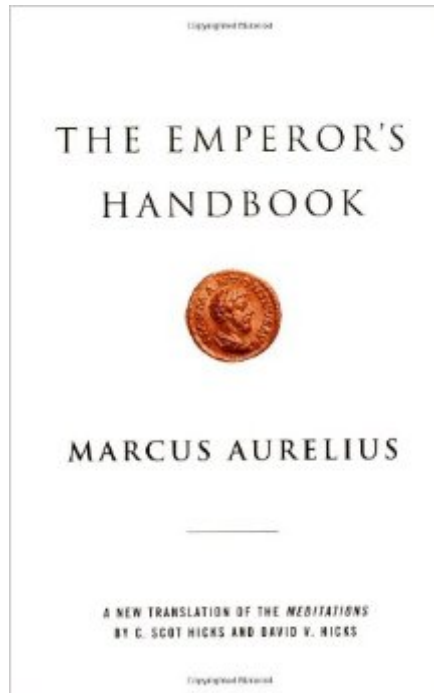


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The Emperor's Handbook: A New Translation Of The Meditations



Synopsis

In the tradition of > and Marcus Aureliusâ™ >â™ a practical book of timeless advice from one of the most powerful individuals in historyâ™ available for the first time in a highly accessible translation, including several unique features for contemporary readers and users of daily wisdom guides. Essayist Matthew Arnold described the man who wrote these words as âœthe most beautiful figure in history.â• Possibly so, but he was certainly more than that. Marcus Aurelius ruled the Roman Empire at its height, yet he remained untainted by the incalculable wealth and absolute power that had corrupted many of his predecessors. Marcus knew the secret of how to live the good life amid trying and often catastrophic circumstances, of how to find happiness and peace when surrounded by misery and turmoil, and of how to choose the harder right over the easier wrong without apparent regard for self-interest. The historian Michael Grant praises Marcusâ™s book as âœthe best ever written by a major ruler,â• and Josiah Bunting, superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, calls it âœthe essential book on character, leadership, duty.â• Never intended for publication, the Meditations contains the practical and inspiring wisdom by which this remarkable emperor lived the life not of a saintly recluse, but of a general, administrator, legislator, spouse, parent, and judge besieged on all sides. The Emperorâ™s Handbook offers a vivid and fresh translation of this important piece of ancient literature. It brings Marcusâ™s words to life and shows his wisdom to be as relevant today as it was in the second century. This book belongs on the desk and in the briefcase of every business executive, political leader, and military officer. It speaks to the soul of anyone who has ever exercised authority or faced adversity or believed in a better day.

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Customer Reviews

This translation of the Greek writings that the author called "To Himself" is smooth, deft, and self-assured; the book sits well in the hand; the subject index is thorough. For generations Marcus Aurelius has proven not only a welcome counselor, but a worthy opponent to measure oneself against. Why does this version leave one feeling not refreshed but harangued? In an earnest attempt to reach modern readers, something has gone wrong with the tone. The pages are peppered with the imperative contraction "Don't," and the "You" being addressed is not a man conferring with his soul, but a smug preacher hectoring us with his own perfection. Yet consider how often Marcus returns to certain themes---that you should not mind what other people think of you; that you should cease to assign blame, or feel resentment for ill-treatment; that since life is but breath you should not care whether yours is long or short. The very repetition shows how hard it was for him to attain permanent detachment: you need not exhort yourself to meet standards you have already mastered. Perhaps a claim made in the introduction, explaining the rationale for a new edition, hints at what seems amiss in *The Emperor's Handbook*: "[W]e tend to conceive of freedom, even the religious freedoms we take pretty much for granted, in largely political terms, perhaps because, second, we have come seriously to doubt our psychological freedom, or freedom of mind." (9) (How's that again? Rather, in an era of contracting public freedoms and increasing pressure toward conformity, many contend that the only true liberty lies within.) A version inspired by such assumptions skews the even-tempered voice of the fellow human being who wrote these meditations. The layout, with bullet lists and sound bites, makes the book look like yet another treatise aimed at the tired businessman; and the new title seems a marketing ploy. The world needs no more emperors. When judging a work in a foreign tongue, it is wise to use one translation as a corrective for another. By all means buy this version, as I did: the celebrated and successful give it high praise (see dust jacket). And buy one of the other renderings; consult the reviews on this site for Hays, or Staniforth. Then read them in tandem, compare and contrast, in order to better "See things for what they are" (Book 12, Section 10) for yourself.

The Hicks brothers have produced a handsome volume of the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* that is also the best translation available. The old Penguin edition translation was servicable. George Long's translation was incomprehensible in many parts. The Gregory Hays translation does very well but is not as transparently clear and as elegant as this one. I got this book the first week that it came out and it will be my preferred edition for many years to come. Highly recommended.

The Hicks brothers' collaboration has produced a masterful translation of a masterpiece. "The Emperor's Handbook" captures the sublime essence and ancient character of "The Meditations" but never strays into the arcane terminology of the ancient Stoics. The Hicks brothers also avoid the forced and complex grammatical constructs found in other translations. This translation could easily be understood by a sixth grade child yet it sacrifices none of the profound meaning or prosaic beauty of the original. Most refreshing is the absence of any effort to turn the work into some New-Age mystical revelation. Having read about nine translations I must say, this one is, by far, the best contemporary English translation available. There are other fine ones such as the work by Hard and Gill or even the Loeb Classics version but they are better suited for people already familiar with Marcus Aurelius and Stoic philosophy. My warmest thanks go out to David and Scot Hicks for a work that I hope will broaden the audience of Marcus Aurelius.

This review is of the translation, not of the work (which I would rate 5 stars). The translation in "The Emperor's Handbook" is probably more readable to a general audience than the much more accurate Loeb Classical Library translation, but the writing has been spun into soundbites. Marcus Aurelius did not write in soundbites. This results in a punchier work that is more accessible yet unfortunately shallower as well. The tone of a man writing for his own edification is turned into an almost preachy self-help book. Which is apparently what the publisher wanted, something to follow "The Book of Five Rings" and "The Art of War" as the latest book to help businessmen sound pseudo-intellectual and impress their non-reading fellow businessmen . . . and there are lots of readily-quotable soundbites separated out for easy use. I am not being snarky. Read the intro and see who their target audience is. See what they are trying to accomplish. Marcus Aurelius never would have named his work "The Emperor's Handbook," because he was not trying to teach people how to be emperor. He did not write in preachy soundbites. Marcus Aurelius was a man trying to remind himself how to be a better person and live according to his stoic principles. This translation abandons that basic point.

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