

THE BIG IDEAS

Close the Gap
And Live with *Areté*

Activate
Your Heroic Potential

Ancient Wisdom
+ Modern Science

Move From Theory
To Practice to Mastery

If Enough of Us Commit
WE Will Change the World

Areté

Activate Your Heroic Potential

BY BRIAN JOHNSON · HEROIC BLACKSTONE © 2023 · 1060 PAGES

“We make eye contact. He’s fully present and tracking. Me: ‘So... What do you want in your life?’

Emerson: ‘Well... I want to be happy and...’

Me: ‘Exactly.’ I pull up the sleeve on my sweatshirt and show him the (one-inch-tall, five-inch-wide!) tattoo on my left forearm. ‘You want to be HEROIC and show up as your best self and create a great, joyful life in which you’re giving your gifts to the world.’ He nods his head. ‘And... You know HOW you will do that?’... Then I pull up the other sleeve on my sweatshirt to show him the (one-inch tall, four-inch wide!) tattoo on my right forearm.

‘You need to live with ARETÉ. You remember what that means?! It’s an ancient Greek word. We translate it into English as ‘virtue’ or ‘excellence,’ but it has a deeper meaning. Something closer to ‘expressing the best version of yourself moment to moment to moment.’”

~ Brian Johnson from *Areté*

Areté. It’s the one-word answer the Stoics would give you if you asked them how to live a good life, the one-word summation of our philosophy at Heroic, and the title of Brian Johnson’s book featuring 451 ideas/chapters to help us activate our Heroic Potential.

Now, before you get confused about the 3rd person references to Brian, let’s follow the advice of [Randy Pausch’s dad](#) in [The Last Lecture](#) and address the “[elephant in the room](#).”

You may have already guessed it, but this Note isn’t being written by Brian. It’s Michael here, Bri’s right-hand-guy and the President and Head Coach at Heroic. It is a profound honor for me to be distilling *Areté* into the 687th Philosopher’s Note in our collection.

As you know if you’re familiar with Brian and his iconoclastic style, the book is a quick-reading, conversational, knock-your-socks-off-with-practical-wisdom masterpiece.

Most of the books Brian profiles in these Notes are so PACKED with Big Ideas they’re tough to narrow down to just a few favorites. *Areté’s* 1,000+ pages are so dense with distilled wisdom that we’re not even going to make it too far past the cover! (!!!) Grab a physical copy [here](#), or download a PDF of the cover and the first 12 chapters [here](#), and let’s get to work!

P.S. As you’ll see on the copyright, *Areté* is owned by Heroic Public Benefit Corporation, which is owned by 3,000+ investors from 75+ countries who have invested between \$100 and \$1 million+. Learn more about becoming an investor in Heroic here: [wefunder.com/heroic](#)

P.P.S. *Areté* is the first book published by Heroic Blackstone Publishing, the new imprint we formed in partnership with the world-class, values-aligned publishing company Blackstone Publishing. A HUGE shout out to our team at Blackstone for their incredible work, and special gratitude to Josh and Stephanie Stanton. We’re blessed to have you as partners and couldn’t be

“I can’t wait to see all that you will become and all the gifts you will joyfully give to the world in the decades ahead. I love you and I look forward to celebrating a lifetime of joyfully Heroic moments together.”

~ Brian Johnson

*"This book is dedicated to
YOU, the hero we've been
waiting for."*

~ Brian Johnson

more FIRED UP about what's in store for Heroic Blackstone Publishing, including Volume II (~20% done!), the *Areté Workbook*, *The Way of the Heroic Kid*, a younger-kids picture book series, and a Heroic Blackstone edition of *Meditations*. (More old-school classics coming soon!)

CLOSE THE GAP AND LIVE WITH ARETÉ

"Then I stop again and hold my right hand about eye level so it's parallel to the ground. 'You see that line? That's you being your absolute best self.' Then I hold my left hand about a foot below that, also parallel to the ground. 'You see THIS line? That's you *not* being your best self. Now... You see that GAP between THIS line and THAT line?'

Emerson nods his head.

'Well... You know how you feel when there's *that* big of a gap?'

Emerson: 'Not very good?!'

Me: 'EXACTLY. Now... what if we CLOSED THE GAP between who we are capable of being and who we are actually being as we show up as the best version of ourselves?! How do you think that feels?!'

Emerson: 'It feels good!!!'

Me: 'NO! It feels GREAT!! And THAT is the ultimate game we're all playing all day every day. When we close the gap and choose to do the things that help us show up as the best version of ourselves, we feel a deep sense of joy. The ancient Greek and Stoic philosophers had a word for that as well. They called it *eudaimonia*.'

*"It's time to activate your
Heroic potential."*

~ Brian Johnson

Both quoted passages so far come from the idea/chapter "*Areté: Explain it Like I'm 10*."

The scene, a real one, features Brian and his son Emerson walking and chatting on their family trail. Emerson, who is REALLY into chess and has put in *ASTONISHING work* ("*Effort counts thrice!*"), is debating whether or not to go to a tournament that he doesn't think he'll win.

In addition to being the perfect way to introduce *Areté*, this sequence is also a beautiful and powerful demonstration of a father lovingly and encouragingly coaching his son to "show up as your best self and create a great, joyful life in which you're giving your gifts to the world."

The passage makes me think of "*Wisdom from My Mom & Thomas Carlyle*," and *Aristotle*.

First, when I read about Brian (and Alexandra!) bringing forth the best in Emerson and Eleanor (remember: to parent literally means "to bring forth"), I can't help but recall this story:

"Once, when I was about 10 years old, I did something my mom didn't like. At all. She sternly grabbed me by the shoulders and looked me straight in the eye (I can still feel it like it was yesterday) and said: 'God gave you gifts. You must give them to the world!'"

(I got goosebumps as I typed that.)

It's funny how my whole life and work can be summed up in those two sentences."

Goosebumps reading that. (Again.) Because Brian has done the same thing to ME on numerous occasions, along with so many in our community! THANK YOU, Bri, for seeing and bringing forth OUR potential! And bless you Cathy for seeing the potential in your son!

Spotlight on you.

Imagine YOUR mom (or dad, or whoever played/plays that role for you in your life) down on one knee in front of you or grabbing you by the shoulders. They gaze deeply into your eyes and say:

"CLOSE THE GAP between who you are capable of being and who you are actually being! You have been given gifts. You must give them to the world!"

"Maslow and the Buddha and Joseph Campbell would all agree - we become the heroes of our own lives for one simple reason: so we can help others do the same. The ultimate Heroic quest is simple: The hero becomes the guide. That, my friend, is what Heroic Coach is all about"

~ Brian Johnson

Do that, and you'll experience *eudaimonia*, which brings us to Barnes' intro to the [Ethics](#):

"To call a man eudaimōn is to say something about how he lives and what he does. The notion of eudaimonia is closely tied, in a way in which the notion of happiness is not, to success: the eudaimōn is someone who makes a success of his life and actions, who realizes his aims and ambitions as a man, who fulfills himself.."

The Ethics, we are thus supposing, is not telling us how to be morally good, or even how to be humanly happy: it is telling us how to live successful human lives, how to fulfill ourselves."

What aims and ambitions do YOU have, hero?!

Is TODAY the day to take action towards fulfilling yourself as a human being?! Close the gap!

P.S. Learn more about Emerson's journey towards chess mastery in the Notes on [Move by Move](#) by [Maurice Ashley](#), a bunch of +1s, and those *Way of the Heroic Kid* books coming soon!

ACTIVATE YOUR HEROIC POTENTIAL

"Have you ever heard of 'activation energy'? It's a chemistry thing. The dictionary tells us that it's 'the minimum quantity of energy that the reacting species must possess in order to undergo a specified reaction.' Mundane examples:

Water only boils once it reaches its activation energy point of 212° Fahrenheit. 100° certainly won't do it. 200° won't do it. Not even 210° or 211° will do it. Simmering but not boiling. Want to boil? Then you need to get the heat all the way up to 212°. Then you'll undergo the 'specified reaction' and boil.

Same rules apply with fire. Carbon and hydrogen atoms are hanging out in paper all day every day. And, of course, oxygen is hanging out in the air all day every day. But... They won't combine to set the paper ablaze until a certain threshold is reached. We need 451° of heat to create enough energy to catalyze the magical dance that is fire. 400°? Nothing. 449°? Nothing. 450°? Nope. Nothing. 451°? BAM! Let there be fire.

That's activation energy. And that's why this book has 451 ideas—any one of which might help you go to the next level. In aggregate? If all goes as planned, we'll activate your Heroic potential.

Activation energy. When one thing transforms another thing.

In Fahrenheit, water melts at 32° and boils at 212°. Fire ignites at 451°. You can mold plastic into a spork at around 500°, but you need closer to 2000° if you want to forge steel into sword.

Same idea applies to our lives.

What's the intensity of energy required for YOU to undergo your next transformation from who and what you're currently being into who and what you're capable of being?

Whether you're currently at 0° or 32° or 212° or 451° or 2000°+, know this: If you don't CONTINUE to add energy into the system that is your life, and surround yourself with others doing the same, your temperature will trend down towards the energy of your surroundings.

Know this as well: There is ALWAYS going to be another next best version of you waiting to be activated and actualized. As [Ellen Langer](#) tells us in [Counterclockwise](#), our potential is unknowable. And as Brian shares in the idea/chapter on "*Your Souls Cries*:"

"Our potential is asymptotic. We never arrive. There's always more we can become. And, even more importantly, there's ONLY EVER a single moment in which we can actualize our potential. THIS MOMENT. Which is why I will unapologetically repeat myself and encourage/admonish you to: 'Close the gap. Live with Areté. TODAY.'"

What is YOUR Heroic potential? And what energy do you need to activate it? Close the gap!

"Know what you want. Know what you need to do to get it. Tell Part X to settle down. And go do what you're here to do. Close the gap. Give us all you've got. TODAY."

~ Brian Johnson

"KNOW THIS: If you can only get your Energy Focused on What's Important Now once in a while, you will NEVER (!) actualize your potential. But... If you can get yourself to show up CONSISTENTLY... you can tap into your infinite superpowers."

~ Brian Johnson

"You want to be Heroic and show up as your best self and create a great, joyful life in which you're giving your gifts to the world."

~ Brian Johnson

ANCIENT WISDOM + MODERN SCIENCE

"Let's invite Aristotle (no last name necessary) and Martin Seligman (founder of the positive psychology movement) to the party for their wisdom on the ultimate meaning of life. They'll serve as proxies for Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science."

Us: 'Gentlemen. Thanks for joining us. Let's jump straight in. What's the meaning of life?'

We notice Aristotle and Seligman share a knowing glance with one another. They both seem to have a twinkle in their eyes...

Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science agree: The ultimate meaning of life is to flourish by putting our virtues in action. Or, if you prefer to go old school, to live with eudaimonia via Areté.

That's from the idea/chapter "Aristotle & Seligman," and it only just begins to capture one of my favorite parts about this book (and Heroic!): the integration of SO MANY teachers.

Areté (and the 50+ categories in the Heroic app!) features life-changing insights from ancient wisdom traditions (Greek and Roman philosophers, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Confucianism, Islam, Taoism, Hinduism, Sufism) along with the best of modern science (Positive Psychology, Behavioral Neuroscience, Sport & Human Performance, Humanistic Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, the science of Habits, Hope, Goals, Grit, and more).

Look closely on the front cover of *Areté* and you'll find the phrases *Ancient Wisdom + Modern Science*. Look deeply into their shared truths and you'll find an astonishing amount of coherence.

Ancient wisdom + modern science agree on the ultimate meaning/game of life and how to play it well. In two phrases: *Eudaimonia via Areté* and *Flourish by Putting Your Virtues in Action*. (Look closely at the red ring of the virtue compass in the [Heroic app](#) and you'll find both!)

ALL ancient wisdom traditions also agree on the four cardinal virtues most important for living a good life: Wisdom, Discipline, Courage, and Love. And modern science has identified the five virtues most highly correlated with wellbeing: Gratitude, Hope, Curiosity, Zest, and Love.

Look closely at the back cover of *Areté* (and the virtue compass in the app!) and you'll see those same eight virtues and their corresponding declarations. (For more reminders, you can also grab a physical virtue poster or medallion from our [store](#), or [download a digital poster or wallpapers](#).)

And...

Over the past few decades, Brian has done the hard work to integrate ancient wisdom + modern science into a single, overarching, 7 Objective framework that forms the basis of EVERYTHING we do at Heroic, from *Areté* to [Basic Training](#) to the [Mastery Series](#) to our [Coach program](#) and [1-on-1 Heroic Performance Coaching](#) to our work with elite corporations and teams.

Explore the above for more details. For now, here's the broad overview: I. Know the Ultimate Game. II. Forge Antifragile Confidence. III. Optimize Your Big 3. IV. Make Today a Masterpiece. V. Master Yourself. VI. Dominate The Fundamentals. VII. Activate Your Superpower.

P.S. The virtue compass (in the top-left corner of the app) was the very first thing that we designed with the world-class product firm that we partnered with to create Heroic, the same firm who also helped build Slack, Tinder, Uber Eats, and Elon Musk's new business Neuralink.

P.P.S. Speaking of modern science, we're INCREDIBLY proud of the fact that both our [Heroic Coach program](#) and our [Heroic App](#) have been scientifically-validated by [Sonja Lyubomirsky's](#) world-leading wellness lab. SCIENCE SAYS... Heroic can help you flourish!

Read Sonja's memo on our Coach research [here](#).

"Imagine being the MOST committed to doing the little things you know keep you plugged in when you LEAST feel like it.

The worse we feel, the more committed we are to doing the work."

~ Brian Johnson

"Heroes finish strong."

~ Brian Johnson

MOVE FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE TO MASTERY

"The old-school philosophers knew it was really hard to live in integrity with our highest ideals. They told us we needed to be WARRIORS of the mind, not mere librarians of the mind.

To state the obvious: All of these +1's aren't ideas to be catalogued in the libraries of our minds. These are ideas to be LIVED in the moment-to-moment experiences that determine our destiny."

Look closely at the front cover again for the phrase: *Move from Theory to Practice to Mastery*.

Importantly, it starts with *Theory*. Which is why we LOVE having Brian distill "*More wisdom in less time*" for us. +1s. PNs. 101s. Basic Training. Mastery Series. Coaching. Areté.

But we can't STOP there. Again:

"To state the obvious: All of these +1's aren't ideas to be catalogued in the libraries of our minds. These are ideas to be LIVED in the moment-to-moment experiences that determine our destiny."

The truth is, you *already know* what you *could* be doing. The challenge is actually *DOING* those things, consistently. As per Michael Bernard Beckwith in *Spiritual Liberation* (see "*Blissipline*"):

"Your philosophy may give you a temporary state of euphoria, but if you want to be anchored in reality, it takes practice, practice, practice. We are not here to be euphoric but to get free. Rudimentary spirituality is theory; advanced spirituality is practice."

When we're working with the elite leaders, performers, and organizations that we're blessed to serve (from Notre Dame football and the Chicago Bulls to military officers within USSOCOM and NSW to corporations that are integrating Heroic into their cultures), we like to frame it like this:

Imagine a competition (or battle!) between two people. One is a version of you who actually does the things that help you to be your best. The other is the version of you who doesn't.

Which one will outperform the other?

The answer isn't debatable. It's ALWAYS going to be the you actually LIVING your philosophy.

Our app has a measure for that. We call it your Soul Force score. The version of you *with* a Soul Force score of 101 will outperform the version of you *without*. Period. (What's yours?)

And remember, this isn't a hypothetical competition. It's an inner war that's being waged ALL DAY EVERY DAY between your daimon and your demon. And that inner war has outer consequences in your Energy, in your Work, and in your Love, ALL DAY EVERY DAY.

"*The Battle Within*" is won (or lost) with every little choice you make. Your "*Destiny Math*" is adding up, +1 or -1. So pre-define and pre-commit to your choices, and then use every moment of every day to forge excellence (and antifragile confidence!) by hitting your Heroic targets.

You won't be perfect. None of us are. And it won't be fun all of the time. But it IS addicting. And eventually, as Seneca says in *Letters From a Stoic*, you may experience "*How much better to pursue a straight course and eventually reach that destination where the things that are pleasant and the things that are honorable finally become, for you, the same.*"

IF ENOUGH OF US COMMIT, *WE* WILL CHANGE THE WORLD

"It has been a sacred privilege to spend time with you. With wisdom, discipline, love, courage, gratitude, hope, curiosity and zest, I say... HEROES UNITE.

It's time to change the world. One person at a time. Together. Starting with you and me and all of us. Closing the gap and activating our Heroic potential by living with Areté. TODAY."

Those are the final words of the final idea/chapter of the book. They remind me of what Phil Stutz (*The Tools, Coming Alive, Lessons for Living*, featured in *Stutz*), says in the final words of

"For whom will YOU do the hard work to conquer YOUR fear and laziness so you can give us all you've got?"

I'm committed to working hard and conquering MY fear and MY laziness for my wife, my kids, my friends, my team, our community and YOU.

Day 1. All in. Let's go, Hero."

~ Brian Johnson

If you liked this Note, you'll probably like...

[Lessons for Living](#)

[Letters from a Stoic](#)

[Toward a Psychology of Being](#)

[The How of Happiness](#)

[Atomic Habits](#)

[The Daily Stoic](#)

Move from Theory to Practice to Mastery!

Download the Heroic app to get even more of the ancient wisdom, modern science, and practical tools you need to forge excellence and activate your Heroic potential. Proven by science. Trusted by pros. Created for you. Get started at heroic.us/apps.

P.S. Like this Philosopher's Note? Share it with a friend!

his foreword, which are also at the top of *Areté's* front cover:

"This book will change your life. And, if enough of us commit, it will change the world."

In my 1-on-1 work with Phil (Brian has done 451+ sessions, I've done 212+), he is constantly telling me to disagree with him and "throw away" his ideas. So with that in mind, I offer:

It will not change the world.

WE will. ALL of us. Together.

When EACH of us answers the call and spreads ripples through our own lives and communities.

Remember, the ultimate Heroic quest is simple: Become the hero in your own life so that you can help others do the same. The hero becomes the guide.

Our Heroic mission? 51 | 2051. A flourishing world. How? By empowering 100,000+ Certified Heroic Coaches by 2030 and training Certified Heroic Workshop Instructors to teach in 1,000 Cities and every country in the world.

Want to change the world and help create a humanity that's flourishing, hero?!

"YOU ARE THE HERO WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR. We just need you to step up and start acting like it."

HEROES UNITE! All in. Day 1. Let's GOOOOOOO!



Michael Balchan,
President + Head Coach

About the Author of This Note

MICHAEL BALCHAN



Michael Balchan is the President + Head Coach of Heroic Public Benefit Corporation. Over the last five years, he's led the creation of everything from the [Heroic Coach program](#) to our Heroic social training platform to our team in forging excellence and activating our Heroic potential. Michael is a Harvard trained behavioral economist, an Eagle Scout, an Ironman / Crossfitter / yogi, and a committed husband and father to his wife Kristen and their daughters, Dylan and Cameryn.

About the Author of *Areté*

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic Public Benefit Corporation and the author of *Areté: Activate Your Heroic Potential*. He's 50% Philosopher and 50% CEO and 101% committed to helping create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by the year 2051. As a Founder/CEO he's made crowdfunding history and built and sold two social platforms. As a Philosopher/teacher, he's helped millions of people from around the world, trained 10,000+ [Heroic Coaches](#) from 100+ countries and created a protocol that science says changes lives. He lives in the country outside Austin, Texas, with his wife, Alexandra, and their two kids, Emerson and Eleanor. Learn more at heroic.us.