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## The greco-roman world

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The sentences are frequently introduced by simple phrases responding to the rules for the practice of meditation. Always bear in mind . . . in the morning to say to yourself in advance : I shall meet men who . . . You will have this consciousness more plainly if you often say to yourself : I am a part of the great divine whole. You will be more cheerful and more good-natured if you bear in mind . . . " Often he writes only the question what is the state of his "hegemonikon", his "governing" factor (that is to say, his reason-controlled will), and thinks over in silence. " ' To what purpose, then, am I now using myself? ' In every case ask yourself this question, and examine yourself : ' What have I now in this part which men call the governing self, and whose soul have I at present? A child's, a woman's, a despot's, a dumb animal's, a dangerous beast's? ' " \*

In moments of exaltation he addresses the soul by name ; as he employs the direct address to himself in the second person :

Delve within ; within is the fountain of good, and it is always ready to bubble up, if you always delve (VII, 59). . . . Men look for retreats for themselves, the country, the seashore, the hills ; and you yourself, too, are peculiarly accustomed to feel the same want. At all this is very unlike a philosopher, when at any hour you please you may retreat into yourself. For nowhere does a man retreat into more quiet or more privacy than into his own mind . . . Continually, therefore, grant yourself this retreat and repair yourself. But let them be brief and fundamental truths, which will suffice at once by their presence to wash away all sorrow, and to send you back without blemish to the life to which you return.

At times he introduces a principle in the form of an observation, and then applies it to himself in the form of an address, also as a rule with alternating second and first person ; the clearest trace of the diatribe of Epictetus then becomes visible.\* The basic truths which must always be kept ready for restatement, " as actors have their instruments and scalpels always at hand to meet sudden demands for treatment ", he produces, familiar to men as they are, indicating each with a demonstrative " go through that from the elements ". This especially concerns the contemplation of the organization of the world, in which the individual finds himself associated with all rational beings. Then

\* *Meditations*, V, ii. "Soul of a woman" seems an unnatural, far-fetched phrase ; but it may have been a reaction to the taunts of the general Avidius Cassius at the military revolt of A.D. 175—see below. The translation here and in the following quotations is taken, with a few slight changes, from *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus*, edited by A. S. L. Farquharson (Oxford, 1944).

he makes use of logical distinctions to mark out the field of objects valuable to man and duties incumbent on him, or he recalls his points in turn, first, second, third. When he has exhausted all possibilities and has examined each of them, he may say to himself : " That's all there is. So be of good courage. "

That is the uniform principle of the book—to collect one's thoughts and examine oneself and keep one's ends and aims in mind, and consider them in advance in face of typical problems such as recur in life and have to be solved by taking thought for man's position in the world as a part of the great whole of universal nature ; and continually to saturate oneself with the great simple ideas which are the first principles of moral life—truth, justice, fulfilment of duty, freedom, work in the assigned post, Roman virtue, beneficence, love of one's fellow-beings. To that extent we find here again the abstract idea of personality : the true self is the rational will. Marcus Aurelius expressly puts to himself the question " What am I ? " But this question of self-knowledge does not concern his own individuality, but has reference to man's nature, and finds its answer through the general distinction between the reason or the rational will, as the centre of the person, and both the body and the soul, the latter term taken in the sense of the principle of organic life, that is to say, as breath or *pneuma*.

This, whatever it is, that I am is flesh and vital spirit and the governing factor. Disdain the flesh : blood and bones and network, a twisted skein of nerves, veins, arteries. Consider also what the vital spirit (*pneuma*) is : a current of air, not even continuously the same, but every moment being breathed out and in again. There is then a third part, the governing factor (II, 2).

He adopts this psychological theory as an established doctrine, without reflecting upon it, so little is he interested in theoretical philosophy.\*

In accordance with the practical tendency of the Roman philosophers of life he continues :

Put away your books, be distracted no longer, they are not your portion. Rather, as if on the point of death, reflect like this : " You

\* Characteristic of this is his picture of Socrates. It does not matter, he declares (VII, 66), that Socrates "argued fluently with the Sophists" ; what matters is "what kind of soul he had, whether he could be content with being just in his dealings with men and righteous in his dealing with the gods, whether he was neither hastily indignant with wickedness nor a servant to any man's ignorance, whether he neither accepted as unfamiliar anything assigned by Universal Nature or endured it as intolerable, nor submitted his mind to be affected by the affections of the flesh".

