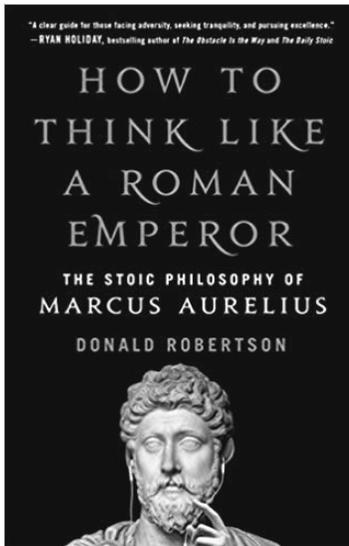


BOOK REVIEW

How to Think Like a Roman Emperor



How to Think Like Roman Emperor by Donald Robertson. St. Martin's Press. 294pp. Available in bookstores and on Amazon <https://amzn.to/2VW7xFa>

Reviewed by
Chuck Chakrapani

An unusual book on Stoicism

How to Think Like a Roman Emperor is three books in one: The story of Marcus Aurelius, a clear exposition of Stoic principles, and a great collection of Stoic exercises. It is also an introduction to CBT as it relates to Stoic thought.

The title of the book *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor* is somewhat deceptive. The impression one gets is that it is book on Marcus Aurelius and his thoughts. It is that, yes, but it is a lot more than that. It is an introduction to the entire Stoic ethics supported by several specific Stoic exercises dealing with different everyday problems like fear, anger, anxiety and the like.

How to Think Like a Roman Emperor is unlike any other book Donald Robertson has written. In fact, it is unlike any other book on Stoicism currently on the market. It is an 'eyewitness' account of the story of Marcus's life told in a non-linear style. Yet, it is not really a biography of Marcus Aurelius. Rather it is an explanation of the Stoic philosophy of Marcus Aurelius (and of other Stoics), with incidents in his life providing the backdrop. It is, as the subtitle says, *The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius*; and, we can add, "...and Other Stoics and Its Influence on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy."

What is in the book?

Roberson opens with the death of Marcus Aurelius and traces the origin of Stoicism and its basic tenets such as living in agreement with nature, indifferents, virtues and passions. Then he explores Marcus' childhood and early adulthood and describes the three stages of experiencing passion (negative emotional state): Our first reactions to events, our uncritical assent to our initial reaction and, as a result, experiencing

'passion'. This is followed by a chapter on Marcus as a young man given to anger and how he learned life lessons from different people close to him, leading to a discussion of an idealized version of a Stoic, the Stoic sage.

And Marcus also learned from his co-emperor Lucius – how *not* to be a hedonist like him and how to conquer desire by considering its consequences. A discussion of Marcus' physical fragility that follows discusses how to tolerate pain. The next two chapters of the book deal with Marcus' battles with Sarmatians, and Avidius Cassius' revolt. These two chapters deal with fear and anger respectively.

The book ends with a chapter that folds back into the place in which the book began: Marcus's death. We get the view from above.

This book is not a quick read. It is about 300 pages long and it demands your full attention, especially if you are new to Stoicism. But your attention will be well-rewarded.

Who is this book for?

Who is this book for? A better question might be "who is it *not* for?" Those who are new to Stoicism will benefit from Marcus's thoughts and the exercises that follow. Those who are already familiar with Stoicism may want to read this as well to appreciate how Marcus' short book *Meditations* covers a wide range of Stoic principles. I could not think of anyone who would not benefit from reading this excellent book.

Can you read a book over a weekend and become wise? I don't know and I wouldn't think so. But reading the book over a weekend made me *feel* wiser. That's a lot more than I can say for most other books I read.

Highly recommended.