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MARCUS AURELIUS

Meditations

Translated with Notes by MARTIN HAMMOND
With an Introduction by DISKIN CLAY

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Preface

The writings of Marcus Aurelius, conventionally known as the *Meditations*, are unique in Classical literature – the personal and philosophical diary written in Greek by an intellectual Roman emperor without any thought or intention of publication – and remain of unique interest and relevance to the modern world. *To Himself* is the better title given in the manuscript used for the first printed edition in 1559 (this manuscript is now lost: there is only one other complete manuscript): but neither this title nor the convenient division into 'Books' and 'chapters' has any authenticity. Marcus wrote for himself, probably without title and certainly without planned overall structure: and he wrote in Greek because in the second century AD Greek was still the language of philosophy, read, written, and spoken with facility by most educated Romans. Marcus' Greek – lively, taut, spare, sometimes crabbed – is both a joy and a challenge to the translator.

In a striking passage Matthew Arnold described Marcus Aurelius as 'perhaps the most beautiful figure in history. He is one of those consoling and hope-inspiring marks, which stand for ever to remind our weak and easily discouraged race how high human goodness and perseverance have once been carried and may be carried again' (*Essays in Criticism: First Series* [London, 1865]). Though Marcus himself would have rejected the extravagance of this praise, there is some truth in Arnold's rhetoric: truth likewise in G. M. A. Grube's more recent characterization of the *Meditations* as 'a strange, noble, and sad book' (*Marcus Aurelius: The Meditations* [Indianapolis, 1983]). What is certainly true is that the range, diversity, and honesty of

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Marcus' reflections on human life and death in the perspective of eternity – doubt and despair, conviction and exaltation all equally intense – have enduring power to challenge, encourage, or console. And there is the constant interest of the personal preoccupations, problems, and prejudices which give sharp life to Marcus' writing. All this is informed by a passionate moral commitment, the philosophical conviction of the unity of all things, and a firm belief in the interfusion of the human and the divine ('The gods are with us and share our lives' [6.44]; 'every man's mind is god' [12.26]).

For this translation I have used, with only a few minor variations, the text in A. S. L. Farquharson's two-volume edition (Oxford, 1944). I have also followed Farquharson's division of chapters into sub-sections, except in 6.16, 6.30, and 11.18. The sub-sections are marked in the text of the translation by marginal numbers in italics.

Readers may wish to use the notes selectively, consecutively, or of course not at all (much of Marcus is immediately accessible without need of annotation). The notes are intended to give detail and/or explanation where that might be helpful, and to provide a 'road map' for the *Meditations*, so that at and from any point the reader may find either discussion or directions to discussion elsewhere: hence the welter of cross-references in the notes, and a number of synoptic notes gathering together the dispersed range of Marcus' thoughts on a particular topic (e.g. Marcus on the gods, note on 6.44).

I have many debts of gratitude. To the Governors of Tonbridge School for granting me a sabbatical term in Michaelmas 2002, which accelerated what would otherwise have been the glacial pace of progress in the writing of this book; to Peter Carson and Lindeth Vasey of Penguin for encouragement, help, and guidance; to Anna Rogers for her wonderfully calm and efficient management of the conversion of my unevenly legible manuscript to printer's copy; to Professor Tony Long for much detailed help and advice; to Andrew Crawshaw for giving us the use of his delightful house on the island of Andros, where much of this book was written.

Above all, I am very grateful to Professor Diskin Clay of Duke University for kindly agreeing to write the Introduction to this book: he has also provided the suggestions for further reading.

Martin Hammond

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Chronology

AD 121 26 April: Marcus born in Rome.
*c.*124 Death of Marcus' natural father, M. Annius Verus. Adopted by his grandfather.
138 Adopted (together with **Lucius** Ceionius Commodus) by his uncle **Antoninus**, who became emperor in succession to Hadrian on 10 July.
Betrothed to Antoninus' daughter **Faustina**.
140 Consul for the first time.
145 Married to Faustina.
147 Birth of first child.
between 155 and 161 Death of Marcus' mother, Domitia Lucilla.
161 7 March: Death of Antoninus Pius.
Succession of Marcus and Lucius as joint emperors.
31 August: Birth of son **Commodus** and twin brother.
166–7 Plague in Rome and throughout the empire.
168–80 Most of these years spent on campaign on the northern frontiers (in central and south-eastern Europe north of the Danube).
169 Death of Lucius.
175 Rebellion of Avidius Cassius, governor of Syria, in the east.
Death of Faustina at Halala in Cappadocia.
177 Commodus (aged 15), Marcus' only surviving son, made joint emperor.
180 17 March: Died near Sirmium in Pannonia.
Succession of Commodus as sole emperor.

Introduction

Meditating on the *Meditations*

In his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus describes himself as 'a male, mature in years, a statesman, a Roman, a ruler'.[1] When Marcus Aurelius wrote this simple description of himself, he was emperor. He was born in Rome as Marcus Annius Verus on 26 April AD 121 and died on the northern frontiers of the Roman empire (near Sirmium in Pannonia) on 17 March AD 180. Like his adoptive father and uncle by marriage, Titus Aurelius Antoninus, Marcus Annius Verus was not born to the purple. He was the last of the long series of 'adoptive' emperors that began with the accession of Nerva in AD 96 and ended when Marcus' natural son Lucius Aurelius Commodus became emperor in AD 180. This era of more than eighty years was recalled nostalgically by Edward Gibbon as a golden age for humankind: 'If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.'[2]

Marcus' father died when he was a boy and he was brought up in the home of his paternal grandfather, named, like his son and grandson, Marcus Annius Verus. The emperor Hadrian (ruled AD 117–38) came to know and admire Marcus when he was a young man of seventeen and liked to call him *verissimus* (most true and truthful), after his cognomen Verus (true). Marcus' names and titles (*nomina*) are an omen of his career as an emperor and a philosopher. His cognomen translates into Greek as *alethes*, and truthfulness, realism, and honesty, as we

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will see, were the virtues Marcus admired most. In February of AD 138, just months before his death, Hadrian adopted the man who was to become Marcus' adoptive father, Titus Aurelius Antoninus. In turn, Antoninus adopted Marcus that same year. Marcus Annius Verus then took the name and title Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Antoninus Pius, as he came to be called, ruled from 138 until his death in 161, when Marcus became emperor in his turn.

Some of this history is evident in Book 1 of the *Meditations* where Marcus speaks of his debts to those who had raised and educated him and expresses his deep debt to the man who was first his uncle by marriage and then his father. His progress through the major offices of the Roman state (the *cursus honorum*) was rapid. He was named Caesar (a cognomen recognizing him as a member of the imperial family) in 139 and he served as consul (the highest office in Rome below the emperor) in 140 and 145. He was serving as consul for the third time in 161, when at the death of Antoninus on 7 March he received the titles Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, to which was added the title and office of Pontifex Maximus, the highest religious office in Rome.

These were Marcus' titles when he became emperor. The Romans made the distinction between service in Rome and Italy and service abroad on military campaigns. The contrasting terms they employed were *domi* and *militiae*, 'at home' and 'with the army on campaign'. Marcus' career as emperor is distinguished in like manner between the eleven years he served as emperor in Rome and the last stage of his life. On becoming emperor, Marcus named Lucius Verus as co-emperor. Verus' campaigns and fragile victories on the eastern frontiers of the empire gained the emperor who remained in Rome the titles Armenicus (164), Medicus, Parthicus Maximus, and Pater Patriae (Father of the Fatherland) – all in 166. So far as we know, Marcus did not leave Italy until 168, when he and Lucius Verus headed north to command the legions on the northern frontiers where tribes north of the Danube continued to break into Italy, Pannonia, and Greece. In 169 Verus died suddenly on the northern frontier, and it was left to Marcus, now sole

emperor, to continue the campaigns against the Quadi and Sarmatians and assume the additional titles Germanicus (172) and Sarmaticus (175).

All these weighty titles commemorated victories that did not last beyond the reign of Marcus Aurelius. His son Commodus soon abandoned the defence of the northern frontier. During Marcus' reign there were natural disasters at home: the flooding of the Tiber, the famine that inaugurated his rule, and the plague that reached Rome with the return of some of Lucius Verus' eastern armies (breaking out in AD 166/7 and continuing for years after). There was the very human threat to Marcus' authority that developed suddenly in the east when Marcus' general, Avidius Cassius, who had accompanied Lucius Verus on the Parthian campaign, announced in Antioch that the emperor had died and proclaimed himself emperor (175). All this is external history, commemorated by the triumph celebrated in 176, a victory column and arch erected in Rome, and on coins, but barely visible in the secret history of the emperor's *Meditations*.

There is another feature of Marcus' reign forgotten by the historian of his life in the *Historia Augusta* (identified as 'Julius Capitolinus'), who gives him the title Philosophus. This was the persecution of the Christians. The Christian, Justin Martyr, wrote an 'apology' for Christianity in a letter directed to Antoninus Pius but also meant for his co-religionists; in it he described Antoninus' son as *verissimus* and a philosopher. This letter, written after AD 155, constitutes Justin's first 'apology' for Christianity. Justin was condemned to death (in AD 165) by Quintus Junius Rusticus, the prefect of Rome and the Stoic who influenced Marcus in his early years (1.7). Justin thus earned the title Martyr. Then there were the persecutions of the Christians in Lyon and Vienne in Gaul and Smyrna in Asia Minor. These were important events during his rule and long remembered by the Christians after his death, but Marcus glances at the Christians in his *Meditations* only once (11.3), and his glance is one of scorn for their 'theatrics'.[3]

Marcus spent most of his life as emperor (AD 161–80) responding to the urgent solicitations of letters and petitions.

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Yet he also maintained a very private life. Somehow in the last twenty years of this life of external pressures from every side he found – or made – the time to address himself. The writings now known as his *Meditations* are not so much silent dialogues with a divided self as admonitions and reflections the emperor addressed to himself and to which he seldom replies. Marcus wrote in Greek. In Greek these admonitions came to be entitled *ta eis heauton* – 'addresses to himself'. In these aphorisms, pithy definitions, reflections, reminders, and exhortations, Marcus occasionally urges himself to give up books and reading in favour of the more serious enterprise of self-mastery and self-improvement.[4] This admonition is one of the many that direct the emperor inward. Yet we possess a book that preserves a record of his thoughts as he withdraws from the external pressures and burdens of rule and warfare into himself in order to reassert his rule over himself. This inner retreat is his fortress (as he calls it in 8.48). His *Meditations* are our portal into that *acropolis*.[5]

In one entry of his *Meditations*, he is more explicit about the books he would give up. These were written by the emperor himself: 'No more wandering. You are not likely to read your own jottings, your histories of the ancient Greeks and Romans, your extracts from their literature laid up for your old age' (3.14). Nor, did he think, would others. We know from the first book of the *Meditations* that he had written dialogues as a boy (1.6), but by 'jottings' (the diminutive *hypomnematia*) he might refer to the instalments that now make up the twelve 'books' of his *Meditations*. Some readers have thought so. Marcus uses the word *hypomnemata* to describe the records of Epictetus' lectures (1.7). The more accurate description of the *Meditations* comes from an oration of the contemporary of Julian the 'Apostate' (emperor 361–3), Themistius. As we shall see when we turn to the fame of the *Meditations*, the word 'exhortations' (*parangelmata*) is the first description in later antiquity of the character of the *Meditations*. It is accurate, except it must be added that these exhortations are not to an army but the allocution of the emperor to himself.

The emperor never abandoned his *Meditations*, and the notebooks or scrolls out of which they developed somehow survived

his death, unknown, it seems, even to his son and successors. Marcus might have never seriously contemplated publishing his *Meditations*. All that he says about the insubstantiality of fame persuades us that he did not. But he was mistaken about his own fame. We now remember him more as a philosopher than as an emperor and more for his *Meditations* than for his place in history and in the imperial lives of the *Historia Augusta*. But for his contemporaries and for posterity the monuments of his fame were ever present in Rome. He lived on in the imposing images of the emperor depicted on the monumental victory column in Rome that has given its name to the Piazza Colonna.[6] The spiral narrative of this column commemorates the northern campaigns of AD 169–76. On an arch (now destroyed) built to commemorate his victories of 176 he is shown in his campaign on the Danubian frontier mounted on a horse and greeted in awe and reverence by subdued Germans and Sarmatians. (The eight panels from this arch were inserted into the attic of the arch of Constantine.) The most memorable of the images of him as emperor is the mounted equestrian statue that once stood on the Lateran Hill. It was transported to the Capitoline in 1538, where it now attracts crowds of tourists. (The original regilded bronze is housed in the Portico of the Capitoline Museum.) Henry James said of it: 'I doubt if any statue of King or captain in the public places of the World has more to commend it to the general heart.' The emperor grips the bridle in his firm left hand, reminding us that 'the left hand is awkward for most tasks, but has a stronger grip on the bridle than the right' (12.6).

These prominent monuments in Rome project the emperor's public image. It is an image of power and submission to power. There are scenes in the column which show the emperor addressing his troops in a formal *adlocutio*. His *Meditations* too are devoted to power and submission to power: the power of what he calls the 'directing mind' (*to hegemonikon*) over impressions, impulses, desires, and passions. For all the very private entries in the *Meditations* that rudely dismiss the importance of fame, his *Meditations* have best preserved his fame and they have proved useful to those dedicated to his own sustained

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project of self-improvement and self-mastery, day by day. This inner life is best revealed not on a victory column or the equestrian statue in Rome but by the bust of Marcus that was once displayed in Athens, then still the epicentre of Greek philosophy and a city he visited in AD 178. It is likely that this bust was displayed with the bust of Herodes Atticus, the Athenian who instructed Marcus in Greek rhetoric and who was deeply and dangerously involved in Roman affairs. Of all the portraits of Roman emperors before him that advertised their power, this imperial image is the most introspective. It was broadcast in some 120 copies. It announces a new age of spirituality.

The Literary Character of the Meditations

There is no work quite like the *Meditations* in Greek or Roman philosophical literature. The *Meditations* are unique in three senses of this much abused word. First and foremost is the fact that Marcus silently addresses *himself*. Second, the author of these meditations was the Roman emperor and the emperor wrote in Greek. Most Roman philosophers wrote in Latin. Third, Marcus never seems to have intended for publication the long series of meditations he entered into his journal, although the refined rhetoric of some entries and the ordering of entries within a book often suggest that he had a larger audience in mind. Certainly they attest to his training in Greek rhetoric.

One looks for parallels to the *Meditations* in Greek literature and fails to discover them. Marcus was much impressed by Heraclitus of Ephesus, who, although he speaks of his inner search for himself, does not address himself. Nor are there any exact equivalents to be found in the writings of the French *moralistes*, who sometimes remind their reader of the *Meditations*. François, duc de La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* are brief, well polished, and very public reflections; Blaise Pascal does not address himself in his *Pensées* (published posthumously in 1670), nor does Nietzsche, the master of aphorism – but not of meditation. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius address a 'self' that has retreated from public view; they are a

'dialogue' in the sense envisaged by Socrates in Plato's *Theaetetus*, that is, the inner conversation of the soul as it speaks to itself (*Theaetetus* 189E–190A). Impressively, Marcus addresses his soul in *Meditations* 10.1. It is clear from many of the admonitions that this self is divided and that the higher rational 'self' confronts a weaker self that has slipped into attitudes that are unphilosophical and threaten his pursuit of virtue (8.40):

> If you remove your judgement of anything that seems painful, you yourself stand quite immune to pain. 'What self?' Reason. 'But I am not just reason.' Granted. So let your reason cause itself no pain, and if some other part of you is in trouble, it can form its own judgement for itself.

A symptom of the shifting location of the 'self' of the *Meditations* can be found in the inconsistency in Marcus' Greek between the reflexive pronoun 'yourself' and 'himself'. In a remarkable entry Marcus uses the second person plural to describe the effect of tragedy upon the soul; thereby he becomes a part of the audience (11.6.1). The self of the *Meditations* is not entirely enclosed within the book itself. Most often we hear Marcus addressing his weaker nature, but on occasion we can hear the voices of others, the idle prayers to the gods he corrects in 9.40 and the vain lamentations of mourners in 10.36. Occasionally, he addresses an imaginary interlocutor, sometimes rudely (as in 11.15). In Book 11 we can overhear Epictetus (34) and Socrates (39) in brief exchanges with anonymous interlocutors. The emperor even dismisses another voice from without – the spectre of his sense impressions (*phantasiai*) as it breaks in on his solitude (7.17). This is a voice he would silence.

The most rhetorically impressive of his admonitions to himself is the address to his soul that opens Book 10. I give only its beginning (10.1):

> My soul, will you ever be good, simple, individual, bare, brighter than the body that covers you? Will you ever taste the disposition to love and affection? Will you ever be complete and free of need,

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missing nothing, desiring nothing live or lifeless for the enjoyment of pleasure?

The chastised soul does not respond.

There is much more than inner dialogue – or soliloquy – to be found in the *Meditations*. There are long reflections on duty, virtue, the place of human rationality in the scheme of the universe, the kinship of all mankind that has its source in human rationality, the cities humans inhabit and the *polis* or 'higher city' or the 'other world' of the universe, the god within and the gods without, the purposefulness and cohesiveness of the universe, Providence, the nature of anger, death, and regret, and epigrams, aphorisms, and quotations that seem to come from a book of commonplaces.[7]

The reader will encounter a great deal of repetition in the *Meditations*. This might strike the reader as a stylistic flaw, but for a philosopher seeking to guide himself repetition is a philosophical virtue. Repetition is a form of spiritual exercise designed to reinforce the main principles of Marcus' philosophy; its purpose is to effect a 'dyeing of the soul' (5.16). Three of the most common imperatives Marcus addresses to himself are: 'Remember', 'Keep in mind', 'Do not forget.'

Readers who come to this book expecting the hardness and austerity of a Stoic will not be disappointed, but they will be surprised by prose that often reads like modern poetry and startled by the vivid illustrations that reveal Marcus' deep appreciation of the beauty and purposefulness of Nature (a word that is properly capitalized). I draw attention to three passages that reveal the poetry and philosophy to be found in the *Meditations*. The first is an excerpt (3.2.1 and 3):

> We should also attend to things like these, observing that even the incidental effects of the processes of Nature have their own charm and attraction. Take the baking of bread. The loaf splits open here and there, and those very cracks, in one way a failure of the baker's profession, somehow catch the eye and give particular stimulus to our appetite. Figs likewise burst open at full maturity: and in olives ripened on the tree the very proximity of decay lends a special beauty to the fruit . . . So any man with a feeling and deeper insight for the workings of the Whole will find some pleasure in almost every aspect of their disposition . . . he will see a kind of bloom and fresh beauty in an old woman or an old man . . .

Second (8.51):

> 'They kill, they cut in pieces, they hunt with curses.' What relevance has this to keeping your mind pure, sane, sober, just? As if a man were to come up to a spring of clear, sweet water and curse it – it would still continue to bubble up water good to drink. He could throw in mud or dung: in no time the spring will break it down, wash it away, and take no colour from it. How then can you secure an everlasting spring and not a cistern? By keeping yourself at all times intent on freedom – and staying kind, simple, and decent.

Last (8.57):

> The sun appears to pour itself down, and indeed its light pours in all directions, but the stream does not run out. This pouring is linear extension: that is why its beams are called rays, because they radiate in extended lines. You can see what a ray is if you observe the sun's light entering a dark room through a narrow opening. It extends in a straight line and impacts, so to speak, on any solid body in its path which blocks passage through the air on the other side: it settles there and does not slip off or fall.

The reader who has meditated on Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* will come to appreciate the philosophy expressed in these seemingly poetic passages. In the first, a deep and hard-won acceptance of the cycle of birth, growth, and decay reveals the beauty of every natural stage of life, the rising and baking of bread, the over-ripeness of a fig or olive, the natural beauty of an old woman or an old man. Looking to escape from the brutality of life and the desperate cries of other voices in the *Meditations*, 'They kill, they cut in pieces', Marcus retreats inward to a pure spring that wells up within. Unlike a cistern that is filled by rain falling from above, a spring takes its source

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in the divine rationality that permeates the world.[8] The complex description of the sun's light radiating into a darkened room is clarified in the conclusion of this meditation (continuing 8.57):

> Something similar will be true of the flow and diffusion of the universal mind – not an exhaustible stream but rather a constant radiation. And there will be nothing forceful or violent in its impact on the obstacles it meets: it will not fall off, but will settle there and illuminate what receives it. Anything unreflective will deprive itself of that light.

Perhaps the most sustained analogy to be encountered in the *Meditations* is that made possible by the discovery of the intimate and indissoluble connection between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between the providence, rationality, and benevolence of the Whole and the transitory part of it that we know as Marcus Aurelius.

The Book of Marcus' Meditations

The emperor, who was trained in Greek from his early years, wrote his *Meditations* in Greek. Greek was the language in which philosophy was taught and it was a language that Marcus preferred to Latin for the purpose of withdrawing inwards, meditating and clearing his mind. He might have preferred Greek for his *Meditations* as a means of alienating himself from Latin rhetoric and things Roman. Most of the entries in the *Meditations* were probably written far from Rome, the centre of the universe, in regions where Latin was barely understood and the Latin rhetoric exemplified by Marcus' tutor, Fronto, meant nothing.

We know very little about the dates of composition of the *Meditations*. Occasionally, Marcus expresses his belief that the end of his life is near (2.2, 10.15, 10.36) and he twice states that an intelligent man who has lived to the age of forty can fully comprehend the pattern and monotony of human life (7.49, 11.1.2). This suggests that the *Meditations* were written after he became emperor at the age of thirty-nine. We know

from the titles to Books 2 and 3 that some of the entries were written in the northern campaigns of the early 170s on the frontiers of the Roman empire.[9]

In the letter to Lucius Gellius to whom he conveyed his records of Epictetus' lectures (*diatribai*), the historian Arrian of Nicomedia made a distinction between his transcription of the lectures of Epictetus at which he was present and which he preserved in something close to stenographic accuracy and the 'compositions' of other authors. Like the Roman Stoic, Musonius Rufus, and like Socrates, Epictetus did not commit his philosophy to writing. The same cannot be said of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. The long series of admonitions, aphorisms, and reflections that now make up the twelve 'books' of the *Meditations* were entered into a journal as the emperor made the time to set them down. They are so personal and inwardly directed – and at times incomprehensible – that it is difficult to imagine that he dictated them to his Greek secretary, Apollonius. An example of their dense privacy is the entry: 'A black character, an effeminate, unbending character, the character of a brute or dumb animal: infantile, stupid, fraudulent, coarse, mercenary, despotic' (4.28). We do not know who the emperor is describing.

As they have come down to us, the *Meditations* are not a mere transcript of the entries from Marcus' journals. Like his own life, these entries show signs of careful composition as they are redacted as his *Meditations*.[10] The first book of the *Meditations* is unlike any of the eleven books that follow. It is the carefully considered statement of the emperor's last will and testament. It constitutes the final testimonial of his gratitude to those who had directed, influenced, and improved his life. The beginning of the *Meditations* is the fitting conclusion of Marcus' life, not as an emperor but as a philosopher. He begins by recording his gratitude to his grandfather, Marcus Annius Verus, to his natural father (of the same name), and to his mother, Domitia Lucilla. He concludes by expressing his gratitude to and admiration for his adoptive father and uncle, Antoninus Pius, and finally his gratitude towards the gods.[11] There are many signs of arrangement or composition in the

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twelve books of the *Meditations*, especially in the first and last books. But the impression given by the manuscripts and printed editions of the *Meditations* now displayed in twelve books and divided into 488 'chapters' (some long; some of a single sentence) is misleading. 'Chapters' are better thought of as journal entries. 'Journal' is an accurate term to describe books or entries written 'at break of day' (5.1) or 'first thing in the morning' (2.1).

The pleasure of meditating on the *Meditations* resembles the challenge and austere pleasure of reading the epigrams and pronouncements that survive from the book of Heraclitus. There are 127 of these.[12] The challenge of reading them is like the challenge – and pleasure – of reading the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. This can be expressed in the words E. M. Forster chose as the epigraph for his *Howards End*: 'Only connect . . .' Connecting was the project of the emperor, and it is now the challenge of his reader.

Marcus the Emperor of the Meditations

In the private entries of his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus does not conceal from himself the fact that he is the Roman emperor and one in a long line of emperors. His insistent demand for rational analysis and stripping his human and material environment down to its essentials reveals an essential part of his character. Scattered through his *Meditations* we encounter reflections on his duty to serve, as 'a male, mature in years, a statesman, a Roman, a ruler' (3.5). This 'service' is subsumed under his more fundamental duty as a rational human being to benefit and tolerate – perhaps the more difficult task – his fellow human beings. He never reflects on the many difficult questions of policy that confronted him during his nearly twenty years as emperor. He never names any of the contemporaries who played important roles in his armies or administration;[13] nor does he allude to the serious threats posed by the revolt of his general Avidius Cassius in 175, whose head was brought to him as proof of his defeat. There is only the

most oblique recognition of his campaigns on the northern frontiers begun in AD 169.

Typical of his philosophical attitude towards his military career is the analogy: 'A spider is proud to trap a fly. Men are proud of their own hunting – a hare, a sprat in the net, boars, bears, Sarmatian prisoners. If you examine their motives, are they all not bandits?' (10.10). Another more trenchant analogy is set down in 8.34: 'If you have ever seen a severed hand or foot, or a head cut off and lying some way away from the rest of the body – analogous is what someone does to himself, as far as he can, when he will not accept his lot and severs himself from society or does some unsocial act.' As emperor, Marcus, soon to be recognized as Germanicus, witnessed the beheading of captive Germans. The two panels (LXI and LXVI) showing this punishment are the grimmest scenes on his column in Rome. What is most impressive about the emperor as philosopher are the analogies or images (*eikones*) his own brutal experience as *imperator* (or military commander) suggested to him.[14] The emperor who bore this heavy weight of honorific titles was well aware of his predecessors and of Julius Caesar, whose cognomen, Caesar, became the equivalent of emperor. Marcus Aurelius mentions most of the emperors from Augustus to Antoninus Pius, whom he admired more than any of his predecessors.[15] But it was not from Rome or the military camp that he looked at the empire and the court of the emperor. It was from within the heights of his inner fortress.

Marcus also reflects on his own role as emperor. A deep contempt for the recipients of his benefactions is tersely expressed in one of the epigrams he quotes (itself a quotation) in Book 7: 'A king's lot: to do good and be damned' (36). And yet the emperor cautions himself not to complain of life in the palace. It is no obstacle to his own virtue.[16] He reminds himself of the dangers of his station by inventing a new Greek verb: 'Take care not to be Caesarified, or dyed in purple' (6.30). As for the purple dye that distinguished his senatorial order, he reduces it to 'the hair of a sheep soaked in shell-fish blood' (6.13; cf. 9.36). In his meditations on the brevity and