

The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus/Book 6

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BOOK VI

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1. The matter of the Whole is docile and adaptable, and the Reason that controls it has in its own nature no ground to create evil, for it contains no evil; nor does it create anything amiss nor is any injury done by it; and all things come into being and are accomplished according to it.
2. Provided you are doing your proper work it should be indifferent to you whether you are cold or comfortably warm, whether drowsy or with sufficient sleep, whether your report is evil or good, whether you are in the act of death or doing something else. For even that wherein we die is one of the acts of life, and so even at that moment to 'make the best use of the present' is enough.
3. Look to what is within: do not allow the intrinsic quality or the worth of any one fact to escape you.

4. All things that exist will very swiftly change; either they will pass into vapour, if we presume that matter is a whole, or else they will be dispersed into their atoms.
5. The controlling Reason knows its own disposition, what it creates, and the material upon which it works.
6. The noblest kind of retribution is not to become like your enemy.
7. Rejoice and set up your rest in one thing: to pass from act to act of fellowship, keeping God in remembrance.
8. The governing principle it is which wakes itself up and adapts itself, making itself of whatever kind it wills and making all that happens to it appear to be of whatever kind it wills.
9. All things are being accomplished in each case according to the nature of the Whole; for certainly they cannot be in accordance with any other nature, whether embracing them without, or enclosed within, or attached to them outside.
10. Either a medley, a mutual interlacing of atoms and their scattering: or unification, order, providence. If then the former, why do I so much as desire to wear out my days in a world compounded by accident and in a confusion governed by chance? Why am I concerned about anything else than how I am in one way or another to 'return to earth'? And why am I troubled? Whatever I do, the scattering into atoms will come upon me. But, if the alternative be true, I bow my head, I am calm, I take courage in that which orders all.
11. Whenever you are obliged by circumstances to be in a way troubled, quickly return to yourself, and do not, more than you are obliged, fall out of step; for you will be more master of the measure by continually returning to it.
12. Had you a step-mother and a mother at the same time, you would wait upon the former but still be continually returning to your mother. This is now what the palace and your philosophy are to you. Return to her again and again, and set up your rest in her, on whose account that other life appears tolerable to you and you tolerable in it.
13. Surely it is an excellent plan, when you are seated before delicacies and choice foods, to impress upon your imagination that this is the dead body of a fish, that the dead body of a bird or a pig; and again, that the Falernian wine is grape juice and that robe of purple a lamb's fleece dipped in a shell-fish's blood; and in matters of sex intercourse, that it is attrition of an entrail and a convulsive expulsion of mere mucus. Surely these are excellent imaginations, going to the

heart of actual facts and penetrating them so as to see the kind of things they really are. You should adopt this practice all through your life, and where things make an impression which is very plausible, uncover their nakedness, see into their cheapness, strip off the profession on which they vaunt themselves. For pride is an arch-seducer of reason, and just when you fancy you are most certainly busy in good works, then you are most certainly the victim of imposture. Consider for instance what Crates says even about Xenocrates.

14. Most of the objects which the vulgar admire may be referred to the general heads of what is held together by 'stress', like minerals and timber, or by 'growth', like figs, vines, olives; those admired by slightly superior folk to things held together by 'animal spirit', for instance flocks and herds or bare ownership of a multitude of slaves; those by persons still more refined to things held together by 'reasonable spirit', not, however, reasonable as such but so far as to be technical or skilled in something else. But one who reveres spirit in its full sense of reasonable and political regards those other objects no longer, but above all continually keeps his own spirit in reasonable and social being and activity, co-operating with a fellow being to this end.

15. Some things are hastening to be, others to have come and gone, and a part of what is coming into being is already extinct. Flux and change renew the world incessantly, as the unbroken passage of time makes boundless eternity ever young. In this river, therefore, on which he cannot stand, which of these things that race past him should a man greatly prize? As though he^[1] should begin to set his heart on one of the little sparrows that fly past, when already it has gone away out of his sight. Truly the life of every man is itself as fleeting as the exhalation of spirit from his blood or the breath he draws from the atmosphere. For just as it is to draw in a single breath and to return it, which we do every moment, so is it to render back the whole power of respiration, which you acquired but yesterday or the day before, at birth, to that other world from which you first drew it in.

16. To transpire like plants or to breathe like cattle or wild beasts is not a thing to value, nor to be stamped by sense impression or drawn by the strings of impulse, nor to live in herds or to take in nourishment—this last is on a level with relieving the body of the dregs of that nourishment. What, then, should be valued? The clapping of hands? Surely not; and so not even the clapping of tongues, for the applause of multitudes is a clapping of tongues. Therefore you have put mere glory away. What is left to be valued? To my thinking to move and to be held back according to man's proper constitution, the end to which both rustic industries and the arts give the lead. (For every art aims at this, that what it fashions should be suited to the purpose for which it has been fashioned. This is the aim of the gardener and of the vine-dresser, of the breaker of colts and the trainer of dogs.) And to what end do children's training and teaching labour? Here, then, is what

is of true value, and if this be well, you will not endeavour to obtain for yourself any one of the rest. Will you not cease to value many other things besides? Then you will not be free or self-contained or passionless; for you will be obliged to entertain envy and rivalry, to regard with suspicion those who are able to take away those things, to plot against those who have what is valued by you. To sum up, he who feels the want of any one of those things must be sullied thereby and besides must often blame the gods. But to reverence and value your own understanding will make you acceptable to yourself, harmonious with your fellows, and in concord with the gods; that is, praising whatsoever they assign and have ordained.

17. The motions of the Elements are up, down, in circles: the movement of man's excellence is in none of these, but proceeding in a more divine way and on a path past finding out it fares well.

18. Only think what it is they do. They refuse to speak good of men living at the same time and in their company, yet themselves set great store on being spoken well of by those who will be born after them, whom they have never seen and never will see. Yet this is next door to being sad because men born before you were not speaking good words about you.

19. Do not because a thing is hard for you yourself to accomplish, imagine that it is humanly impossible: but if a thing is humanly possible and appropriate, consider it also to be within your own reach.

20. In the field a player may have scratched us with his nails or given us a blow with his head, in a rage, yet we do not label him for that or hit back or suspect him afterwards of designs against us. Still, we do, in fact, keep away from him, not, however, as a foe and not with suspicion but with good-natured avoidance. Let us take this for an example in other departments of life; let us overlook much in the case of those who are, so to speak, our opponents in the game; for, as I said, it is possible to avoid them, yet neither to suspect nor hate them.

21. Suppose a man can convince me of error and bring home to me that I am mistaken in thought or act; I shall be glad to alter, for the truth is what I pursue, and no one was ever injured by the truth, whereas he is injured who continues in his own self-deception and ignorance.

22. Let me do my own duty; nothing else distracts me, for it is either lifeless or without reason or has gone astray and is ignorant of the true path.

23. Use dumb animals and lifeless things and objects generally with a generous and free spirit, because you have reason and they have not; use men because they have reason, in a

neighbourly spirit; and in all things call upon the gods for help. Let it make no difference to you for how long a time you will do these things, for even three hours in this spirit is enough.

24. Alexander the Great and his stable boy were levelled in death, for they were either taken up into the same life-giving principles of the Universe or were scattered without distinction into atoms.

25. Reflect upon the multitude of bodily and mental events taking place in the same brief time, simultaneously in every one of us; and so you will not be surprised that many more events, or rather all things that come to pass, exist simultaneously in the one and entire unity, which we call the Universe.

26. Suppose a man puts you the problem how to write the name Antoninus. Will you raise your voice to pronounce each of its component parts? Then suppose they are angry, will you be angry in return? Will you not quietly enumerate and go over in succession each of the letters? In the same way then, in our life here, remember that every duty has its complement of definite numbers. These you must preserve and not be troubled, and if men make difficulties, not meet them with difficulties, but bring what you propose to do methodically to completion.

27. How inhuman it is to forbid men to set out after what appears suitable and advantageous to themselves. Yet, in a way, you are not allowing them to do this, whenever you are indignant because they do wrong; for certainly they are moved to what looks to be suitable and advantageous to themselves. 'But it is, in fact, not so.' Very well, instruct them and make it plain; don't be indignant.

28. Death is repose from sense-response, from the stimulus of impulse, from intellectual analysis and the service of the flesh.

29. It is absurdly wrong that, in this life where your body does not give in, your spirit should be the first to surrender.

30. Take heed not to be transformed into a Caesar, not to be dipped in the purple dye; for it does happen. Keep yourself therefore, simple, good, pure, grave, unaffected, the friend of justice, religious, kind, affectionate, strong for your proper work. Wrestle to continue to be the man Philosophy wished to make you. Reverence the gods, save men. Life is brief; there is one harvest of earthly existence, a holy disposition and neighbourly acts. In all things like a pupil of Antoninus; his energy on behalf of what was done in accord with reason, his equability

everywhere, his serene expression, his sweetness, his disdain of glory, his ambition to grasp affairs.

Also how he let nothing at all pass without first looking well into it and understanding it clearly; how he would suffer those who blamed him unjustly, not blaming them in return; how he was in no hurry about anything; how he refused to entertain slander; how exactly he scrutinized men's characters and actions, was not given to reproach, not alarmed by rumour, not suspicious, not affecting to be wise; how he was content with little, in lodging, in his bed, in dress, in food, in service; how he loved work and was long-suffering.

What a man, too, he was to remain in his place until evening; because of his spare diet not needing even to relieve nature except at his usual hour. Moreover, his constancy and uniformity to his friends, his tolerance of plain-spoken opposition to his opinions and delight when any one indicated a better course; and how he revered the gods without superstition. So may your last hour find you, like him, with a conscience void of reproach.

31. Be sober once more, recall yourself and shake off sleep again. Perceive that they were dreams which troubled you, and once again fully awake, look at these things as you looked at those.

32. I am composed of body and spirit. Now to the body all things are indifferent, for it cannot distinguish them itself. And to the understanding all that are not its own activities are indifferent, and all that are its own activities are in its control. Even of these, however, it is concerned only about the present, for its future and past activities are themselves also at the present moment indifferent.

33. Neither pain of hand nor pain of foot is contrary to Nature, provided the foot is doing the service of a foot or the hand of a hand. It follows that not even for a man, as man, is pain contrary to Nature, while he is doing the service of a man, and if pain for him is not contrary to Nature, neither is it an evil for him.

34. What monstrous pleasures brigands, pathics, parricides, and despots enjoy.

35. Do you not see how mechanic craftsmen suit themselves up to a point to amateurs, yet none the less stick to the rule of their craft and never submit to desert that? Is it not grievous, then, that architect and physician will reverence, each the principle of his art, more than man his own principle, which he has in common with the gods?

36. Asia and Europe are corners in the Universe; every sea, a drop in the Universe; Mount Athos, a clod of earth in the Universe; every instant of time, a pin-prick of eternity. All things are petty, easily changed, vanishing away. All things come from that other world, starting from that common governing principle, or else are secondary consequences of it. Thus, even the lion's jaws, deadly poison, and every injurious thing, like a thistle or a bog, are by-products from those august and lovely principles. Do not, then, imagine them to be contrary to what you reverence, but reflect upon the fountain of all things.

37. He who sees what is now has seen all things, whatsoever came to pass from everlasting and whatsoever shall be unto unlimited time. For all things are of one kin and of one kind.

38. Meditate often upon the bond of all in the Universe and their mutual relationship. For all things are in a way woven together and all are because of this dear to one another; for these follow in order one upon another because of the stress-movement and common spirit and the unification of matter.

39. Fit yourself into accord with the things in which your portion has been cast, and love the men among whom your lot has fallen, but love them truly.

40. Every instrument, tool, and vessel is well off, if it carry out the work for which it was fashioned. Yet here the maker is outside the tool. Where things are held together by a natural principle, the power which made them is within and abides with them. You must accordingly reverence it the more, and believe that if you are and continue according to the will of that power, you have all things to your mind. And in like manner its things are to the mind of the All.

41. Should you propose to yourself as good or evil something beyond your will, the necessary result is that, if you fall into that evil or fail of that good, you blame the gods and you hate men who are or who you suspect will be the causes of your loss of the good or your falling into the evil; and indeed we commit many wrongs from concern in regard to these things. If, however, we decide that only what our will controls is good or evil, then no ground is left either to arraign God or to adopt the position of an enemy to man.

42. We are all working together to a single end, some consciously and with understanding, some without knowledge, as Heraclitus, I think, says that even 'Sleepers are workers and fellow-workers in what comes to pass in the world'. One helps in one way, one in another, and ex *abundanti* even he who finds fault and tries to resist or destroy what is coming to pass; for the Universe has need even for such a one. Finally, therefore, see with which you take your post, for in any event he who controls the whole will employ you aright and will accept you as one part of

the fellow-labourers and fellow-workers; only do not you become as mean a part as the cheap and ridiculous verse in the comedy, which Chrysippus mentions.

43. Does the Sun god claim to do the work of the god of rain, or Aesculapius the work of the Fruit-bearing goddess? And how is it with each of the stars? Is not their province different, but they are working together to the same end?

44. If so be that the gods took counsel about me and what must happen to me, they took counsel for good; for it is not easy to conceive a god without purpose, and on what possible ground would they be likely to desire to do me harm? What advantage would there be from this either for themselves or for the common good, which is their principal care? But if they took no counsel about me as an individual, surely they did for the common good, and as the present follows upon that by way of consequence, I am bound to welcome and to love it. But suppose they take counsel, if you will, about nothing (a thing it is impious to believe, or else let us cease to sacrifice and pray to them, to swear by them and to do all else that we do, believing them to be present and living in our midst); yet still, suppose they take counsel about none of our concerns, I am able to take counsel about myself, and my consideration is about what is advantageous. Now the advantage of each is what is proper to his own constitution and nature, and my nature is reasonable and social. As Antoninus, my city and my fatherland is Rome; as a man, the Universe. All then that benefits these cities is alone my good.

45. All that befalls the individual is to the advantage of the Whole. This should be enough. However, if you watch carefully, you will generally see this besides: what advantages a man also advantages the rest of men; but here advantage must be taken in its more usual acceptance of what lies in between good and evil.

46. Just as the performances in the amphitheatre and such places pall upon you, being for ever the same scenes, and the similarity makes the spectacle nauseating, so you feel in the same way about life as a whole; for all things, up and down, are the same and follow from the same. How long will it last?

47. Think constantly of the death of men of all sorts, of all sorts of pursuits and of every kind of nation, so that your thought comes down to Philistio, Phoebus, and Origanio. Now pass on to the remaining classes of men. We are bound to change to that other world, where are so many subtle orators, so many grave philosophers, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Socrates; so many heroes of old, captains and kings of later days. Besides these, Eudoxus, Hipparchus, and Archimedes, other acute natures, great minds, hard workers, rogues, self-willed men, those who made mock of man's mortal and transient life itself, like Menippus and all of his kind. Of them all

reflect that long ago they were laid in the ground. Why was it dreadful for them, why dreadful for those whose names are not even remembered? One thing here is of great price, to live out life with truth and righteousness, gracious to liars and to the unrighteous.

48. Whenever you desire to cheer yourself, think upon the merits of those who are alive with you; the energy of one, for instance, the modesty of another, the generosity of a third, of another some other gift. For nothing is so cheering as the images of the virtues shining in the character of contemporaries, and meeting so far as possible in a group. Therefore you should keep them ready to your hand.

49. You are not discontented, surely, because you weigh only so many pounds and not three hundred? So, too, because you may only live so many years and no longer? As you are contented with the quantity of matter determined for you, so also be contented with your days.

50. Endeavour to persuade them, but act even if they themselves are unwilling, when the rule of justice so directs. If, however, a man employs force to resist, change your object to resignation and freedom from a sense of present injury, and use the opposition to elicit in yourself a different virtue. Remember, too, that you set out with a reservation and were not aiming at the impossible. What then was your aim? 'An aim qualified by a reservation.' But you do achieve this; what we proposed to ourselves does come to pass.

51. He who loves glory thinks the activity of another to be his own good; he who loves pleasure thinks his own feeling to be his good; he who has intelligence, thinks his own action to be his good.

52. It is possible to entertain no thought about this, and not to be troubled in spirit; for things of themselves are not so constituted as to create our judgements upon them.

53. Habituate yourself not to be inattentive to what another has to say and, so far as possible, be in the mind of the speaker.

54. What does not benefit the hive is no benefit to the bee.

55. If the crew spoke evil of the master of the ship or his patients of the doctor, would they listen to any one else? Or how should the master achieve safety for the passengers or health for those he is treating?

56. How many in whose company I came into the world are gone away already!

57. Honey appears bitter to the jaundiced, water is dreaded by those bitten by a mad dog, and to little boys a ball seems a fine thing. Why then am I angry? Or do you think that misrepresentation has smaller power over men than bile over the jaundiced or poison over the victim of a bite?

58. No one will prevent your living by the rule of your own nature: nothing will happen to you contrary to the rule of Universal Nature.

59. What creatures they are whom they wish to please, and by what kind of results and what kind of actions! How swiftly eternity will cover all things, and how many it has covered already!

Footnotes

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