

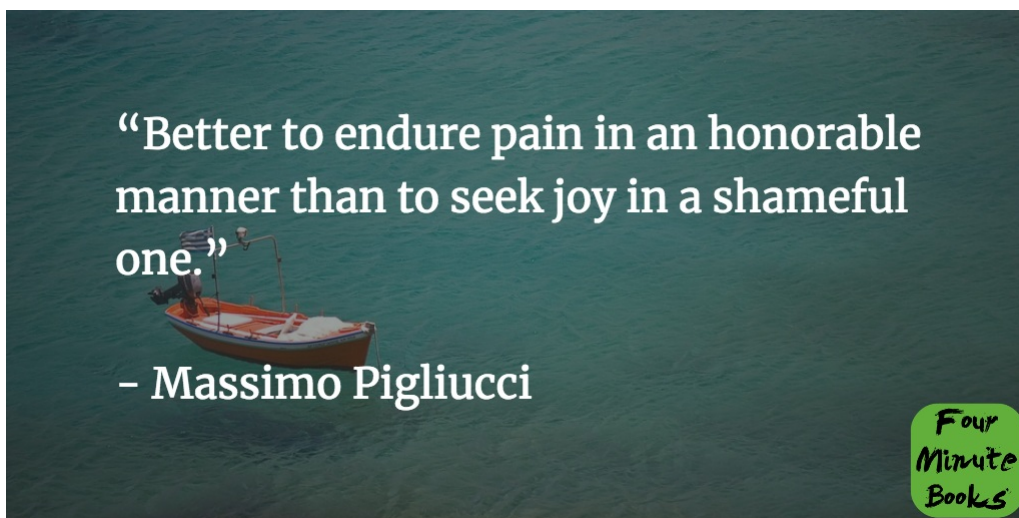
How To Be A Stoic Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *How To Be A Stoic* is a practical guide to ancient philosophy in modern life, covering the principles Socrates, Epictetus, and Cato followed in the three disciplines of desire, action, and assent.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Did you know that Stoicism was invented by accident? Quite literally. Zeno of Citium suffered shipwreck and ended up in Athens in 300 BC. Strolling around the city while taking some time to recover, he found a book about Socrates in a book store. He was so inspired that he ultimately stayed in Athens, began studying philosophy himself, and eventually started his own school of Stoicism.

Today, most of us briefly brush this philosophy in school and history books, but we never get beyond scratching the surface of what is actually a very practical approach to modern life. In *How To Be A Stoic*, philosophy professor Massimo Pigliucci aims to change that. Taking a page out of the writings of Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and others, he breaks down their suggestions into three different disciplines: desire, action, and assent, which stands for how we react to situations.

Here are 3 lessons from the book, one from each area:

1. The concept of preferred indifferents can help you act in line with your morals without becoming extremist.
2. In Stoicism, virtue is the highest good, and it's made up of four values.
3. You can have useful, pleasurable, and good friendships. The good are the most important.

Despite all that's different today compared to 2,000 years ago, the fundamentals of life haven't changed all that much. So let's see what we can take from these timeless teachers to improve our day-to-day!

Lesson 1: Use preferred indifferents to live morally without becoming a fanatic.

Despite being influential and sometimes wealthy figures, many famous Stoics died premature deaths. Or sometimes, because of it. Seneca, Socrates, and Cato were all sentenced, imprisoned, ordered to, or somehow otherwise condemned to commit suicide. Cato refused to be captured by Caesar, Seneca was conspired against by Nero, and Socrates was unjustly executed. Unlike the others, however, he had a chance to escape. But he didn't, in order to stand by his morals.

This kind of inflexibility is a rather uncommon example among Stoics. Usually, the philosophy likes to see its teachings adjusted in practical, livable ways. One such way is to look at everything that's desirable as so-called preferred indifferents. That could be wealth, health, family, friends, or whatever else makes you particularly happy.

A preferred indifferent is an option you would *prefer*, given the choice, but are indifferent to, should you be unable to attain it. For example, if the Stoics had a chance to work with their emperor and become rich in the process, they would take it. But they would never take desperate measures to become rich on their own.

Everything in life has a moral component. There's always a *right* choice. Often, it will also lead to happiness. But if it doesn't, choose it just the same.

Lesson 2: Virtue is the highest good, and it consists of temperance, courage, justice, and wisdom.

One thing that can make it a lot easier to make the morally correct choice time and time again in your life is the Stoic concept of virtue. If you align all your decisions with it, you will do just fine by not just Stoic, but pretty much all religious or spiritual standards across the world.

Pigliucci analyzed how the Stoics defined virtue and found it to break down in four parts:

1. **Temperance.** This is the ability to control your gut instincts and impulses and reign them in if you need to.
2. **Courage.** The mental strength you need to see your decisions through when the going gets tough.
3. **Justice.** Do you treat others the way you'd want to be treated?
4. **Wisdom.** This is the knowledge and foresight you need to deal with all of life's situations.

Out of all these, the Stoics considered wisdom the most important, because it is good and helpful, regardless of the event. Wisdom will help you make the best choice, even when the odds aren't stacking up in your favor, which they occasionally don't for all of us.

A simple question you can ask any time, to figure out what's the most virtuous option, is this: "What would the person do who deserves everything I want?" It's become [my go-to problem solver this year](#).

Lesson 3: There are three kinds of friendships, and while all are important, one you should particularly focus on.

A sad part of growing up is that the older you get, the more superficial new friendships become. Wouldn't you agree? I sure find this to be the case. And while we don't need many true friends, it'd sure be nice to make some [real connections](#), even after we [launch into our careers](#). Luckily, the Stoics have a solution for this too.

When Aristotle studied under [Plato](#), he developed a classification of friendships:

1. **Friendships of utility.** When you go to the dentist, you return with healthy teeth and he gets paid. While mutually beneficial, this isn't exactly the kind of relationship you'd want your life to depend on, is it?
2. **Friendships of pleasure.** These are your poker buddies, your sorority sisters, your drinking friends, and most of your work colleagues. If the shared activity or organization disappears, so does the relationship.
3. **Friendships of the good.** What we call true friendships. They're not based on business or hobbies, but on who we are as people, which is what makes them so strong.

While we all need friendships of the first and second kind, you should treat them like preferred indifferents. It is only the last type that is truly worth striving for, and we don't need many of them to live a good life.

My personal take-aways

The distinction between the three disciplines is almost equivalent to the one Ryan Holiday makes in [The Obstacle Is The Way](#). It is commonly used when [dissecting Stoicism](#), and as such, a useful tool indeed. I enjoyed the level of detail and research that went into [How To Be A Stoic](#). Even if you're already familiar with many of this philosophy's ideas, you can still learn something new.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- How Stoicism managed to spread so far and wide

- The dichotomy of control
- A modern example of practicing morality
- Why Stoics believed in the power of role models
- What perspective Stoicism takes on death and why it's healthy
- How you can use other-izing to be less angry

Who would I recommend the How To Be A Stoic summary to?

The 17 year old pupil, who recently heard about Stoicism in school, but didn't bother to look deeper, the 25 year old college student, who's frustrated with her friendships, and anyone who is short-tempered.