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## Stoic '21

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*'We should always be asking ourselves: "Is this something that is, or is not, in my control?"*  
**- Epictetus (50-135 CE)**

*'If you are pained by any external thing, it is not this thing that disturbs you, but your own judgment  
opens it. And it is in your power to wipe out this judgment now.'* - **Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE)**

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These two quotes, one from a former slave and one from a Roman emperor, sum up a basic tenet of Stoic philosophy, an action-based philosophy which was born in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and which has experienced a revival in recent years.

Societies were very different back then, but contemporary authors like Ryan Holiday convincingly show how the teachings of stoics like Epictetus, Seneca, Zeno, Marcus Aurelius and others can help us live a virtuous life today.

Marcus Aurelius, known as the last of 'Five Good Emperors' in Rome, notably lived and reigned through a plague much like our very own Covid-19: The Antonine Plague was a global 15-year pandemic with a mortality rate of between 2-3%, killing between 10 and 18 million people and bringing about misery to many. Like Churchill during the Blitz, Marcus Aurelius rose to the occasion through his leadership skills, philosophical wisdom, kindness, devotion to service, and humility. He himself eventually succumbed to the plague, but not before acting in a virtuous way to navigate through the pestilence in question. He led by example.

The four core principles of stoicism are wisdom, temperance, courage and justice. Wisdom refers to the knowledge to choose well, what to reject, and what is indifferent. Temperance is moderation, lying between excess and deficiency. Courage refers to speaking your mind, insisting on truth. Justice combines the other virtues together, beyond narrow self-interest.

Fast forward to Malta in 2021, and we can apply such principles both to our personal lives, to the sphere of policy making and to other areas of everyday life.

Compared to various other societies, Malta has so far navigated relatively well in the Covid-19 crisis, despite certain policy and behavioural shortcomings and inconsistencies. In fact, I see a parallel open en this and the way Malta navigated through the financial crisis over a decade ago. At th