

# A GUIDE TO MARCUS AURELIUS AND STOICISM

Donald J. Robertson



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The Philosophy of a Roman Emperor

by Donald J. Robertson



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"IN MY MIND'S EYE, I LOVE TO SOAR AMONG THE STARS OR STAND ON MIGHTY ATLAS' SHOULDERS, AND FROM AFAR TO LOOK DOWN UPON MEN'S WANDERINGS BELOW."

THAT'S FROM OVID, MASTER, ISN'T IT?

YES, THE PHILOSOPHY OF PYTHAGORAS, WHICH HE SAYS NUMA BROUGHT TO ROME... BUT THAT'S PROBABLY JUST A LEGEND. ANYWAY, TRY TO WRITE ABOUT THIS IDEA, PUTTING IT IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

HAVE YOU NOTICED, MARCUS, HOW LOOKING AT EVENTS FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE CHANGES THE WAY WE FEEL ABOUT THEM?

INDEED. THOSE MEN ARGUING IN THE STREET BELOW ALMOST CAME TO BLOWS... ALARMS OTHERS WITH THEIR SHOUTS... AND YET A PAINTING OF THEIR BRAWL WOULD NOT ALARM US.

NEITHER ARE THE THINGS THEY'RE ARGUING ABOUT.

LIKE IN A WORK OF ART...

BUT THE PAINTING ISN'T REAL...

PERHAPS ONE DAY, GRAVE CONCERNS THAT TROUBLE OUR WAKING HOURS WILL SEEM NO MORE IMPORTANT THAN DREAMS THAT AGITATED US WHILE SLEEPING.

## THE STOIC GOAL OF LIFE

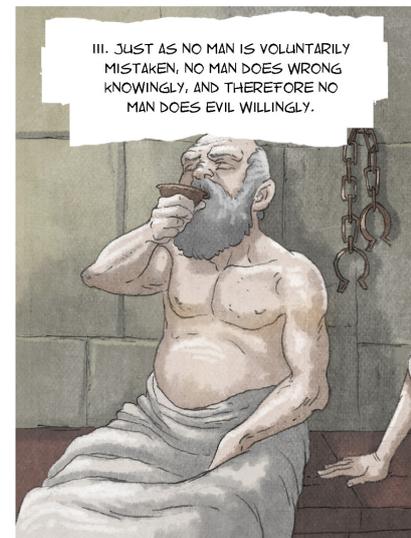


In 399 BC, Socrates, the most important philosopher of antiquity, was executed for impiety and corrupting the youth. His death sent shockwaves through the ancient world. In the centuries that followed several “Hellenistic” schools of philosophy rose to prominence, including Stoicism. It flourished for nearly five centuries altogether, originating in Greece at the end of the 4th century BC, and later spreading throughout the Roman empire.

The Stoics' main rivals were Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Epicureanism, although Cynicism and Skepticism were also important movements in philosophy at this time. Stoicism, though, was the school most focused on training in psychological resilience, and even resembled modern psychotherapy in many ways. Stoicism is a practical philosophy – *philosophy as a way of life*.

The Stoics taught that the supreme goal of life is arete, meaning “virtue” and “excellence”, or rather a type of moral wisdom. Indeed, the word philosophy (*philosophia*) literally means “love of wisdom” in Greek. The majority of people, however, mistakenly view “external” advantages such as health, wealth, and reputation, as the most important things in life.

These are not good in themselves, say the Stoics, but only become so insofar as they are used wisely. In the hands of a foolish and vicious man, by contrast, wealth merely provides more opportunity to do foolish and vicious things, and the same arguably goes for other such “external” advantages.



## LIVING IN AGREEMENT WITH NATURE

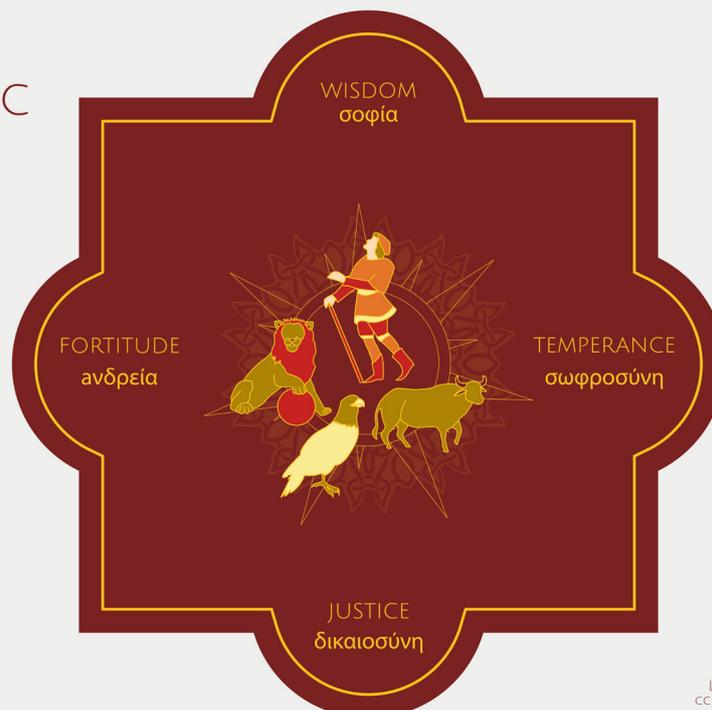
The Stoics described the goal as “living in agreement with nature,” by which they meant living in accord with human nature, whose highest faculty they considered to be reason. For Stoics, living in accord with nature therefore means living rationally, wisely, and virtuously.

They treated the “four cardinal virtues” of Greek philosophy as broad categories referring to the different forms that moral wisdom takes in different areas of life. Wisdom is the central virtue but takes the form of justice when applied to our dealings with other people. We require both courage and temperance to act consistently in accord with justice throughout life, because otherwise our fears and desires would threaten to draw us in a contrary direction.



- **Wisdom**, knowing what is really good (for us and others) as opposed to what merely appears so
- **Justice**, applying wisdom (plus fairness and kindness) to society and our relations with other individuals
- **Fortitude** (aka Courage), acting with wisdom in the face of things that most people fear
- **Temperance** (aka Moderation), exercising wisdom in relation to things we typically desire

## THE SOCRATIC VIRTUES



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## THREE STOIC PRACTICES

The Stoics taught many psychological practices, intended to help us fulfill our natural potential by living more consistently in accord with wisdom and justice.

**1. CONTEMPLATION OF THE SAGE.** Imagine the ideal Stoic wise man or woman, and take them as your example. How might they cope with different challenges in life? Try to put their attitudes into words, which you can memorize as short sayings or maxims. Consider examples such as Socrates, Zeno, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, or other specific role models from history, fiction, or your own life.

**2. PREMEDITATION OF ADVERSITY.** Practice imagining different “catastrophes” that could befall you, as if they’re happening now, while maintaining Stoic objectivity and indifference toward them. Focus on the distinction between what is up to you and what is not, and allow sufficient time for your initial feelings to abate naturally. Consider how a Stoic sage would respond to the same events.

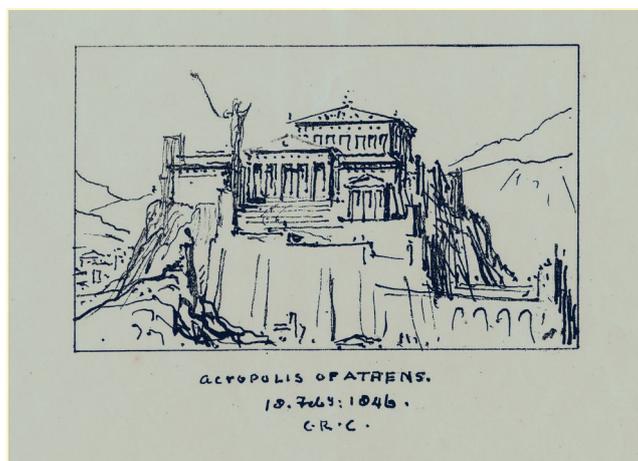
**3. CONTEMPLATION OF DEATH.** Periodically reflect on your own mortality, viewing it dispassionately, and as both natural and inevitable. Each morning remind yourself that the day ahead could be your last; each evening imagine viewing the day behind you as if it were your last. Try to live grounded in the present moment, appreciating the gift of life as if you’re a guest at a festival or banquet, which you know will only last for a short while.



## THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

This is a fourth Stoic practice, and one of the most popular. Imagine the whole world as if seen from high above, like the gods looking down from Mount Olympus. Alternatively, try to imagine the whole of space and time, and your place within things. Consider also the transience of all material things, and the small span of time that human life lasts.

When Marcus Aurelius describes the View from Above he mentions looking down on *agoras*, or marketplaces. Elsewhere he calls the mind rising above violent passions, in this way, an impenetrable citadel, using the Greek word *acropolis*. Later in life he would have the opportunity to actually look down from the famous Athenian Acropolis upon the Ancient Agora, where Socrates was tried and executed centuries earlier.



*Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum*

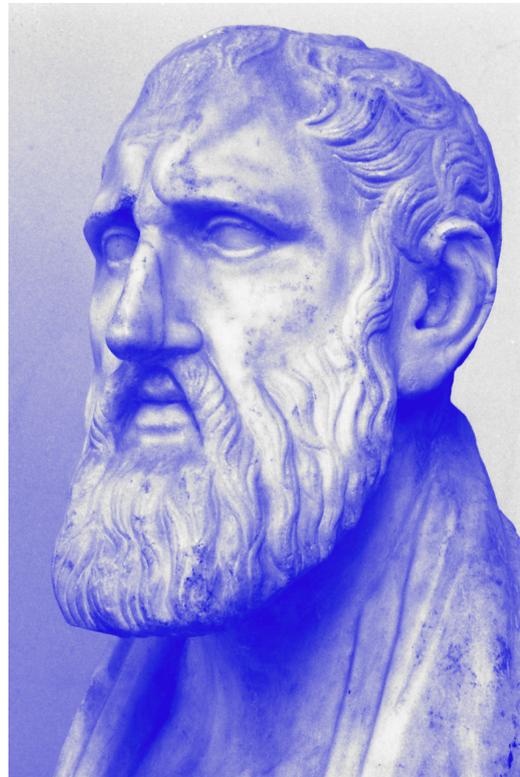
# WHO WERE THE STOICS?



## EARLY STOICISM AT ATHENS

The Stoic school of philosophy was founded in 301 BC by a Phoenician merchant called Zeno of Citium. It drew upon earlier schools of philosophy, particularly the teachings of Socrates and his followers. After Zeno died, his student Cleanthes became the “scholarch” or head of the Stoic school. He was succeeded in turn by Chrysippus, a prolific writer and one of the greatest intellectuals of the ancient world. Together, these three philosophers defined early Stoicism.

They were followed by a series of scholarchs, one of whom, Diogenes of Babylon, visited Rome as part of an embassy in 155 BC. Stoic philosophy particularly appealed to the Romans because it complemented their traditional martial values, and was soon embraced by their statesmen and generals.



*Zeno of Citium, founder of Stoicism. CC BY-SA 4.0 BEIC Foundation*

<b>Heads of the Stoic School</b>
Zeno of Citium
Cleanthes of Assos
Chrysippus of Soli
Zeno of Tarsus
Diogenes of Babylon
Antipater of Tarsus
Panaetius of Rhodes

## MIDDLE STOICISM IN THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

The last head of the Stoic school at Athens, was Panaetius, whose most illustrious student, Posidonius, relocated to the island Rhodes. By this time, the school appears to have become decentralized and divided into three branches, corresponding to the teachings of the last three scholars: Diogenes, Antipater, and Panaetius.

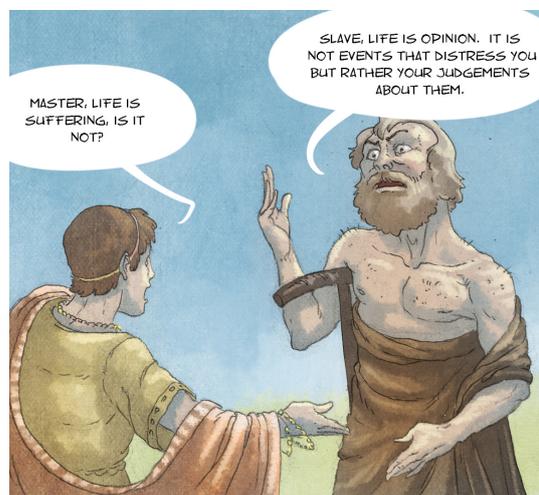
Only a tiny fraction of the original Stoic writings survive today. We have fragments from Zeno and other early Greek Stoics. We should also mention Cicero, although he was not himself a Stoic, but an adherent of the Academic school of philosophy founded by Plato. Cicero was a prominent statesman, and a former consul, who died during the final years of the Roman Republic. He was also one of the most celebrated orators in Roman history, and had studied Stoic philosophy in Athens. Cicero was somewhat critical of Stoicism but also drew upon many of its teachings. He was friends with a famous Roman Stoic called Cato the Younger, whose detailed description of Stoic ethics Cicero portrays in *De Finibus*.

Cato and Cicero opposed Julius Caesar, who instigated a civil war in an attempt to overthrow the Republic and appoint himself dictator of Rome. Although Caesar was victorious, before long he was assassinated by Cato's nephew, Brutus, and other conspirators. This led to another series of civil wars, from which Octavian, Caesar's nephew, emerged as the victor. Octavian later assumed the title Augustus, and effectively became the founder of the Roman empire. He studied philosophy under two Stoic teachers, and reputedly wrote an exhortation to philosophy, although it does not survive today. This set a precedent for Roman emperors, and other senior statesmen, to take an interest in Stoicism.

## LATE STOICISM IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Most of the Stoic writings we have today come from three famous philosophers of the Roman imperial period: Seneca the Younger, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. Seneca was rhetoric tutor and speechwriter to the Emperor Nero. He wrote many letters concerning Stoicism, which were apparently meant for publication and read like modern essays.

Epictetus was originally a slave owned by Nero's Greek secretary. He gained his freedom, though, and went on to become perhaps the most influential teacher of philosophy in Roman history. Although he wrote nothing himself, we have four volumes of his discussions with students concerning Stoicism, called *The Discourses*, and a short condensation of some key sayings called *The Handbook* or *Encheiridion*. *The Discourses* were transcribed by one of Epictetus' students called Arrian of Nicomedia, who became one of Emperor Hadrian's most senior statesmen and generals, and an important author in his own right.



The last famous Stoic of antiquity was the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, who was educated in philosophy from his teenage years. He had several teachers, foremost among whom was Junius Rusticus, who had served in the military alongside Arrian, and gave Marcus his personal copy of *The Discourses* to read. Marcus adopted Stoicism as his philosophy of life. He also kept a series of private notes recording Stoic advice to himself, which we know today as *The Meditations*.

Within a few generations, Stoicism was superseded by Neoplatonism as the dominant school of Greek philosophy, and philosophy in general was eventually eclipsed by Christianity. Early Christians were, however, often familiar with and sympathetic toward certain Stoic teachings. The Stoics even get a mention in the New Testament.

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens... A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. – Acts, 17:16-18

Stoicism's influence on religion and the arts endured down to the Renaissance, when there was a resurgence of interest in classical literature. A philosophical movement called Neostoicism appeared in the 16th century, which sought to combine the ethics of Christianity and Stoicism.

More recently, in the late 20th century, the Stoics were cited by the founders of modern cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) as the philosophical inspiration for their research, which has led to psychotherapeutic treatments supported by modern clinical trials. Since then, its popularity has grown rapidly in the self-improvement sector.

<b>Stoic Writings</b>
Seneca wrote various letters, dialogues, and tragedies, the best known being a collection of 124 letters addressed to his friend Lucilius, sometimes called the <i>Moral Letters</i> .
Epictetus himself wrote nothing but his teachings were transcribed in <i>The Discourses</i> and summarized in <i>The Handbook</i> or <i>Enchiridion</i> by his student Arrian.
Marcus Aurelius wrote his philosophical reflections in a private notebook, published after his death, which is known today as <i>The Meditations</i> .

## WHO WAS MARCUS AURELIUS?



Marcus Aurelius was Roman emperor from 161-180 CE. He is also the last famous Stoic philosopher of antiquity. We know more about Marcus than about any other Stoic because, as emperor, he was such an important historical figure. We learn about his personal reflections on philosophy from *The Meditations*.

These notes show him applying Stoicism to many aspects of life. They also contain a few clues about Marcus' personality. *Anger*, for instance, is one of the recurring themes of *The Meditations*, and Marcus describes at least ten different ways of coping with it. We know he struggled to control his own temper, and often became angry with Rusticus, his main Stoic teacher, because he mentions this in the first chapter. He also tells us a lot about the family members and teachers who influenced him, beginning with his paternal grandfather, whose freedom from anger Marcus praises.



We also gain remarkable insights into Marcus' character from a collection of letters discovered in the 19th century. They contain conversations between the Latin rhetorician Fronto and several of his friends and students, most notably Marcus Aurelius. Marcus comes across as good humored and very affectionate toward his close friends. We can see that he took his duties as emperor extremely seriously, and was perhaps even a workaholic.

We also learn a great deal about Marcus from several Roman histories.

- Cassius Dio's *Historia Romana*
- Herodian's *History of the Empire from the Death of Marcus*
- The *Historia Augusta*, whose chapter on Marcus is attributed to Julius Capitolinus

There are also many passing references to Marcus and his empire in other ancient sources.

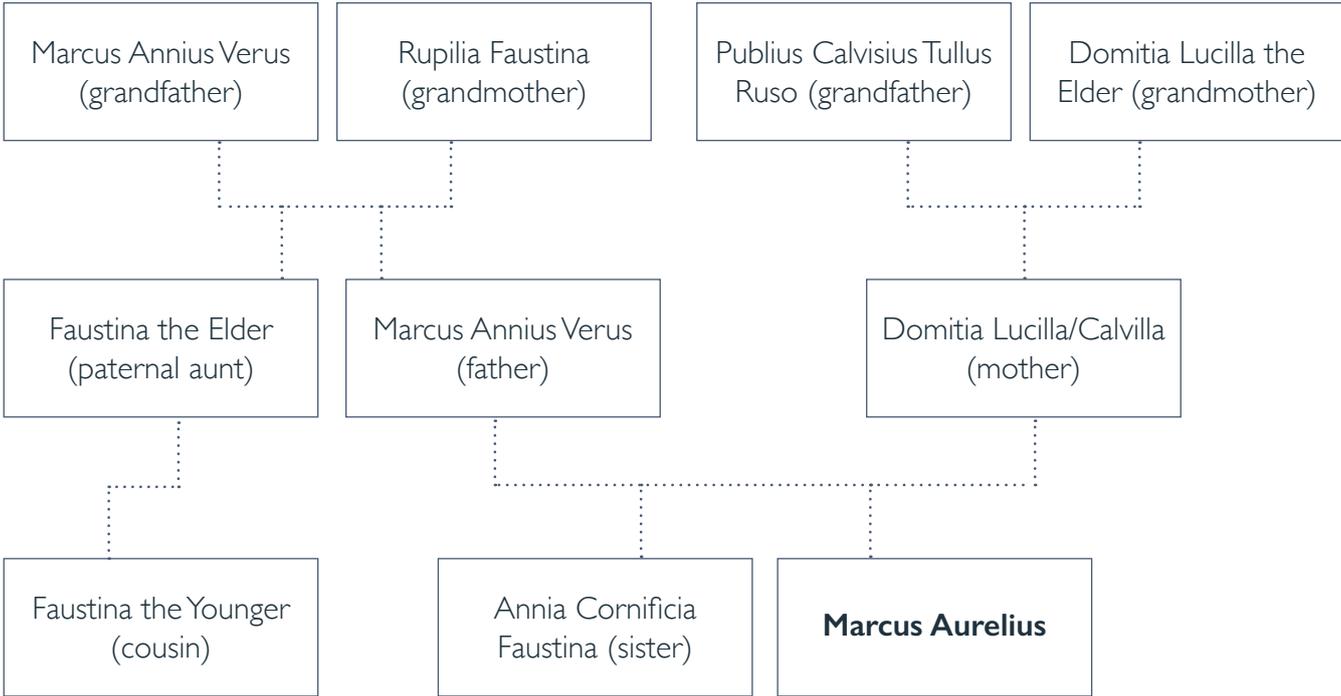
In addition, we have many surviving references to Marcus' legislative actions in Roman legal digests, which show that he consistently adopted a progressive attitude toward improving the rights of women, children, and slaves. He didn't believe in sudden change, though, as *The Meditations* says we must be satisfied if we make small steps in the right direction toward our political ideals. We even have evidence from archeology, in the form of statues, inscriptions, and coins, etc., dating from the time of Marcus Aurelius.

Marcus was born into a very wealthy and powerful family of Roman nobles or "patricians". His grandmother, Rupilia Faustina, was a great-niece of the Emperor Trajan and the half-sister of Emperor Hadrian's wife, the Empress Vibia Sabina. Marcus' great-grandfather on his mother's side, Lucius Catilius Severus, was appointed consul twice, the most senior rank among senators. He also served, under Hadrian, as Urban Prefect, the official in charge of the city of Rome. Marcus' paternal grandfather, Marcus Annius Verus, served three times as consul, making him another of Rome's most senior statesmen. When Marcus was aged only about four, however, his father died from unknown causes, before he had a chance to reach the rank of consul. Marcus was raised mainly by his mother, Domitia Lucilla, who inherited a brick and tile factory. She was an exceptionally wealthy and highly-educated woman, who spoke fluent Greek, and surrounded herself with intellectuals.

Toward the end of Emperor Hadrian's life, he named Antoninus Pius as his successor, the next emperor. Hadrian instructed Antoninus to adopt Marcus, along with the son of a recently-deceased Roman noble, a boy who would later become known as Lucius Verus. Antoninus was Marcus' uncle, having married his mother's sister, Faustina the Elder. Antoninus also arranged for Marcus to marry his daughter, Faustina the Younger. When Marcus became Emperor, in 161 CE, he immediately appointed Lucius Verus his co-emperor, and they ruled jointly. Lucius died suddenly, perhaps from plague, eight years into their rule.



This is a list of notable relatives, as we have very incomplete details of Marcus' extended family.



## THE IMPERIAL SUCCESSION



One of the most common questions people ask is why a good emperor like Marcus Aurelius would allow a bad one, like his son Commodus, to succeed him on the throne. There's more to this than you might think at first. It's worth noting, for instance, that Lucius Verus, having been appointed co-emperor, was likely expected to outlive and succeed Marcus. Lucius was nine years younger, and in better physical condition. After marrying Lucilla, Marcus' daughter, Lucius became his son-in-law, and our sources suggest he was even referred to as Marcus' son.



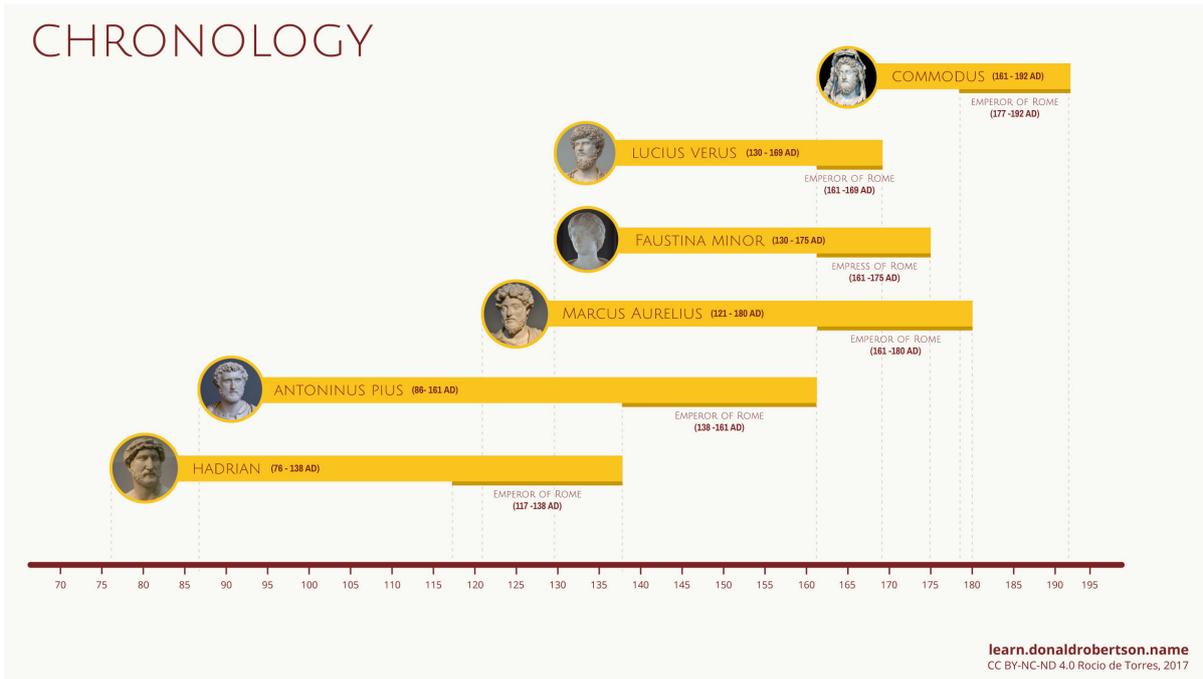
Emperor Lucius Verus insisted, on returning from the Parthian War, that Marcus' two young sons, Commodus and Marcus Annii Verus, should be named Caesars, making them Marcus and Lucius' designated successors. Commodus was five years old at this time, and his brother was a year younger. A few years later, Lucius Verus died unexpectedly, and not long after, the young Caesar, Marcus Annii Verus, also passed away. Commodus was left Marcus' only surviving son, and heir to the imperial throne.

Marcus arranged for his daughter, Lucilla, to marry Claudius Pompeianus, the most senior Roman general in the Marcomannic Wars. Pompeianus, a Syrian of humble birth, became not only the emperor's son-in-law but also the husband of an *augusta* (akin to an empress), Lucilla being the

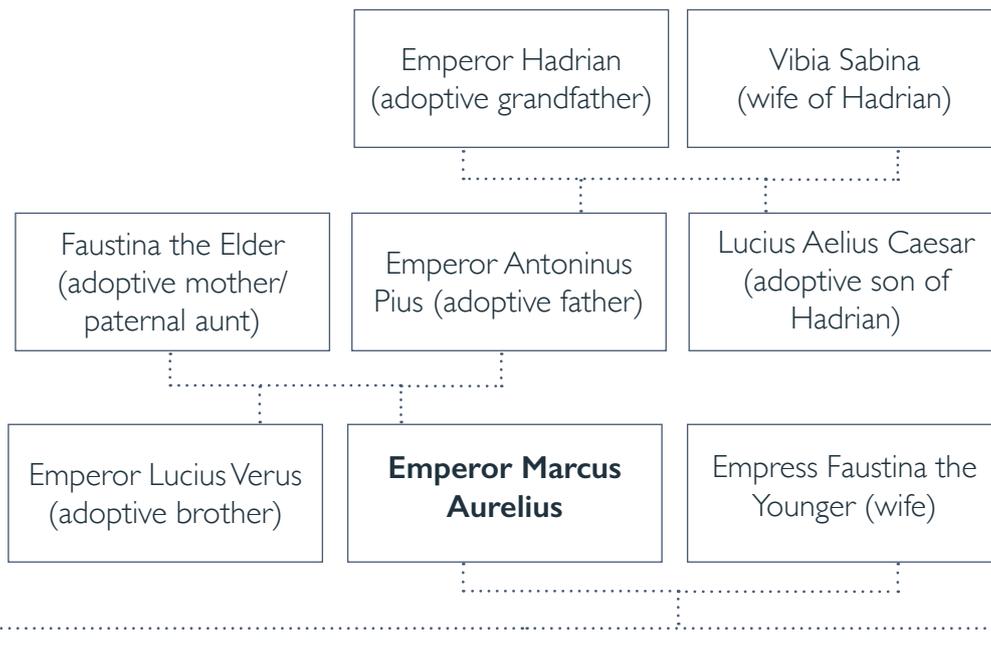
widow of the Emperor Lucius Verus. We're told that Marcus invited his son-in-law, Pompeianus, to assume the title of Caesar, which would presumably have placed him next in line to the throne, perhaps ruling alongside Marcus and later Commodus. However, Pompeianus declined, for reasons unknown – although it may have been feared that his appointment would have incited a civil war in the east.

Another of Marcus' most senior generals, called Avidius Cassius, was a Syrian, of exceptionally noble birth, descended from several royal dynasties, and distantly related to Augustus, the founder of the empire. He did, in fact, instigate a civil war, around this time, reputedly complaining in part about Marcus' promotion of men from humble backgrounds. Marcus, who was leading the military campaign on the northern frontier, responded by rushing his son from Rome to the army camp for protection. Commodus promptly adopted the *toga virilis*, becoming legally an adult, in order to assume political office. After the death of Cassius, Marcus soon appointed Commodus co-emperor, and he ruled alongside his father in a similar manner to Lucius Verus, for the last three years of Marcus' life, before succeeding him as sole emperor. Our sources suggest that by the end of his life, Marcus realized that Commodus lacked the qualities of a good emperor. It is possible that Marcus and the senate agreed that, as long as the succession was clear, even a bad emperor was preferable to the threat of another civil war, which could tear the empire apart.

# CHRONOLOGY



This is a partial genealogy, showing some notable figures in Marcus' adoptive family, and his children.



- Annia Aurelia Galeria Faustina b. Gemellus Lucillae
- Annia Aurelia Galeria Lucilla d. Titus Aelius Antoninus
- Titus Aelius Aurelius
- Hadrianus
- Domitia Faustina
- Annia Aurelia Fadilla
- Annia Corni cia Faustina Minor
- Titus Aurelius Fulvus Antoninus
- **Lucius Aurelius Commodus Antoninus (Caesar and later Emperor)**
- **Marcus Annius Verus (Caesar)**
- Vibia Aurelia Sabina

## MARCUS' FRIENDS



**Marcus Cornelius Fronto** was Marcus' Latin rhetoric tutor and one of his closest family friends. We know a great deal about their relationship since many of Fronto's letters were discovered. It was Fronto's job to train Marcus so that one day he would be able to deliver eloquent speeches in his role as emperor.

**Herodes Atticus** was Marcus' Greek rhetoric tutor and the most celebrated orator in the empire. He was the leading figure, at this time, in a cultural movement called The Second Sophistic, a revival of the Sophists, Greek intellectuals who taught rhetoric and moral improvement. Herodes was a controversial figure, and a critic of Stoicism, whose relationship with Marcus was troubled. However, he grew up in the same household as Marcus' mother, and remained a lifelong family friend.



**Apollonius of Chalcedon** was a Greek professor of philosophy and perhaps the most renowned teacher of Stoicism, following the death of Epictetus. He journeyed from Athens to Rome, at the request of Antoninus, to become Marcus' main Stoic tutor. Marcus greatly admired his intellect although Fronto implies that the Stoicism lectures Marcus' attended at this time were quite dry and formal.

**Junius Rusticus** was a senior Roman statesman, who reputedly served in the military alongside Arrian, during the rule of Hadrian, in a war against the Alani, a Sarmatian tribe who had invaded Armenia. Shortly after returning to Rome, Rusticus became Marcus' favorite Stoic tutor, and a sort of mentor to him. Rusticus gave Marcus a private copy of *The Discourses of Epictetus* transcribed by his friend Arrian. As emperor, Marcus later placed Rusticus in charge of the city of Rome, appointing him Urban Prefect.

**Claudius Pompeianus** was Marcus' senior general during the Marcomannic Wars. Marcus arranged for Pompeianus to marry his daughter, Lucilla, the widow of Emperor Lucius Verus. This placed Pompeianus in line to the throne, although he reputedly declined Marcus' offer to name him Caesar, and appoint him as successor. Instead, he seems to have agreed to serve as a sort of guardian and mentor to Marcus' wayward son, Commodus.

Some of these dates are approximate, based on the available evidence.

	<b>Timeline of Key Events</b>
121	Marcus Aurelius born
124	Possible date of Marcus Annius Verus' death (father)
133	Begins studying philosophy, aged 12
138	Adopted by Antoninus, aged 17
	Death of Emperor Hadrian
	Emperor Antoninus Pius takes the throne
145	Marries Faustina the Younger
161	Death of Antoninus Pius
	Emperor Marcus Aurelius takes the throne, aged 40
	Lucius Verus acclaimed co-emperor
	Parthian War begins
166	Outbreak of Antonine Plague
	Roman victory in The Parthian War
167	First Marcomannic War begins
169	Death of Lucius Verus
	Death of Marcus Annius Verus Caesar (son)
170 – 174	Likely date during which Marcus wrote The Meditations
172	Possible date of Boukoloï uprising in Egypt
175	Civil War of Avidius Cassius
	Death of Faustina (wife)
177	Second Marcomannic War begins
180	Marcus Aurelius dies, aged 59, probably from plague

## MARCUS' ENEMIES



Stoics believe that all human beings are fellow-citizens of the universe, regardless of their race or culture, an idea known as *cosmopolitanism*, from the Greek term meaning “citizen of the cosmos”. Marcus frequently refers in *The Meditations* to the need to avoid anger or hatred toward others, even his supposed enemies, and his duty to treat all men with justice, fairness, and kindness. He was actually writing these words *during* the First Marcomannic War, while meeting with foreign envoys to negotiate peace, and even engaging in warfare against those he sought to view benevolently, as his own brothers.

Shortly after Marcus was acclaimed emperor, **King Vologases IV of Parthia** invaded the Roman client-state of Armenia, instigating a Parthian War, which would last about five years. About five hundred years earlier, Alexander the Great had conquered Persia, turning it into a Hellenistic kingdom, inherited by one of his generals, which became known as the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucid Empire was later conquered by the Parthians, a race of tribal warriors who fought primarily from horseback, using high-quality steel weapons and armor, making them the “barbarian” army most feared by the Romans.

Following the Parthian War, **King Ballomar** of the **Marcomanni**, a Germanic tribe whose name probably means the “border men,” led a massive invasion of the Roman empire itself. Ballomar formed a secret alliance with many other Germanic tribes who lived along the Rivers Rhine and Danube. They invaded the northern provinces and fought their way south along the Amber Road, a major trade route. They eventually reached and besieged the wealthy Roman city of Aquileia. Ballomar was the first “barbarian” ruler to lead an army across the Alps into northern Italy since Hannibal centuries earlier.

**King Fustius**, the ruler of the **Quadi**, had probably been a Roman ally, as his people were one of the largest Germanic tribes and the Amber Road passed through their homeland, potentially making them wealthy from trade. At first, the Quadi took part in the invasion led by their cousins the Marcomanni but, following negotiations, Marcus persuaded them to accept peace terms. Fustius was later deposed by the Quadi, and replaced by a more warlike chieftain called **Areiogaseus** who resumed the war against the Romans.

**King Banadaspus** was the ruler of the **lazyges**, a warlike Sarmatian tribe, located to the east of the Quadi. The Sarmatians were an Iranian race, believed by the Romans to be related to the ancient Scythians. They were nomads, who drove cattle across the steppe, and fought primarily from horseback, like the Parthians, although Sarmatian weapons and armor were made from carved hooves rather than steel. Nevertheless, the Romans feared the charge of their heavy cavalry. Banadaspus looted Roman provinces around the same time as the initial Germanic invasion, and his horsemen perhaps took to the field with their Germanic neighbors. Later, he tried to sue for peace but Marcus refused his offer, arguing that he could not be trusted having already participated in the Germanic rebellion. Banadaspus was deposed by a more warlike chieftain called **Zanticus** who resumed hostilities against the Romans.

While Marcus was busy fighting the Quadi and Sarmatians, a warrior-priest called **Isidorus** led a native Egyptian tribe called the **Boukoloi** or “Herdsmen” in an uprising against Roman rule.

WHILE I STUDIED QUIETLY AT ROME, UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF MY FATHER, A YOUNG GENERAL CALLED AVIDIUS CASSIUS WAS EARNING A REPUTATION FOR FEROCITY IN BATTLE. FAR AWAY, ON THE NORTHERN FRONTIER, HIS LEGION WAS FACING THE SARMATIANS, A RACE OF NOMADIC WARRIORS DESCENDED FROM THE ANCIENT SCYTHIANS.



After gradually drawing neighboring tribes to his cause, he was able to besiege the great city of Alexandria and through force of numbers defeated the legion garrisoned there in a pitched battle. Marcus had no choice but to send the nearest senior Roman commander to break the siege.

**Avidius Cassius** was one of Marcus' most distinguished generals in the Parthian War, and was rewarded by being made governor of Syria, although it was his own homeland – something normally against Roman policy. Cassius was the general sent to liberate Alexandria following the Boukoloi uprising, the city in which he'd lived as a child. He was granted more powers until he became a sort of viceroy over the eastern provinces. Eventually, claiming that Marcus had died, or was dying, he returned to Egypt and was acclaimed emperor by the legion there. This effectively instigated a civil war, and Marcus was forced to march a loyalist army against him, although Cassius was assassinated by his own officers a few months later, bringing the matter to an end with little blood shed except his own.

# QUESTIONS, QUOTES, AND READING



## STUDY QUESTIONS

- Why do you think Marcus allowed Commodus to succeed him as emperor?
- Should we expect Marcus to have abolished slavery because of his Stoic beliefs?
- What do you think are the potential disadvantages and benefits of Stoicism as a philosophy of life?

## FAMOUS QUOTES FROM THE MEDITATIONS

- Waste no more time debating what a good man should be, just be one. 10.16
- The cucumber is bitter. Throw it away. There are brambles in the path. Turn aside. That's enough. You don't need to add "Why are such things found in the world?" 8.50
- The mind, unconquered by violent passions, is a citadel, for a man has no fortress more impregnable in which to find refuge and remain safe forever. 8.48
- Be like a headland of rock against which the waves continually break. It stands fast nevertheless, and around it the crashing waters come to rest. 4.49
- In but a short while you shall be ashes, or a few dry bones, and possibly just a name, or not even a name. 5.33
- Take a bird's-eye view of the world: it's endless gatherings and endless ceremonies, many journeys in both storm and calm, and the transformations of things coming to be, existing, and ceasing to be. 9.30

## RECOMMENDED READING

### Modern Translations of *The Meditations*

- *Meditations: The Philosophy Classic* (2020), translated by George Long, edited with an introduction by Donald J. Robertson. This is an old but popular translation, updated for modern readers in this edition.
- *Meditations: A New Translation* (2002) translated by Gregory Hayes. This is a very readable little book, a very readable modern translation, although not the most literal version available.
- *Meditations: with selected correspondence* (2011) translated by Robin Hard with commentary by Christopher Gill. This is a more literal modern translation, good for comparison, and it contains a selection of the letters between Marcus and Fronto, as well as valuable commentary by Prof. Chris Gill
- *Meditations: The Annotated Edition* (2021) by Robin Waterfield. An excellent modern translation with detailed notes.

### Philosophical Commentary and Analysis

- *Marcus Aurelius: Philosophy in the Roman World* (2020) by John Sellars
- *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (2001) by Pierre Hadot
- *Marcus Aurelius: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2012) William O. Stephens

## ABOUT THE GRAPHIC NOVEL



*Verissimus: The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius* from St. Martin's Press is a full-color graphic novel about the life of Marcus Aurelius by Donald J. Robertson and award-winning illustrator, Zé Nuno Fraga. It takes the form of a sweeping epic that interweaves action, closely-based on historical accounts of his rule, with insights and wisdom derived from Marcus' philosophical reflections in *The Meditations*.

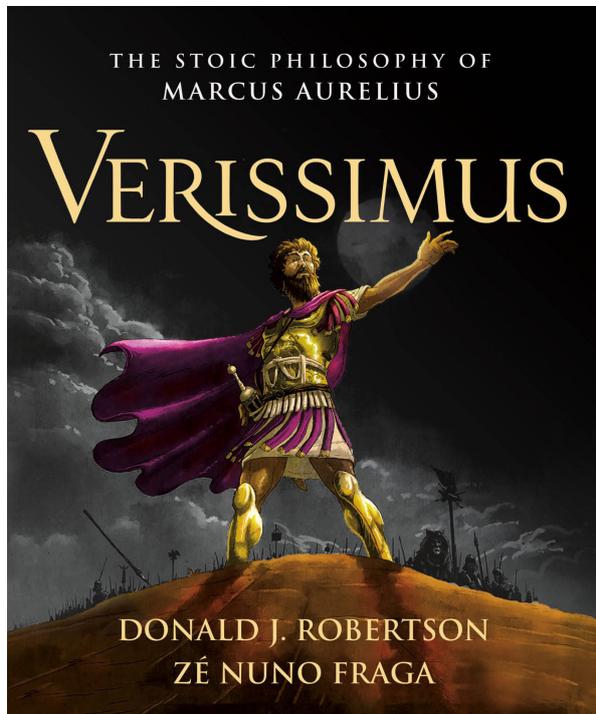
"Donald Robertson is one of my favorite writers about Stoicism." – Ryan Holiday, author of *The Daily Stoic*

"Whether you're new to Marcus Aurelius or already know him as a friend and guide, this graphic novel will open your eyes." – Robin Waterfield, translator of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus

"Represents the vanguard of the next phase of the ongoing Stoic renaissance." – Prof. William B. Irvine, author of *A Guide to the Good Life*

"A wonderful and engaging introduction, like no other." – Dr. John Sellars, author of *Lessons in Stoicism*

"A superb graphic novel that provides stunning insights into one of the most interesting figures of antiquity, as well as into the philosophy that guided him throughout his life." – Prof. Massimo Pigliucci, author of *How to Be a Stoic*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donald Robertson is a cognitive-behavioral psychotherapist who writes about ancient philosophy and modern psychology. He was born in Scotland and now divides his time between Toronto, Canada, and Athens, Greece.

His other books include *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor* (St. Martin's Press), which combines historical anecdotes from the life of Marcus Aurelius with self-help advice based on Stoic philosophy. *Ancient Lives: Marcus Aurelius* (Yale) is a prose biography of Marcus Aurelius, which examines how his philosophical beliefs can provide insight into his actions as emperor. *The Meditations* (Capstone) is a modernized version of the classic George Long translation, with an introductory essay by Donald Robertson.