
January 14th

CUT THE STRINGS THAT PULL YOUR MIND

“Understand at last that you have something in you more powerful and divine than what causes the bodily passions and pulls you like a mere puppet. What thoughts now occupy my mind? Is it not fear, suspicion, desire, or something like that?”

—MARCUS AURELIUS, *MEDITATIONS*, 12.19

Think of all the interests vying for a share of your wallet or for a second of your attention. Food scientists are engineering products to exploit your taste buds. Silicon Valley engineers are designing applications as addictive as gambling. The media is manufacturing stories to provoke outrage and anger. These are just a small slice of the temptations and forces acting on us—distracting us and pulling us away from the things that truly matter. Marcus, thankfully, was not exposed to these extreme parts of our modern culture. But he knew plenty of distracting sinkholes too: gossip, the endless call of work, as well as fear, suspicion, lust. Every human being is pulled by these internal and external forces that are increasingly more powerful and harder to resist.

Philosophy is simply asking us to pay careful attention and to strive to be more than a pawn. As Viktor Frankl puts it in *The Will to Meaning*, “Man is pushed by drives but pulled by values.” These values and inner awareness prevent us from being puppets. Sure, paying attention requires work and awareness, but isn’t that better than being jerked about on a string?