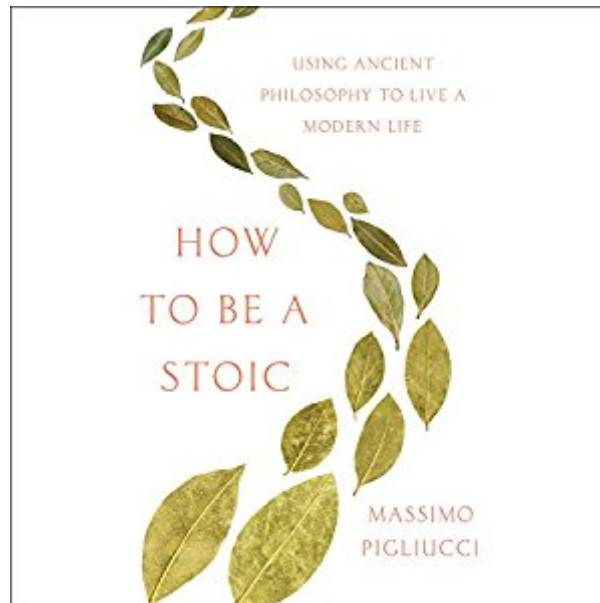




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# How To Be A Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy To Live A Modern Life



## Synopsis

An engaging guide to how Stoicism - the ancient philosophy of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius - can provide lessons for living in the modern world. Whenever we worry about what to eat, how to love, or simply how to be happy, we are worrying about how to lead a good life. No goal is more elusive. In *How to Be a Stoic*, philosopher Massimo Pigliucci offers Stoicism, the ancient philosophy that inspired the great emperor Marcus Aurelius, as the best way to attain it. Stoicism is a pragmatic philosophy that teaches us to act depending on what is within our control and separate things worth getting upset about from those that are not. By understanding Stoicism, we can learn to answer crucial questions. Should we get married or divorced? How should we bank in a world nearly destroyed by a financial crisis? How can we survive great personal tragedy? Whoever you are, Stoicism has something for you - and *How to Be a Stoic* is your essential guide.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Stoicism is a guide to living a happy, peaceful, and fearless life. It may be two thousand years old, but what it says is especially its way of life which the Stoics called *ethics* is as applicable today as it has ever been. Stoicism doesn't need improvement but it does need to be expressed in current English and the examples need to be updated so it is relevant to modern life. There have been several attempts to do this. For example, Donald Robertson's "Stoicism and the Art of Happiness" and "The Philosophy of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy" explain Stoicism in specific contexts. My own *Unshakable Freedom: Ancient Stoic Secrets Applied to Modern Life* is also an application of Stoic philosophy

to a specific area of life – achieving personal freedom. William Irvine's "A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy" takes a more comprehensive view of Stoicism. There is much to like in this book, but I felt Irvine was unduly defensive about Stoicism and deviated from it in some aspects. Therefore, I was looking for a comprehensive book on Stoicism that would be true to the original Stoic thoughts, but would express them in current English with modern examples, without being defensive about it. In Massimo Pigliucci's "How to be a Stoic", I found such a book. I got it yesterday, read it overnight, and I like it. Here is why.

1. It is clearly written. Stoic thinkers were also excellent communicators and good at expressing their thoughts. And there are many translations of their works which are also excellent. The problem is, when 2,000-year-old texts are translated they sound stilted to the modern ear. Sometimes the sentences are too long, the references too obscure, and the examples too far removed from our experience. Massimo's book, on the other hand, uses relatively shorter sentences, familiar words, contemporary idioms, and examples that are of immediate relevance. It is easier to read and understand.
2. The examples refer to problems we face today. The ancient Stoics faced imminent execution, exile, and arbitrary punishment. When Stoicism is explained using those examples, it can sound far removed from our concerns. Massimo applies Stoicism to our current concerns. This not only modernizes the Stoic examples, but points to solutions to problems that many people face.
3. It answers objections to Stoicism without being defensive. Anyone who tries to interpret Stoicism to a modern reader has this challenge: How to relate our current life situation to what the Stoics said some two thousand years ago? Massimo uses a clever device to achieve this just like Epictetus did. While Epictetus had an imaginary conversation with Zeus, Massimo has several imaginary conversations with Epictetus. Pigliucci brings his concerns to Epictetus who then deconstructs them and shows how the Stoic solution really works. What I really liked here was the fact that the responses of this imaginary Epictetus are not a pale imitation of what Epictetus actually taught, but a clear interpretation of it. The result is a compelling picture of a Stoic way of life that is compatible with modern life.
4. It uses personal experiences to illustrate the principles. Throughout the book, Massimo uses personal experiences. This works because it is immediate. It shows how he applied Stoicism in his own life. It is definitely easier to identify yourself with someone living today, leading a "normal" life than with someone who lived 2000 years ago under very different conditions. The book, in the tradition of Pierre Hadot, uses the framework of three disciplines of the Stoics: Desire, Action, and Assent. It starts with the basic premise of Stoicism that, "Some things are up to us and others are not." Here Massimo discusses the dichotomy of control and why it makes sense. Then he goes on to discuss questions like: What does "living according to nature" mean?

mean? Why is life "playing ball"? How do preferred and dispreferred indifferents work? Most importantly, does God exist or is the universe a case of swirling atoms? While Epictetus (and other Stoics) were firmly in God's camp, Massimo is not so sure. He prefers to be a skeptic, which should assure agnostics and atheists that the practice of Stoicism is open to anyone, believer or not. Then the book moves on to the discipline of action or how to live in this world. It starts discussing character (virtue) and provides several examples such as Helvidius Priscus and Malala Yousafzai. Massimo mentions that the virtues of Stoicism can also be found in various religions and it is important to preserve one's integrity. We need to develop compassion toward others. One way to achieve this is to remember that people do bad things because they lack wisdom, rather than out of pure malice. Having role models can help us put things in perspective, so we can become better human beings. This section of the book concludes with a particularly good and useful discussion of coping with disability and mental illness, and the relevance of Stoic principles in such contexts. The third section of the book, the discipline of assent or how to react to situations, starts with a discussion of death and suicide. We are bothered by death because we are capable of contemplating it. Massimo believes that death is inevitable and takes issue with Ray Kurzweil (who believes in things like extraordinarily long life and singularity) for never wanting "to leave the party." If you are thinking or worried about death, you may want to read this chapter. Then it moves on to dealing with anger, anxiety, and loneliness. Here he reprises the idea that people do bad things because they don't know any better. Think rationally about the situation to avert negative emotions. As Epictetus says "Logic defeats anger, because anger, even when it is justified, can quickly become irrational. So use cold, hard logic on yourself." Massimo also discusses love and friendship before concluding the section with practical exercises. The Appendix section of the book has a brief but useful outline of the Hellenistic schools of practical philosophy. Massimo's agnosticism and focus on Epictetus as the chief exponent of Stoicism parallel my own approach to Stoicism. I enjoyed reading the book. Reading it is like walking with a friend, who practices Stoicism, trying to explain to you what it is all about and how it helped him in his own life. A good read.

Despite its title, this book is more of a rumination on the core tenets of stoicism rather than a practical guide to living them. Do yourself a favor and if you are seriously interested in how to live more stoically, buy William Irvine's "A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy." That book not only introduces you to all the great stoic thinkers (rather than just Epictetus as Pigliucci does), it also includes exercises for practicing stoicism and is written in a far more straightforward

manner. Once you've read that, then come back for this book. In it, Pigliucci introduces modern ideas to the ancient philosophy, like cognitive behavioral psychology, evolutionary biology and more. Consider this book more of a journeyman's guide rather than an apprentice's.

Well written and great introduction to stoicism. The author does well mixing in excerpts from the original teachings and translating them into applicable, relatable terms of today. I wrote down the tips at the end and will use this book as a guide to incorporate some of the tips in my own life. I do wish more of Marcus appeared in the book, as he is my personal favorite stoic.

A useful tool to help guide you on your path to Stoicism. Be warned that this book is not wholly unbiased as it told from the perspective of the author however he does right by us by informing us in text where his beliefs differ. Many refer to Massimo as a modern Stoic, this book might be a testament to the fact. If you buy this book, supplement it with Stoicism and the Art of Happiness by Donald Robertson.

I don't usually write book reviews but this definitely deserves one. The book is just terrific. Both articulate and highly intelligent. Probably the best book available on applying stoicism to daily living.

A great read for those with some knowledge of stoicism but want simple and easy to read explanations on how and why to apply stoicism in the modern age. Although Pigliucci does use mostly Epictetus, he draws plenty from Seneca, Rufus, Cicero and Marcus Aurelius. I would also recommend this book as a gift.

Excellent.

I enjoyed this book. I'm a beginner in stoic studies..I ordered another book from yesterday..It appears to be a major task to be able to practice the stoic lifestyle.

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