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Potestās Marci Aurelii: Cursus Philosophus



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## ABSTRACT

### Potestās Marci Aurelii: Cursus Philosophus

#### (The Ruling Power of Marcus Aurelius: a Philosophical Journey)

Anna Wirth, Philosophy/Classical Studies (HSP)

What is it that makes a man who he is? What causes him to make certain decisions - to take certain actions over others? The beliefs and values of a human being are the only reasons for which a free person will act. Marcus Aurelius, Emperor of Rome from 161 to 180 AD, was aware of this fact, and sought to rule his conscious will with supreme reason, the dispassionate thinking process through which decisions are made, in accordance to Nature. A free person is not ruled by emotions, and does not base decisions upon externals at all, but will always act according to his or her ruling reason. Marcus sought to embody the true philosopher, one whose reason guided all and whose behavior flowed from that rationality into the practical application of living. Being human, it is in his nature to live in communion with others and fulfill the duties for which he was born. His love for Philosophy, and his lifetime spent seeking after her, formed his *potestās*, or ruling power. This ruling power is over the self as well as over the world in which one lives. Humans are citizens of the world, and as citizens have duties to the world as a political realm. In order to actualize this human potential to its fullest, Marcus believed in doing his duty for Rome and also for himself. Marcus Aurelius' beliefs in Stoicism are reflected in all of his actions and musings, and are the foundation for his political rule and influence in Rome.\*

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\* Front page photo by Cjon Mili, *Shadow Cast by equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in Piazza del Campidoglio (in Rome)*, black and white photograph, 1965, Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

## PREFACE

My time as an undergraduate has been one of exceptional growth. This thesis is the product of great learning and years of interest. I wanted to explore why Marcus Aurelius was remembered as he is and whether the representation of him came from fact or fiction. *The Gladiator*, featuring Richard Harris, reasserts a common claim that Marcus Aurelius did not wish for his son, Commodus, to become emperor following his death. I wanted to judge for myself the validity of that claim and, after finding it false, why the dichotomy exists between the historical evidence and the representation. That process led me to a deep and abiding fascination with Stoicism, particularly, how Stoicism affected Marcus Aurelius. Out of this, I came to explore the role which philosophy played in the life of Marcus Aurelius with the goal of answering my own question: why did a man, whom I offer great respect, who sought to live the best life that a man was capable of living, make as his heir such an amoral character as Commodus?

Fortunately, I was able to use my acquired and freshly gleaned skills to find an acceptable answer. I am thankful for my years of studying and my small, yet incredibly important, knowledge of Greek and Latin languages and cultures as well as my understanding of the development of post-Socratic philosophies, with their mutations, in the near millennia-long life of the Academy and Lyceum. As a result of my studies in the departments of both Philosophy and Classical Studies, I was able to find an answer to my own question and argue that answer, accordingly, while keeping my own voice apparent.

Anna L. Wirth

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, to my parents, Zack and Patty Wirth, for their years of support and confidence in the power of my mind.

Next to all of my teachers, without whom I would never have been able to push myself this far.

For Dr. Barry Ferst, who put the fear of God in me to cease procrastinating and always had a new idea with which for me to work, for Fr. Dan Shea, whose sense of humor and high expectations have tortured and tempered me into becoming a better student, and for Dr. Jeanette Fregulia, to whom I could go every time I was crying and who would patiently listen to all my concerns before offering just the right advice.

Finally, to all my friends and family, for their great patience and support of my doubt and hysterics, especially Nancy Scow, for staying up past two a.m. helping me go over my grammar again and again and laughing when I thought the world would end along with my computer's ill-timed demise five days before this was due.

More than anything, thanks be to God for answering my prayers for the inspiration and insight to create this document and for the confidence and health to see it through.

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## INTRODŪCTIŌ<sup>1</sup>

As time passes and memory fades, there is less and less material from which to build an idea of a man who once lived. What is left are but shadows. The living are left to piece together the puzzle of the past, with the goal of forming a clear picture, but when many of the pieces have been lost to the passage of time there is only so much one can do. The statue of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, in the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome, survived the stress of time through the belief of the Christians that it was actually a statue of Constantine. Now that error has been corrected and it lives on as a triumphant reminder of M. Aurelius, the Philosopher-Emperor; but only a shadow of what he really was remains, with most of the outlines lying in a little philosophical diary that he wrote to himself during the final ten years of his life. In those final years he was often at war and he wrote while in the midst of battle-camps. That diary holds the musings of a Stoic, a man, and an emperor, figuring out how to deal with his life as it had fallen to him. My argument is Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus strove to live the ultimate life of a Stoic Philosopher, and where he gloried and failed personally is a direct result of the strengths and weaknesses of Stoicism as a philosophy.

Primarily this conclusion is derived from his own musings, *The Meditations*, as they were translated by C.R. Haines.<sup>2</sup> Haines is also the translator of the English version of *Fronto's Correspondence* used here. There are also references from Cassius Dio's *Histories* translated by Earnest Cary, as well as selections from Chrysippus, Cicero,

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<sup>1</sup> "Introduction." Translations of all titles by Anna L. Wirth.

<sup>2</sup> C. R. Haines does a particularly clear translation in demonstrating that M. Aurelius was writing these things to himself, as compared to, for example, George Long's popular translation of the text. The choice to use Haines' rendering was made in order to clarify that these writings were chiefly M. Aurelius' dialogue with himself.

Seneca, and Epictetus. Secondary sources include the respected biographer Anthony Birley and the philosophical writer John Sellars. However, this is not an exhaustive list of references.

The life of Marcus Aurelius has been recorded and analyzed many times, his *Meditations* have been translated into at least twelve languages, and there are over fourteen different renderings into English available. Yet, independently, these writings look at merely one-half of M. Aurelius' hyphenated epithet at a time merely acknowledging the other with a word or two commenting on how it is of interest before moving on. Marcus Aurelius Antoninus is known as the Philosopher-Emperor and, for him, these are intrinsically linked. It is written that he balked at becoming emperor at all, because he wished instead to be a philosopher, but at the same time it was his philosophy which drove him into being emperor: he had to fulfill his duty regardless of his personal desires. This tension is the foundation for this work as a historical and philosophical analysis of Marcus Aurelius, and how he represents Stoicism and his times.

In pursuit of completing the particular puzzle that makes up M. Aurelius, it is necessary first to look at his times and who and what influenced him early on. He had a unique childhood in that he was strongly favored by Emperor Hadrian, and that his grandfather took great pains to have him tutored well in his youth. He was introduced to philosophy by his tutor, Rusticus, whom he thanks in Book I, section 7 of the *Meditations* for gifting him with the *Memoirs of Epictetus*.<sup>3</sup> This gift leads straight into discourse about the *Memoirs*, and the origins and doctrines of the Stoic Philosophy. Then the road swoops back to Marcus Aurelius' own thoughts and how he grapples with his life and

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<sup>3</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1916, 1999)7.



Stoic doctrine in his *Meditations*. Coming then, out of his inner reflections, the view opens to what can be learned from those musings. These inner reflections illuminate the reasons behind his political actions, particularly his decision to become emperor jointly with his adopted brother Lucius Commodus Verus, the manner in which he dealt with the uprising against him perpetrated by his dear friend Cassius, and his decision to make, as his heir, his only surviving son, Commodus.

These actions, good and bad, are reflective of his Stoic doctrine and how it developed his *potestās*. The word *potestās* is particularly useful in that, while it means literally “ruling power,” it deals not only with political rule but also self-rule and the greater influence a body sends out. In this way, *potestās* becomes the gravitational force of a man: what keeps him as his self and what binds all things to him. M. Aurelius’ actions directly reflect his *potestās*, and his *potestās* was consciously formed to be in line with the Stoic doctrine in which he believed.

## I. ORIENS MARCI AURELII<sup>4</sup>

### Opening:

In a letter to Fronto, his tutor in Latin rhetoric, Marcus Aurelius humors his friend with a story. As the story goes, M. Aurelius, and his cavalcade, were riding along a road when they came upon a band of sheep and two shepherds; the flock was taking up the road, so it was going to be quite difficult to circumvent them. But then, the young man heard one shepherd remark to the other, “*Marry, keep an eye on those mounted fellows, they be rare hands at pillaging.*”<sup>5</sup> Upon hearing this, the impetuous boy says that he dug in his spurs and lunged his mount straight through the flock, and the poor shepherd in anger threw his crook at the party as they scattered the sheep and it fell upon his equerry riding behind him. In his own words, M. Aurelius recounts; “We got clear off. So it chanced that he, who feared to lose his sheep, lost his crook.”<sup>6</sup>

### Part One: Marcus Aurelius and his World

From a young man who scatters sheep for fun, to the father of thirteen, and emperor for nineteen years, Marcus Aurelius seems overall to have led a charmed life. Born in 121 AD, south of Cordova, in a place called Uccubi, in the province of Baetica, he was among the many Roman nobles of the time that hailed out of Iberia.<sup>7</sup> His naissance fell during the reign of Hadrian, who solidified the furthest northern and western expansion of the Roman Empire. He was born to Annius Verus and Domitia Lucilla II; however,

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<sup>4</sup> “Chapter One: The Rising and Childhood of Marcus Aurelius.”

<sup>5</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *The Correspondence of Marcus Cornelius Fronto*. vol. 1. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1919, 1982) 151.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966) 23.

M. Aurelius never really knew his father as a result of Annius Verus' early death circa 124 AD.<sup>8</sup>

Domitia Lucilla II and A. Verus had a daughter as well, younger than Marcus, named Annia Cornificia Faustina.<sup>9</sup> The two siblings seem to have kept in touch and been on good terms throughout their lives. M. Aurelius would often give her inheritances that had been left to him. She married Pomponia Ummidia, another high-ranking Roman, and their children play into the complex tapestry of Roman interconnections gained through marriage.

Neither M. Aurelius nor Annia Cornificia were tended to by their own mother while very young, but instead were placed in the care of nurses. This practice of wet-nurses raising noble children is an issue that Anthony Birley takes into consideration at length, for the practice was disputed on multiple grounds. One of the issues, relevant to the Verus children, was the practice of using a Greek-speaking nurse, since it was vital for a Roman noble to master Greek as well as Latin, but it risked the child speaking with an accent.<sup>10</sup> M. Aurelius refers in his journal to his nurse within the same lines he does his parents, saying that he shall live as Universal Nature wills:

...until the day when I shall sink down and rest from my labours,  
breathing forth my last breath into the air whence I daily draw it in, and  
falling upon that earth, whence also my father gathered the seed, and my  
mother the blood, and my nurse the milk.<sup>11</sup>

Lacking a paternal figure, his education was left up to his grandfather, Marcus Annius Verus, and his step-grandfather, Catilius Severus.<sup>12</sup> M. Aurelius speaks of them

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<sup>8</sup> A. Birley, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>11</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 30.

later as being genial and caring. He was raised on the southern edge of Rome in the family residence upon the Caelian with M. Verus, who was reputed to be a patron and player of many parlor and lawn games while also holding the position of consul three times. He was likely a key role-model to the boy, both politically and socially. Holding an equal role in M. Aurelius' upbringing, Catilius Severus chose to educate Marcus Aurelius through hiring personal tutors rather than sending him to public schools.

M. Aurelius' formal schooling commenced at the age of seven under the care of three masters for his elementary education; Euphorion in Greek, Geminus for Latin elocution, both under the purview of a head tutor who oversaw his general moral development and welfare.<sup>13</sup> Marcus Aurelius later gives credit to this head tutor, whose name is unknown, for teaching him to mind his own duties and pay little attention to what did not concern him.<sup>14</sup> These three are the first academic influences on M. Aurelius, and it is noted that he took immediately to the role of a student with great seriousness.

This great *gravitas*, or "serious disposition," displayed by Marcus Aurelius from even a very young age is supposed to be the one marked attribute which drew Emperor Hadrian's interest in the boy. Apparently Hadrian was on good terms with the family already; else M. Annius Verus would never have held the appointment of consul three times under his reign. But Hadrian took a liking to Marcus Aurelius and nicknamed him "Verissimus." The name is a play on his given surname and is the Latin superlative of that name, meaning "The Truest." From this endearment it can be inferred that his *gravitas* was coupled with *veritas*, or "truthfulness." That reputation remained with M.

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<sup>13</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 34-35.

<sup>14</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 5.

Aurelius for his lifetime; as evidenced by coinage, minted during his reign, apparently even the nickname “Verissimus” stuck with him longer than the surname “Verus.”<sup>15</sup>

Hadrian was the third in line of what are considered today to be the “Five Good Emperors of Rome.” That title was bequeathed them by Edward Gibbons, and was meant to demonstrate that the time of relative health in the empire was short-lived and shared a common thread. That common thread was the adoption of an heir who was the best suited to the task of handling Rome, rather than following law of primogeniture. This practice of adoption began with Emperor Nerva, the first on Gibbons’ list, who reigned from 96-98 AD.

In Nerva’s short reign he began the necessary process of pulling the empire together from the crashing times of Domitian and Vespasian, both born out of the reigns of Nero and other leaders. Nerva was pivotal for the course of Roman leadership; one way that shift is demonstrated harkens directly to what was occurring prior to his reign. When Nerva took over, he swore to the senate that he would “refrain from executing”<sup>16</sup> any of its members. Beyond his dealings with the senate, in 97 AD he officially adopted Marcus Ulpius Traianus, more commonly known as Trajan, to be his heir. He also made him his joint consul, so that the inheriting of leadership would prove easier for Trajan, the senate, and the people.

This practice of adoption is viewed as being one of the best practices the empire ever took up, for in the time that it was followed things seemed to progressively improve for Rome. There is the happy correlation that the opposition against Rome seems to have taken a break during this period as well, but that is a whole other topic. Important

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<sup>15</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> David Wend, “Nerva.” *De Imperatoribus Romanis*, accessed 20 March 2011, <http://www.roman-emperors.org/nerva.htm>.

though, is the world that Trajan set up as emperor from 98-117 AD. His nineteen-year reign was a sigh of relief to the Roman people, and it was he that set many of the boundaries of the empire.

Trajan hailed out of Baetica, the same region where Hadrian and M. Aurelius were to be born years later. When Trajan heard the news that he had become emperor he remained with the armies along the Danube. He settled the boundaries and made agreements with the German peoples there in what became known later as the Dacian wars. He also greatly improved the infrastructure of the empire and built roads, bridges, and ports; some of which survive still. In his final years he was engaged in war with the Parthians, and placed Hadrian in command when first he fell ill. The war with the Parthians seems to have sprung out of internal power-plays over whom would become the next ruler of their country. Parthia was a sub-province of the empire, so the empire had to approve of the Parthian ruler and they were under law to seek Rome's counsel when a new leader was needed. The Parthians failed on their end of that agreement several times, as exemplified by a similar incident years later that opened war under M. Aurelius and L. Verus.

Thus it passed that Trajan adopted Hadrian from his sick-bed, a matter over which there is some dissension, and made him his heir.<sup>17</sup> Hadrian became emperor in 117 AD while fighting the Parthians and his first duty was to win that war for Rome. Hadrian's next goal was to consolidate, rather than expand, the empire.<sup>18</sup> Trajan had expanded the Eastern fronts of the empire to what Hadrian considered to be ridiculous lengths. After

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<sup>17</sup> Herbert W. Benario, "Trajan." De Imperatoribus Romanis, accessed 20 March 2011, <http://www.roman-emperors.org/trajan.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert W. Benario, "Hadrian." De Imperatoribus Romanis, accessed 20 March 2011, <http://www.roman-emperors.org/hadrian.htm>.

subduing the Parthians, Hadrian pulled back on the Eastern front and forsook some of Trajan's conquests as untenable. He traveled throughout the whole empire – no small task! – settling uprisings and edifying boundaries. However, his time spent in Rome was rather controversial. At the beginning and end of his reign he seems to have executed a number of people to whom he took a disliking without firm evidence of dissension. These rumors of ill-intent include poisoning his own wife, Sabina.<sup>19</sup> The senate did not trust this emperor, with good reason according to many sources, as a result of his unpredictability.

Towards Hadrian's end he was very ill at times and frustrated by the fact that he could not die. A famous story is his demanding that one of his physicians poison him and that the man committed suicide himself rather than obey.<sup>20</sup> Hadrian's successor was a matter of great concern at that time. He had adopted a man by the name of Ceionius Commodus to be his heir, a favorite of his, but that man died before Hadrian did. Thus he had to choose another to take his place. It seems he favored M. Aurelius even at that time to become emperor, but M. Aurelius was too young. So he looked to M. Aurelius' uncle, Antoninus Pius. A. Pius requested some time to ponder the decision but eventually acquiesced to becoming heir, also accepting Hadrian's conditions that, at the same time he himself was adopted by Hadrian, he would adopt two sons: Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Commodus.

Lucius Commodus, who would later take the name Verus, was the son of the late heir Ceionius Commodus. He would have been a child still, probably eight years old. It was Hadrian's wish that both of his favorite families would carry on his duties, and he

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<sup>19</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 44.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

intended that both boys would succeed Antoninus Pius upon that man's death. M. Aurelius, at that time seventeen, was a decade older than his newly adopted brother; still too young to be Hadrian's heir himself. But his future emperorship was secured by Hadrian in his choosing of Antoninus Pius, whose name at that time was T. Aurelius Antoninus, as heir and caretaker of the two heirs whom he had really wished to instate. This also explains Emperor Hadrian's intense interest in M. Aurelius even from a very young age.

### Part Two: The Philosophical and Developmental Influences of Marcus Aurelius

Even as a young man who loved riding and hunting, Marcus Annus Verus, later Marcus Aurelius,<sup>21</sup> was noted for his exceptional *gravitas*. "A solemn child from his earliest infancy,"<sup>22</sup> this young man took life seriously from his very beginnings. As was traditional for a noble his education included language and morals first, then all the *artes liberales* designed to fully educate a human being. Noted earlier were his tutor and first educators in Greek and Latin, and now it serves to delve into the influences of M. Aurelius in the liberal arts and particularly philosophy.

It was normal for a young Roman to begin the *grammātica* between the ages of ten and twelve. Anthony Birley puts the year M. Aurelius began at 131 AD, making him around ten years old. He was then assigned additional tutors in geometry, music, and

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<sup>21</sup> For the sake of simplification I have chosen to use Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus as the names by which to refer to these characters, but it is important to note that the Romans were great at changing their names and this can lead to much confusion. Their roles, stages of life, place in the *cursus honorum*, and actions all went in to their names. As such their names are different in different years, and generally only the first name remains throughout their life. This is the case with Marcus Annus Verus, later Marcus Aelius Aurelius Verus, later Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, and Lucius Commodus, later Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus, later Emperor Caesar Lucius Aurelius Verus Augustus. See Anthony Birley, particularly pg. 153.

<sup>22</sup> A. Birley, 32 states "*fuit a prima infantia gravis.*"



painting. His tutor in geometry and music was called Andron, and very little is known of him. The painting-master, Diognetius, is he who earns the first blame for pulling the young noble into the world of mystery known as philosophy.

From Diognetius, not to be taken up with trifles; and not to give credence to the statement of miracle-mongers and wizards about incantations and the exorcizing of demons, and such-like marvels; and not to keep quails, nor to be excited about such things; not to resent plain speaking; and to become familiar with philosophy... and to write dialogues as a boy; and to set my heart on a pallet-bed and a pelt and whatever else tallied with the Greek regimen.<sup>23</sup>

A twelve-year old boy does not normally forsake the niceties of life and demand to sleep on the ground, with but a few skins that were apparently only supplied at his mother's demand. As Birley puts it, at this time he was "fired with eagerness to follow the austere way of the life of a philosopher."<sup>24</sup> M. Aurelius took it upon himself at this time to train in the discipline and the endurance becoming of a philosopher, and this in addition to his other studies. That shows considerable motivation from one so young, but perchance it was thought of differently at the time. The scholar Frederick Pollock argues that this was not as unusual for a Roman citizen as it first appears, for he says of the matter that;

It [liberal education] was not an intellectual exercise or a special study, but a serious endeavor to gather up the results of all human knowledge in their most general form, and make them available for the practical conduct of life.<sup>25</sup>

With this view of *paideia*, translated generally to mean "education," or "enlightenment," maybe M. Aurelius is not as extreme as he sounds. *Paideia* was the Greek idea of education for the whole human being, a concept that Werner Jaeger

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<sup>23</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Pollock, "Marcus Aurelius and his Stoic Philosophy." *Oxford Journals*, vol. 4, no. 13. (Oxford University Press, 1879) 47.

discusses at great length in his three-volume work on the topic, and so it is arguable that the idea of education, at all, was much more intrinsic to M. Aurelius than a presentist reading is able to conceive. Education of the time was an all-encompassing endeavor, permeating every aspect of life. There is never an end to *paideia* so long as one still lives; in contrast, today goals and endings are much appreciated in education. M. Aurelius certainly lived up to this ideal though, for he never once stopped learning. His tutors were never cast aside and some became his closest friends. It is evident that he took his studies to heart from the beginning.

The next great influence upon his development was a tutor named Rusticus. M. Aurelius thanks him in Book I, verse 7 of his journal for making him aware of his own inadequacies. Rusticus brought before him the idea that he “needed amendment and training for my character.”<sup>26</sup> This man also taught him to be exactly who he was, and not to act or show false face in any unbecoming way. Fronto blames Rusticus for tempting M. Aurelius away from the study of oratory, and indeed M. Aurelius lends validity to the accusation in that same verse, crediting Rusticus with teaching him to “eschew rhetoric, poetry, and fine language.”<sup>27</sup> Another lesson this man gave M. Aurelius was one on forgiveness, which is worth quoting: “To shew oneself ready to be reconciled to those who have lost their temper and trespassed against one, and ready to meet them halfway as soon as ever they seem to be willing to retrace their steps.”<sup>28</sup> This lesson would have ample opportunities for its practice in his life. As would other lessons from that man, in diligent reading and care in all matters great or small. The gift that really affected the

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<sup>26</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

course of M. Aurelius' development, though, was a little book that Rusticus supplied him "out of his own library,"<sup>29</sup> and that little book was the *Memoirs of Epictetus*.

That particular gift will be better discussed during some more focused time on Stoicism itself.<sup>30</sup> From here his philosophical journey developed consistently until he came of age in 135 AD. That year M. Aurelius officially assumed the *toga virilis*, or "garment of manhood."<sup>31</sup> For a Roman citizen this transition was an important marker; time to set aside childish things, and move into the world of men.

At that time M. Aurelius was engaged to a young girl named Ceionia Fabia.<sup>32</sup> She was the daughter of the late Ceionius Commodus and, since his betrothal was at the behest of Hadrian, it is evidence of a deep desire of the emperor to unite the families. This betrothal never resulted in marriage, but his introduction into the family of Ceionii Comodi proved quite important. Birley reports that it was in that social circle where M. Aurelius first met the Stoic philosopher Apollonius of Chalcedon.<sup>33</sup> Regrettably, no known writings of the man are extant, but M. Aurelius speaks of him, with one long sentence attempting to sum up all the lessons he learned from him, in the opening book of his journal, verse 8:

From Apollonius, self-reliance and an unequivocal determination not to leave anything to chance; and to look to nothing else even for a moment save Reason alone; and to remain ever the same, in the throes of pain, on the loss of a child, during lingering illness; and to see plainly from a living example that one and the same man can be very vehement and yet gentle: not to be impatient in instructing others; and to see in him a man who obviously counted as the best among his gifts his practical experience and facility in imparting philosophical truths; and to learn in accepting

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<sup>29</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Stoicism, including but not limited to its definition in the *Memoirs of Epictetus*, is discussed in Ch. 2.

<sup>31</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

seeming favours from friends not to give up our independence for such things nor take them callously as a matter of course.<sup>34</sup>

These are all lessons he later muses upon at length. Naturally, for he remembered them, all the lessons he learned that he notes in the opening book of his musings are discussed over and over within the text. Taking great pains to take care of everything, looking only to Reason, having great patience and humility, the idea that this philosophy indeed was Truth, and balance in his dealings with others are all evidenced throughout the work. These things made M. Aurelius who he was as a man and a philosopher, and were acted out within his interchanges with others.<sup>35</sup>

However, the key point of interest regarding M. Aurelius is not contained merely in his manliness and philosophical beliefs, for he was not fortunate enough to live a private life. In order to understand the paradox that he was, his public life must be taken into account. He was born out of a political family, and they with varying degrees of ambition, and from such men's reputations and duties a great portion of M. Aurelius' influences were nourished.

### Part Three: The Political Influences upon Marcus Aurelius

It is necessary, here, to go again through the timeline of M. Aurelius' upbringing. Without doing so, one risks missing out on the important relationships and distinctions between his formal education and the effects of the people who had expectations of him and with whom he would have engaged in conversation from the earliest age. These influences served as the role-models for how to behave as a politician and in positions of

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<sup>34</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> How his philosophy is played out in his dealings is discussed in Ch. 4.

leadership, which M. Aurelius began holding at a very young age. In the case of M. Aurelius, his influences began when he was born into the family of the Annii Veri.

The Annii Veri hailed from a part of the Roman Empire on the Iberian peninsula, as noted before, called Baetica. This province nurtured the Emperors Trajan and Hadrian, and many other political figures as well as several Stoics. It could be argued that Baetica was one of most important provinces in the first two centuries of the Roman Empire. M. Aurelius, however, was probably not there long as his father had died while serving as praetor sometime between 123 and 126 AD,<sup>36</sup> and there is evidence that the boy would have been in Rome for certain by 126 AD, when his grandfather M. Annius Verus was consul for the third time.

M. Aurelius' mother, Domitia Lucilla II, was the heiress of a vast fortune from her own mother, Domitia Lucilla I. Domitia Lucilla I inherited, from her own grandfather, an immense fortune, a scandal which Pliny recounts in his letters.<sup>37</sup> It seems her grandfather despised her father and left the fortune to her upon the condition that she be released from paternal control. Her father conceded, but she was immediately adopted by her uncle with whom her father shared all his possessions in common. Thus, she did not actually inherit the wealth until those two men had died. The connections she, Domitia Lucilla II, held must have proved advantageous to Annius Verus as her husband. She was fluent in Greek and friend to one of M. Aurelius' future tutors, Herodes Atticus. Herodes was a very wealthy Hellene and a prolific orator, and was brought up for a time in Domitia

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<sup>36</sup> A. Birley sets the year of Annius Verus' death at 124 AD; see discussion on pg. 26 of *Marcus Aurelius*.

<sup>37</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 25-26, recounts the tale as follows: "The circumstance were that Curtilius Mancianus (consul in A.D. 55, at the beginning of the reign of Nero) had taken a violent dislike to his son-in-law, Domitius Lucanus. In his will he left Lucilla his fortune, but only on the condition that she be released from paternal control – he did not want Lucanus to touch a penny of it. Lucanus complied. But the girl was at once adopted by Lucanus' brother, Tullus. The brothers held their possessions in common, 'and thus the purpose of the will was defeated', Pliny explained... Pliny's letter retails in full the complicated and embarrassing family history."

Lucilla II's childhood home.<sup>38</sup> Domitia Lucilla I was later to marry Catilius Severus, hence his becoming M. Aurelius' step-grandfather.

Domitia Lucilla I also had another daughter; Annia Galeria Faustina I. She is the link tying M. Aurelius in kinship to T. Aurelius Antoninus Pius. Her husband had shared a consulship in 120 A.D. with Catilius Severus, Faustina's future step-father. The daughter of Faustina and Antoninus Pius, Annia Galeria Faustina II, is who would eventually marry Marcus Aurelius. That was not in line with the wishes of Hadrian but instead was according to the wishes of Antoninus Pius.

Out of this tracing of family ties, it is quite apparent that M. Aurelius was well-connected from infancy. He never wanted for anything attainable by wealth, but rather than becoming spoiled by that he retained humility and forsook many inheritances that were intended for him. He would either refuse them or hand them over to another who had the time and desire to manage more property and wealth. In that choice, he proves again his utter lack of ambition, for he knew his inherited duties were more than adequate to fill his time.

Lack of ambition appeared to be one of the things Hadrian had been looking for in an heir. That desire is evidenced by his choice of A. Pius rather than another relative of M. Aurelius, Catilius Severus. That man was senior in experience, both military and civil, to A. Pius, yet, he desired power and had allies among the high-ranking citizens. Several of those fell out of favor immediately following A. Pius' adoption, and Catilius Severus was under suspicion for insurrection.<sup>39</sup> Regardless, Hadrian chose A. Pius as his place-holder for his favorites.

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<sup>38</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

Hadrian had begun watching M. Aurelius while he was but a child, and even sponsored him becoming a member of the *equites* at the age of six although he was technically ineligible. In order to be enrolled as a member of that order one's father had to be living, but apparently when the emperor requested such a thing that technicality was overlooked. The following year, Hadrian enrolled Marcus into a priestly order called the *Salii*. His roles there included performing ritual dances and reciting ancient cantations from memory. It was common for young nobles to be members of priestly orders, and later in life to host religious ceremonies and sacrifices.

Faith in the pantheon was an ingrained piece of the entire Roman culture. The deified past emperors and empresses had their own priestly orders, and as emperor it was expected that one day you also would become deified. Upon the death of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius engaged in his first argument as emperor, with the senate, over whether to deify Hadrian and won. So it was expected that M. Aurelius and L. Verus would deify Antoninus Pius, as this tradition was part of Roman culture.

Prior to his death, Hadrian spent the vast majority of his energy on solidifying the empire according to either natural or man-made borders. The wall bearing his name across the breadth of England is the greatest example of the results of his efforts. As a result of his time at war under Trajan, settling conflicts with the Jewish uprisings and the Parthians in the East, and his dedication to visiting all the provinces, the time after Hadrian was completely at peace. The demonstrations of his power gave no room for considerations of misbehavior from their neighbors. So throughout the reign of Antoninus Pius, there was peace across the lands of Rome.

In 138 AD Hadrian's long illness finally came to its mortal end. Prior to his death he had adopted Antoninus Pius, who then subjected himself to the post of emperor of Rome. A. Pius' adopted sons were to move to his home where much of their education was taken over by him at that time. As noted above, L. Verus was very young at the time, and, while not recorded precisely, it seems probable that he was not fully taken into A. Pius' home while still being young enough to warrant a mother's attentiveness. Domitia Lucilla II, possessing her own wealth, never had to remarry but could live as she wished with her son. Faustina I and Antoninus Pius had no sons, but their daughter Faustina II was betrothed to M. Aurelius following the cancelling of his prior betrothal to L. Verus' sister.

M. Aurelius was placed in his first official position at the age of seventeen. This was 139 AD, and he became quaestor in Rome. At the same time, his education was taken up a notch. The famous Latin orator, Fronto, became his instructor in oratory and rhetoric, while the great Greek orator, Herodes Atticus, was placed in charge of his Hellenic education. In addition to these men, Appollonius of Chalcedon became his official tutor of philosophy.

As his appointment to quaestor shows, M. Aurelius was now on the path of the *cursus honorum*.<sup>40</sup> The following year was marked by his first appointment as consul along with Antoninus Pius. Although he would not become emperor until he was thirty-nine years old, he began taking on greater responsibilities for Rome at age eighteen. He was very concerned with doing everything correctly, and in his correspondence with

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<sup>40</sup> The *cursus honorum* is the path of offices a citizen of rank traveled through in order to gain experience and knowledge regarding the scope of Roman politics.



Fronto discusses his form and rhetoric in speeches which he was required to deliver to the Senate.

He married the younger Faustina, daughter of Faustina I and Antoninus, when he was twenty-four years of age. His moral development must have been very good growing up, for he notes that he was pleased with himself for having saved himself from temptations of the flesh for not only as long as was expected but even somewhat past that time. Their first child was born in 147 AD, two years into the marriage. Annia Aurelia Galeria Faustina was, happily, one of their children fortunate enough to survive into adulthood.

His younger brother, L. Verus, would have to wait quite a while for his own marriage, although he was only a decade younger. This is because he would wait for M. Aurelius' second daughter, Annia Aurelia Galeria Lucilla, to come of age, and she was not born until 149 AD. L. Verus' first appointment was in 153 AD as quaestor, and like M. Aurelius he became consul the following year. Both were being groomed for rule, and serving as consul with their father must have proved a great asset to their education.<sup>41</sup>

The gap in the two boys' education was their great inexperience in warfare. Neither served with an army during their shortened version of the *cursus honorum*, and Antoninus Pius never left the Italian peninsula as emperor. This was a great contrast from Hadrian, yet the consequences were never felt by A. Pius but would fall to his sons to handle. It is said that the mark of a true philosopher is that he never expects anything to the exclusion of anything else, and thus is able to handle, according to reason, the best option without fail. The heirs of A. Pius certainly had a great deal of reckoning to put that ideal to the test.

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<sup>41</sup> For these dates, see Table II from A. Birley, 50 and 51.

### Conclusion:

The young Marcus Aurelius always had his life planned by others. The portion of his life which represents entirely his own decision, though certainly not without influences, was his devotion to Philosophy. As a politician, he served well and did what was expected and needed of him. But that role did not settle his spirit, and he was called into the service of something greater than himself. He saw his nature as being part of a greater fabric woven by Reason; the weaver of all things. This axiom is delineated by Stoic doctrine as it existed in Late Roman antiquity. It is vital to understand what exactly the world looked like to someone viewing it through a Stoic optic; this is how M. Aurelius saw the world, and it was with this vision, primarily, that he made decisions in his ruling of Rome.

## II. GRAVITĀS STŌICORUM RATIŌNIS<sup>42</sup>

### Opening:

What is my object? To understand Nature and follow her. I look then for some one who interprets her, and having heard that Chrysippus does I come to him. But I do not understand his writings, so I seek an interpreter. So far there is nothing to be proud of. But when I have found the interpreter it remains for me to act on his precepts; that and that alone is a thing to be proud of. But if I admire the mere power of exposition, it comes to this – that I am turned into a grammarian instead of a philosopher, except that I interpret Chrysippus in place of Homer. Therefore, when some one says to me, ‘Read me Chrysippus’, when I cannot point to actions which are in harmony and correspondence with his teaching, I am rather inclined to blush.<sup>43</sup>

~Epictetus

What affect such words had on Marcus Aurelius has yet to be seen, but there are many echoes of this phrasing in his *Meditations*. This quote comes from the same text given him by Rusticus when he was but a boy, forgiving the copies, renderings and translations that may alter meaning. Epictetus was the primary influence on M. Aurelius’ philosophy, through his *Memoirs*, which today are called his *Discourses*. These were written down by Epictetus’ student Arrian and thus preserved. His philosophy, though, came from a tradition just a few centuries old that was taught under a painted porch in Athens called the *Stoa Poikile*.<sup>44</sup>

### Part One: The Origins of Stoicism

The man who taught on that painted porch was the founder of what became known as Stoicism. He was called Zeno of Citium and had come to Athens circa 311 BC. He

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<sup>42</sup> “Chapter Two: The Severity of Stoic Reason.”

<sup>43</sup> Epictetus, “Discourses of Epictetus.” *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers*, trans. by P. E. Matheson (New York; Random House, 1940) 482.

was in his early twenties and desired knowledge. In seeking that knowledge he studied for a time in Plato's Academy and also followed Crates the Cynic for several years. It is accepted that he began to teach his own theories around the turn of the century in 300 BC. He took what he had learned, modified and expanded a few things, and offered up a slightly different answer to carry on what Socrates had begun. In doing so he set himself in opposition to his contemporary Epicureans, Cynics, and Peripatetics.

Socrates' primary pupils had founded schools in and around Athens seeking the Good. In that search, it was necessary for them to formulate ideas on how the world functioned and what exactly was in it. From that search were formed several primary explanations: Plato talked of the world of forms and dualism, Aristotle that of *anima* in successive levels but held that there was only one world, and Epicurus that there were many possible worlds and that atoms and void made up all existence. Zeno held that the world came from Reason<sup>45</sup> and was, literally, materialistic in that all existence was made up of bodies.

For Zeno of Citium, what is seen is as it is - at least provided that one has seen correctly. Only bodies exist, so there was literally nothing immaterial in existence. Confusing bodies, such as the soul, were explained as being "a kind of finer matter endowed with special qualities of penetration and diffusion."<sup>46</sup> Understanding of these bodies came to the human being through "cognitive impressions."<sup>47</sup> According to the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, in Stoic epistemology;

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<sup>45</sup> Reason, capitalized, refers to *logos*, which encompasses a range of meanings from a word, to a saying or speech, to a thought process capable of being exhibited in speech, to *reason* as a reckoning faculty, to the divine and supreme order placed upon the universe. See "Logos,"

<sup>46</sup> Pollock, "Marcus Aurelius and his Stoic Philosophy," 56.

<sup>47</sup> James Allen, "Arcesilaus." *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 1. (New York; Thomson-Gale, 2006) 328.

...all knowledge depends in one way or another on cognitive impressions, which is why the cognitive impression is the school's criterion of truth. By restricting one's assent (in the sphere of perception) to impressions with this character, one can avoid ever assenting to a false perceptual impression. If further conditions are satisfied, one can avoid error altogether.<sup>48</sup>

With this epistemological foundation, there was no need for "other entities," because these could be fully understood with the senses. Restricting assent to only impressions which are cognitive is an interesting thought, foreshadowing today's motto of "prove it to me." But Zeno did not leave out the sense of mystery about the world, as today's scientific culture often attempts. Along with this materialism, he explained the world as being produced by Reason, and the beings which contained lesser degrees of Reason existed for the sake of those beings which possessed a greater share of reasoning capabilities.<sup>49</sup>

With that in mind it serves well to move on to the philosophical doctrines stemming from that concept. Zeno separated the knowledge one gleaned into three main categories. These three are technically considered equal, but the ordering often came to study first Logic, then Physics, and finally Ethics. A great definition for these categories is given by Aetius I;

Physics is practised whenever we investigate the world and its contents, ethics is our engagement with human life, and logic our engagement with discourse, which they also call dialectic.<sup>50</sup>

These three essentially sum up most human actions. There is not a concept here of dealing ethically with the world and its contents outside of humans, but everything else can be argued to exist under one of these umbrellas. Following Zeno's beginnings in

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<sup>48</sup> James Allen, "Arcesilaus." 328.

<sup>49</sup> Pollock, "Marcus Aurelius and his Stoic Philosophy." 53.

<sup>50</sup> Aetius, "Stoicism," *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987) 158.

developing these theories, there came several head teachers of his school upon the Stoa, and together they give a more complete representation of what Stoicism looked like in its original form.

Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoic school, is given credit for consolidating the Stoic doctrines into a complete form. His writings were commented upon by Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus, as well as Plutarch and Galen. Today, only fragments of his original texts exist, so it is necessary to use references to his words from these others to achieve an idea of his teachings. He solidified his arguments for Stoicism specifically contra the Epicureans. He is the intellectual child of Zeno and could lay claim to completing what Zeno had begun. At this point, it is required to lay out a portion of what constituted Stoic Logic, Physics, and Ethics.

## Part Two: Stoic Doctrine in its Original Forms

### Stoic Logic:

In order to engage in discourse, there are rules which must be followed. Simply put, most anyone can make noise vocally just as easily as most anyone can jam away at a piano, but in order for that noise to have meaning it must have laws and order in its organization. So a child learns the general pieces of nouns and verbs and their connecting words to give a sentence meaning, similarly the scales are learned on the piano. It is a beautiful thing then when, out of noise, comes significance. In order for an argument to have meaning it must follow laws of logic and grammar, same as a piece of music must obey laws of harmony in order not to instantiate raucousness.

Freedom of expression, and the ability to learn new ideas, thus springs forth from this bedrock of logic. A symphony is not composed of players choosing their own notes, and the same is true for eloquence. True grace in speaking is based upon an orderly system from logic and syntax. Cicero quotes Zeno on this topic in *de Oratore*, when differentiating between logic and eloquence, saying;

Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, used to give an object lesson of the difference between the two arts; clenching his fist he said logic was like that; relaxing and extending his hand, he said eloquence was like the open palm.<sup>51</sup>

That human ability of taking its impressions and converting them into eloquence is the practice of dialectic. First the format, then the execution, and finally the result is an argument which should be completely resistant to opposition. That is why it is important to note how a body comes to possess true knowledge; that knowledge is the matter out of which an argument is formed. Chrysippus also states this emphatically in a fragment from his book *On the Use of Reason*: “It [the faculty of reason] must be used for the discovery of truths and for their organization, and not for the opposite ends, though this is what many people do.”<sup>52</sup>

The necessity of using the faculty that man has been endowed with in order to organize the world, as it is perceived, leads directly into the next section of Stoic doctrine. How the world came into being, and the nature of that world, as well as where that order places mankind, explains why and how a man must act for the good of his own pursuit of happiness and the betterment of the world.

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<sup>51</sup> Cicero, “de Oratore.” *The Great Tradition*. ed. Richard M. Gamble, (Wilmington, DE; Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2007) 80.

<sup>52</sup> Josiah B. Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus*. (Albany, New York; State University of New York Press, 1970) 67.

## Stoic Physics:

The purpose of physics is to explain what exactly the world is made up of, how, and why. Zeno claimed that all things were substance and that substance made up existence. There were two types of substance: one passive that was acted upon and another active that did the acting. Josiah Gould makes a point here that by the term “substance” two things are being discussed; in one the matter of all things, and in the other a particular thing or part of a thing.<sup>53</sup>

The active substance is Reason. It is Reason that can take the passive matter and mold it, “like wax which can be molded into innumerable forms.”<sup>54</sup> This Reason is the monotheistic concept developed by Zeno. His explanation of polytheism was Reason showing itself through various substances (i.e. Poseidon: Reason in the behavior of water).<sup>55</sup> Reason was a special substance, possessing qualities that allowed it to diffuse and intertwine in the substance of particular bodies, and those also possessed qualities which were conducive to being intertwined.

Reason created various levels of substance. That hierarchy is important in order to distinguish a person’s place in this worldview. For the Stoic, then, there are three levels of existence that are in *tonos* (tension): first, *hexis* (cohesion), next, *phusis* (nature), and lastly, *psuche* (soul). *Hexis* gives a corporeal body its shape by holding its “self” together, *phusis* is the force that gives a body its breath of life, and *psuche* is the soul of bodies capable of receiving impressions, moving and reproducing. They exist upon a

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<sup>53</sup> Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus*, 93, 96, and 97.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.



continuum for the Stoics, in the order presented. All three exist in reality, under the umbrella of *pneuma*, or the “breath of Reason.”<sup>56</sup>

The tension forming this world is incredibly important to understanding an individual’s place in the world; all things are intertwined and affect one another. The last thing of note possessed in Stoic physics, for the sake of this discussion, is that they also possessed a phoenix-like idea of eternity. The world occasionally would experience a great conflagration and be reborn. It can be concluded then that all things within the universe are diffused and reborn as well. Mortality was not something to be feared, for even when a soul clings to itself it is already a part of the Universal Reason. Life, then, is a gift of Reason,<sup>57</sup> and must be lived accordingly.

#### Stoic Ethics:

Built up straight from the foundation stones of the Physics, Ethics includes the nature of a thing with *psuche*. The theory of Stoic ethics is called the “Doctrine of *oikeiosis*.” Untranslatable directly into English, the word requires some periphrasis. Often used, yet not fully adequate, are words like “orientation” or “appropriation.” A more precise rendering would include the sense that *oikeiosis* is the natural desire of a thing to be whatever it is that it is supposed to be. “Whatever it is” gives it the appropriate orientation, or path, upon which it should walk out its life. For the human creature, this includes being a rational being. Diogenes Laertius refers to Chryssipus’ teaching on *oikeiosis* in these terms: “The dearest thing to every animal is its own

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<sup>56</sup> Sellars, *Stoicism*, 91.

constitution and its consciousness thereof.”<sup>58</sup> He further analyzes this saying to mean that the very first priority in every being’s nature is its own survival. This primitive and honest analysis lays the cornerstone for Stoic Ethics. The Stoics do not deny the selfishness of the creature; it is only trying to improve its own constitution.<sup>59</sup>

On that basis, many moral questions arise, one of the most significant being that of value judgments. All value judgments are self-opposing, as in, if one exists then its opposite also exists. “Good” creates “Bad” and “Light” creates “Dark,” and so on, for if this were not the case it would not have a value in being judged. The Stoics make a distinction here between the ethics of animals and rational beings. Mainly that an animal’s “good” must include things that keep it alive, such as food and shelter. A rational being’s “good” can certainly include those but also covers the act of being a free-thinking thing. The reason for this is that, within Reason, the concept of “self,” within “self-preservation,” includes the virtues and soul, and there are cases where the preservation of the mind-self supersedes the preservation of the body-self.<sup>60</sup>

Humans alone have the reasonable capacity to take action. These actions can be in the interest of virtue (excellence), or vice (imperfection), or be wrongly influenced by things indifferent: things that are good for the soul are virtues, things that are bad for the soul are vices, and things that don’t specifically affect the soul are indifferent. Indifferents<sup>61</sup> have levels as well, because the biological state of being can aid or impair, or have no effect at all, upon the soul.

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<sup>58</sup> Sellars, *Stoicism*, 107-108.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

<sup>61</sup> “Indifferents” refers to the usage of ellipses in order to escape the redundancy of using the phrase “indifferent things.” The adjective in that phrase becomes a noun. For the sake of defining the term, here and in Stoic doctrine “indifferents” are those things which have no value pertaining to vice or virtue for the human being. All things that can needlessly enslave a human being are indifferents. An indifferent thing

Cicero refers to Zeno's teaching on this matter, saying: "All other things... neither good nor bad, but nevertheless some of them were in accordance with Nature and others contrary to Nature."<sup>62</sup> This continues to argue that some of these indifferents are "preferred," such as having water and adequate nutrition, health and happiness, while some are "non-preferred," such as starvation and chills, sickness and exposure. A "neutral indifferent" is one that has no real affect at all. Things that have no real effect ought not to concern a rational being. Epictetus makes clear that one should only have concern for things that are "up to us," like our thoughts and actions, and let go of things that are "not up to us," such as the actions and opinions of others.<sup>63</sup> This achieved, one can seek absolute virtue and achieve a healthy and excellent state of the soul.

If the soul is healthy and excellent, it follows that it will also be purely and incandescently filled with joy. No thing and no one are able to take internal fulfillment away. One having achieved this state of being would be living in accordance with the self and, if this is true, it follows that he or she would be living in accordance to Nature. Living would no longer include conflict, because, living according to Nature or Reason, one would be in line with the Cosmos itself.

Because humanity was endowed with a greater share of Reason, there came a great duty to use the Reason with which it found itself: for all things live according to their own nature and each one's nature is naturally in accordance to Nature. That Nature is the same as Reason, and mankind possesses enough reasons to require responsibility for its faculty of reasoning. Therein lays the duty of mankind in living among others and as part

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must be treated with indifference. Opinions, well-being, physical pain; all have no real goodness or badness intrinsic to them. They cannot possibly have more significance than that, nor are they deserving of value judgment, because they affect good and bad people alike without prejudice.

<sup>62</sup> Sellars, *Stoicism*, 111.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-113.

of the greater realm of the universe. However, to the Romans, their empire essentially made up the Universe.

### Part Three: Stoicism in Rome: Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus

Every time that Greece was conquered, her ideas lived on and conquered her invaders from within. In that way Hellenic thought gained eternal life. But it was not able to do so entirely without distortion. When Stoicism entered the Roman world, the focus shifted to Ethics and left behind the original balance between the three areas of study. This was very practical, and made sense for a society that was more interested in doing than thinking. Some men, though, were exceptional at managing both. Here it behooves the argument to look at some men who proved quite good at both doing and thinking, because it was these that would have exhibited a much more direct influence upon Marcus Aurelius.

Marcus Tullius Cicero was a man of many skills. He lived from 106-43 BC and in that time was an orator, lawyer, statesman, and, arguably, a philosopher. He was not a Stoic, but was sympathetic to some of the doctrines of that school. His views are often directly in line with late Stoic thought. Eloquence, or graceful speaking, was his passion. Like a symphony, every piece of oratory ought to be full of purpose and passion, and underlying it all must be rigorous tension and training, yet to the audience the whole performance should appear effortless.<sup>64</sup>

That idea echoes strongly of Stoic logic, and Cicero adds even more to such a correlation. In his book, *De Oratore*, he discusses the necessity of virtue in the training of the ideal orator. Talent with words in the hands of a skilled and knowledgeable man is

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<sup>64</sup> Cicero, "de Oratore." 72. – This analogy was inspired and is supported by his words found there.

an asset in a leader, and a powerful weapon in a dissenter. Ethics then were vital, Logic foundational, and knowledge of the world and its contents in Physics sensible.

The next Roman noted for his claim upon Stoicism is the senator and playwright Lucius Annaeus Seneca. He is largely ignored by M. Aurelius, supposedly due to his hypocrisy, but is still important to Stoicism as it existed in Rome. His hypocrisy is evidenced by his status as a very wealthy politician, who spouted the ideals of Stoic Ethics, but, supposedly, did not live up to what he said. The comments he left, upon the duty of a citizen and a Stoic, are taken up in M. Aurelius' writings, but it is not clear if he attained them from Seneca or through another source.

Seneca presents two commonwealths to the conception of man. The first and lesser is the immediate world a man is born into, Athens or Rome for example, and the second is the Universe itself, "where gods as well as men are included."<sup>65</sup> This concept relates to the Platonic ideas of the microcosm and macrocosm duality wherein mankind resides. It is in the nature of some to devote their life mainly to one or the other of these two, but always a man has need to observe that they are a member of both. He argues that the life of contemplation is of great service to the community as long as the contemplator does not remain lost within his thoughts.

In his preface to Seneca's "On the Private Life" in his compilation of *The Great Tradition*, Richard Gamble notes that Seneca;

...refuses to choose between the extremes of the contemplative life and the active life. Instead, he desires to grasp truth through private contemplation and to render service to the community with that truth

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<sup>65</sup> Seneca, "Can A Stoic choose the private life?" *The Great Tradition*. ed. Richard M. Gamble, (Wilmington, DE; Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2007) 95.

through public activity... For the Stoics, contemplation is not a path to self-absorbed idleness; 'it is an anchorage, not a harbor.'<sup>66</sup>

It is exactly this thought from Seneca to keep in mind when reading the *Meditations* and consider how it is displayed in the concepts with which M. Aurelius grappled. As aforementioned, M. Aurelius does not directly refer to Seneca, specifically, but merely hearkens to his thoughts in his musings. The man most responsible for M. Aurelius' development was Epictetus, the Phrygian Slave.

Epictetus was a slave from Phrygia who taught philosophy in Rome as a freedman in the middle of his life. Then, he was cast out of Rome under Domitian, who had a habit of casting out free-thinking people from his city. So it happened that Epictetus lived most of his life outside of Rome, and, interestingly, taught on freedom and ethics for the duration of his life. The freedom he spoke of, though, was not what one would expect from a former slave. He spoke of internal freedom from all things. "All things" include desire for glory, ambition, the need to sleep, and more; all such things cause a rational being to alter his behavior, potentially contra his own character. An absolutely free man would be quite willing to give up his physical existence in order to maintain his spiritual or mental code. This definition of freedom made Cicero dismiss the Stoics, although he sympathized with them, because he refused to accept an idea that made him a slave to the passions and beliefs by which he lived.<sup>67</sup>

Epictetus' *Memoirs* fell into the hands of M. Aurelius at a very young age and generated many of his ideas regarding steadfastness and release from the temptations of the world. In Epictetus' discourse "To Those Whose Heart is Set on a Quiet Life," he

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<sup>66</sup> Richard M. Gamble, "Seneca." *The Great Tradition*. ed. Richard M. Gamble, (Wilmington, DE; Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2007) 92.

<sup>67</sup> Cicero, "de Oratore." 75.

remarks that all desires enslave the human heart to wrong action. Not only ambition to offices of esteem, but also lust for knowledge or leisure or any thing a body wants. He says, “Regard for any external thing, whatever it be, makes you subservient to another.”<sup>68</sup> He makes no distinction in misery, be one miserable for want of time or want of action; he preaches freedom from all desires, for they all make man miserable. Instead, he offers a way of life to his students, that they might say, “as Socrates did, ‘If God so wills, so be it’”<sup>69</sup> and go about life with great contentment and wonder.

These three instrumental men make up the primary influences in Roman culture of the Stoic doctrine. With such a thorough education as M. Aurelius received, it is inconceivable that he did not study all three, among many other influences who were either less prolific as authors or simply have nothing extant.

### Conclusion:

Now, with the main influences of his intellectual culture outlined, the tale may move forward into the writings of the Emperor-Philosopher himself. Marcus Aurelius dedicated his life to the study of philosophy, much to his teacher Fronto’s chagrin. Fronto was frustrated thoroughly by his pupil’s decision to give over entirely to philosophy, and tried to dissuade him. The very history of thought to which M. Aurelius devoted himself was used in the argument against his cessation of continuing other studies. Fronto appeals to M. Aurelius with all his skill, pleading that;

Philosophy will tell you what to say, Eloquence how to say it... Provide yourself rather with speech worthy of the thoughts you draw from philosophy, and the more noble your thoughts, the more impressive will

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<sup>68</sup> Epictetus, “Discourses of Epictetus.” *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers*, trans. by P. E. Matheson (New York; Random House, 1940) 425.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

your utterance be... summon Eloquence, the handmaid of Philosophy, and cast away those crooked, twisted modes of speech.<sup>70</sup>

However, his words fell upon deaf ears: Marcus Aurelius forsook his studies of elocution to devote what leisure time he had amidst his duties purely to the pursuit of Philosophy. Yet, Fronto's education was not in vain; he had left his mark upon his student. M. Aurelius' speeches and letters, and even his musings, all exhibit his studies in oratory to have been finely styled. Pitiably, there are very few of his speeches left to judge, and the greatest piece of work he left is his journal. That book, of disconnected thoughts and doctrines, speaks of all the things which he pondered over, and it can be inferred from those grapplings what he struggled with in his life.

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<sup>70</sup> C.R Haines, trans., *Marcus Cornelius Fronto*. vol. II. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1920, 1988) 71.



### III. SCRŪTĀTIŌNES MARCI AURELII SECUM<sup>71</sup>

#### Opening:

It is in thy power to rid thyself of many unnecessary troubles, for they exist wholly in the imagination. Thou wilt at once set thy feet in a large room by embracing the whole Universe in the mind and including in the purview time everlasting, and by observing the rapid change in every part of everything, and the shortness of the span between birth and dissolution, and that the yawning immensity before birth is only matched by the infinity after our dissolution.<sup>72</sup>

The smallness of man, compared to the immensity of the universe, is matched only by the shortness of time man exists, compared to the infinite, unknown span of eternity. This theme is recurring in the *Meditations* as Marcus Aurelius seeks to internalize all that he has learned from Stoicism in a lifetime. These thoughts were written in the last part of his life, a time when he had very little left unto himself besides his own thoughts.

#### Part One: Time and Place of the *Meditations* in the Life of Marcus Aurelius

Antoninus Pius passed away on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 161 AD. Immediately Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus were titled *Imperator*. M. Aurelius was thirty-nine at the time and had suffered no small pains in his personal life even then. His wife was Annia Galeria Faustina, the daughter of A. Pius and his aunt Faustina. Before he became emperor, he had watched at least three, but likely four, of his children fall ill and die.<sup>73</sup> Following his titling, he lived on while many of those he considered friends died. Fronto passed away c. 166 AD, and Lucius Verus followed suddenly in 169 AD. Ever since A. Pius had died, war was frequently nibbling at the borders of Rome.

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<sup>71</sup> “Chapter Three: The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius.”

<sup>72</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 251.

<sup>73</sup> See A. Birley, 137-141.

Immediately after M. Aurelius and L. Verus began their Harmonious Rule,<sup>74</sup> war broke out on the eastern front, in Parthia. The joint emperors placed Avidius Cassius, a trusted friend, in charge. It was soon clear that more dedication would be needed to win the war, so the younger emperor, L. Verus, went to the East. While he stopped and partied the entire duration of his journey, he did eventually get to the East and aid in winning the war. His only contribution seems to have been offering treaties, as there is a letter from Fronto praising L. Verus' successful parley with the Parthian king. In that same letter, Fronto manages to reassert praise for himself as the teacher through whom L. Verus developed his gift of oratory used in the treaty letter which served as a "vocal army fighting with words."<sup>75</sup>

When L. Verus and the armies returned to Rome they brought with them a tragic plague that devastated the armies and the citizens. That sickness, combined with the dearth of conscriptions due to the lack of any expansions over the past generations failing to increase the armies, put the emperors in a tough position when war broke out again on the northern front. The treaties that had been made with Trajan were no longer being respected, and the Marcomanni tribe crossed the Danube River. So, the emperors who had grown up in total peace were forced into war yet again.

The series of battles that followed lasted into the end of M. Aurelius' life. The *Meditations* were written amidst this atmosphere. Book II was written while in a battle-camp among the Quadi on the Gran, and Book III at Carnuntum in what is now Austria. It is not known precisely where he resided while writing the remainder of the books, but

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<sup>74</sup> At the beginning of their rule there were coins minted, showing both M. Aurelius and L. Verus, that declared the era as the "Harmonious Rule" of the two emperors. See A. Birley, image 6a.

<sup>75</sup> C.R Haines, trans., *Marcus Cornelius Fronto* , vol. II, 133.

there is evidence that the entirety was written away from Rome while at war between 170 AD and his death in 180 AD.

### Part Two: Purpose of his Writings

The entire journal, except perhaps Book I, was written by Marcus Aurelius as he was actively practicing introspection. Prof. Michael Sugrue of Ave Maria University argues that in writing the *Meditations* M. Aurelius was showing himself to be the loneliest man in the world; one who had only himself, of equal intellect and station, with whom he could engage in dialogue.<sup>76</sup> This argument can force a sympathetic view of the man, who was left by those closest to him and was far from the home he loved. More than that, though, the practice of writing a philosophical journal is one that was suggested by Epictetus. Probably it is a combination of practical reiteration of the doctrines he worked so hard to internalize, and a putting down on paper all of the things that bothered him while he was out riding and had time to ponder the meanings of those things he did not think he understood about life.

Within the pages of the *Discourses of Epictetus*, and also amidst fragmented sayings from the same man, one finds the iteration that pursuers of Philosophy ought to repeat the doctrines she teaches over and over to themselves in order to memorize and internalize what they had learned. As a task, learning is never easy; for it pushes the boundaries of comfort and expands them. Sometimes learning is even painful, when the elasticity of the mind and disposition seem so stretched that they can hardly bear the strain. In order to make this easier it is good for a man to repeat what he is trying to understand day by

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<sup>76</sup> Michael Sugrue, "The Virtual University: Marcus Aurelius" Parts 1-5, accessed 3 Feb 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLD09Qa3kMk>.

day and write these things down that they might stand on their own for a more objective judgment.

These arguments, directly from Epictetus, first from his memorabilia and then from within the *Discourses*, are as follows:

You must know that it is not easy for a man to arrive at a judgement, unless he should state and hear the same principles every day and apply them all the time to his life.<sup>77</sup>

These are the thoughts that those who pursue philosophy should ponder, these are the lessons they should write down day by day, in these they should exercise themselves.<sup>78</sup>

The second selection here contains many repetitions of “these,” so perhaps it is useful to extrapolate. “These” refer to the concept of human will and all the actions born of the will coupled with how to consider that aspect of the mind. This is because an individual’s will is the causal antecedent for whether to act or not to act. According to Epictetus, there is no one, not even Zeus, who is able to enslave the person’s free will. They may incarcerate the body, torture the limbs, and even entangle the passions all for the sake of control: however, all those are vain attempts to control the mind’s will. No one, then, is able to stop a human from being free *without his or her permission*.

From this evidence, it is displayed that M. Aurelius indeed was attempting to learn through the process of writing down his scattered expositions of Stoic doctrine. He wanted to internalize these teachings, and achieve freedom from his druthers. He accepted the doctrine that suffering was a result of emotions and their attachments, in relation to the perceptions placed upon the importance of those attachments. So he

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<sup>77</sup> Epictetus, “Discourses of Epictetus.” 463.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 226.

worked regularly to learn, and followed Epictetus' advice by writing down his thoughts day by day.

### Part Three: The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius

Fragmentary and disjointed, the *Meditations* were not written to be a single, cohesive unit. They had no editor overseeing their creation to make sure everything flowed together. Add the passage of time and the ruination of certain sections and the result is a miracle that the piece has survived at all, much less that it is in readable form. As such, topics are sprinkled throughout the piece and it is a great task to put them under inclusive headings. The discussion of those topics, then, will be organized by major themes in the work and the selections examples of where those themes appear. M. Aurelius' life, world, and the school he studied are now in view. Beginning with the Nature of the Universe, moving to how Human Beings fit within that Cosmos, and finally moving on to the Morality and Virtues demanded by those two, the exploration of M. Aurelius' own thoughts is now possible.

#### The Nature of the Universe

Cease not to think of the Universe as one living Being, possessed of a single Substance and a single Soul; and how all things trace back to its single sentience; and how it does all things by a single impulse; and how all existing things are joint causes of all things that come into existence; and how intertwined in the fabric is the thread and how closely woven the web.<sup>79</sup>

These are intrinsically linked: the world and each single man. Man shares in the soul of the Universe and its substance. The whole Cosmos is actually a single body and

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<sup>79</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 91.

everything in it merely the parts. Every action has its effect upon the body. As a great fabric, unbalance in the tension of a single thread will pull against many others. The Universe exists in tension and every release of that tension produces ripples throughout the cosmos.

That single idea, that the Cosmos is ultimately linked upon every level, is an idea to keep in focus before every decision. But mankind is finite, and has limits. No man can step outside the cosmos, outside of time, and take a look around at what the world looks like from that vantage point. Man can simply strive to perceive with understanding.

All things are mutually intertwined, and the tie is sacred, and scarcely anything is alien the one to the other. For all things have been ranged side by side, and together help to order one ordered Universe. For there is both one Universe, made up of all things, and one God immanent in all things, and one Substance, and one Law, one Reason common to all intelligent creatures, and one Truth: if indeed there is also one perfection of living creatures that have the same origin and share the same reason.<sup>80</sup>

This quote is noteworthy because of M. Aurelius' indecision regarding the doctrine he has laid out. He has said over and over that all these things are true, but here he adds a conditional to the argument. He could be writing thusly in a satirical manner, but there is no evidence, so that would be just a matter of opinion. It seems more likely he had difficulty completely accepting that all things derived from a single origin, and this is a piece of him trying to understand that concept. He was not always absolute in his confidence about his knowledge. Albeit, he does not call into question that all things are intertwined.

The individual thread, made up of a single human being, shares within the greater substance which created the Universe, called Divine Reason. M. Aurelius refers to that

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<sup>80</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 169.

gift, of sharing in the greater substance, that “hidden thing” with a human that causes the will to form into action. The Universe is a whole, made up of tiny parts, and how humans can know that they share in the substance is from the most deeply buried seeds of causing creation for themselves. He reminds himself to “Bear in mind that what pulls the strings is that Hidden Thing within us: *that* makes our speech, *that* our life, *that*, one may say, makes the man.”<sup>81</sup> Divine Reason has created each individual to fit within the cosmos as a whole.

The complex interconnections of all the universe also explains man’s responsibilities to its membership in the Universe. This line of reasoning is given by M. Aurelius to prove the need for community, and community demands the practice of fellowship:

There is one light of the Sun, even its continuity be broken by walls, mountains, and countless other things. There is one common Substance, even though it be broken up into countless bodies individually characterized. There is one Soul, though it be broken up among countless natures and with bodies individually characterized. There is one Intelligent Soul, though it seem to be divided. Of the things mentioned, however, all the other parts, such as Breath, are the material Substratum of things, devoid of sensation and the ties of mutual affinity-yet even they are knit together by the faculty of intelligence and the gravitation which draws them together. But the mind is peculiarly impelled towards what is akin to it, and coalesces with it, and there is no break in the feeling of social fellowship.<sup>82</sup>

### Human Beings’ Responsibilities within the Cosmos

Social fellowship, guided by Reason, is how mankind lives in accordance with the Universal Nature. Abhorring all distortions of Reason, one is guided to the truth. In every case that a vice or poor judgment is a possibility one must check oneself, and repeat the doctrine that: “This thought is not necessary; this is destructive of human

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<sup>81</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 291.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

fellowship; this could be no genuine utterance from the heart.”<sup>83</sup> These reproaches for ambling off-course are meant to steer one’s life upon a straight path when living amidst others.

Marcus Aurelius repeats many goals to himself regarding living with others, and also for living with himself. Book II opens with this warning for patience: “Say to thyself at daybreak: I shall come across the busy-body, the thankless, the overbearing, the treacherous, the envious, the unneighborly. All this has befallen them because they know not good from evil.”<sup>84</sup> Presumably, he would tell himself this after convincing himself to get out of bed on mornings that he was loathe to rise. He would tell himself to consider the thought, “I am rising for a man’s work... Am I then still peevish that I am going to do that for which I was born and for the sake of which I came into the world?”<sup>85</sup> A little peevishness may be left after that, but it is outside of his chosen character and so is deserving of his chiding. The Nature of man is fulfilled by using his given Reason, completing his duties, and doing nothing unworthy of a man. “Do not thou turn thine eyes aside, but keep to the straight path, following thy own and the universal Nature; and the path of these twain is one.”<sup>86</sup> Nature gave to each creature a path to follow. For a man this means living in communion with other men, and doing so according to rules required by their given Reason and their possession of moral sensibilities. This being done, mankind can achieve true happiness.

If in obedience to right reason thou doest the thing that thy hand findeth to do earnestly, manfully, graciously, and in no sense as a by-work, and keepest that divine ‘genius’ of thine in its virgin state, just as if even now

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<sup>83</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 313.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>85</sup> C.R. Haines, trans., *The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus: Emperor of Rome*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961) 99.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.



thou wert called upon to restore it to the Giver – if thou grapple thus to thee, looking for nothing, shrinking from nothing, but content with a present sphere of activity such as nature allows, and with chivalrous truth in every word and utterance of thy tongue, thou shalt be happy in life. And there is no one that is able to prevent this.<sup>87</sup>

Freedom is the only right a man can never be forced to forsake. Always he can think whatever he wills to think. There is no room in M. Aurelius' mind to shirk, to be found wanting, or to be lazy. His demands of himself are without grandeur. He does not tell himself that it is easy to live this austere life. Reason demands much, but nothing it demands is unreasonable. He takes time to contemplate, but follows Seneca's value that "contemplation is an anchorage, not a harbour."<sup>88</sup> Contemplation is necessary for the soul, like sleep is necessary for the body. Necessary, but not an end in itself, for both prepare for action. His view is that:

Men seek out retreats for themselves in the country, by the seaside, on the mountains... But this is unphilosophical to the last degree, when thou canst at a moment's notice retire into thyself. For nowhere can a man find a retreat more full of peace or more free from care than his own soul.<sup>89</sup>

M. Aurelius makes one small assumption here: that one's soul is a peaceful place to be. It ought to be, and in the interest of seeking happiness a peaceful soul seems like a requirement, but it is not so common to find souls free from care. This rarity is not without reason. Externals weigh heavily upon the average person, and everyday duties allow little time for leisure. Rejuvenating contemplation finds itself scratched off most priority lists, and scheduled "self" time usually means a long bath. In addition to these externals, which ought to be purely indifferent, are the many vices laid out like traps to ensnare the soul. The balance upon the continuum connecting virtue to vice, such as

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<sup>87</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *The Communings* 61.

<sup>88</sup> Richard M. Gamble, *Great Traditions*, 92.

<sup>89</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *The Communings*, 67, 69.

from confidence to pride to hubris, is so nuanced that sometimes it seems impossible never to fall from one into another. Yet embodied in one is a kind of excellence spiced with a certain humility and in the other is a great sin for which many have been punished and fallen. To guard against sliding, M. Aurelius regularly undergoes his own self-examination:

*To what use then am I putting my soul? Never fail to ask thyself this question and to cross-examine thyself thus: What relation have I to this part of me which they call the ruling reason?*<sup>90</sup>

His arguments are upheld by following the Nature of man. Man was never meant to be an island unto himself. M. Aurelius says: “The Good, then, for a rational creature is fellowship with others.”<sup>91</sup> Thus community is natural, and laws must govern the community just as they govern the individual and just as there are laws governing Nature.

Two key facets are necessary for peaceful fellowship and community: first, kindness, second, forgiveness. M. Aurelius says of these virtues first that “kindness is irresistible, be it but sincere and no mock smile or mask assumed.”<sup>92</sup> With kindness, no harm is caused. Regarding forgiveness, the piece under an individual’s control is their own reaction to potential harms. M. Aurelius says that in order to live free from perturbation, man must not give assent to the impressions he may imagine. “Wipe out imagination, ...and you are saved.’ ‘Do not think yourself hurt and you remain unhurt.’”<sup>93</sup> Without seeing harm, none exists. Thus, never causing nor receiving harm from others, mankind can live amidst others without emotional pain.

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<sup>90</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *The Communings*, 111, 113.

<sup>91</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 117.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>93</sup> C. R. Haines, *Marcus Aurelius*, xxv.

The first priority then is the immediacy of influence in the community wherein he resides. Every individual can spark ripples, but as the emperor his ripples can seem more like waves. Concerned about this, he rationalizes, “But my nature is rational and civic; my city and country, as Antoninus, is Rome; as a man, the world.”<sup>94</sup> He wants to perform well for Rome and the world. M. Aurelius, although he was a Roman, saw the world not delineated by the bounds of his empire, or known lands, but rather the cosmos itself.

### Morality and Virtue

In order that they might live together, men were given an innate sense of morality. That morality imparts some of the guidelines for how a human should act. M. Aurelius followed Epictetus’ words when he said that anything which would cause him to blush was unworthy of existing in his mind. The reaction of blushing is considered to be the self, noting that it was shamed in some way. The inner self shuns vice, and needs justifications before accepting these vices into itself. This ought to be stopped at the very beginning. M. Aurelius says:

A man should accustom himself to think only of those things about which, if one were to ask on a sudden, *What is now in thy thoughts?* thou couldst quite frankly answer at once, *This or that*; so that thine answer should immediately make manifest that all that in thee is simple and kindly and worthy of a living being that is social and has no thought for pleasures or for the entire range of sensual images, or for any rivalry, envy, suspicion, or anything else, whereat thou wouldest blush to admit that thou hadst it in thy mind.<sup>95</sup>

M. Aurelius also held that committing a shameful act mentally was harmful. Those things that one thought affected the self and one’s own honor, because if one thought

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<sup>94</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 155-157.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

such things then they were acted out in the inner realm. This is particularly disgraceful since nothing is more precious to the individual than his or her own internal world: he or she only has the one bequeathed him or her.

M. Aurelius deepens his self-examination when he asks himself how he is doing in relation to his community. He asks if he can say to himself honestly, that in all scenarios where he has had occasion to relate with others, that he has held no injury or wrong to them or himself. His challenge is to:

...call to mind all that thou hast passed through, all thou hast found strength to bear; that the story of thy life is now full-told... how many beautiful sights hast thou seen, how many pleasures and pains hast thou disregarded, forgone what ambitions, and repaid with kindness how much unkindness.<sup>96</sup>

While living, he never ceased being a work-in-progress. It took great discipline to undergo such examinations nightly. When he had gone astray he said to himself, with analogies that are a bit lost on the modern reader, to return to Philosophy like she is a balm to cool his wounds. The physical pains are greatly aided by the treatment of salves and compresses, and Philosophy is that healing power for the soul. He chides those who would treat her as a taskmaster, but reinforces that she is a healer and the right course of life:

Do not feel qualms or despondency or discomfiture if thou dost not invariably succeed in acting from right principles; but when thou art foiled, come back again to them, and rejoice if on the whole thy conduct is worthy of a man, and love the course to which though returnest. Come not back to Philosophy as to a schoolmaster, but as the sore-eyed to their sponges and their white of egg, as this patient to his plaster and that to his fomentations. Thus wilt thou rest satisfied with Reason, yet make no parade of obeying her. And forget not that Philosophy wishes but what thy nature wishes, whereas thy wish was for something else that accords not with Nature.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 125.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

His duty to himself then, as his Nature required, was to mind his character. From that would flow good action. A philosopher operates within Reason alone, and there is no frustration living there – no act, no falsity, and no ignorance. For the ideal Stoic sage, living itself is the skill which he exemplifies; as the architect demonstrates his skill in building a sound structure, the sage demonstrates his skill by building a well-structured life. In a good life, as in a good building, there are no complaints but merely efficiency, simplicity, and beauty in its lines. Think well, and from that will come living well.

The character of thy mind will be such as is in thy character of thy frequent thoughts, for the soul takes its dye from the thoughts. Dye her then with a continuous succession of such thoughts as these: Where life is possible, there it is possible also to live well. – *But the life is life in a Court...*<sup>98</sup> See thou be not *Caesarified*, nor take that dye, for there is the possibility. So keep thyself a simple and good man, uncorrupt, dignified, plain, a friend of justice, god-fearing, gracious, affectionate, manful in doing thy duty. Strive to be always such as Philosophy minded to make thee. Revere the Gods, save mankind. Life is short.<sup>99</sup>

### Conclusion:

Marcus Aurelius struggled to live up to his own expectations. His expectations were very high, but it is from his own expectations that the modern world judges him. Even his contemporaries and those writing immediately after his reign color their view of his *potestās* with reference to his philosophy. How that philosophy played out in his political life is yet to be told. Without argument, his *Meditations* offers a unique insight into the man, but the connection between the writings and his actions requires inference and some forgiveness. He worked adamantly towards becoming the absolute Stoic, putting his thoughts to practice for mankind, but whether he succeeded is the question.

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<sup>98</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *The Communings*, 117.

<sup>99</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 145.

#### IV: INSTANTIA STŌICI IN POTESTĀTE MARCI AURELII ROMAE<sup>100</sup>

It is not, O fellow soldiers, to give way to resentment or lamentation that I am come before you. For what avails it to be wroth with the Divinity that can do whatever pleaseth Him? Still, perhaps, they that are undeservedly unfortunate cannot but bewail their lot; and that is the case with me now. For surely a terrible thing for us to be engaged in wars upon wars; surely it is shocking to be involved in civil strife, and that there is not faith to be found among men, and that I have been plotted against by one whom I held most dear and, although I have done no wrong and committed no transgression, have been forced into a conflict against my will.<sup>101</sup>

These words, spoken to the armies in explanation for the rumors, depict a ruler who, even in conflict, proves himself forgiving of men and accepting of all that occurs. Very few speeches from M. Aurelius are extant, and those that remain are questionable in their validity, but this one recounted by Cassius Dio is considered to be from the emperor. It fits his style, and is naturally more formal than his musings because it is a speech. This selection, among some others, shows where the Stoic doctrine can be found in his political words. What remains to be seen is how Stoicism played out in a few of his notable actions.

#### Part One: *Concordia Augustorum*: the Harmony of the Emperors

Marcus Aurelius served in an official function during the whole of the reign of his adopted father, Antoninus Pius. According to Dio, he was assistant to A. Pius for nineteen years and eleven days, “yet from first to last he remained the same and did not change in the least. So truly was he a good man and devoid of all pretense.”<sup>102</sup> Dio wrote his *Histories* only two decades following M. Aurelius’ reign. Upon the death of M.

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<sup>100</sup> “Chapter Four: The Instantiation of Stoicism in the *potestās* of Marcus Aurelius.”

<sup>101</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 349.

<sup>102</sup> Earnest Cary, trans., *Dio’s Roman History*, vol. IX (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927, 1982) 65.

Aurelius' father, he took action which was completely unprecedented in the history of the empire.

At the appointed time wherein he would receive official authority from the senate, he refused to accept if they did not hold to certain conditions. Birley explains that M. Aurelius must have had true *horror imperii*, but knew he had no real way out of the path of becoming emperor. He felt no ambitions to hold office, but knew he had no choice. He wished to live the life of a philosopher, and it was a difficult enough task as merely a member of the court, much less the head of it. His affinity towards Stoicism held him to accept the duties of community, though, so there were few options left to him.

His younger adopted brother, Lucius Verus, had "remained a private citizen in his father's house for twenty-three years."<sup>103</sup> A. Pius had done much less in grooming him for rule and likely let go of any intentions towards him ruling as Hadrian had desired. Evidently he was still tutored similarly to M. Aurelius; letters between him and Fronto were preserved as well. He had been made quaestor in 153 AD, and was consul the following year. For the six years between his two appointments as consul nothing is really known of him, except that he enjoyed the games and that he considered chariot racing to be a supreme sport. However, in the year A. Pius passed he and M. Aurelius were consuls together.

It also was not the first time that an emperor had wished his succession to be handled by two men. Augustus had intended that his grandsons, Gaius and Lucius, should rule jointly and share equal powers. Tiberius had requested that his adopted and natural sons would rule together, Germanicus and Drusus the younger. Claudius even

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<sup>103</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 153.

had intended that Nero and Britannicus would rule as a pair. These are not all the cases where such intentions were made, but never before had they come to fruition.<sup>104</sup>

Even the senate was not keen on the demands of M. Aurelius. L. Verus was a party-goer with whom they only had contact when it was required of him. Where they had worked alongside M. Aurelius for two decades, L. Verus was young and not as trustworthy to them. Dio reports that one of the reasons M. Aurelius required them to accept joint rule was that he was frail and in overall poor health, and since Lucius was younger he was better suited to military adventures.<sup>105</sup> Yet this explanation doesn't hold up entirely because, at the time, war had not yet broken out and there were no reports of its imminence.

More revealing is Dio's account; "Marcus Antoninus, the philosopher, upon obtaining the throne at the death of Antoninus, his adoptive father, had immediately taken to share his power Lucius Verus, the son of Lucius Commodus."<sup>106</sup> Yet M. Aurelius was a philosopher, and the philosophy he had followed then for nearly thirty years made no small thing of duty and responsibility. It was his *potestās*, tempered by these doctrines, that "made the path of duty plain."<sup>107</sup> So, with humility and confidence, he influenced the senate to accept his condition prior to accepting his title.

Thus it passed on 7 March 161 AD that the senate conferred upon the heirs of Antoninus Pius, along with the wishes of Hadrian, the titles of Imperator and Augustus. Their names then became Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, *pontifex maximus*, and Imperator Casesar Lucius Aurelius Verus Augustus, *pontifex*.

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<sup>104</sup> For these claims see A. Birley, 153-154.

<sup>105</sup> E. Cary, trans., *Dio's Roman History*, vol. IX, 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>107</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 152.



These latter titles upon each are priestly titles, and respectively refer to the “highest priesthood being indivisible”<sup>108</sup> and more simply a member of the highest priesthood.

As their priestly titles show, the senate also got its own say, for they felt it necessary to make M. Aurelius officially the senior. He was a full decade older than his brother and had ruled with some shared powers himself with A. Pius for over half of Pius’ reign. Later he would marry one of his daughters to L. Verus in order to solidify Verus’ right to rule. Dio recounts that “Marcus made him [Lucius] his son-in-law by marrying him to his daughter Lucilla and sent him to conduct the war against the Parthians.”<sup>109</sup> From other accounts these events did not occur in the order Dio gives, but both did happen. For war did break out in the East, and being the younger of the two, L. Verus was sent to handle the conflict. Thus they followed a practice which was standard for the Spartan kings: one stayed home and protected the city, while the other went out and protected the borders and honor of the kingdom.

Their joint time flowed fairly well according to the annals. War was not easy, and neither of the emperors had any experience in conducting war. However, they had generals that had well-earned their trust; men who had not grown up in the luxuries of the court but instead had defended the borders of the empire for their lifetimes. Among these was a man named Avidius Cassius. After L. Verus’ sudden death in 169 AD, Cassius was left to keep the eastern empire intact. This worked well until some rumors came about of M. Aurelius supposed death in 175 AD.

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<sup>108</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 154.

<sup>109</sup> E. Cary, trans., *Dio’s Roman History*, vol. IX, 3.

## Part Two: The Uprising of Cassius

Marcus Aurelius was ill in a battle camp when rumors started to circulate that he had died. These rumors reached Avidius Cassius in the East, and his troops and several provinces there proclaimed him emperor. Syria, his homeland, as well as Egypt were the first to make the proclamation. Cappadocia remained loyal to M. Aurelius, and it was from the governor of Cappadocia, one Martius Verus, that M. Aurelius was informed of the disruption. Several sources claim that he did so at the behest of the *arma mater*, Faustina II.

The claim states that Faustina was “‘in despair over her husband’s ill health’, and, ‘expecting him to die at any moment, she was afraid that the empire would fall to someone else.’”<sup>110</sup> These concerns were supposed to have caused her to coerce Cassius to revolt. Yet, there are letters between Faustina and M. Aurelius at the time as well, comforting her and telling her not to worry about the revolt and that he would be home soon. The two claims do not entirely sit side by side.

It has been oft-claimed, though, that Faustina played M. Aurelius for a fool in many scenarios. In Book I, section 17, he thanks the gods for being “‘blessed with a wife so docile, so affectionate, so unaffected.’”<sup>111</sup> He would not have referred to her in this way had he not revered her to some extent. In history she earned a reputation as a promiscuous adulteress, and is said to have slept with many generals and used her wiles for intrigue. M. Aurelius took no notice of these things if they were true, and sincerely seems to have loved and trusted Faustina throughout their marriage. She was deified by him in 176 AD.

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<sup>110</sup> Alan K. Bowman, *The Cambridge Ancient History: The High Empire, A.D. 70-192*. (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2000) 176.

<sup>111</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 23.

The rebellion, for whatever reasons it had begun, was ended in three months and six days, according to Dio. It was settled by the murders of Cassius and his son. M. Aurelius was greatly grieved by this turn of events and had not ordered the killings. In the end, he was remarkably lenient to all involved and most of all simply tried not to become overly upset by the whole turn of events. He said in a speech to his men, “I have been forced into a conflict against my will, though I have done nothing wrong or amiss. What virtue, what friendship shall henceforth be deemed secure after this experience of mine?”<sup>112</sup> He even went so far as to burn letters of possible evidence in order that he might remain ignorant of all others whom may have plotted against him.<sup>113</sup>

M. Aurelius speaks in his speech to his men about how strongly he wished to make amends with his friends, and seems never to have given up hope that Cassius would repent until news came of his death. He shows that he is actually terrified that someone may kill Cassius;

For great is the prize of war and victory... of which I shall be deprived. And what is that? To forgive a man who has done wrong, to be still a friend to one who has trodden friendship underfoot, to continue faithful to one who has broken faith.<sup>114</sup>

These things were important, in Stoicism, in the *Meditations*, in his political relations, and in his personal life. Acceptance of the way the world worked, in all its mystical mutability, was sought and here seems to have been greatly achieved by the Philosopher-Emperor. So why, then, why did he fail? Why do historians and the public ignore the final act of his reign, and pretend it never happened? Because of his blind

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<sup>112</sup> E. Cary, trans., *Dio's Roman History*, vol. IX, 41.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-49.

<sup>114</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 351.

hope, brought about by emotions, he allowed the empire he loved so much to move past him. The next cue comes out of Dio's words on the end of his life;

Just one thing prevented him from being completely happy, namely, that after rearing and educating his son in the best possible way he was vastly disappointed in him. This matter must be our next topic; for our history now descends from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust, as affairs did for the Romans of that day.<sup>115</sup>

### Part Three: The Succession of Commodus

Marcus Aurelius and the younger Faustina had thirteen children together. Of these, seven boys and six girls were given them. But five of these, four boys and a girl, died while very young. His eldest two girls were married strategically as soon as they came of age, Annia Faustina to Cn. Claudius Severus and Annia Lucilla to Lucius Verus, and after his death to Claudius Pompeianus. The younger children are not often mentioned but for three boys. The twins, Commodus and Antoninus, and the younger M. Annius Verus.

Faustina was three months into her pregnancy with twins when M. Aurelius ascended to power. Following his acceptance of the title she had a dream that she gave birth to two serpents, but that "one of them was fiercer than the other."<sup>116</sup> On August 31<sup>st</sup>, 161 AD she gave birth to two boys at Lanuvium. The elder was named T. Aurelius Fulvus Antoninus, and the young Lucius Aurelius Commodus. Indeed one was fiercer, for Antoninus would only live up to around five years old.

Commodus and his younger brother, named M. Annius Verus, were given the title of "Caesar" at ages five and three in celebration of the victories in the East.<sup>117</sup> This was done at L. Verus' request. The triumph was held on 12 October 166 AD. At the same

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<sup>115</sup> E. Cary, trans., *Dio's Roman History*, vol. IX, 67, 69.

<sup>116</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 157.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

time, L. Verus and M. Aurelius each received the title of *pater patriae*, or “father of the fatherland.” M. Annius Verus Caesar would only enjoy the name for three years, as he fell ill and passed away in 169 AD. M. Aurelius and Faustina had their last child probably in 173 or 174 AD,<sup>118</sup> a girl named Vibia Aurelia Sabina.

Faustina passed away in 176 AD while accompanying M. Aurelius on his journey eastward. Her place of death, a village named Halala, was renamed “Faustinopolis.” She was deified accordingly. M. Aurelius is said to have been quite distraught. His life thus far included so many deaths of those close to him, and at this point in time it seems he had only Commodus and Herodes near to him for reasons regardless of his power.

Even before the passing of Faustina, during the uprising of Cassius, M. Aurelius had made it clear who his heir apparent was to be. He had it proclaimed on 7 July 175 AD. On that day was a large ceremony for Commodus called *tirocinium fori*, which was the ceremony where a boy was given the *toga virilis* and became a man. He was fourteen years old.

After the proclamation, on the same journey upon which Faustina died, he and Commodus visited Athens together. Father and son were there initiated together into the temple of Athena. While in Athens, M. Aurelius set up four chairs in honour of Philosophy. He asked Herodes Atticus to suggest a good man each “for a Platonist, an Aristotelian, a Stoic and an Epicurean.”<sup>119</sup> This was an important visit for M. Aurelius, one he presumably had desired to make before he died.

The following year, when Commodus was just sixteen, he was made co-emperor of Rome along with his father. This clearly demonstrates that M. Aurelius made the

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<sup>118</sup> See Appendix II, section D of A. Birley’s *Marcus Aurelius*.

<sup>119</sup> A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 268.

decision over a number of years and with full knowledge of his son's nature. After M. Aurelius' death, excuses were made for his choice of Commodus as his heir. It has been depicted over and over that he really didn't choose him at all; there was some plot and intrigue behind what became his greatest mistake. This idea appears in the reputations of those around him, in the histories, and now even in film. However, the evidence is entirely against this theory. By this point he was an old man, yes, but he wanted his son to succeed him. Regardless of whether his son was the best man for the job, regardless of reason; M. Aurelius made an emotional decision.

#### Conclusion:

The true life of a Stoic involves ruling the emotions with Reason. Also required is living according to Nature. M. Aurelius spent nearly fifty years studying philosophy, Stoicism, and how to be the best of men. Yet he still made a decision based in emotions against all given impartial reason. This is a sign that man's nature is not purely rational. In the life of a man, fifty years is a long time to entirely devote oneself to an ideal and miss the mark in such a way. G. R. Stanton takes this dilemma and argues that "the real Marcus Aurelius seems to be basically a Roman rather than a Stoic."<sup>120</sup> Directly opposed to this, he quotes Dr. Pol Noyen's argument that Marcus Aurelius was an "active adherent of the Stoic school and even the greatest practitioner of Stoicism."<sup>121</sup> The dilemma is in the possibility that maybe Stoicism had its own flaws, and maybe Marcus

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<sup>120</sup> G. R. Stanton, "Marcus Aurelius, Emperor and Philosopher." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, vol. 18. No. 5. (Dec. 1969) pgs. 570-587, accessed 20 March 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4435105>. 587.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 571.

Aurelius did follow his philosophy to the best ability of a man, but the philosophy itself failed to guide him into a completely right course.

## CONCLŪSIŌ<sup>122</sup>

Marcus Aurelius was the embodiment of Roman Stoicism, as it existed in Late Antiquity. This is demonstrated in his writings and many of his speeches and sayings that are gathered from other sources. In his actions he stayed true to his Stoic doctrines until he could no longer bear his own rejection of his emotions. The refusal to consider emotions as a piece of human nature that must be recognized and dealt with accordingly within the doctrine of Stoicism led Marcus Aurelius to err precisely in accordance with his philosophy.

Because of his decision, Commodus became the next emperor of Rome. The following century or more was disastrous. Immediately following his father's death, he made treaties with the enemies his father had been waging war against and went back to Rome. He opened the era to intrigues and murders of one emperor after another while the borders of Rome were gnawed upon with negligible resistance from within.

The precedent of joint rule, set by Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, was next put into practice by Emperor Diocletian in 286 AD, two years into his own reign. Rather than ruling one cohesive empire he split the empire into two halves, and set a man named Maximian in Rome to care for the Western half. He himself ruled the Eastern half from Byzantium. While in M. Aurelius' time every politician required knowledge of both

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<sup>122</sup> "Conclusion"

Greek and Latin, with the split, government could be conducted more generally in Greek in the East and Latin in the West.

Stoicism, as a philosophy, transmuted forms and came out in much of Christian doctrine. Christianity added the focus to Stoicism of a God that helped His people learn how to act, rather than allowing them to decipher entirely upon their own reason. Christianity also combined its own examination of conscience with that of Stoicism with the intent to make its followers increasingly self-aware. Lastly, Christianity added that emotions were permissible, though most desires were still not. These feelings needed to be looked at in order to then make decisions based on complete reasoning, without ignoring that which makes humans *beings* rather than machines. Stoicism desired to create men of virtue, and a life of virtue is the foundation upon which to build a Christian life.

Marcus Aurelius' own legacy has become a unique story; the actions of the son in this case were refused to be allowed to stain the image of the father. Instead Faustina caught a lot of the stories, whether they were valid or not, and the following centuries branded her as being no better than a camp follower with gladiators and soldiers alike. Commodus was even claimed to be the son of a gladiator rather than M. Aurelius' own boy. These things were not reported while he was alive, but from the search to explain away his rotten heir.

The *Meditations* were kept by some strange miracle throughout the ages. C.R. Haines says in his introduction to his translation of the text that the first mention of the work is in 350 AD by a pagan philosopher, who merely mentions the work as M. Aurelius' "precepts." Then there is no word of them until 900 AD, when a dictionary



compiler named Suidas reveals its existence and calls it the “directing of his own life by Marcus the emperor in twelve books.”<sup>123</sup> From there it was propagated, silently from today’s perspective, and appeared in the hands of men such as Frederick the Great and Captain John Smith of Virginia.<sup>124</sup> As for the legacy of the Stoics, Zeno, Cicero, and Seneca all appear in the first circle of Dante’s *Inferno* of *La Divina Commedia*. Due in large part to its transmutation there are none who claim the title of being a Stoic after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Today the word only lives on as an expression to refer to one who is resistant or impervious to emotions and sensations of pleasure or pain. What Marcus Aurelius proved in his lifetime was the hope of Plato, reported to always be on M. Aurelius’ lips, that; “Well was it for states, if either philosophers were rulers or rulers philosophers,”<sup>125</sup> would only be entirely true if the ruler were able to embody an absolute and complete philosophy.

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<sup>123</sup> C. R. Haines, *Marcus Aurelius*, xv.

<sup>124</sup> For further reading, see Haines’ introduction to *Marcus Aurelius*, particularly page xiv.

<sup>125</sup> C. R. Haines, trans., *Marcus Aurelius*, 361.

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