

Mary Beard on Stoicism

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of June 19, 2024 at 11:27 AM

Thought there might be some interest in [this interview with classicist Mary Beard, from the New York Times magazine](#):

I don't know if this is novel to you, but in the last few years there has been a real resurgence of [popular interest in Stoic philosophy](#) Thanks to the popularization efforts of, among others, groups like Modern Stoicism, the philosophy entrepreneur Ryan Holiday (author of “The Obstacle Is the Way”) and a wealth of Stoicism-themed podcasts. — why'd you just roll your eyes?

All to the good when people are interested in the ancient world, but this is one of the more mystifying bits of interest: clichéd self-help from a philosophy that, if you looked at it really hard, was nasty, fatalistic, bordering on fascist.

But what's your hunch about why people are being drawn to Stoicism?

What comes out in Marcus Aurelius particularly is rather clichéd thoughts: Never take a major decision when your mind is troubled. We can all agree with clichés like that. And they come with the rubber stamp of great antiquity because they were written by an emperor — an emperor who was about as brutal in massacring the enemy as Julius Caesar. But we tend to forget that side of him because he's a bearded “philosopher.” It's not very salutary to look at your Amazon ratings, but I always feel terribly pleased — though it doesn't happen often — when I'm higher up than Marcus Aurelius.

Post by “Remus” of June 19, 2024 at 11:41 AM

A “nasty, fatalistic, bordering on fascist” philosophy indeed!

It was commonly assumed at the time that Commodus, the son of Marcus Aurelius, was not his son but the son of one of Aurelius' wife's many paramours: a common gladiator. Whether true or not, this may go some way toward explaining the fatalistic tone of the Meditations. Just my

two cents (or two denarii).

Post by “Cassius” of June 19, 2024 at 12:14 PM

That's basically the story of "Gladiator" and the older "Fall of the Roman Empire" with Ava Gardner and Alec Guinness as Aurelius? I've been meaning to rewatch those.

Post by “Remus” of June 19, 2024 at 3:22 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I don't think Commodus' paternity was ever brought up in the film, as best I recall. I've never seen "Fall of the Roman Empire...but if it has Alec Guinness in it I'll have to.

You don't ever want to watch a movie like Gladiator with me. In between popcorn munching at the first rate entertainment I'm going to lose control and say "It didn't happen that way!" 😊