

THE BIG IDEAS

Inner Confidence

“Disaster is virtue’s opportunity.”

Philosophy

What it’s really about.

Stressed?

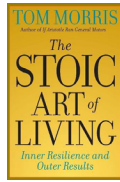
Put it into a cosmic perspective.

Authentic Living

How to train for it.

Wisdom

For the battles of life.



The Stoic Art of Living

Inner Resilience and Outer Results

BY TOM V. MORRIS · OPEN COURT © 2004 · 192 PAGES

“If you live long enough and pay attention to what you see, you may come to understand one of the deepest truths about life: Inner resilience is the secret to outer results in this world. Challenging times demand inner strength and a spirit that won’t be defeated. And, as a philosopher, I’ve come to understand that nearly all the times we live in are in some sense challenging. ...

How can we keep our balance when life threatens to throw us completely? How can we make the most of our talents and energies in such an unpredictable world? Is any form of enduring success and personal happiness even possible when, on any given day, it can feel like we’re running through a minefield and dodging potential disaster with every step?

A group of ancient philosophers known as the Stoics had some powerful answers to these questions. Three thinkers in particular, living during the Golden Age of Rome, saw that the strength of inner resilience is the secret of personal effectiveness; that inner peace is, for most of us, the missing link to personal happiness; and that a nobility of self-possession and emotional self-control can make all the difference for living a life in full command of its own resources, and with a deep enjoyment of its intrinsic rewards. The Stoics saw what we need. And they left us some powerful advice about how to find it in our lives.”

~ Tom V. Morris from *The Stoic Art of Living*

“At its best, philosophy is an activity to be pursued by every thoughtful person.

It’s not an enterprise of purely esoteric speculation reserved for ancient minds with nothing better to do.

It’s not a dusty museum of past masters. Philosophy is a vibrant quest to know, to understand, and finally, to act with wisdom.”

~ Tom V. Morris

This is our fourth Note on one of Tom Morris’s books.

As we discussed in our Notes on [True Success](#), [The Art of Achievement](#), and [Superheroes and Philosophy](#), Tom Morris got a dual Ph.D. from Yale in Philosophy and Religious Studies. Then he taught at Notre Dame for fifteen years before lecturing widely.

This book combines two of my favorite things: Tom Morris’s practical, philosophical wisdom with Stoic philosophy. (Get a copy of the book [here](#).)

We’ve done over 15 Notes on Stoicism—including many on the three primary Stoic philosophers Tom references above and features in this book: [Epictetus](#), [Seneca](#) and [Marcus Aurelius](#).

For the record: My favorite book on [Stoicism](#) (and one of my favorites all-time)? [The Daily Stoic](#) by modern Stoic Ryan Holiday. If you are looking for a place to start, THAT is (unquestionably in my opinion) the place to begin. (Ryan’s [DailyStoic](#) site and newsletter are also fantastic.)

Followed by [The Practicing Stoic](#), [The Stoic Challenge](#), [How to Think Like a Roman Emperor](#). (And, of course, the source material including: [Meditations](#) + [On the Shortness of Life](#) + [Discourses](#).) (And don’t forget [Musonius Rufus](#)!!)

As always, the book is packed with Big Ideas and I’m excited to share a few of my favorites we can apply to our lives TODAY so let’s jump straight in!

INNER CONFIDENCE

*"Philosophy did not find Plato
already a nobleman, it made
him one."*

~ Seneca

"Too many people seem to view the toughness of the world, the difficulties of life, as undermining the possibility of any sort of strong confidence in our pursuits. Seneca looks at this in the opposite way, seeing the obstacles we face as a proving ground for that inner attitude of resilient self-confidence that we all need:

The powers we have can never inspire in us a genuine inner self-confidence until we have confronted many difficulties along the way, and even now and then have had to struggle fiercely with them. This is the only way our true spirit ever can be really tested—the inner spirit we have that will never consent to be ruled by outer forces. The nature of such a spirit can be seen in the fact that no prizefighter can go into a contest with high spirits if he has never been beaten black and blue. The only man who can enter the ring with confidence is one who has seen his own blood, has felt his teeth rattled by an opponent's fist, has been tripped up and has experienced the full force of an adversary's charge, who has been knocked down in body but not in spirit—one who, as often as he falls, gets up again with greater determination than ever.

He even goes so far as to say in one place that:

Disaster is virtue's opportunity."

I'm creating this Note in late March, 2020—right as the COVID-19 crisis is challenging all of us.

This wisdom seems particularly timely.

Disaster? It's virtue's opportunity. It's time to practice our philosophy.

With that in mind, let's take a quick look at our cardinal virtues and figure out how we can put them to work for us TODAY.

Ancient Wisdom says, practice these four cardinal virtues:

Wisdom + Self-Mastery + Courage + Love.

- **Wisdom:** We know the game we're playing and how to play it well. (Hint: Live with virtue! High five your inner soul!)
- **Self-Mastery:** We're actually playing the game when it matters most. (Hint: Right now!)
- **Courage:** We're willing to act in the face of fear. (Now what needs to be done?!)
- **Love:** We remember the ultimate WHY of it all: Love. (Let's be kind, present and encouraging!)

Modern Science says, practice your Top 5 signature strengths ([what're yours?](#)) and THE Top 5:

Zest + Hope + Gratitude + Curiosity + Love.

- **Hope:** We know our future will be better. (Why? Because we'll do whatever it takes to make it so. Starting TODAY.)
- **Gratitude:** We appreciate all the blessings in our lives—especially (!) when things are tough. (God, thank you for blessing me with the gift of...)
- **Curiosity:** We are eager to see how the future will unfold and shine a flashlight on what's working and what needs work. (What's working? What needs work?! +1 +1 +1!!)
- **Zest:** We know that ZEST or Energy is the #1 predictor of our eudaimonic flourishing. (As such, in the toughest times, we're the MOST committed to our fundies: Eat! Move! Sleep!)

How can you put those virtues into practice TODAY?

" Make progress, and, before
all else, try hard to be
consistent with yourself."

~ Seneca

PHILOSOPHY: WHAT IT'S REALLY ABOUT

"Epictetus has the highest standards for philosophy. It should be true, and it should be practical. It should give us the noblest possible picture for our lives and train us in how to live them well. Philosophy is not an esoteric arena for the assiduous cultivation of presumptuous cleverness. It's not about words and labels and 'isms.' And least of all is it about academic credits, textbooks and tenure. It's about the soul. It's about virtue. And freedom. And happiness. It is about the best sort of achievement in life. ..."

Epictetus offered his visitors a philosophical diagnosis of their problems, and a Stoic prescription for a cure. But he knew that philosophy, at its best, requires more than just listening and learning. It involves putting into practice what's been learned, and making changes in our lives. We must not only think differently. We must live differently."

Philosopher-Professor Morris organized this book in three parts.

Part I features *The Wisdom of Seneca: A Lawyer's Advice for Life in the Fast Lane*.

Part II features *Epictetus on the Life Worth Living: Inner Achievement and Personal Freedom*.

Part III features *The Imperial Insights of Marcus Aurelius: Wise Words on Life Straight from the Top*.

That passage above is, of course, from Part II on Epictetus.

Philosophy? *It's about the soul. It's about virtue. And freedom. And happiness.*

Seneca talks about the power of philosophy as well. In *Letters from a Stoic*, he tells us:

"Philosophy's power to blunt all the blows of circumstance is beyond belief."

And: "Shall I tell you what philosophy holds out to humanity? Counsel... You are called in to help the unhappy."

Of course, we need to be philosophical [WARRIORS of the mind, not just librarians](#). We need to move from Theory to Practice to Mastery.

We must not only think differently, we must ACT differently.

In times of intense challenge, it's EVEN MORE important to return to the basic fundamentals. Questions like these are super helpful to get our bearings when the world gets crazy.

Part 1+. What's the #1 thing you KNOW you could be doing that, if you started doing it TODAY, would have the most positive impact on your life?

Seriously. What is it?

I can and will start doing THIS Today: _____

Part 1-. What's the #1 thing you KNOW you could STOP doing that, if you STOPPED doing it TODAY, would have the most positive impact on your life?

Seriously. What is it?

I can and will stop doing THIS Today: _____

One more time: Disaster? It's virtue's opportunity.

It's time to practice our philosophy.

TODAY.

" Consider what the trainers
of boys do. Has a boy fallen?
' Rise,' they say, ' and wrestle
again until you become
strong. You should also do
something like this. For you
can be confident that nothing
is more trainable than the
human soul."

~ Epictetus

STRESSED? PUT IT INTO A LARGER COSMIC PERSPECTIVE

"In a large and complex universe, matters will sometimes go awry, things will bump into

"It doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor, a CEO or a custodian your primary job is always personal growth in virtue. You are here to bring the right attitudes and actions to the people around you and to the external world. But it is always the inner you that is your first workplace and most important task."

~ Tom V. Morris

"If something is difficult, don't conclude too quickly that it's impossible. It's better to assume that whatever is possible at all is within your personal reach as well."

~ Marcus Aurelius

each other, and events will intersect in occasionally unfortunate ways. But when something does happen that seems bad, our philosopher urges that if we put it into this larger cosmic perspective, it will not shock and dismay us as much.

Whenever we are unhinged by a turn of events, it is because we are viewing those events in a very constricted context, from an unduly narrow perspective. In a small setting, anything can look big. But when we mentally step back and set the event disturbing us into a larger and broader contextualization, gaining a bigger picture perspective on it, we find it will not look either as surprising or as big and important. In the grandest scheme of things, our most dreaded obstacles take on a different and much less imposing look. According to the Stoics, it is the task of reason to give us this contextualization."

Welcome to a chapter on how Stoics deal with Obstacles.

One core practice that is, again, ESPECIALLY helpful when we feel overwhelmed by challenges?

Get perspective.

Put whatever's stressing you out in a broader context.

Note: We don't do this so we can numb ourselves out and avoid the problem. We do it so we can tame our emotional overwhelm and approach the challenge with the right perspective—that is, with a fierce, calm, antifragile confidence.

My current go to practice is an idea we talk about in our Mastery Series module on Hero-ology.

It's inspired by some Tripp Lanier wisdom and goes something like this...

Take a moment and step back from your current crisis.

Launch yourself like a rocket up and out into space. Hover around the moon and look down at the Earth from that perspective.

That help put things in perspective a bit?

Now, being jumbo huge and all, pick the Earth up in your hand like a baseball and fly to the sun. It's about 93 million miles away, but let's get there in a second.

Now, hover in front of the sun and, just for perspective-building fun, throw our beautiful little planet into the sun.

You know how many Earths can fit in the sun? 1.3 million.

Throw that many Earths into the sun to fill it up real quick. It'll only take a second.

Now, to continue our perspective-building tour of the Universe, look at the "i" on this page. Specifically, look at the dot in the "i." Get this: In terms of its relative size to the Milky Way Galaxy, that's how big our 1.3-million Earth-eating sun is. (Wow.)

Finally, grab a pin. Hold it up at an arm's distance at the darkest part of the night sky. Shine the Hubble Telescope at the spot covered by the pinhead. You know how many GALAXIES can fit into that little pinhead pointed at the darkest part of our night sky? THOUSANDS.

Head explode yet?

Now... Return to Earth.

And have this wisdom from Marcus Aurelius in mind as you go approach your challenge with all the fierce, calm, antifragile confidence you've got: *"And consider something else very near to you, the boundless abyss of the past and the endless stretch of the future in which all things vanish. Only a real fool is puffed up by things, or worried about them, or miserable because of them. Any problem that arises lasts only for a time, and really for just a very short time."*

TRAINING FOR AUTHENTIC LIVING

"He is wise who doesn't grieve for the things he doesn't have, but rejoices for the things he does have."

~ Epictetus

"Epictetus lays out a full and vivid picture of inner human excellence. He also recommends mental exercises and other practices to cultivate and reinforce that stance in our lives. At one point, he suggests:

First, tell yourself what you want to be, then act consistently with that in everything you do. In nearly all activities we see this at work. Those who follow athletic exercises first determine what they want to be, then they act accordingly. If a man is a long distance runner, there is a certain kind of diet, walking, massage, and exercise. If someone is a sprinter, all these things are different. If he is entering the pentathlon, they are even more different. You'll find the same thing true in the arts. If you are a carpenter, you will have certain things to do, but if you work in metal, other things. If we do anything without a goal in view, we do it to no purpose, and if we do it in connection with the wrong goal, we miss the mark. Furthermore, everyone has a general purpose, and a particular purpose. First, we must act as an authentic human being.

Acting as an authentic human being involves guarding our beliefs, managing our desires, and crafting our emotions, attitudes, and actions around an exalted inner orientation of the soul."

That's some powerful wisdom: *"First, tell yourself what you want to be, then act consistently with that in everything you do."*

Begs the question: What do you want to be? Or, perhaps: WHO do you want to be?

When you look at your Optimus-best self Energy + Work + Love wise, what do YOU see?

We need to have something to aim at—a clear target—because that target is going to determine what we need to do on a day-to-day basis to express that best version of ourselves.

The distance runner? They train very differently than the sprinter. The carpenter? They need to master different things than the metal worker.

I also love Epictetus's point that *"everyone has a general purpose, and a particular purpose. First, we must act as an authentic human being."*

We talk about this basic idea in the Mastery Series module on Hero-ology where I propose that we all have Three Quests: Universal + Unique + Ultimate.

We're all on the SAME Universal quest: To become the best version of ourselves! Think: Maslow's "What one can be, one must be!"

And... We all have totally Unique expressions of that Ultimate quest. Think: "What must YOU be?" Your Unique mission will be different than mine. We each need to play our roles well.

And... ULTIMATELY, it's all about one quest: Expressing that Optimus-best version of ourselves RIGHT NOW—closing the gap between who we're capable of being and who we're actually being as we do our best to high five our inner daimon and give the world all we've got.

All of which leads us to becoming authentic human beings—in integrity with our deepest values as the "authors" of our life's story.

Makes me think of our Note on [Character Strengths Matter](#) where we chatted about this: *"Authentic living correlated positively with happiness. When we have the courage to live authentically, we feel better! This is an example of research catching up with the wisdom through the ages. As one case in point, see how Polonius' advice to Laertes in Shakespeare's Hamlet reflects authentic living: "This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man."*

"Here's the way I like to put it. It's a 3D approach to life's achievement: (1) Discover your talents. (2) Develop those talents. (3) Deploy your talents into the world for the good of others as well as yourself."

~ Tom V. Morris

WISDOM FOR THE BATTLES OF LIFE

"Money alone will never satisfy—nor will power, fame, or status. The only wealth certain to fulfill us is inner wealth, a sort of health of the spirit, manifested in proper attitudes, emotions, and thoughts. And it is inner wealth that most easily flows over into the world in sustainable accomplishment."

~ Tom V. Morris

"This busy general took time during his military campaigns to sit up late at night and write down his observations about life in a personal notebook. These 'Meditations' have become one of the most popular expressions of Stoic philosophy ever published. With them, he became the last great Stoic thinker and writer of antiquity.

I find it interesting that Marcus Aurelius had his insights about life, and wrote them down, while out on military campaigns. He wasn't in his study, or in the comfort of a palace. He was living an adventure, facing danger, making difficult decisions, and dealing with the occasionally unpleasant consequences of those choices. I believe there is in this a lesson for us all. It is in our most difficult times, metaphorically fighting the battles of life, that we often gain the most valuable wisdom of all."

I can still vividly remember encountering the Marcus Aurelius exhibit in the Hungarian National Museum. It must've been September of 2001. Days later I picked up my first copy of his *Meditations*—which was written right there on the ancient battlefields of the Danube.

Isn't it fascinating that one of the world's most cherished books of wisdom was written by a leader in the midst of the most challenging times of his life (and his era)?

I find that fact particularly poignant in light of our current reality.

May we remember that *"It is in our most difficult times, metaphorically fighting the battles of life, that we often gain the most valuable wisdom of all."*

Here's to living with Wisdom + Self-Mastery + Courage + Love in service to our families, communities and world. TODAY.

B

Brian Johnson,
Philosopher in Residence

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About the Author of "The Stoic Art of Living"

TOM V. MORRIS



Tom Morris is the author of over twenty-five books. His twelfth, *True Success*, launched him into an ongoing adventure as a philosopher working throughout the broader culture. His audiences have included a great many of the Fortune 500 companies and the largest national and international trade associations. His work has been noted or covered by NBC, ABC, CNN, CNBC, NPR, and in most major newspapers and news magazines. He is also the author of the books *If Aristotle Ran General Motors*, *Philosophy for Dummies*, *The Art of Achievement*, *The Stoic Art of Living*, *The 7 Cs of Success*, *Twisdom*, and *If Harry Potter Ran General Electric: Leadership Wisdom from the World of the Wizards*. Tom has been called the world's happiest philosopher.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.