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## [The greco-roman world - suite]

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He feels close to the spirits which, according to the pantheistic belief, wander through the upper regions of this world. From that position, and not from a wearied melancholy, springs what has been called Pessimism. It is nothing peculiar to him and nothing gloomy. In that time of religious excitement the feeling that, in his words, "human life is smoke and nothingness" (X, 31) passed like a wave that seized the most sensitive; and Stoic pantheism, which was still unaware of the creative nature of individuation and development, became all the more true to life through the sufferings of human existence being insisted on. They had been denied only intellectually, by force of the moral will declaring, for instance, that "no injury can be done to your soul". Recognized as human experiences, suffering and evil were religiously interpreted, and thereby justified, from the pantheistic basic relation of the parts to the divine whole of the universe, as the royal meditator puts it in a typical passage:

We commonly say: "Æsculapius ordered a man horse exercise, cold baths, or no shoes"; similarly we might say: "Universal Nature ordered him sickness, disablement, loss, or some other affliction." . . . Accordingly let us accept these orders as we accept what Æsculapius orders. Many of them, too, are assuredly severe, yet we welcome them in hope of health. Let the performance and completion of the pleasure of Universal Nature seem to you to be our pleasure, precisely as the conduct of your health is seen to be, and so welcome all that comes to pass, even though it appear rather cruel, because it leads to that end, to the health of the Universe, that is to the welfare and well-being of Zeus (V, 8).

Thus Marcus Aurelius created equanimity in his soul with a deep feeling of the dissonances of this reality. Only if we take these pages of his book by themselves and not together with the other aspects of life with which they are associated in the structure, reflected in his sublime conduct, of his personality, can it seem as if he is tossed about by conflicting moods.<sup>98</sup> The function of the journal involves (and does so all the more under the Stoic requirement of moral perfection) a disproportionate mention of the unsatisfied states of mind occurring in life. We can draw from his confessions inferences as to the true character of the person making them only if we base our judgment on the structure of the whole work. This structure, however, is hard to demonstrate in a work like that of the emperor Marcus which, from the very nature of a *journal intime*, is not, as regards its outward form, a consistent whole. In the twelve "books" of more or less elaborated reflections and maxims, quotations (or sayings) and

jottings, thrown together under no visible plan, there are considerable sections in which one or another mood predominates, the optimistic or the pessimistic mood, gloom or hope, anxiety or peace of mind. But this varying intonation of the "Meditations" is not explained, or at all events not entirely, by the various situations in which he wrote them down: at headquarters amid the chances of war, in intervals in the fighting, taking a breath after victory over the barbarians or startled by the revolt in Antiochia, or on a journey to the East that took him to Egypt and the Pyramids. The contrasting moods correspond rather to the characteristic and, as we emphasized, realistic two-sidedness of the Stoic outlook on the world: on the one hand pantheism, together with the realization of the ephemeral nature of all things human, leads to the individual feeling his own life with its duties as a burden from which he would be glad to get free in order to feel, like the spirits in the skies, a part of universal Nature; on the other hand ethical idealism is a source of confidence and of the heroic will to take up the struggle of life, in spite of the awareness of the perishability of all things human. In this spirit Marcus Aurelius, in the reflection in which he exhorted himself to bear continually in mind "that man's life is smoke and nothingness", continues:

Why, then, are you bothered? Why not satisfied to pass through this brief moment ordering your ways? What kind of material condition and station are you running away from? What is it all except a school of exercise for a reason which has exactly and scientifically looked into what life contains? Wait, therefore, until you assimilate even these things to yourself, as a strong stomach assimilates any food and a bright fire turns whatever you throw into it to flame and light (X, 31).

So far we have here a philosophic sort of self-communion which, based on an already established doctrine or conviction, remains fundamentally the same amid the changes of situations and moods, and so re-traces its circles again and again through the whole work. For us the question remains how this, so to speak, timeless movement fits in with the biographical point of view from which the individual life with its ups and downs appears as a single whole, formed in the course of time. This question leads in turn to the two-sided outlook of the Stoic, but also leads beyond it.

In the midst of meditations on the passage of time, which might take the sting out of the thought of death, he recalls the course of his own life (IX, 21).

