

# **Aurelius *qua* Philosopher**

The Classical World: Spring 2010

- I. Life and Influences
- II. Philosophy Then and Now: Stoic Philosophy
- III. Structure, Origins and History of the Text
- IV. Central Themes in the *Meditations*
- V. Workshop

# References

Birley, Anthony. *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography*.

Inwood, Brad, and L. P. Gerson, eds. *Hellenistic Philosophy*.

Hadot, Pierre. *The Inner Citadel*.

Morford, Mark. *The Roman Philosophers*.

Sharples, R.W. *Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics*.

# Aurelius' Life and Work

- 121..... born Marcus Annius Verus
- 127 ..... enrolled as an equestrian by nomination of Hadrian
- 138 ..... Hadrian adopts Antoninus Pius, and has him adopt Marcus and Lucius Verus
- 139-167 ..... correspondence with Fronto, his teacher of rhetoric
- 144-147 ..... begins studying work of Epictetus under Junius Rusticus
- 161-169 ..... co-emperor with Lucius Verus
- 169-180 ..... sole emperor
- 170-173 ..... composed Books II and III?
- 173-180 ..... composed Books IV to XII?
- 176-180 ..... composed Book I?
- 180 ..... dies

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## Philosophy Then

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- metaphysical theories were continuous with ethical theories
- ethics focused on the question “how ought we to live?”
- to be a philosopher was to ***live a certain kind of life***

# Central Features of Stoicism

## ***Cosmos is perfect***

*“Just as a target is not set up to be missed, in the same way nothing bad by nature happens in the world” (Epictetus, Handbook, 27).*

# Central Features of Stoicism

***Cosmos is perfect***

***Cosmos is entirely determined***

*“And Chryssipus himself ... finally says that nothing, not even the smallest thing, is in any state or motion otherwise than according to the reason of Zeus, who is the same as fate” (Plutarch, Stoic Self-Contradictions, 1056c).*

# Central Features of Stoicism

***Cosmos* is perfect**

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**We are interconnected with *Logos* (god, Zeus)**

*“All of that which contains us is one and is god. And we are his allies and parts” (Seneca, Letters on Ethics, 92.30).*

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***Cosmos* is perfect**

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**Accept all that occurs with equanimity**

*“Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go well” (Epictetus, Handbook, 8).*

# Central Features of Stoicism

***Cosmos is perfect***

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**Keep your judgments objective**

*“Remember that what is insulting is not the person who abuses you or hits you, but the judgment about them that they are insulting. So when someone irritates you be aware that what irritates you is your own belief ...”*  
(Epictetus, *Handbook*, 20).

# ***Meditations: What Kind of Text is It?***

Divisions into chapters and books are due to Gataker, 1652

Some divisions between books are clear in manuscript:

**I & II   II & III   IV & V   VIII & IX   XI & XII**

Other divisions are unsupported by the manuscript:

**III & IV   V & VI   VI & VII   VII & VIII   IX & X   X & XI**

# ***Meditations*: What Kind of Text is It?**

No title (*Meditations* is first used in 1634)

Aurelius did not set out to write a *book*

Probably written as personal notes – *hypomnēmata*

Notes were probably saved and assembled upon his death

# Not a Journal, Not a Treatise

Written as *hypomnēmata* – a common form of writing in 1<sup>st</sup>  
& 2<sup>nd</sup> century Roman society

*Notes to oneself to aid memory – more precious than sticky notes*

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Why would Aurelius feel the need to write *hypomnēmata*?

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Why would Aurelius feel the need to write *hypomnēmata*?

***Because he was a Stoic philosopher!***

# ***Meditations* as Stoic Exercises**

***A Stoic philosopher = one who lives the way of life of a philosopher, and who adheres to Stoicism.***

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## **Central doctrines of Stoicism**

- 1) Make only objective judgments
- 2) Accept all that occurs with equanimity
- 3) Act in a way that reflects one's interconnection with *Logos*

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(VII.54).

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# ***Meditations: Central Disciplines***

<u>Discipline</u>	(1) Make only objective judgments	(2) Accept all that occurs with equanimity	(3) Act so as to reflect interconnection with <i>Logos</i>
<u>Activity</u>	Judgment	Desire	Will
<u>Attitude</u>	Objectivity	Acceptance	Justice

# ***Meditations: Point of the Writing***

## **Central doctrines of Stoicism**

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The doctrines must be ***continually brought to life in the mind.***

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**This is what Aurelius is doing in the *Meditations*.**

# How Does Aurelius Bring Stoic Doctrines to Life?

## Simple statements

*“What the nature of the Whole brings to each man is to his benefit, and it is so at the time she brings it” (X.20). [2<sup>nd</sup> discipline]*

# How Does Aurelius Bring Stoic Doctrines to Life?

**Simple statements**

**Examples and Analogies**

*“A branch cut off from its neighboring branch must of necessity be cut off from the whole tree. So a man who severs himself from a single other man falls away from the whole human community”*  
(XI.8). [3<sup>rd</sup> discipline]

# How Does Aurelius Bring Stoic Doctrines to Life?

**Simple statements**

**Examples and Analogies**

**Exhortations**

*“Continually, and, if possible, in the case of every mental image, consider its nature, realize its emotional content, and judge it rationally” (VIII.13). [1<sup>st</sup> discipline]*

# How Does Aurelius Bring Stoic Doctrines to Life?

**Simple statements**

**Examples and Analogies**

**Exhortations**

**Arguments**

*“Either all things come from one intelligent source and happens as in one body, and the part must not then complain of what is to the advantage of the Whole, or else all things are atoms and nothing but a medley and a dispersal Why then are you perturbed?” (IX.39). [2<sup>nd</sup> discipline]*

# Workshop on Disciplines

- 1) Make only objective judgments
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*Group 1: II & III, 1<sup>st</sup> Discipline*

*Group 2: II & III, 2<sup>nd</sup> Discipline*

*Group 3: II & III, 3<sup>rd</sup> Discipline*

*Group 4: IV & V, 1<sup>st</sup> Discipline*

*Group 5: IV & V, 2<sup>nd</sup> Discipline*

*Group 6: IV & V, 3<sup>rd</sup> Discipline*

*Group 7: VI, 1<sup>st</sup> Discipline*

*Group 8: VI, 2<sup>nd</sup> Discipline*

*Group 9: VI, 3<sup>rd</sup> Discipline*

- Find examples of the assigned discipline in your assigned books
- Find *another* theme that recurs in those books. Speculate about the connection between the discipline and that theme.