

How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life By Seneca He counseled readers to “study death always” and took his own advice returning to the subject again and again in all his writings yet he never treated it in a complete work. Edited and translated by James Romm How to Die reveals a provocative thinker and dazzling writer who speaks with a startling frankness about the need to accept death or even under certain conditions to seek it out. Featuring beautifully rendered new translations How to Die also includes an enlightening introduction notes the original Latin texts and an epilogue presenting Tacitus's description of Seneca's grim suicide. Stoicism is one of those philosophies like Buddhism or Taoism that shallow moderns like to mention favorably in passing usually with an implicit criticism of backward religions like Christianity. As with all philosophical systems before the modern era a great many very smart people gave much thought to the philosophy and while I know little about it I know that Stoic thought is complex and far-reaching and had substantial interaction with early Christian thinkers (including St. Moreover he lived and was politically active during the reigns of Caligula and Nero where the life of any prominent man was not secure and he was far from the only man forced to commit suicide in that era. Although the modern tendency is to ignore death and perhaps that's always been the tendency of humanity some choose to want to focus their minds and Seneca offers a reasonable set of thoughts to them. Dying well then to Seneca consisted of the right mental frame with which to approach death but also the choice when to die which strongly indicated suicide for any person not granted a quick and unexpected death. This creates a problem for us moderns because taken from its pagan elite context and applied to the mass of individuals in today's society especially as a rationale for structuring society's laws this second instruction has baleful effects. nothing and if we did not fear that why should we fear death? His argument isn't very convincing because it ignores two basic points both springing from that life gives us the ability to consider the future. ” Seneca mostly says death is merely nothingness; sometimes he says we are dissolved in the universe and thereby live on; a few times he seems to endorse belief in a desirable Christian-type afterlife (i. But I think few of those reading his writings or receiving his letters would have been much comforted by his core idea that we are going back into the dark from whence we came. More compelling by far is the story the Venerable Bede tells of how Edwin king of Northumbria was convinced to convert from paganism by a counsellor who analogized the life of man to a sparrow flying from cold darkness to cold darkness but passing for a moment through the light warmth and merriment of the mead hall “Even so man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what follows we know nothing therefore this new doctrine contains something more certain it seems justly to deserve to be followed. ” Seneca perhaps aware that his argument isn't very compelling tries to buttress it with even weaker arguments like “If death holds any torment then that torment must also have existed before we came forth into the light. This seems somewhat in opposition to his first point—if fear is supposed to disappear because there is no reason to fear adding on that it's degrading seems unnecessary though certainly true in the abstract. A third point is that the length of life doesn't matter a point Seneca addresses at length in a letter to a grieving mother with his argument being basically that we're all negligible anyway so what's wrong with being a little more negligible? I'm pretty sure a grieving mother didn't think much of this advice unless she persuaded herself that Seneca knew better than her a common failing of intelligent people in their relationship with self-proclaimed philosophers though the ages. ) That said suicide is logical and often desirable; it can avoid a more painful death; or it will “set you free” from unpleasantness like slavery or torture or simply from a decline especially one where you can no longer take action because you are too weak. This is of course a very pagan attitude and the antithesis of the morals of the West since Christianity began to dictate private and public morality thereby hugely improving the moral tone of society and eliminating as an acceptable option formerly unexceptional things like infanticide abortion and sex slavery. While the Christian (and Jewish) belief in the inherent God-given and God-mandated sanctity of life with the tagline “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away” is internally coherent so is the pagan approach to suicide and Seneca lays it out well. The people with whom the pagan approach resonates today though are not Stoics much less Cato the Younger (who committed suicide by

stabbing himself in the gut and then tearing out his intestines when his friends sewed him up). This is the natural consequence of the devaluation of human life that has taken place over the past fifty years with baneful instances in many areas (not to mention the various horrors of earlier in the twentieth century). After all if you insist on killing yourself there is no argument you're killing someone else (unless you pick a poor method) and if you take care of your obligations no good argument that you are directly harming others. Stripped of the Christian framework the ability to kill oneself in the face of a terminal illness or other perceived overwhelming need seems entirely logical entirely in keeping with the advice of Seneca and both brave and not degrading. It used to be a commonplace which seems to have been forgotten that suicide and its assistance is not criminalized to prevent suicide (though it does express a salutary moral opinion) but rather to prevent pressure from being brought to bear on those for whom their suicide would be convenient for others. This problem though always known is infinitely worse in the modern world when most old people live much longer and have more money tied up in themselves and moreover often are in a condition physical or psychological where they are susceptible to arguments that their "quality of life" is low. Compounded with the ever-increasing cost of medical care and the government's tendency to dictate choices using cost-benefit analysis the inevitable consequence of legalizing suicide is that suicide will be encouraged and will expand inexorably as expectation then demand from the old and sick and be imposed involuntarily even on children. These are not guesses; all these things that can be seen in Europe already though as with all such horrors their existence is kept largely out of sight by a complicit press. Industrialized coerced suicide of the weak is a far cry from educated Roman elites committing suicide; it has much more in common with the cries of a little boy doused with Zyklon B "Mama it's so dark! But Mama I've been good! I've been good!" And that's not to mention that there is every argument to be made that when Christianity loses its power to which legalizing suicide will contribute (part of why it is pushed by the enemies of Christianity) so will all the moral commands of Christianity of which we have forgotten their origin. Delete the endorsement of suicide and the bleak metaphysics and Seneca would agree that when it's time to go it's time to go and whatever your metaphysics to see the other side. Thus those tech types obsessed with life extension whether by improved medical science or by supposedly imminent radical changes such as the Singularity degrade themselves for they are merely masking their overwhelming fear by promising themselves eternal life without the need for death. Oh they cover it up with fine words about "curing death" and the supposed moral imperative to extend our lives but there is no such imperative and death will never be cured. Philosophy Fiction Seneca's How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life is a sobering book about not being afraid of death even of hurrying it on if life has nothing else to offer you. The essays grouped here make for a powerful series of meditations on what Seneca referred to as the ultimate test of our character the great equalizer the thing we are most afraid of though there really is no reason to. Part of the ongoing Princeton Press's series Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers it's one of the best entries I've read so far (which is high praise because I'm enjoying the whole series). Isn't it morbid to keep thinking about our own demise? Isn't it going to come too soon anyway? But that betrays exactly the sort of thoughtless and unwise habit of thinking that Princeton's collection are attempting to cure us from. Philosophy Fiction "All of my plays are about people missing the boat closing down too young coming to the end of their lives with regret at things not done as opposed to things done. I have to wonder if one day one of the regrets by some might be: spent too much time on social media and my phone?=====Sobering note: I stumbled on to an interview with Christopher Hitchens on C-Span in 2009. ) Philosophy Fiction Although this book contained some meaningful insights about the way we contemplate death the narrator's chipper voice was completely inappropriate to the subject at hand and often made Seneca's musings seem somewhat pretentious and elitist. Apart from some outdated ethic views about death and suicide it has some interesting thoughts about the so-called symmetry argument which compares the state of non-existence prior to our births with the state of non-existence after our deaths. Sometimes a phrase from a novel or a play or a film can catch the imagination so powerfully—even when misquoted—that it lifts off from the page and acquires an independent life of its own. I suspect that

many people who have not read Vonnegut are familiar with the phrase but they and also I suspect many people who have read Vonnegut think of it as a kind of resigned commentary on life. Life rarely turns out in the way the living hope for and "So it goes" has become one of the ways in which we verbally shrug our shoulders and accept what life gives us. *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life* is a deep beautiful and wonderful book filled with wisdom and timeless advice on how to live a life well enough so that when it is time to die you are ready for it does not have fear of it and embrace death wholeheartedly! Seneca's teachings are based on Stoicism which is a practical philosophy of life,

And she says that growing up knowing that death can happen at a young age shaped her perspective: "What good stuff can I do that would be useful and meaningful? That is a driving force in my life, " "So I understand the gift of each day—the gift that is life. We are not promised life and then we don't know how long it is. So I'm able to cherish it and be really clear about what is my highest and best use as long as I'm here, "She says that she and her husband shared the opinion that having access to great riches changed people—and not for the better. " =====Depending on circumstances.

"It takes an entire lifetime to learn how to die" wrote the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca (c. 4 BC - 65 AD). *How to Die* gathers in one volume for the first time Seneca's remarkable meditations on death and dying. Seneca believed that life is only a journey toward death and that one must rehearse for death throughout life: Here he tells us how to practice for death how to die well and how to understand the role of a good death in a good life: He stresses the universality of death its importance as life's final rite of passage and its ability to liberate us from pain slavery or political oppression. *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life*



Lucius Annaeus Seneca (often known simply as Seneca or Seneca the Younger); ca. 4 BC - 65 AD) was a Roman Stoic philosopher statesman dramatist and in one work humorist of the Silver Age of Latin literature, While he was later forced to commit suicide for alleged complicity in the Pisonian conspiracy to assassinate Nero the last of the Julio Claudian emperors. Collection of Seneca's moral epistles and letters of consolation to those affected by death or those fearful of death. Seneca teaches us not to fear death; but to study it prepare for it and in the end accept it, He justifies rational suicide and thinks of it highly as an escape from political oppression slavery or pain: He however does note that sometimes the liberation by suicide is not morally right if we have an obligation towards family or friends. Fear of death is redundant as it diminishes nobility and integrity of life, Thus we are in no one's power if death is in our power. A man is a fool if he weeps for he didn't live for the past 1000 years: He is therefore also a fool if he cries because he won't live for 1000 years to come, Furthermore one should strip oneself of any hope for it fills one's heart with greediness and fear: The book includes some of the most virtuous examples of real suicides as means of escaping one's tormented life. Seneca himself leaves a testament of his life by the action of suicide showing his friends and others the courage to die on his own terms in the face of execution. Philosophy Fiction *How to Die* compiled from various writings of the Roman Stoic philosopher

Seneca by the excellent James Romm assembles Seneca's thoughts on death: The reason for the compiling and publication of this book presumably is to educate moderns about how to die, It also offers an interesting view into the philosophy of the late pagan Classical world already dying itself although Seneca didn't know it, This book can doubtless educate moderns but for us different than our predecessors it is either valuable or dangerous or both depending on who is reading it and with what aim, Often such mentions are combined with a reference to the Meditations of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (died A, 180) who had a brief efflorescence in the public consciousness a few years ago when he was lucky enough to be depicted in the blockbuster movie Gladiator. This book to be sure does not purport to explain Stoicism only the thought of one philosopher on one topic over several decades of his life: Seneca though he lived to nearly seventy years old had multiple reasons to focus on death other than mere philosophy, He suffered from recurrent aggressive asthma which regularly threatened to suffocate him and he also appears to have suffered from tuberculosis: Having his breath potentially snuffed out at any time doubtless kept death near the front of his mind: Thus it is not surprising that he recurred to the topic over the decades, Both sets of instructions fall under Seneca's epigraph for the book well-chosen by Romm "He lives badly who does not know how to die well. The second type of instruction explains how one should actually go about dying physically. Seneca is indifferent to the method but for him the key is that wherever possible each person should choose for himself when and how to die: As to how one should think about dying Romm pulls Seneca's own thoughts from his various writings. He groups Seneca's thoughts into five subsets: "Prepare Yourself"; "Have No Fear"; "Have No Regrets"; "Set Yourself Free"; and "Become a Part of the Whole, " While there is some variability in the message and even contradictions (though none fatal—ba dum!) he offers mostly repetitions of a few basic philosophical points. One is that death is no different than what we had experienced before birth—i: The facile one was expressed by Isaac Asimov: "Life is pleasant. " The deeper point was expressed by Hamlet: "To sleep perchance to dream—aye there's the rub, not in the traditional Hades—by this point Greek and Roman philosophers had abandoned that framework). " Maybe but not necessarily is the obvious answer and so with his other arguments as well: A second point Seneca makes is that in essence fear is degrading so stop it. My guess is that this is part of a larger Stoic framework but I don't know enough to be sure: A variation on this argument more compelling that Seneca also makes is that mere life extension in the old is pointless in and of itself, (Seneca does suggest though that sticking around for others such as his beloved and much younger wife is a decent reason not to kill oneself: ) As long as a person lives "until attaining wisdom" he should be content (though this contradicts Seneca's other point somewhat that we're all negligible). And Seneca's fourth point is in essence that death is coming for you and for me and we can't avoid it so we might as well not get too worked up about it. (My guess is this latter point about not getting too worked up probably encapsulates the Cliff's Notes version of Stoicism as a whole: Many people reading this book today would find resonance in Seneca's strong endorsement of each person determining for himself how and when he should die: Instead they are the fashionable and not-very-deep thinkers who push "assisted suicide" "legal euthanasia" or whatever buzzword it's going by nowadays. On the surface though suicide has more appeal and fewer obvious drawbacks than say demands for legalized abortion or the same thing infanticide: And since stripping the Christian framework is what those who rule in the West are today all about criminalizing suicide or assisting in a suicide seems illogical, But as with most age-old moral rules that have been demolished in our time of glory there is more of practical value in moral rules than meets the eye: That said more thinking about death does have a lot to recommend it. Modern people have not forgotten death but they do their best never to think about it, We all know people who won't even get life insurance to protect their families because it makes them think about their own deaths, And when the time comes to die most end up in a hospital having nasty things done to them so they can live a few more hours or a few more days, Seneca would say that this is no way to live and he would be right, Ignoring it or painfully and slowly eroding your body with needles and tonics isn't going to change that, And it is indeed a disgrace to spend your life in fear. Once you accept that and if you can think accurately and cogently about suicide this book is

worth reading: And you can mention it instead of the Meditations at cocktail parties thus putting yourself ahead of other pseudo-Stoics in the estimation of your fellow party-goers. Seneca indeed was requested by the Emperor Nero to commit suicide: The epilogue of this book is the Roman historian Tacitus's description of the double suicide of Seneca and his wife Polina, Philosophy Fiction While Seneca's writing has serious implications for suicide and euthanasia that many might disagree with I really appreciate his views on taking a lifetime to die. □□□ ¾ Philosophy Fiction How to Die is a collection of Seneca's writings on the topic of death particularly dear to the Stoics, Some modern readers may think the very idea to be profoundly misguided. Keep this book handy return to it often and enjoy your life precisely because you are aware of its brevity and of your mortality. I find most people spend too much time living as if they're never going to die: "— Edward

Albee=====Laureen Powell Jobs widow of Steve Jobs has become an amazing philanthropist. Her father died when she was 3 it's not uncommon for an 18 year old especially a male to feel invincible: You have your whole life ahead of you and as the saying goes the world is your oyster. When I was that age any such illusions about that were quickly dispersed as a result of tragedy: I have a brother who is 20 years older than I am got married young and had a child right away: The unusual aspect of this is that I ended up having a nephew who was two months older than me: While my brother and his family continued to live in New England my family moved to the Bay Area when I was 7: My younger brother and I spent time with our two nephews (this included my older brother's second son) in exchanged visits one there and one here. In the summer after my older nephew and I graduated from high school he back East and me in CA he was killed in an auto accident, As with Laureen Powell Jobs it changed my entire outlook on life. Better make the most of it and don't do anything or fail to do anything you might regret: In essence by recognizing the reality of death it can help you live a better life: And it's also a mistake to squander your life as if you are never going to die. Meanwhile live every day as if it's precious and don't be risk-averse, The interviewer asked Hitchens what kind of father he had been and he said indifferent But he expressed hopes that now that his kids were older he would try to do better: Although at the outset of the interview he said he had not expected to live as long as he had (with a likely nod toward his bad health habits): (BTW there is zero evidence that Hitchens converted to Christianity on his death bed, His attending physician the devout Christian and head of the NIH Francis Collins testified there was no conversion: Since the former is not something we worry about so too should the latter "count to us as nothing" - an argument against which many have argued quite convincingly, Philosophy Fiction I did not expect this to make me feel less suicidal, Make the most out of it because your life is so ridiculously short, He was right in a way that someone who yearns to die rather than actively seeking it out isn't claiming death as their own. since I tend to be impulsive I've got to work to stay level. But if I'm level if in conscious if I'm aware I can stop myself: Philosophy Fiction From a New Yorker article on the fiftieth anniversary of Slaughterhouse-Five on how we face war and death: So it goes, I had not remembered until I reread "Slaughterhouse-Five" that that famous phrase "So it goes" is used only and always as a comment on death, "Come up and see me sometime" and "Play it again Sam" are misquotations of this type, Something of this sort has also happened to the phrase "So it goes. " The trouble is that when this kind of liftoff happens to a phrase its original context is lost, " "So it goes" is not a way of accepting life but rather of facing death, It occurs in the text almost every single time someone dies and only when death is evoked, How to Die is a collection of Seneca's writings sampled from a wide range of his primary texts: For good measure they included the whole thing in its original Latin at the end - so it's really just 120 or so pages long. Reading the introduction to the text I felt a rising concern for the young translator: The word suicide appears at least once a page and to say it's a fixation would seem an understatement, Then I double-checked the book summary and found yup this is a primer specifically on death from a Stoic point of view. Ol' Seneca lays down some proverbs and a quality research team gives good background for context, A fine collection of nimbly translated thematically related material that spares you the trouble of digging through all his letters yourself, But if this were your first exposure to Stoicism you might think it's excessively macabre: Philosophy Fiction He lives badly who does not know how to die well,

This philosophy is more rational and down-to-earth particularly when compared to the faith based philosophies like religions. The most important highlight of this philosophy is that it is first and foremost an ethical way of thought and living. Whoever doesn't want to die doesn't know how to live well. "That was a really important point for him. It wasn't only that people changed their environment. He felt that they lost their purpose. 4 BC-65 AD). He was tutor and later advisor to emperor Nero. To die well is as important as to live well he says. To fear death is to fear life. You won't exist just like you didn't exist. As he repeats rather often death is a path to freedom. Seneca died during the reign of the emperor Nero in A.D. 65 having been "encouraged" by him to commit suicide. D. Paul in Acts 17). His instructions are really of two types." The first explains how one should think about dying. This is valuable to some at least. e. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome. e. My older brother and his wife never got over it. Nothing in this life was guaranteed. Life was fragile. If you are mistaken own up. This is the message of Seneca. It's a mistake to run scared.----Regrets of the dying. <https://bronnieware.com/blog/regrets->. Hitchens was 60 at the time. A year later Hitchens would be diagnosed with cancer. And the year after that he would die. I thought it would actively trigger me. I thought it would give me ideas. But Seneca was kind of a bastard. Life only has meaning because we die. Because life is so short. Otherwise why bother. It's almost funny. But I was out at ease. Perhaps it might cause some to act on suicidal thoughts. Because I won't otherwise plan out a suicide. I'll just ruminate until I'm so overwhelmed that I attempt. And I should be conscious of my true intent. Do I want to die? According to Seneca no. And that's helped me clear my head. I needed to hear this. I now need to make this my every day philosophy. But that is not its purpose in "Slaughterhouse-Five. Tonally the translation is bright and colloquial. Textually the content is morbid. 3.5 stars out of 5. For no pain is long lasting if it is great. Philosophy Fiction.