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A Stoic's Guide to an Uncomfortably High Probability of an AI Apocalypse

Dirk Primbs primbs.ca ~7 minutes

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01 · THE PROBLEM NOBODY TALKS ABOUT

When you take the risk seriously, two traps wait for you



Denial & Numbing

Call it sci-fi. Look away. Tell yourself smarter people have it handled and go back to business as usual.

OR



Doomscrolling & Burnout

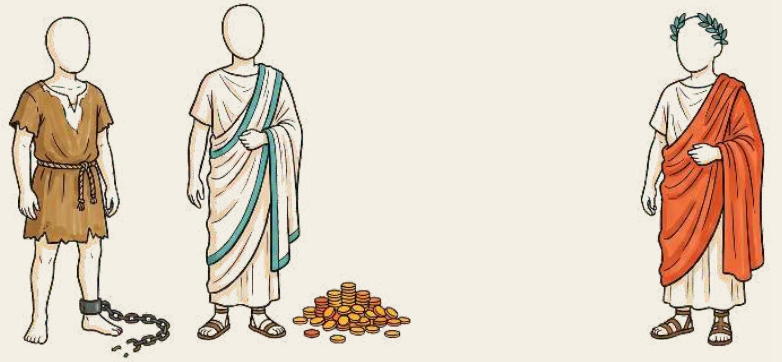
Live in permanent alarm. Lose sleep, argue online, and treat every ordinary joy as irresponsible.

> Neither makes the world safer. We need a way to stay clear-headed, humane, and useful for the long haul.

02 · A 30-SECOND PRIMER

What is Stoicism?

A 2,300-year-old practical philosophy - born on a public porch in Athens, tested through exile, plague, and war.



KNOWN PRACTITIONERS

From Parliament to podcasts

Mark Carney, Pierre Poilievre, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Tim Ferriss all draw on the Stoics - not monks in a cave, but people inside messy public life.

THE COMPASS

Four practical virtues

Wisdom, courage, justice, and moderation. Judge your day by your character, not your luck.

THE GOAL

Clear action under pressure

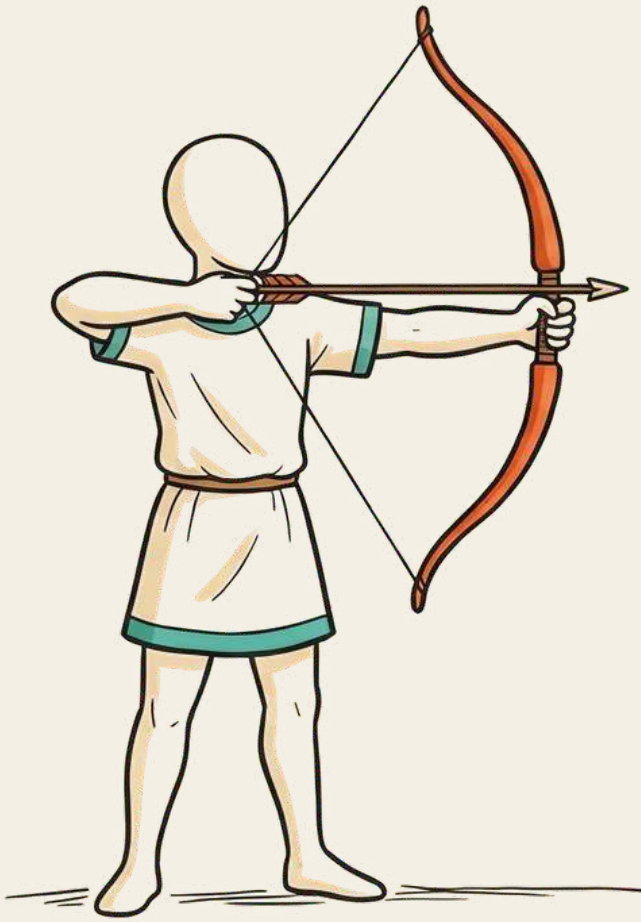
Feel your emotions without being hijacked by them, so you can respond instead of react.

03 · CLEARING UP THE WORD

Real Stoicism is not *apathy*.

It is a practical operating system for staying clear and useful when the stakes are huge and the outcome is not yours to guarantee.

The Stoic Archer



The archer controls how well they train, aim, and release the arrow.

They do not control the gust of wind after it leaves the string.



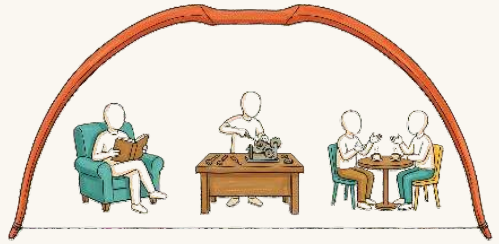
> Letting go of control over the **outcome** frees up your energy for the **effort**.

Separate what is up to you from what isn't



Not up to you

- What a handful of frontier labs decide
- Whether governments pass a treaty in time
- Geopolitics and race dynamics
- Whether humanity passes the test

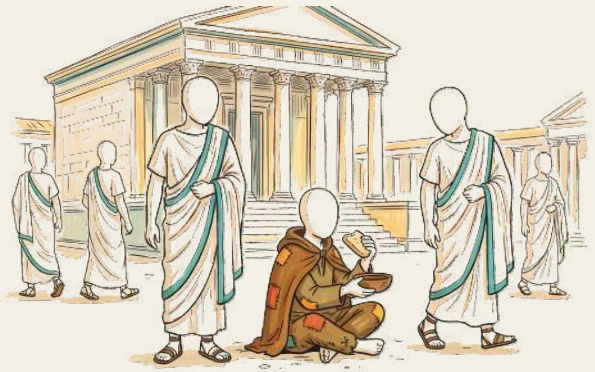


Up to you

- Your attention and mental clarity
- What you learn, build, and refuse to build
- How honestly you talk to friends and colleagues
- Where you spend your time and energy

Try this: Put your AI news on a leash - mute live outrage feeds and switch to one calm weekly digest.

Look straight at the worst case - without flinching



Stoics rehearsed worst-case scenarios on purpose. Not to wallow in dread, but to take away the element of shock.

01

Name the risk plainly

Refusing to look away is honesty, not "doomerism."

02

Drain the panic

Once you've faced the scenario, it stops hijacking your nervous system.

03

Keep a steady hand

Clear eyes let you do the unglamorous work that actually reduces risk.

> **Try this:** Schedule your worry - give hard AI-risk reading a bounded 30-minute slot instead of letting dread leak into every evening.

> *"We were made for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids."*

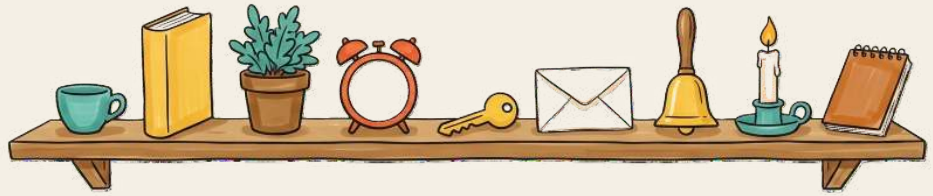
Marcus Aurelius · Meditations, Book II (written during plague and war)

He could not end the plague or the wars. He still showed up every morning to do his part. You do not need a guaranteed win to justify showing up.



Try this: Contribute one unglamorous skill you already have - writing, organizing, law, teaching, or operations.

Pick one to try this week



Control & The Archer

- Mute live AI outrage feeds and switch to one calm weekly digest
- Pick one action in your reach this month: raise a safety question at work, email your MP, or learn how one AI system works
- At week's end, ask "Did I put in honest effort?" instead of "Did the news get better?"

Rehearsing the Worst Case

- Set one 30-minute weekly slot for hard AI-risk reading - and close the tab outside it
- Replace "AI might destroy us" with one specific question to research (e.g. "Who is liable when an agent fails?")
- Practice a calm two-sentence answer for when a skeptical friend asks why you care

Duty Without Guarantees

- Keep showing up to rooms like this - find two people you can talk to honestly
- Offer a skill you already have: writing, organizing, law, policy, teaching, or operations
- Protect your ordinary Tuesdays - keep your friendships, hobbies, and rest intact

09 · THE CLOSING RULE

Do not forfeit the thing you are trying to protect.

Taking AI risk seriously does not mean giving up friendship, curiosity, humour, or a normal Tuesday.

> Look clearly. Aim the bow well. Care for the people next to you. Refuse to go numb.



Where to go from here

- **The Daily Stoic** - Ryan Holiday & Stephen Hanselman (one short Stoic passage a day; easy way to build the habit)
- **Meditations** - Marcus Aurelius (private notes written during plague and war)
- **Enchiridion (The Manual)** - Epictetus (a 20-minute pocket guide to the dichotomy of control)
- **If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies** - Eliezer Yudkowsky & Nate Soares (the blunt case for taking AI risk seriously)
- **Otherness and Control in the Age of AGI** - Joe Carlsmith (essays on living with deep uncertainty)
- **Last Week in AI** - podcast (a calm weekly digest of AI news)



Slides & PDF
have-a-look.at/aistoic

THANK YOU

Questions & Conversation

Which trap do you catch yourself slipping into more often - looking away, or burning out?





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Dirk Primbs primbs.ca dirk@primbs.ca

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