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RHETORIC AND SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN MARCUS AURELIUS' *MEDITATIONS*[*]

by

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ABSTRACT: The traditional view that the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius were devoid of rhetoric and literary beauty has been recently questioned by a number of scholars. It is now believed that even though the Emperor probably never had in mind the publication of his *hupomnemata*, he consciously used the art of rhetoric in his work. The purpose of this was to enhance the effect of spiritual exercises which are at the heart of the *Meditations*. The article demonstrates the use of some rhetorical devices in the work, such as enumerations, fictitious dialogues, the use of diminutives and superlatives, and their spiritual purpose.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of Book Two of his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius says to himself:

> 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 are an old man, suffer this governing part of you no longer to be in bondage, no longer to be a puppet pulled by selfish impulse, no longer to be indignant with what is allotted in the present or to suspect what is allotted in the future". (II 2)[1]

Is this to be taken as an anti-intellectual stance of the old Emperor? And what are τὰ βιβλία here? Epictetus, Plato or other classics of Greek philosophy? Or maybe the great Roman poets? Cicero perhaps? We do not know. Another question is what it means for Marcus Aurelius to get rid of his books. Is it merely because they are no longer necessary, since their content has already become an

[*] I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reader of the article for suggesting changes which helped me to make the composition more clear and to emphasise more strongly some points of this contribution.

[1] ἄφες τὰ βιβλία· μηκέτι σπῶ· οὐ δέδοται. ἀλλ' ὡς ἤδη ἀποθνήσκων ὧδε ἐπινοήθητι· γέρων εἶ· μηκέτι τοῦτο ἐάσῃς δουλεῦσαι, μηκέτι καθ' ὁρμὴν ἀκοινώτητον νευροσπαστηθῆναι, μηκέτι τὸ εἱμαρμένον ἢ παρὸν δυσχεραῖναι ἢ μέλλον ὑπιδέσθαι. (Greek text and translation according to the edition by Farquharson 1968).

integral part of the Emperor's own being, or is it because studying them uses up the precious time he always lacks? Or maybe the very interest in books or in knowledge, or in what we now call (somewhat against their classical meaning) the "theoretical" or the "abstract", which for us means "dissociated from everyday life", is for Marcus an obstacle on the way to virtue?

We know that this young, adopted son of Antoninus Pius had already as an adolescent been converted to philosophy, understood as a "way of life", to use Pierre Hadot's now famous phrase[2], but for him it did not mean studying "the books". Rather it involved lying on a simple bed, eating and sleeping very little, working on eradicating his passions. On the other hand, a mentor and a very close friend of Marcus was not in fact an ascetic philosopher, but Marcus Cornelius Fronto – a rich and famous rhetorician, a typical example of the Second Sophistic intellectual.

In the third chapter of Book Two, Marcus Aurelius says: "Put away your thirst for books, that so you may not die murmuring, but truly reconciled and grateful from your heart to the gods" (II 3)[3]. So there is clearly a δῖψα, a thirst for books, and there is a typical dilemma and a conflict between those two great, aristocratic ladies of Antiquity – Rhetoric and Philosophy. I would like to consider the relationship between these two aspects, or more precisely, between the art of rhetoric, as a part of Marcus Aurelius' own curriculum, and the spiritual exercises which he ardently practiced throughout his life and to which the *Meditations* witness.

Before proceeding however, a brief survey of the main tendencies in the literature is in order. Pierre Hadot argued that the *Meditations* belong to the category of *hypomnemata*, that is a broad genre of personal notes, which may have served different purposes in Antiquity[4]. In this particular instance, *hupomnemata* take the form of Stoic spiritual exercises, as Hadot successfully demonstrated in his monograph. Recently, John Sellars has classified the *Meditations* as an example of a text which not only *describes* spiritual exercises, but actually *is* spiritual exercise in itself (by the very act of writing and the act of reading it)[5]. Richard Rutherford contributed to our understanding of literary sources and genological features of the work, distinguishing four aspects of its literary form: traditional diatribe, Stoic treatise, protreptic and collections of stories about famous people[6].

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[2] See Hadot 1987.

[3] τὴν δὲ τῶν βιβλίων δίψαν ῥῖψον, ἵνα μὴ γογγύζων ἀποθάνῃς, ἀλλὰ ἵλεως ἀληθῶς καὶ ἀπὸ καρδίας ἐυχάριστος τοῖς θεοῖς.

[4] Hadot 1992: 45–49.

[5] Sellars 2003: 173.

[6] Rutherford 1989: 21. Dickson (2009: 102 f.) also points out an autobiographical dimension to the *Meditations* – not only the first book, which contains obvious autobiographical references, but the entire text as well.

The initial *opinio communis* of scholars used to be that the *Meditations* are merely "private notes", without any literary ambitions or rhetorical refinement[7]. Pierre Grimal was still a representative of this traditional view, not denying the presence of rhetoric in the *Meditations* and pointing out the influence of Fronto, but not considering this work as a literary work at all[8]. However, in the 1970s, this opinion began to change. Authors such as Joachim Dalfen, Monique Alexandre, Richard Rutherford and Pierre Hadot have pointed out that the Emperor's style and the composition of his notes testify not only to his literary and aesthetic sensitivity, but also to his "self-conscious artistry"[9]. Hadot, in his monograph on the *Meditations*, believes that the debate about the value of Marcus' literary style is thus definitely over. This does not mean that scholars have stopped studying the style and rhetoric of the *Meditations*[10].

More recently, scholars have seemed to separate the more strictly defined "rhetorical" aspects of the text (i.e. those that aim at persuasion or self-persuasion) from the "literary" ones (which concern style, beauty of language and composition)[11]. Of

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[7] The question of the literary value of the Emperor's work was already being studied in the 19th century. Matthew Arnold in 1865 claimed that it is better to read the *Meditations* in the English translation than in Greek, at least if one is looking for literary beauty: "[it] is not exactly one of those styles which has a physiognomy, which are an essential part of their author, which stamp an indelible impression on the reader's mind [...] he [the reader] will find crabbed Greek, without any great charm of distinct physiognomy"; "...without the slightest attempt at style, with no care, even, for correct writing" (Arnold 1865: 279 and 364, quoted in Rutherford 1989: 11). And Farquharson, who edited and translated the *Meditations*, wrote that "[t]he purity and simplicity remain, but all else has been stripped away or trebly refined; the rhetoric lessons of that pompous old tutor [i.e. Fronto] have been forgotten, the youthful desire for learned attainment has faded..." (Farquharson 1951: 122 f.). Brunt (1974: 2) is also very harsh in his judgment of the *Meditations*' literary value: "Scattered reflections are strung together with rapid changes of topics, logically inconsequential and often wholly unaccountable. [...] Grave eloquence or vivid and poetic imagery alternates with passages that are arid or actually ungrammatical, with mere ejaculations or unconnected extracts from other writers".

[8] "Ce qu'il s'agit de faire œuvre littéraire, ce que n'est, à aucun degré, le livre des *Pensées*" (Grimal 1991: 339). Grimal says that this is the case because Marcus Aurelius wrote only for himself and not for other readers. He also blamed the fact that "Marcus pense en latin, et traduit, mot pour mot" (Grimal 1991: 338). Jäkel (1991: 3) argued that the opposite was the case – the bilinguality of the Emperor enabled him both to think and write in Greek, and the fact that Greek made him more emotionally distant and objective only contributed to the value of his writing.

[9] Rutherford 1989: 43. Joachim Dalfen defended the value of Marcus Aurelius style in his lecture at Munich University (referred to in Hadot 1992: 352, nn. 43 and 44). See also Alexandre 1979 and Hadot 1992: 275–278.

[10] In Polish literature we can find opposing views. Żurek (1997: 183) described the Emperor's work as not designed for publication, lacking in intellectual and formal order and devoid of any literary ambitions. On the other hand, Łapiński (2011: 8–15) has recently conceded to a lack of general, formal order in the work, while at the same time pointing out the existence of smaller portions of the text which display great beauty and literary subtlety along with self-conscious, persuasive power.

[11] For instance, Karadimas (2003) analysed the rhetorical devices in Book Two of Marcus Aurelius' work, focusing on the persuasive function of the text. Rutherford (1989: 13) writes that

course, in antiquity both these dimensions would have been seen as belonging to rhetoric *sensu largo*, but it is interesting that some readers tend to see the imbalance in Marcus Aurelius' text in terms of his use of rhetorical skills. In general, however, most recent critical assessments of the *Meditations* have become increasingly appreciative of both their literary and rhetorical value and their sophistication. Scholars such as Robert Newman[12], Jean-Baptiste Gourinat[13], Angelo Giavatto[14],

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"[I]nasmuch as rhetoric was and is commonly defined as the art of persuasive discourse, whether in speech or in writing, the *Meditations* can be described as rhetorical in this sense". For instance, Grimal, who is rather critical of the literary value of the *Meditations*, does not deny it a persuasive, rhetorical power (Grimal 1997: 26 f., 69–73 and 135 f.). Asmis (1989: 2233–2235) argues that, in general, Marcus does not discount rhetoric as such, even though in his work it mainly serves the purposes of practical philosophy. She also, like other scholars, mentions the influence of Fronto on the Emperor's education and way of writing.

[12] "...the *meditatio* is rhetorical by nature. The paradoxes, *sententiae*, metaphors, and other devices are not simply displays of rhetorical prowess on the part of the author; the very effectiveness of the *meditatio* depends on its ability to counteract ingrained false opinion. Thus, the act of meditation itself has a literary character" (Newman 1989: 1479). According to Newman, Stoic meditation is also fundamentally dialogical in its nature (p. 1480). When it comes to Marcus Aurelius, Newman also classifies four forms of meditation in his work: (1) dialogue, (2) free meditation (in which he gives "preference [...] over the stricter form of repetitive questions and answers. His meditations lack the highly rhetorical style used by Seneca, or even that used by Epictetus"), (3) *sententiae* which are usually "artfully constructed", and (4) metaphors and commonplaces (pp. 1512 f.).

[13] Gourinat (2012: 321) claims that some books, especially II, III, VI and VIII, show a sophisticated, formal structure, while the *Meditations* on the whole lack such structure, because they were "written over the years, at different places". Also the fact that they were not intended for publication contributes, Gourinat claims, to the lack of more conscious rhetorical organisation of the text, even though the French scholar concludes that "the structure [...] is not completely inexistent" (p. 318). He also points out that Marcus Aurelius certainly used rhetoric when composing the concise sentences which are quite often encountered in the *Meditations*; he also classifies parts of the text into three types: descriptive, prescriptive and interrogative. On top of that, he gives a rather long list of "techniques of writing", such as maxims, formulation, and meditation of doctrines, short lists of headings, logical formulation of arguments, self-dialogue, self-exhortation, exercises on impressions, morning meditation for the day to come, reflections on his own position, repetitions and rephrasing of the same thought. These are, at the same time, types of spiritual exercises, which, Gourinat argues, can be traced back to Socrates and Plato (pp. 328 f.).

[14] On the other hand, Giavatto (2012: 334 f.) praises Marcus' style as having "a high degree of a rhetorical refinement". He also tries to describe certain rhetorical strategies and particular devices utilised by the Emperor for the sake of spiritual exercise. For example, the use of words with the *alpha privativum* is intended to reject some particular bad habit through exercise. He also mentions sentences or rather "brief forms", as he calls them. Their aim is to quickly bring to mind longer chains of reasoning or rhetorical syllogisms. The presence of "self-dialogue" or a fictitious dialogue between the master and the disciple is due to the generally "self-educational style of the *Meditations*" (pp. 335–339). Giavatto also demonstrates that Marcus Aurelius uses repetition and variation of the same motif by giving it different forms: descriptive, moral, exhortative, educational, etc. (pp. 339–442).

Michael Erler[15] or Shadi Bartsch[16] demonstrate a close interplay of rhetoric and spiritual exercises.

It seems, therefore, a common understanding that the *Meditations* are a text belonging to a long literary tradition and a text which reveals the fact that its author was very much aware of the existence of other similar texts. Even though Marcus Aurelius probably had no decisive intent of ever publishing the text, both literary and rhetorical refinement can be found in the *Meditations*. Moreover, the Emperor used rhetoric not for display or beauty, but in order to enhance the influence of his spiritual exercises. The purpose of this article is to contribute to the existing literature by analysing selected examples of how rhetoric is used in spiritual exercises by Marcus Aurelius. It is divided in three sections which represent different uses of rhetoric, aiming at achieving the goal of the practical ethics of Stoicism, which is an inner transformation of the mind.

ENUMERATIONS AND LISTS

The first rhetorical technique that I would like to discuss here is *enumeratio*. Rutherford briefly mentions this device in his book[17]. However, he is not entirely appreciative of it and even suggests that at times Marcus Aurelius "runs wild in his enumerations of examples"[18]. Rutherford notes the existence of similar lists in Cleanthes, Plutarch or Epictetus, and even in the New Testament, but he does not analyse their function in those texts[19]. Those "chains" in the *Meditations* can indeed appear as random and without a deeper meaning, but I think that they are, in fact, a part of spiritual exercise. When we take a closer look at those lists, we can see that Marcus Aurelius is, as it were, looking for the right or precise

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[15] Erler (2012: 347) praises the Emperor's literary and rhetorical skills expressed in the *Meditations*, in which "the will to compose a structured work is evident". The German scholar points to the dialogical and oral dimensions of the Emperor's work, which may give an impression of some disorder, but are actually consciously chosen literary and rhetorical devices. The goal that Marcus Aurelius tries to achieve in that way is to engage the reader in his own spiritual practice, inviting the reader to participate in what the author does and, so to speak, exercise together with the author (pp. 348–354). Erler writes: "the *Meditations* do not let the reader become just a witness of the author's philosophical practice; instead, this work must and can become part of the philosophical practice of the reader, be it that of Marcus himself or of another reader" (p. 359).

[16] Bartsch (2009) focused exclusively on the function of metaphor in Marcus Aurelius (and Seneca). She writes about "*a metaphorical approach to the world* in the process of self-formation" (p. 194, her italics). According to her, Stoic meditation should not remain merely logical or abstract; on the contrary, it should engage emotions through rhetorical devices and especially through metaphor: "And yet, reason is not the only tool to hand: in the formation of correct propositional content, metaphor too can play a role in nudging us towards an appropriately Stoic perspective upon externals" (p. 197).

[17] Rutherford 1989: 132 f.

[18] Rutherford 1989: 140.

[19] Rutherford 1989: 133.

name for a certain phenomenon in order to grasp its true essence. In that it resembles a method that Hadot called a "physical definition"[20], that is, stripping a phenomenon down to its bare essence. Every word of such a chain shows a different aspect of the phenomenon in question and brings to mind a different association or emotion. In this way it can be helpful in seeing what the thing really is.

When the Emperor is reflecting on what a human being is, he says: "water, dust, bones, stench" (IX 36)[21], which is quite similar to his earlier description of the affairs of human life, which are compared to a bath: "soap, sweat, dirt, greasy water, all disgusting" (VIII 24)[22]. Of course, those words are not free from emotional resonance. They are in fact suffused with very negative emotions, mostly disgust and spite. It is an interesting strategy, since for Stoics those emotions were clearly πάθη, so we might ask what the point of inducing those pathological passions in the reader was. As I pointed out elsewhere, it is a way to play one pathological judgment/passion off against another in order to create a free space for a healthy one to emerge. In order to free himself from an excessive attachment to his body or to external goods, Marcus Aurelius uses rhetoric to bring about painful emotions associated with them. The intensity of the emotions which are used here is related to the intensity of the attachment to external goods. The Emperor invokes a potentially false representation, which is antagonistic to the one that he tries to fight off: emotionally charted images are introduced in order to fight some other, more dangerous and deeply rooted passions[23]. In other words, since Stoics do not despise the body or physical existence as such, there is no philosophical reason for Marcus to hate those things. But people are so in love with it that, in order to show them the objective perspective, first we have to shock them by introducing opposite passions. The chain is also a gradation, in that it grows in intensity and climaxes towards the end.

Another example is IV 28, which Farquharson understands as the enumeration of different aspects of a despotic ruler, since the climax of this list is the adjective τυραννικόν[24]. But it could also be seen as a series of characters:

> A black character, an unmanly character, a stubborn character; a character resembling a beast, a brute, a child; foolish, crafty, ribald, mercenary, despotic[25].

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[20] Hadot 1992: 122 f.

[21] ὕδωρ, κόνις, ὀστάρια, γράσος.

[22] ἔλαιον, ἱδρώς, ῥύπος, ὕδωρ γλοιῶδες, πάντα σικχαντά.

[23] Stróżyński 2014: 60–69.

[24] Farquharson 1968: 617.

[25] μέλαν ἦθος, θῆλυ ἦθος, περισκελὲς ἦθος, θηριῶδες, βοσκηματῶδες, παιδαριῶδες, βλακικόν, κίβδηλον, βωμολόχον, καπηλικόν, τυραννικόν (translation of Farquharson, modified).

It seems that the aim here is to create an impression that moral evil and human vices are an overwhelming mass, arousing fear, disgust or anger in a Stoic *proficiens*. It may be a list of different people, or different characters, such as we find at the beginning of Book Two, where Marcus says to himself: "I shall meet today inquisitive, ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, uncharitable men" (II 1)[26]. A similar list can also be found elsewhere: "What monstrous pleasures brigands, pathics, parricides, and despots enjoy" (VI 34)[27].

A different type of enumeration is found in IV 44, where not people but evil phenomena are listed:

> Of like fashion is sickness, death, calumny, intrigue, and all that gladdens or saddens the foolish[28].

The paradox is that it is the fool, not the Stoic, that is either happy or unhappy about those things. So why does Marcus Aurelius try to induce negative emotional responses in the reader by accumulating so many evil things in one sentence? Perhaps, the first objective is to "gladden the foolish" and only the second one is to make them realise that there is no reason to be sad, angry or disgusted about those things. In the second step, the exercise is leading back to the essential Stoic position of indifference towards external things which are beyond our control. From this point of view, the enormous mass of evil can be seen not as evil, but as a part of the perfect whole of Nature.

We can notice that not all such chains of words in Marcus are negative; they do not all intend to induce painful emotions in the reader. There are also very positive enumerations, as in IV 49:

> What can prevent your being just, high-minded, temperate, prudent, free from rash judgments, trustful, self-reverent, free[29].

Here Marcus wants, as it were, to "overwhelm" the reader by the power and richness of virtue. Perhaps it is even seen as a contrast to the power of evil, as if all those beautiful traits of virtuous character annihilated the long chain of vices that we encounter daily in our neighbours. Such a juxtaposition of virtues and vices can be seen in IV 16, where Marcus Aurelius writes that when someone turns away from evil and comes back to reason, he may appear in few days like a god to those who previously saw him as a beast or a monkey.

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[26] συντεύξομαι περιέργῳ, ἀχαρίστῳ, ὑβριστῇ, δολερῷ, βασκάνῳ, ἀκοινωνήτῳ.

[27] λῃσταί, κίναιδοι, πατραλοῖαι, τύραννοι.

[28] τοιοῦτον γὰρ καὶ νόσος καὶ θάνατος καὶ βλασφημία καὶ ἐπιβουλὴ καὶ ὅσα τοὺς μωροὺς εὐφραίνει ἢ λυπεῖ.

[29] δίκαιον εἶναι, μεγαλόψυχον, σώφρονα, ἔμφρονα, ἀπρόπτωτον, ἀδιάψευστον, αἰδήμονα, ἐλεύθερον.

A third way the Emperor uses enumerations is designed apparently just to demonstrate how rich, complex, and intricate the world is. For instance:

> Can't you see the plants, the birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees each doing his own work (V 1)[30].

This chain of different living beings may not express, but does at least suggest, how complex the rational harmony of Nature is, in which innumerable things act harmoniously for the benefit of the whole. The reader is invited to think about all those things, which amount to the great, diversified perfection of Nature. The examples given by the Emperor concern animals which are small or can be considered unimportant. It seems that Marcus Aurelius wants to point out three things in this brief enumeration. The first is that every single part of the world, however irrelevant it may seem to us, plays a significant role in the whole. The second is that we as humans tend to overestimate our privileged role in the universe, while from the "cosmic perspective"[31] we are not that different from ants. The third thing is that in his list the Emperor includes the animals which appear to be "social" and cooperative, such as ants and bees, in order to emphasise that our role in Nature's design is also to work for the benefit of the whole.

Another example is the passage from IV 32, where Marcus Aurelius says that everything is happening exactly the same now as during the reign of Vespasian:

> men marrying, bringing up children, falling ill, dying, fighting, feasting, trading, farming, flattering, asserting themselves, suspecting, plotting, praying for another's death, murmuring at the present, lusting, heaping up riches, setting their heart on offices and thrones[32].

Here enumeration shows the complexity of human affairs, with the conclusion that they are all gone. The rhetorical effect is reached by the contrast between richness and the fact that all those things are brought to nothing, like smoke vanishing into thin air, devoured by time. The more rich life is, the more striking the nothingness that everything vanishes into. Marcus Aurelius shows the totality of transience, of the eternal flux of things – it is expressed much more powerfully than it would have been if he had simply said that people did many different things which are all now gone.

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[30] οὐ βλέπεις τὰ φυτάρια, τὰ στρουθάρια, τοὺς μύρμηκας, τοὺς ἀράχνας, τὰς μελίσσας τὸ ἴδιον ποιούσας, τὸ καθ'αὑτὰς συγκοσμούσας κόσμον;

[31] Hadot 1992: 155–160, 188–196.

[32] γαμοῦντας, παιδοτροφοῦντας, νοσοῦντας, ἀποθνῄσκοντας, πολεμοῦντας, ἑορτάζοντας, ἐμπορευομένους, γεωργοῦντας, κολακεύοντας, αὐθαδιζομένους, ὑποπτεύοντας, ἐπιβουλεύοντας, ἀποθανεῖν τινας εὐχομένους, γογγύζοντας ἐπὶ τοῖς παροῦσιν, ἐρῶντας, θησαυρίζοντας, ὑπατείας, βασιλείας ἐπιθυμοῦντας.

The Emperor also uses this technique when he enumerates personal names. It happens several times in the *Meditations*, for example in IV 33, where he mentions great historical figures, now dead.

> Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, Dentatus; a little after, Scipio too and Cato; then also Augustus, then also Hadrian and Antoninus.

Marcus repeats their names in order to show that, as he himself states in another place, "name is a sound and an echo" (V 33)[33]. We associate names with significant historical figures, but they are in fact non-existent, they are simply not there, which makes their names γλωσσήματα, that is unintelligible names. On the one hand, they are unintelligible because they are no longer used, like certain expressions in the works of archaic poets, but on the other hand, they are just meaningless, no-one knows any more who or what they once referred to. Here Marcus Aurelius does not seem to believe in the survival of the human soul after death. Enumerating these meaningless names allows the reader to experience in a way their very emptiness.

Rutherford considers those enumerations as monotonous[34] and Judith Perkins who writes about "the monotonous catenation of death" is of a similar opinion. She even claims that "[t]he effect of this repeated textual attention to death, however, is not a sense of the author's peaceful acceptance, but rather a feeling that death held a smothering omnipresence for him"[35]. However, this does not seem to be accurate. The chain of names quoted above is quite moving, when we think that Hadrian and especially Antoninus were highly valued and loved by Marcus himself. The name that does not appear, but that the reader must think of too in this sequence, is the very name of the author of the *Meditations*. He knows that he is soon to follow his predecessors. But it is not an expression of fear or sadness, rather an exercise whose purpose is to render those names meaningless in order to realise that, from the point of view of the universe, the existence and death of those people, including Marcus himself, is unimportant, so it should not excite any emotions at all.

There are also variants of enumeration which are chains of short definitions, aimed at showing the essence of things as if in one glimpse of truth. For example:

> The Universe is change, life is opinion (IV 3)[36].
>
> Asia and Europe are corners in the Universe; every sea, a drop in the Universe;

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[33] τὸ δὲ ὄνομα ψόφος καὶ ἀπήχημα.

[34] Rutherford 1989: 140.

[35] Perkins 1992: 268.

[36] ὁ κόσμος ἀλλοίωσις, ὁ βίος ὑπόληψις.

> Mount Athos, a clod of earth in the Universe, every instant of time, a pin-prick of eternity (VI 36)[37].
>
> Again: marble, an incrustation of earth; gold and silver, sediments; your dress, the hair of animals; the purple dye, blood (IX 36)[38].

Usually, the physical definition is a longer process of achieving a clear mental representation of a phenomenon. Here we can see an abbreviated forms of this process or rather an attempt to give a reminder of what is already present in the mind. It is not an exercise for beginners; one has to already have an understanding that "the Universe is change", previously acquired and repeated continuously, to be able to benefit from this succinct reminder of this truth.

At times the Emperor also creates a chain of opposites, as in VI 2:

> 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[39].

It is also to show the complexity of life, but at the same time the indifference of things that are beyond the moral realm. The external things which are beyond our control can meet our emotional expectations or not, but regardless of that, their moral value is the same; they are essentially indifferent. Marcus Aurelius invites the reader here to imagine that he is warm and comfortable or that he is cold and uncomfortable, in order to realise that neither of those states contributes to our being rational and virtuous (or takes anything significant away from us, for that matter).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Emperor also uses a method consisting of accumulating questions. Questions as such appear very often in the *Meditations* and they are a part of the tradition of the diatribe, which influenced his work. The diatribe, which originated in the Cynic school and only later spread to other philosophical traditions, was both practical and interactive, which corresponded to the nature of Cynicism. The dialogical character of diatribe imitates a live dialogue with a teacher or

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[37] ἡ Ἀσία, ἡ Εὐρώπη γωνίαι τοῦ κόσμου· πᾶν πέλαγος σταγὼν τοῦ κόσμου· Ἄθως βωλάριον τοῦ κόσμου· πᾶν τὸ ἐνεστὼς τοῦ χρόνου στιγμὴ τοῦ αἰῶνος.

[38] πῶροι γῆς τὰ μάρμαρα καὶ ὑποστάθμαι ὁ χρυσός, ὁ ἄργυρος, καὶ τριχία τὸ ἐσθὴς καὶ αἷμα ἡ πορφύρα.

[39] μὴ διαφέρου πότερον ῥιγῶν ἢ θαλπόμενος τὸ πρέπον ποιεῖς, καὶ πότερον νυστάζων ἢ ἱκανῶς ὕπνου ἔχων, καὶ πότερον κακῶς ἀκούων ἢ εὐφημούμενος, καὶ πότερον ἀποθνῃσκων ἢ πράττων τι ἀλλοῖον.

a philosopher, but also draws the reader's attention to practical issues and away from thinking which is dissociated from daily life and moral conduct.

Marcus Aurelius also tries to engage both himself and the potential reader in the exercise by using questions and answers. These play an important role as the means to enter the dialogue not only with conceptual thinking, but also with imagination and emotions. As a result, the reader ceases to be a mere witness of the Emperor's soliloquy and becomes an active participant in the whole process. For example:

> 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? (VI 43)[40]

There are also passages in which the Emperor combines the technique of accumulating questions with the already discussed technique of enumeration (as in the third question):

> Which of these is lovely because it is praised or corrupted because it is blamed?
> Does an emerald become worse than it was, if it be not praised?
> And what of gold, ivory, purple, a lute, a sword-blade, a flower-bud, a little plant? (IV 20)[41]

Or:

> Were you born then to please yourself; in fact for feeling, not for action?
> Can't you see the plants, the birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees each doing his own work, helping to adjust a world? (V 1)[42]

It seems at times that the Emperor uses questions to "wake up" the reader, to shake habitual, automatic ways of thinking, in order to suggest something new. In such cases, the questions are very short, leaving no space for immediate answers or reflections, appearing in a way to "attack" or "cross-examine" the reader:

> What more do you ask?
> To go on in your mere existence?
> Well then, to enjoy your senses, your impulses?

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[40] μήτι ὁ Ἥλιος τὰ τοῦ Ὑετίου ἀξιοῖ ποιεῖν; μήτι Ἀσκλεπιὸς τὰ τῆς Καρποφόρου; τί δὲ τῶν ἄστρων ἕκαστον; οὐχι διάφορα μέν, συνεργὰ δὲ πρὸς ταὐτόν;

[41] τί τούτων διὰ τὸ ἐπαινεῖσθαι καλὸν ἐστιν ἢ ψεγόμενον φθείρεται; Σμαράγδιον γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ χεῖρον γίνεται, ἐὰν μὴ ἐπαινῆται; τί δὲ χρυσός, ἐλέφας, πορφύρα, λύρα, μαχαίριον, ἀνθύλλιον, δενδρύφιον;

[42] πρὸς τὸ ἥδεσθαι οὖν γέγονας, ὅλως δὲ πρὸς πεῖσιν, οὐ πρὸς ἐνέργειαν; οὐ βλέπεις τὰ φυτάρια, τὰ στρουθάρια, τοὺς μύρμηκας, τοὺς ἀράχνας, τὰς μελίσσας τὸ ἴδιον ποιούσας, τὸ καθ'αὑτὰς συγκοσμούσας κόσμος;

> To wax and then to wane?
> To employ your tongue, your intelligence?
> Which of these do you suppose is worth your longing? (XII 31)[43]

Or (again, with enumeration):

> Whose soul have I at present?
> A child's, a boy's, a woman's, a despot's, a dumb animal's, a dangerous beast's? (V 11)[44]

Sometimes there are not only questions, but questions with answers, thus imitating a philosophical dialogue between two people, a master and a disciple. The dialogue is far from being cold and logical, as stereotypes about Stoics would suggest. As I have pointed out, it is, above all, practical, experiential, close to daily life and aimed at engaging the whole person of the reader. It is fervent, quick, and thus emotionally engaging:

> – And then you refuse to do a man's office and don't make haste to do what is according to your own nature.
> – But a man needs rest as well.
> – I agree, he does, yet Nature assigns limits to rest, as well as to eating and drinking, and you nevertheless go beyond her limits, beyond what is sufficient. (V 1)[45]

Marcus Aurelius plays here two different roles. One is that of a severe master, asking and admonishing his disciple, and the other is that of a disciple who is ultimately forced to agree with a powerful spiritual authority, but is also at times hesitant, skeptical or even slightly rebellious:

> Enough of this wretched way of life, of complaining and mimicry.
> Why are you troubled?
> What novelty is there in this?
> What takes you out of yourself?
> The formal side of things? Look it in the face.
> The material side then? Face that.
> Besides these there is nothing, except even now at this late hour to become simpler and better in your relation to the gods. To acquaint yourself with these things for a hundred years or for three is the same. (IX 37)[46]

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[43] τί ἐπιζητεῖς; τὸ διαγίνεσθαι; ἀλλὰ τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι; τὸ ὁρμᾶν; τὸ αὔξεσθαι; Τὸ λήγειν αὖθις; τὸ φωνῇ χρῆσθαι; τὸ διανοεῖσθαι; τί τούτων πόθου σοι ἄξιον δοκεῖ;

[44] τίνος ἄρα νῦν ἔχω ψυχήν; μήτι παιδίου; μήτι μειρακίου; μήτι φυναικαρίου; μήτι τυράννου; μήτι κτήνους; μήτι θηρίου;

[45] ἔπειτα σύ οὐ θέλεις τὰ ἀνθρωπικὰ ποιεῖν' οὐ τρέχεις ἐπὶ τὸ κατὰ τὴν σὴν φύσιν' ἀλλὰ δεῖ ἀναπαύεσθαι. δεῖ' φημὶ κἀγώ' ἔδωκε μέντοι καὶ τούτου μέτρα ἡ φύσις, ἔδωκε μέντοι καὶ τοῦ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν, καὶ ὅμως σὺ ὑπὲρ τὰ μέτρα, ὑπὲρ τὰ ἀρκοῦντα προχωρεῖς.

[46] Ἅλις τοῦ ἀθλίου βίου καὶ γογγυσμοῦ καὶ πιθηκισμοῦ. – τί ταράσσῃ; τί τούτων καινόν; τί σε ἐξίστησι; τὸ αἴτιον; ἴδε αὐτό. ἀλλ'ἡ ὕλη; ἴδε αὐτήν. ἔξω δὲ τούτων οὐδέν ἔστιν' ἀλλὰ καὶ

Or:

> Will any man despise me? Let him see to it. But I will see to it that I may not be found doing or saying anything that deserves to be despised.
> Will he hate me? Let him see to it. But I will be kind and well-disposed to every man. (XI 13)[47]

Sometimes those dialogues can be very quick, with the questions and responses short:

> You have reason? Yes, I have!
> Why not use it then? If this is doing its part, what else do you want? (IV 13)[48]

It is not because the answers are given without consideration. The Stoics exercised in order to be ready to form a correct judgment in any situation and the situations are often unexpected, surprising, leaving no room for calm, inner debate. We react immediately: the problem is that mostly we do so in an irrational way. Stoic exercises prepare us for immediate, but rational reactions. The mind should find correct judgments of various life situations as quickly as possible. In order to do so, we should prepare in advance, meditate on various possibilities and on our reactions to them, and, first and foremost, make the Stoic way of seeing the world something natural, habitual and automatic. As I pointed out earlier, it is not for beginners, but for those who have already assimilated the Stoic dogmas and have a correct understanding of the world. The questions and answers are abbreviated, the exchange is quick, because it is rather invoking the truth already present in the mind than searching for it. As in:

> Does a man do wrong? He does wrong to himself.
> Has some chance befallen you? It is well. (IV 26)[49]

THE POSITIVE AND THE NEGATIVE, SUPERLATIVES AND DIMINUTIVES

Towards the end I would like to briefly discuss two other rhetorical methods which can be found in the *Meditations*. The first one is an exercise in finding positive, good or even pleasant aspects in things that appear negative, terrifying, painful, disgusting etc. For example, in VII 18 the Emperor points out that

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πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς ἤδη ποτὲ ἁπλούστερος καὶ χρηστότερος γενοῦ. Ἴσον τὸ ἑκατὸν ἔτεσι καὶ τὸ τρισί ταῦτα ἱστορῆσαι.

[47] καταφρονήσει μού τις; ὄψεται. ἐγὼ δὲ ὄψεται. ἐγὼ δὲ ὄψομαι ἵνα μή τι καταφρονέσεως ἄξιον πράσσων ἢ λέγων εὑρίσκωμαι. Μίσησει; ὄψεται. ἀλλὰ ἐγὼ εὐμενὴς καὶ εὔνους παντὶ.

[48] λόγον ἔχεις; ἔχω. τί οὖν οὐ χρᾷς; τούτου γὰρ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ποιοῦντας τί ἄλλο θέλεις;

[49] ἁμαρτάνει τις; ἑαυτῷ ἁμαρτάνει. Συμβέβηκέ σοί τι; καλῶς.

people are habitually afraid of changes, but change as such is a precondition for many good things which we desire:

> Is it change that a man fears?
> Why, what can have come to be without change, and what is dearer or more familiar to Universal Nature?
> Can you yourself take your bath, unless the firewood changes?
> Can you be nourished, unless what you eat changes?
> Can any other service be accomplished without change? (VII 18)[50]

Without change we could not live at all. The problem is that there are some types of change we do not approve of due to our attachment to certain things. Marcus Aurelius tries to show himself and the reader that change is not only necessary, but also desirable. Even "death", understood as the end of every phenomenon, is something good and pleasant. The Emperor uses various *similia* to undo our habitual ways of thinking and to shake the mind in order to enable it to see things from a new and different perspective. Even death of the self, which is generally conceived as one of the most terrible things, can be looked at as something good.

The change of something terrifying and painful into something pleasant is achieved by Marcus Aurelius through the use of rhetorical means. For instance, when he describes Nature as making things as if out of wax:

> Universal Nature out of its whole material, as from wax, models now the figure of a horse, then melting this down uses the material for a tree, next for a man, next for something else. And these, every one, subsists for a very brief while. (VII 23)[51]

The Emperor introduces the context of a child's game in order to dismantle the potentially horrifying climate of his *meditatio mortis*. In the first example, images of sensual pleasure – bathing, eating, resting – were invoked to bring about a change of perspective. Here it is the image of play and of a certain illusory quality of reality: things do not happen seriously, for real, but like in a game of sorts. Marcus Aurelius offers his own *similia* here to exemplify this idea.

Another example is showing that things that appear ugly or evil are in fact a part of a cosmic harmony and are ultimately good and beneficial:

> 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,

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[50] φοβεῖταί τις μεταβολήν; τί γὰρ δύναται χωρὶς μεταβολῆς γενέσθαι; τί δὲ φίλτερον ἢ οἰκειότερον τῇ τῶν ὅλων φύσει; σὺ δὲ αὐτὸς λούσασθαι δύνασαι, ἐὰν μὴ τὰ ξύλα μεταβάλῃ; τραφῆναι δὲ δύνασαι, ἐὰν μὴ τὰ ἐδώδιμα μεταβάλῃ; ἄλλο δέ τι τῶν χρησίμων δύναται συντελεσθῆναι χωρὶς μεταβολῆς;

[51] Ἡ τῶν ὅλων φύσις ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας ὡς κήροῦ νῦν μὲν ἵππάριον ἔπλασε, συγχέασα δὲ τοῦτο εἰς δενδρύφιον συνεχρήσατο τῇ ὕλῃ αὐτοῦ· εἶτα εἰς ἄνθρωπάριον· εἶτα εἰς ἄλλο τι· ἕκαστον δὲ τοῦτον πρὸς ὀλίγιστον ὑπέστη.

> imagine them to be contrary to what you reverence, but reflect upon the fountain of all things. (VI 36)[52]

A similar strategy can be found in III 2, where the Emperor tries to point to the beauty of imperfections, such as cracks on the bread, the lion's wrinkled brow, the foam flowing from the boar's mouth and old people's faces.

The last example of Marcus Aurelius' use of rhetoric are diminutives and superlatives. For example, in already quoted passage about Nature creating things as if out of wax, every being is in the diminutive form: ἱππάριον, δενδρύφιον and ἀνθρωπάριον. Moreover, the brevity of their existence is also expressed by the superlative: ὀλίγιστον.

Grimal suggests that diminutives in Marcus Aurelius have no function at all. He points out that in Epictetus πνεῦμα has already been replaced by πνευμάτιον without any change in meaning, so the Emperor uses those forms without alluding to anything[53]. This may be so at times, but in the quoted passage, as well as the one below, the presence of other expressions suggesting smallness seems to augment the impact of the diminutive in such a way that it is hardly conceivable that for Marcus they would not sound like diminutives any more.

> Little the life each lives, little the corner of the earth he lives in, little even the longest fame hereafter, and even that dependent on a succession of poor mortals, who will very soon be dead. (III 10)[54]

Here ἀνθρωπαρίων is preceded by the double μικρόν as well as by the superlatives μηκίστη and τάχιστα. Γωνίδιον is used to describe the part of the earth that is inhabited by humans, just as in IV 3 the whole earth is compared to a point (στιγμή). Also in V 24, the immensity of the totality of matter is juxtaposed with the smallness of the human body, and the immensity of time itself is contrasted with the brevity of human life (συμπάσης – ὀλίγιστον).

The purpose of these superlatives and diminutives is to show what Pierre Hadot called a "view from above" or what could be called a "cosmic perspective". That was a commonly practiced Stoic exercise whose aim was first to question the human conviction of the importance of human affairs, and one's own affairs for that matter, and second, to induce a contemplative or even mystical experience in which the very perspective from which the world is viewed shifts from the individual and the egoistic towards the universal, altruistic and divine. Marcus Aurelius does not merely uses logical arguments to demonstrate

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[52] τὸ χάσμα τοῦ λέοντος καὶ τὸ δηλητήριον καὶ πᾶσα κακουργία, ὡς ἄκανθα, ὡς βόρβορος, ἐκείνων ἐπιγεννήματα τῶν σεμνῶν καὶ καλῶν. Μὴ οὖν αὐτὰ ἀλλίτρια τούτου οὗ σέβεις φαντάζου, ἀλλὰ τὴν πάντων πηγὴν ἐπιλογίζου.

[53] Grimal 1991: 339.

[54] μικρὸν μὲν οὖν ὃ ζῇ ἕκαστος· μικρὸν δὲ τὸ τῆ γῆς γωνίδιον ὅπου ζῇ· μικρὸν δὲ καὶ ἡ μήκίστη ὑστεροφημία καὶ αὕτη δὲ κατὰ διαδοχὴν ἀνθρωπαρίων τάχιστα τεθνηξομένων.

that a human life is brief, a human body small and the whole human world relatively unimportant to the universe. He uses rhetoric to shatter that conviction through emotional responses to words.

CONCLUSION

The examples selected above do not exhaust the problem of the complex use of rhetoric in the *Meditations*, but they demonstrate that Marcus Aurelius was not reluctant to use what he learnt from his teachers of the *ars rhetorica*. Moreover, he shows his mastery of this subject, not for mere display, but for enhancing the impact which his spiritual exercise have on his own mind and the mind of whoever happens to read the *Meditations*. Perhaps Marcus Aurelius personally struggled with his "books", with rhetoric, literature and the formal education of his time, because he felt that there was something more important – the practice of a philosophical life, that is, constant attention to whatever happens moment to moment and the constant exercise of seeing things as they really are, not as they appear to our foolish mind. He probably saw rhetoric as a potential distractor or even a possible obstacle on his spiritual way, but he managed, in the end, to use it as a tool for his own purpose.

But if we take a closer look at how exactly he did that in his work, we can see that he actually enjoyed working with words, that it was not merely something he knew he had to do, but probably a true pleasure for him. This presents a different image of Marcus Aurelius than many of us have been accustomed to. In the place of a melancholy, ascetic Emperor, constantly pining for a quiet life, but forced to do public service, we can see a brilliant, educated intellectual of the Second Sophistic period who likes to engage himself and the potential reader not only in spiritual work, but also in a play with words, images and ideas, who tries to see the world in a new, fresh way every time, who admires the complex beauty of the universe and tries to reflect this beauty in his own thinking and writing.

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