



Being Better

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Being better by Kai Whiting and Leonidas Konstantakos is an excellent primer on how Stoicism really works in real life. The authors make it clear that Stoicism is a self-help philosophy with a twist. It does not tell you what you should do because “no one can tell you how to live your life because you must reason for yourself and live accordingly — you must take Stoic principles and make them work for you. You must choose which rules or practices can be accepted and integrated or rejected and dismissed. Sooner or later, you must also decide if you stand for something or if you are just standing around, letting others speak up, waiting for them to make the difference in the world, your world”.

Applying Stoicism to our lives

Easier said than done, you may say. If Stoic principles are not rules to be followed, how does one take the principles and apply them to one’s life? Can they be applied to any decision you are required to make?

Take an apparently trivial thing like drinking milk. Are Stoic virtues relevant here? Using their own example, the authors show how they applied all four Stoic virtues to decide what to do. The main lesson is not what you should do about dairy consumption but how to apply Stoic principles if you choose to.

In many ways, *Being Better* is a unique book about practicing Stoicism in the modern world. The book is full of contemporary examples of Stoic principles in action, even though those who use Stoic principles may not be aware of Stoicism at all, such as Pat Tilman, Rosa Parks, Alex Zanardi, and Nick Hanauer. The authors also include examples of those of whom we might never have heard.

Answering Stoic questions

Being Better has an intriguing structure. It is designed to pose provocative Stoic questions answering of which would lead us to a better life. Imagine yourself surrounded by ancient Stoics who pose you questions like these:

Zeno: When was the last time you asked yourself “Who am I?” What was your

response? What character flaws and strengths did you ignore or downplay?

Musonius. What is getting in your way of thinking and acting virtuously? Is it a possession? If it is, why are you keeping it?

Cato. Was there a time when you could have spoken against something unjust but didn’t? What would you do differently now?

Cleanthes. How much of what you have is the result of accident or inheritance? How much of it are you truly responsible for?

Panaetius. Have you given any thought to how many people have contributed their time, effort, and skills to your success and wealth?

Marcus Aurelius. Who do you consider your enemy? What do you despise about them? Would you change your mind if you realize we are all interrelated?

Sphaerus. How much do you act on what you know? How much have you learned about your community and its problems? How do you help?

Posidonius. Have you ever agreed with a false statement so as not to ‘rock the boat’? Was getting along more important than truth?

How would you answer them? *Being Better* explores these and other questions from a Stoic perspective to show how answering questions like these lead to a deeper exploration of Stoic principles.

Getting to know the Stoics

It is refreshing to note that the book more expansive in terms Stoic teachings. While Whiting and Konstantakos include the teachings of better known Stoics like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, they also deal with the teachings of other Greek and Roman Stoics such as Zeno, Cato, Musonius Rufus, Sphaerus, Panaetius, and Posidonius.

Being Better is clear and concise introduction to practicing Stoicism in the modern world. It is one of the best introductory books on Stoic practice.