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Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* and Its Interpretation With Christian Contemporary Thought

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Abstract:

Often regarded as one of the key Stoic works, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* is a demonstration of the importance of self-reflection and Stoic ideals. His life was one of war and turmoil that influenced his possibly autobiographical writings over the years during his time campaigning during the Marcomannic wars. Since his death, the manuscripts remaining have been altered and interpreted in various ways. I speculate that *Meditations* being framed in the Christian lens is one of the most significant ways it's relevant today as it demonstrates the way contemporary ideas are imprinted onto classical work. Translators and readers of *Meditations* such as Wilhelm Xylander and Meric Casaubon understood Marcus' ideas with a Christian lens in the era of Scholasticism where ancient text was interpreted through the lens of Christianity as a way to attempt to reconcile theology with ancient philosophy. Additionally, Neostoicism, the emergence of Stoicism during the Enlightenment has been intertwined with Christian ideals. Alongside Christianity, historians also speculate that Marcus' writing is an early example of the understanding of self and individualism that came from the late Roman and Greek era of the city-state. *Meditations* is also a demonstration of the human understanding of the unity of the world and the relationship people have with others, which can be seen in the connection between ancient philosophy and modern theology.

Roman emperor Marcus Antonious Aurelius¹ *Meditations* provides a rare glance into the thoughts and contemplations of a ruler of the 2nd century CE. Similar to most ancient texts, it is left up to historians and the reader to understand any message he may have intended in his writing, which was likely not intended for anyone but himself. In this way, Marcus' writing is distinct in its self-awareness and divisiveness of individual moral choice, something that is striking in the era of Roman rule. As an individual, Marcus emphasizes the importance of relationships with others and the unity of the universe. Using his writing, scholars have often interpreted his work as having some kind of Christian message, even against his expressed pantheistic values. As one of the earliest examples we have of personal writings, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* and its interpretations remain significant as an example of how contemporary ideas are imprinted onto classical work. *Meditations* has often been interpreted through a Christo-centric lens in regards to its self-reflective values and understanding of the inner self. Christian ideology is what translators and historians knew and could connect with the world at large, leading ancient texts to be understood through those lenses, despite historical context. Moreover, compared to other scholastic interpretations of ancient philosophy, interpretations of *Meditations* are especially remarkable because they make attempts at understanding someone's internal thoughts rather than those made to be read.

Marcus' Life and Context

Marcus was born in April 121 CE as Marcus Annius Verus, the same name as his father and grandfather.² At the age of three, his father died. From then on, he was raised by his mother, the noblewoman Domita Calvilla and paternal grandfather. Growing up in the rich aristocracy of Rome, Marcus was brought into excellent education almost immediately. Marcus' family insisted on educating him at home and hired a fleet of tutors to teach him subjects from Greek to art.³ In this way, they ensured he would be able to retain the values of stoicism and austerity.^{4 5} Marcus

¹ For the purpose of this paper I will refer to Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus as just "Marcus," as most historians also do in order to reduce the confusion of his multiple titles.

² William Wotton, *The History of Rome, From the Death of Antonius Pius to the Death of Severus Alexander* (London: Queens Head, 1701), 1. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015063907946>.

³ Anthony R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2000), 34-35. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=166108&ppg=1>.

⁴ Frank McLynn, *Marcus Aurelius: A Life* (Massachusetts: De Capo Press, 2009), 20-21. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=625138&ppg=1>.

⁵ Public school was believed to corrupt minds at the time and so education at home was the ideal for those who could afford it. Stoicism had been incorporated into Roman culture through Hellenistic influence and was taught to maintain the old values of tradition.

first became interested in philosophy at ages 11 to 12, under the influence of his tutors Diognetus and Alexander of Cotieum.⁶

Marcus' succession into the imperial family was not strictly hereditary. Before he died in 138 CE, Emperor Hadrian announced Antoninus Pius as his new heir. Under Hadrian's wishes, Antoninus then adopted⁷ his wife's nephew Marcus and Hadrian's adopted grandson Lucius. At the age of 17, Marcus was now in line as a successor to the emperor. He was reportedly dismayed to be adopted into the imperial family as he had notions of the evils of imperial power—something that might hint at his later contemplations in his writing. At points in *Meditations* he recognizes his duty as a ruler, for example: “My city and country, as I am Antoninus, is Rome; but, as I am a man, 'tis the universe. That alone, therefore, which is profitable to those cities, can be good to me.”⁸ The following year after his adoption, he became a public official. Soon after, he became consul to Pius.⁹

As he got older, Marcus' involvement in Roman government became even more inescapable. His adoptive father, Antoninus Pius died in 161 CE.¹⁰ Following this, as heir, Marcus appointed his younger adoptive brother Lucius to function as his co-emperor of sorts. Unfortunately, Lucius died of a stroke just eight years later. This is where Marcus' unitary rule began. Compared to the reign of Antoninus Pius, Rome was calm and peaceful but Marcus Aurelius' era was marked by warfare and struggle.¹¹ Regardless, Marcus' is considered as one of the last five good emperors of Rome.¹² Around the same time as Lucius' death, the Marcomannic wars¹³ began and were combined with casualties from the plague. Marcus' period of loss was not over yet, however, as he lost his seven year old son right before setting out on the front.¹⁴

⁶ Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography*, 37.

⁷ In this case, the switch of the paternal figure is known as adoption in Roman society. (Marcus was adopted by Pius not Verus)

⁸ Marcus Aurelius, *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, trans. Francis Hutcheson and James Moor (Indianapolis: Library Fund Inc., 2008), 80. http://files.libertyfund.org/files/2133/Aurelius_1464_LFeBk.pdf.

⁹ Anthony R. Birley, “Early Life: Family, Youth, and Education,” in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 142-144.

¹⁰ Werner Eck, “The Political State of the Roman Empire,” in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 93. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

¹¹ Eck, “The Political State of the Roman Empire,” 97.

¹² Julia Bruch and Katrin Herrmann, “The Reception of the Philosopher King in Antiquity and the Medieval Age,” in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 494. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

¹³ Frank McLynn, *Marcus Aurelius: A Life*, The Marcomannic wars were a series of wars that lasted from 166-180 CE and involved the Germanic Marcomanni and others along the Roman Empire's northern border, the Danube river.

¹⁴ Birley, “Early Life: Family, Youth, and Education,” 165.

In the following eight year period, Marcus was on military campaign (169-176 CE) at the Northern border of the empire. This is considered the series of years he wrote *Meditations*.¹⁵ At this time, Marcus is recorded as being quite physically weak and later lost his wife. He often reflects on loss and death in *Meditations*. After his time at the front, Marcus returned to Rome for less than two years and then campaigned some more. Around 180 CE he fell ill and then died less than a decade later in March 189 a little before his 59th birthday.¹⁶

The actual structure of *Meditations* consists of twelve organized books assembled in chronological chapters. Historians debate whether it has any structure at all.¹⁷ This is further perpetuated by the fact that when compared to the contemporary copies, ancient manuscripts provide less clarity between chapters. However, dominant themes are still present in each book. Originally, it was written in Koine Greek, considered the language of philosophy at the time and one of the languages he was strongly tutored in. The first book opens with Marcus showing gratitude for the various figures in his life for the values they bestowed upon him. Aside from the first book, *Meditations* is not as autobiographical or organized. Books II-XII consist of iterations of the ideas of unity, self-awareness, and moral statute. For the actual writing style, historians have often discussed his use of rhetoric and metaphor.¹⁸

After his death, Marcus' work was not very well known, but was referred to in passing several times until the fifteenth century. The first recorded reference of his work as a book is from the philosopher Themistius, several centuries later in 364 CE. For four centuries there are no other mentions until around 907 CE. Arethas, a collector of many manuscripts, sent a collection of *Meditations* to Demetrius, Archbishop of Heraclea, keeping a newer copy to himself. Furthermore, in the 2nd century CE Tzetzes, a grammarian of Constantinople, attributes quotes from Marcus' work.¹⁹ ²⁰ The theory that Marcus Aurelius intended his writings as a sort of guide for his son and heir Commodus originates from the 14th century, within the Byzantine

¹⁵ Mateo Ceperina, "The *Meditations*," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 46. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

¹⁶ Birley, "Early Life: Family, Youth, and Education," 144.

¹⁷ Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, "The Form and Structure of *Meditations*," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 317. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

¹⁸ Angelo Giavatto, "The Style of *Meditations*," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 333-336.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

¹⁹ A.S.L Farquharson, introduction to *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Antonius*, ed. A.S.L Farquharson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), xv-xviii.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ed/Meditations_of_the_Emperor_Marcus_Antoninus_-_Volume_1_-_Farquharson_1944.pdf.

²⁰ Ceperina, "The *Meditations*," 48.

historian Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos' *Ecclesical History*, a recounting of history from the birth of Christ into the 3rd century. From this period onward, *Meditations* remained still quite unknown or solely interspersed with other classical texts. Its manuscripts were passed from one learned hand to another.

It was not until the mid-16th century that the first printed edition was made. These printed editions are the main basis of what is read today. In 1558 Zurich, Andreas Gesner published an edition of *Meditations* translated into Latin by German Classical scholar Wilhelm Xylander. This version is attributed to an introduction in which Xylander fails to tie the writings to Stoicism and the reminiscence of a lost manuscript. The manuscript Xylander used to translate and create Gesner's book became known as the Codex Palatinus or simply "P" or "T" was subsequently lost.²¹ Other than P, another manuscript existed around the same time known as the Codex Vaticanus 1950 or "A" but is partially incomplete with 42 lines missing here and there.²² Despite this, it is the most complete manuscript that exists today. In comparison, A and P were in constant discourse with each other in both translation and entirety.²³

The 1558 printed *Meditations* was only made into two different editions, but became rare in only half a century since its publication. This printed edition also followed the printing of a pseudo-historical recounting of Marcus Aurelius' life and letters called the *Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius* written by the Spanish bishop Antonio de Guevara in 1528. Though crude forgery, this book became a best seller and was translated into all the European languages.^{24 25} Less than a century later, Meric Casaubon penned the first English translation known as *Marcus Aurelius and His Meditations Concerning Himself: Treatings of a Natural Man's Happiness: Wherein Consisteth and of the Means to Attain unto it* in 1634, which outwardly criticizes Xylander's edition.²⁶ This version has been critiqued over the years, and has often been overshadowed by another English translation made at the same time by Thomas Gataker. However, Casaubon's edition is where the title "Meditations" is supposed to have originated

²¹ A.S.L Farquharson, *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Antonius*, xx-xxii.

²² Several other manuscripts are notable as having existed at some time, though impartial. These include the Codex Parisinus 319 or "C," Codex Darmstadtus 2773 or "D," and Codex Monacensis 529 or "Mo."

²³ For more on the codices and discourse between manuscripts see Farquharson's introduction.

²⁴ Jill Kraye, "Marcus Aurelius and Neostoicism in Early Modern Philosophy," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 516.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

²⁵ Rivero, Horacio Chiong., and Antonio de Guevara. *The Rise of Pseudo-Historical Fiction: Fray Antonio de Guevara's Novelizations*. New York: P. Lang, 2004.

²⁶ A.S.L Farquharson, *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Antonius*, xlv.

from.²⁷ In the following few centuries, several other English translations were made such as Jeremy Collier's in 1701 which is deemed too colloquial and George Long's in 1862 which is regarded as one of the best.²⁸ From these translations comes forewords and notes from individual authors which add in personal touches to historical ideas.

Marcus' Religious Belief and *Meditations* Through Scholasticism

Historical documents and work are often interpreted through translator's and reader's personal philosophies. Because of this, classical thought is often written about and understood through contemporary ideas that may not reflect the actual intentions behind the original compositions. As a piece of work written two thousands years ago, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* has been presumed to be representative of Christian ideas despite its actual context and origins. However, Marcus' work is not alone in this as several Christian centric translations of ancient work came out of the Enlightenment movement of Scholasticism.

On his own, Marcus used *Meditations* as a source of spiritual analysis and a way to reinforce his own pantheistic beliefs. For centuries, the individual had stood as an inseparable part of the state. With an increase of wealth, Roman men were given the opportunity to be able to pursue intellectual thought in both education and time.²⁹ In this space for contemplation, Marcus was given the opportunity to try to understand himself. Written in a time of divisive religious persecution and philosophical turnpoints, Marcus often makes reference to "God" or "gods" and the human duty to serve them and their involvement in human affairs. "Undertake each action as one aware he may next moment depart out of life. To depart from men, if there be really Gods, can have nothing terrible in it. The Gods will involve you in no evil."³⁰ Remarkably at several places in his writing, Marcus himself seems to struggle with his understanding of religion as well. British academic and historian P.A. Brunt breaks down the perceived origins and meanings behind *Meditations*, specifically Marcus' relationship with spirituality. Throughout his work, Marcus often questions the meaning behind the gods.³¹ "What further, then, should I desire, if my

²⁷ John Sellars, "The Meditations and the Ancient Art of Living," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 458.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

²⁸ C.R. Haines, introduction to *The Communings With Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Emperor of Rome: Together With His Speeches and Sayings*, ed. C.R. Haines (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), xvii-xix. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1_b4379783.

²⁹ Moore, "Individualism and Religion in the Early Roman Empire," 227.

³⁰ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 36.

³¹ P.A. Brunt, "Marcus Aurelius in His Meditations," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 64 (1974): 15-16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/299256>.

present action be such as becoming an intellectual and social being, subject to the same law with the Gods?”³² He also expresses no warm and passionate convictions unlike other Stoics.³³ Brunt asserts that, “If practice and prayer had been more important in Marcus’ spiritual life, we should surely have heard more about it in his intimate diary.”³⁴

Despite Marcus’ own understanding of spirituality, historical interpretations of *Meditations* have often pushed it within religious bounds. In a remarkable amount of translations and editions, authors have made consistent attempts to tie *Meditations* within the context of Christianity. Translators of Marcus’ writing have connected it to the Bible and Christian ideals. Xylander, the translator of the first printed translation, often quotes the Bible to make linguistic points with Marcus’ use of Greek words or attempts to tie his metaphors to Psalms. These impressions were further expanded on in later editions. Thomas Gataker, another translator from around the same time, also often discusses Christ. Meric Casuabon, who wrote the first English translation of *Meditations* often makes ties between Marcus’ words and the New and Old Testament.³⁵ Classics professor Amy Richlin writes, “From the beginning, promising moral guidance, they [translators] write as Christians to Christians, in a world in which education was largely Christian.”³⁶ Interestingly, however, Marcus does mention Christians in his writing a couple times, though not in a partisan way.³⁷ Richlin describes that Christianity was more of a social problem in Marcus’ reign rather than of religious significance to the ruler.³⁸

For the era of the English editions in the late Renaissance, the consistent connection of Christian rhetoric to Stoic text is understood as the movement of Neostoicism, in which ancient Stoicism was revitalized alongside Christianity. Stoicism does pose several similarities with Christian rhetoric, however, these are present themes in several kinds of philosophy. For example, both Stoicism and Christianity preach for the freeness of the inner self in order to reach true sanctum.³⁹ However, the connection between Greek and Roman philosophy and Christian ideals was not a new idea and had in fact existed since Medieval times, as Neostoicism can be

³² Aurelius, *Meditations*, 115.

³³ Brunt, “Marcus Aurelius in His Meditations,” 17.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 16.

³⁵ Krayer, “Marcus Aurelius and Neostoicism in Early Modern Philosophy,” 517-520.

³⁶ Amy Richlin, “The Sanctification of Marcus Aurelius,” in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 499.

³⁷ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 134.

³⁸ Richlin, “The Sanctification of Marcus Aurelius,” 510.

³⁹ Geoffery Aggeler, “‘Sparkes Of Holy Things’: Neostoicism And The English Protestant Conscience.” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 14, no. 3 (1990): 223–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43444772>.

closely tied with Scholasticism. Scholasticism is known broadly as the philosophy developed by connecting Ancient Greek and Roman classics with Christianity.^{40 41} In the case of *Meditations*, it has often been originally translated by members of Christian society, which were often the most educated; Casaubon was an Angelican minister and Gataker a Puritan.⁴² This representation of ancient text through the lens of Christianity has been used as a way to attempt to reconcile their theology with ancient philosophy; something that has been done with Aristotle and Plato's work.

Beyond just parallels, interpreters have often understood Marcus as a "heathen" and sacrilegious figure in the schemes of Christian ideals with his worship of other gods and philosophic means. In this way they are looking past his own religious status and further pushing their own interpretation. Even after the advent of Stoicism during the renaissance, the Christian sentiment continues.

For a later Neoscholastic example take Lydia Signourney, an educated American female poet, author, and publisher renowned in Connecticut in the early 19th century. In her writing, Sigourney regards Marcus Aurelius as a role model but at the same time criticizes him on his various apparent "faults."⁴³ In a textbook-like fashion, Signourney further attempts to connect *Meditations* with the ideals of contemporary life and the importance of various values such as generosity and knowledge. At the same time, she ties Marcus' words to Christian ideology, similar to Casaubon. For example, she compares Marcus' emphasis on the importance of knowledge to the knowledge gained by the Bible: "This book [Meditations] is admired for its wisdom...the child who knows how to read the Bible, has a knowledge; which those wise men never could attain without it."⁴⁴ After a few chapters, she then acknowledges Marcus' persecution of Christians as his greatest fault as well as his worship of "heathen gods."⁴⁵ She also describes all similar philosophies as ignoring the Christian faith as *Meditations* had: "This book is admired for its wisdom. But it has one defect. And all the systems of heathen philosophy had the same most sad defect. They were ignorant of the immortality of the soul, and of salvation for penitent sinners, through our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴⁶ Despite this, her narrative turns back around

⁴⁰ John J. Monahan, "Scholasticism and Order," *Christian Education* 29, no. 4 (1946): 268-267.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41175155>.

⁴¹ Felix Hope, "Scholasticism," *Philosophy* 11, no. 44 (1936): 451. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3746766>.

⁴² Krayer, "Marcus Aurelius and Neostoicism in Early Modern Philosophy," 520.

⁴³ L.H. Sigourney, *History of Marcus Aurelius: Emperor of Rome* (Hartford: Belknap & Hamersly, 1836), 63. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89098878572>.

⁴⁴ Sigourney, *History of Marcus Aurelius: Emperor of Rome*, 59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 59.

and Signourney explains that he halted his immoral actions and is therefore forgiven. Ultimately, Signourney's writing provides a look into 19th century Scholasticism and even more interestingly, the perspective of an educated woman. Beyond religion however, Marcus' writing is an example of early autobiography and the separation of the self.

Reflecting on the Self and Central Unity

Meditations was used by Marcus as a way to analyze himself and express the importance of reflection, often alongside pantheism as well. In Book X, Marcus expresses, "Frequently reflect, how all things which happened formerly were just such as happen now."⁴⁷ He often describes the need to recollect upon pain and how the events of the world affect each other. In this way, he is able to work through his own issues and understand himself better. Marcus advocates for the need to understand the human condition and control emotion, something that is key to many aspects of Stoicism.⁴⁸ Marcus says: "Acquire a method of contemplating how all things change into one another. Apply constantly this part [of philosophy] and exercise yourself thoroughly through it."⁴⁹ In this way, he is promoting the importance of analyzing the day to day and the interconnectedness of it all.

With the intensity of his inward focus, Marcus is able to effectively use skills of self-contemplation and awareness with detaching himself from his body and breath. Anthony Long, a British-American classical scholar interprets *Meditations* through the lens of the self. Long explains that Marcus' way of life in his work falls along the lines of the standard Stoic doctrine in the way that it represents self-realization is our outlook on the world and how we think about things rather than how the world intrudes us. Long also suggests that the ability of Marcus' to detach his "self" from being a speaker and a thinker implies the ability for any individual to address and encourage themselves. In this way self-reflection is emphasized as a way to denote one's internal separation.⁵⁰

Meditations is interpreted by historians to be a representation of the evaluation of inner life as a coping mechanism. While the first book contains autobiographical details, the remaining eleven focus on internal contemplations. Irmgard Mannlein-Robert argues in support of

⁴⁷ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 127.

⁴⁸ Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, "Ethics," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 427. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

⁴⁹ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 124.

⁵⁰ Anthony A. Long, "The Self in *Meditations*," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 472-475. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

Meditations being identified as an autobiography of sorts, despite others' opinions: "In contrast to earlier autobiographical writings of leading Roman politicians and emperors, who were all obviously most interested in an idealized portrait, Marcus focuses on a critical evaluation of his inner life."⁵¹ This brings in the idea of growing with self-contemplation and awareness, something that is prominent in Stoic literature and ideology.⁵² Marcus is able to analyze and criticize himself in order to become a better moral person. Additionally, Marcus' thought process involves him extensively reflecting on past times, which allows him to cope and be resilient to future challenges.⁵³

Historians also describe Marcus' work as a move for self-transformation and his externalist view of himself. Similar to Long and Mannlein-Robert's ideas, John Sellars, a British philosopher ties *Meditations* into the context of the autobiography. In tandem with work by French philosopher and writer Michel Foucault, Sellars connects Marcus' writing of the self and creating a sort of self identity. Sellars identifies Foucault's three kinds of self writing, ethopoetic, notebooks, and correspondence within *Meditations* which suggests Marcus' motive for self-transformation.⁵⁴ "When Marcus reflects...on the cycle of life from birth to death, he is inclined to view the self and himself in an externalist and deflationary way. But when he focuses inwardly on what he calls 'the properties of the rational soul, its capacity to see itself, articulate itself and make itself into whatever it wants—he treats his subjective identity as if he himself is the ultimate subject'"⁵⁵ Ultimately, Sellars suggests that *Meditations* is the result of Marcus' attempt at digesting philosophical ideas in order to become a "good man." Though Marcus preaches the importance of the self, he still relies on gods as some kind of guide. This is in ode to the eventual end of Stoicism in the rise of mysticism: the use of contemplation and the self in order to gain union with the absolute. The intellectual world could not rely on just self-sufficient and required a divine source.⁵⁶ ⁵⁷ One could argue that this is how translators interpreted

⁵¹ Irmgard Männlein-Robert, "The Meditations as a (Philosophical) Autobiography," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 367.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/psu/reader.action?docID=877204&ppg=1>.

⁵² Gourinat, "Ethics," 427.

⁵³ Männlein-Robert, "The Meditations as a (Philosophical) Autobiography," 368.

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault paraphrased by John Sellars, "The Meditations and the Ancient Art of Living," in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. Marcel Van Ackeren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 461.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 476.

⁵⁶ Clifford Herschel Moore, "Individualism and Religion in the Early Roman Empire," *The Harvard Theological Review* 2, no. 2 (1909): 233. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1507024>.

⁵⁷ Aggeler, "'Sparkes Of Holy Things': Neostoicism And The English Protestant Conscience," Here, Aggeler notes that Stoicism in its initial resurgence seemed to be most attractive to Calvinist Protestants in England. This is interesting being that Stoicism is commonly associated with self-sufficiency and Calvinism with the idea of man being insufficient without grace. The shift from complete reliance on the self, to reliance on the self to align with

Meditations themselves in the post-Stoic world; they tied their own requirement of divinity to Marcus' requirement of the self.

The narrative *Meditations* proposes the idea of the individual and the self as the forefront of contemplation. For in the individual, one can find solace, just how Marcus himself is writing from his own single perspective. With the rise of individualism from the increase of wealth in Rome, Marcus and other Stoics found their idea of unity and a collective. Additionally, Stoicism and its self-contemplative nature appealed to the Romans because it fit within action and political life and was brought forth as a source of moral strength and spiritual consolation.⁵⁸ Something that is highlighted by Marcus' own reflections.

Within the individual however, the Stoics emphasized the brotherhood of man. In this changing narrative, Marcus says, "We are all co-operating to one great work, [the intention of the universal mind in the world] some, with knowledge and understanding, others, ignorantly, and undesignedly."⁵⁹ In this way Marcus is promoting the idea of how we affect each other but some people are in fact ignorant in their own right. It is our job to teach and change the ignorant. The idea of the "whole" is something consistently referred to by Marcus and guides along his principles of Nature and the way of the world.⁶⁰ All beings have a purpose and are set forth by a need to be involved in the universe. John Monahan describes Scholasticism as a unity of Greek thought and Christian thought. He asserts it is human nature to find unity in the world. Perhaps the unity of *Meditations* and Christianity was inevitable?

Marcus makes an emphasis on the importance of socializing as human beings. For it is nature's way that guides us to be socially apt beings. For Marcus, society is the ruling principle to life. The English jurist Frederick Pollock analyzes *Meditations* for its representation of Stoic philosophy. He understands that Marcus believes that, "Each man is to the community as a member to an organism, not as a mere part of an aggregate."⁶¹ In that right, it is the human duty to treat all fairly and kindly. Our connections with each other mean everything.

divinity, to complete emphasis on religion highlights the interconnectedness of all philosophies and humans' use of the self. Humanity has always seemed to be lured towards some kind of guidance in a world void of clear meaning.

⁵⁸ Moore, "Individualism and Religion in the Early Roman Empire," 227.

⁵⁹ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 79.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 101.

⁶¹ Frederick Pollock, "Marcus Aurelius and the Stoic Philosophy," *Mind* 4, no. 13 (1879): 62.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2246564>.

Final Thoughts

Through the rise and fall of Stoicism, Neostoicism, Scholasticism, and even Neoscholasticism, *Meditations* continues to be interpreted with both its Christian values and its use as a self-reflective guide. Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, a theologian at Duquesne University argues that Stoic moral thought, “offers a framework for developing a morally rich account of the virtues that takes seriously these Christian beliefs.”⁶² Additionally, Amy Richlin analyzes the words of G.M.A Grube, a Hellenist who published an edition of *Meditations* in 1963 and focuses on Stoicism rather than Christianity, unlike authors before him. Richlin understands Grube’s perspective as that, “Even without Christianity, then, the *Meditations* continues to be treated as a practical manual, and Marcus as a role model, personally knowable.”⁶³ And this is true regardless of religious interpretation. We are still searching for the same solace, whether it be in the self or in divinity.

Compared to other Scholastic interpretations of ancient philosophy, the analysis of *Meditations* stands prominent as it is an exploration of personal writings rather than ones meant for an audience. In this way, historians have interpreted ideas that were not meant to convey a specific message through what was important to them: Christianity. It is not surprising that ancient thought is sometimes corroded with contemporary ideas as there is no exact way to know what anyone’s true intentions are behind their work. Whether However, as Marcus would say, it is not our business to try to infer the actions of other people: “Spend not the remainder of your life in conjectures about others, except where it is subservient to some public interest: conjecturing what such a one is doing, and with what view, what he is saying, what he is thinking, what he is projecting, and such like; this attentions to the affairs of others, makes one wander from his own business, the guarding of his own soul.”⁶⁴

⁶² Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, “Virtuous Assent and Christian Faith: Retrieving Stoic Virtue Theory for Christian Ethics,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30, no. 1 (2010): 117. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23562865>.

⁶³ Richlin, “The Sanctification of Marcus Aurelius,” 510.

⁶⁴ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 41.

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