Readings in the History of Ideas / Volume I: Hesiod to Calvin

Edited by
MORTON DONNER University of Utah
KENNETH E. EBLE University of Utah
ROBERT E. HELBLING University of Utah

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No poem is more deeply, more madly, penetrated by paradox. No sooner are two of its contradictions suggested than two others suggest themselves. The *De Rerum Natura* is a passionate attack upon passion. And it is a poem whose purpose is to kill poetry. . . Lucretius makes his poem out of the death of poetries—of fear, of love, of superstition, of error, of myth, of custom, of tale and tradition—and nothing leaves him more ecstatic than the bleakness he discovers, the hues he sees dissolving. The perfect hue for him is now the cold grey he finds in his atoms. The perfect mystery is the lack of mystery underlying death and change, birth and corruption, loveliness and decay. The perfect song is the silence of what is because it is. The clamor of tragedy comes no longer to his ears: the cries of heroes lost between irreconcilable necessities. There is only one necessity, that things should be what they are.

MARK VAN DOREN (1946)

Lucretius was unique [among philosophical poets] for two reasons which go together, his real scientific ardor for close reasoning and for truth, and the deep poetic emotion which impelled him to seek in science that union between the mind and the outer world for which all poetry contends.

W. F. J. KNIGHT (1944)

The Stoic response to the uncertainties posed by the circumstances of life in Hellenistic civilization was not to insist upon the material reality of all existence, as the Epicureans did, but to deny the importance of such reality. Stoic thought turned man in upon himself, ignoring the external world. The basic principle was that if a man's will were rightly instructed, he could attain a self-reliance that rendered all things outside himself insignificant. Although other features of the Stoic ethical system were modified, this attitude remained the most distinctive characteristic of Stoic thought from Zeno of Citium, who founded the Stoic school in Athens in the third century B.C., to Marcus Aurelius, who in the second century A.D. was the last significant spokesman of explicitly Stoic philosophy in the ancient world. It is this concept of self-reliance that remains the greatest contribution of Stoic thought to the Western world.

Stoic self-reliance was founded on the belief that man lives in an ordered universe that obeys natural laws, because it is governed by a divine principle. This principle could be equated with Zeus, with the idea of fate or destiny, or with the idea of reason itself; but in any case, it permeated the universe and affected all its operations. The role of man was to conform to these natural laws, to live, as the Stoics expressed it, a life in accordance with nature. Whether this role implied a call to reform society, as in the writings of the early Stoics, or a call to ignore society, as in the writings of the later Stoics, it was based on the idea that men should distinguish between those things which reason showed to be necessary parts of existence and those which were "things indifferent"—activities, such as the pursuit of fame or wealth, which originated in the emotions rather than in reason and which were subject to forces outside the individual himself. If a man relied only on what were natural parts of the conditions of human existence, he would not be disappointed.
Zeno the Stoic
335? – 263? B.C.

Zeno was born in Citium, on the island of Cyprus, but went to Athens as a young man and by the turn of the century had begun to acquire a reputation as a teacher and writer of philosophy. Many of his ideas came from earlier philosophical schools, but his synthesis, modification, and development of them resulted in the creation of a unified system that as a whole represented a new branch of philosophy. The name applied to it derives from his habit of giving lectures expounding his system from the stoas (porch) of one of the public buildings in Athens: his followers thus came to be called Stoics. Although Zeno’s writings were considerable, none of them have survived in their original form. Our knowledge of Zeno’s thought is based on summaries, paraphrases, and fragmentary quotations found in the work of his successors, where the distinction between his own ideas and later modifications of them is often obscured. One of the main sources of information about Zeno is the work of a third-century A.D. Greek named Diogenes Laertius, whose Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers is an indispensable, if unskillful, treatment of its subject. Diogenes tends to be gossipy and naive in his handling of biography and unsophisticated and uncritical in dealing with philosophical doctrines. But since he apparently had access to a great many texts no longer extant, his book is invaluable in reconstructing the principles of a system, like Early Stoicism, the original works of which have not survived. Diogenes’ “Life of Zeno” contains a detailed exposition of the main outlines of early Stoic thought as it appeared to a student of philosophy some five centuries after the time of Zeno. The selection from the “Life of Zeno” printed below presents Diogenes’ account of Stoic ethics.

Life of Zeno

The ethical branch of philosophy they [the Stoics] divide as follows: (1) the topic of impulse; (2) the topic of things good and evil; (3) that of the passions; (4) that of virtue; (5) that of the end; (6) that of primary value and of actions; (7) that of duties or the befitting; and (8) of inducements to act or refrain from acting. The foregoing is the subdivision adopted by Chrysippus, Archedemus, Zeno of Tarsus, Apollodorus, Diogenes, Antipater, and Posidonius, and their disciples. Zeno of Citium and Cleanthes treated the subject somewhat less elaborately, as might be expected in an older generation. They, however, did subdivide Logic and Physics as well as Ethics.

An animal’s first impulse, say the Stoics, is to self-preservation, because nature from the outset endears it to itself, as Chrysippus affirms in the first book of his work On Ends: his words are, “The clearest thing to every animal is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof”, for it was not likely that nature should estrange the living thing from itself or that she should leave the creature she has made without either estrangement from or affection for its own constitution. We are forced then to conclude that nature in constituting the animal made it near and dear to itself; for so it comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it.

As for the assertion made by some people that pleasure is the object to which the first impulse of animals is directed, it is shown by the Stoics to be false. For pleasure, if it is really felt, they declare to be a by-product, which never comes until nature by itself has sought and found the means suitable to the animal’s existence or constitution; it is an aftermath comparable to the condition of animals thriving and plants in full bloom. And nature, they say, made no difference originally between plants and animals, for she regulates the life of plants too, in their case without impulse and sensation, just as also certain processes go on of a vegetative kind in us. When in the case of animals impulse has been superadded, whereby they are enabled to go in quest of their proper aliment, for them, say the Stoics, Nature’s rule is to follow the direction of impulse. But when reason by way of a more perfect leadership has been bestowed on the beings we call rational, for them life according to reason rightly becomes the natural life. For reason supervenes to shape impulse scientifically.

This is why Zeno was the first (in his treatise On the Nature of Man) to designate as the end “life in agreement with nature” (or living agreeably to nature), which is the same as a virtuous life, virtue being the goal towards which nature guides us. So too Cleanthes in his treatise On Pleasure, as also Posidonius, and Hecato in his work On Ends. Again, living virtuously is equivalent to living in accordance with experience of the actual course of nature, as Chrysippus says in the first book of his De finibus: for our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe. And this is why the end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe, a life in which we refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the right reason which pervades all things, and is identical with this Zeno, lord and ruler of all that is. And this very thing constitutes the virtue of the happy man and the smooth current of life, when all actions promote the harmony of the spirit dwelling in the individual man with the will of him who orders the universe. Diogenes then expressly declares the end to be to act with good reason in the selection of what is natural. Archedemus says the end is to live in the performance of all befitting actions. By the nature with which our life ought to be in accord, Chrysippus...
understands both universal nature and more particularly the nature of man, whereas Cleanthes takes the nature of the universe alone as that which should be followed, without adding the nature of the individual.

And virtue, he holds, is a harmonious disposition, choice-worthy for its own sake and not from hope or fear or any external motive. Moreover, it is in virtue that happiness consists; for virtue is the state of mind which tends to make the whole of life harmonious. When a rational being is perverted, this is due to the deceptiveness of external pursuits or sometimes to the influence of associates. For the starting-points of nature are never perverse.

Virtue, in the first place, is in one sense the perfection of anything in general, say of a statue; again, it may be non-intellectual, like health, or intellectual, like prudence. For Hecato says in his first book on the Virtues that some are scientific and based upon theory, namely, those which have a structure of theoretical principles, such as prudence and justice; others are non-intellectual, those that are regarded as co-extensive and parallel with the former, like health and strength. For health is found to attend upon and be co-extensive with the intellectual virtue of temperance, just as strength is a result of the building of an arch. These are called non-intellectual, because they do not require the mind’s assent; they supervene and they occur even in bad men; for instance, health, courage. The proof, says Posidonius in the first book of his treatise on Ethics, that virtue really exists is the fact that Socrates, Diogenes, and Antisthenes3 and their followers made moral progress. And for the existence of vice as a fundamental fact the proof is that it is the opposite of virtue. That it, virtue, can be taught is laid down by Chrysippus in the first book of his work On the End, by Cleanthes, by Posidonius in his Protreptic, and by Hecato; that it can be taught is clear from the case of bad men becoming good.

Panaitius,4 however, divides virtue into two kinds, theoretical and practical; others make a threefold division of it into logical, physical, and ethical; while by the school of Posidonius four types are recognized, and more than four by Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Antipater, and their followers. Apollonians for his part counts but one, namely, practical wisdom.

Amongst the virtues some are primary, some are subordinate to these. The following are the primary: wisdom, courage, justice, temperance. Particular virtues are magnanimity, continence, endurance, presence of mind, good counsel. And wisdom they define as the knowledge of things good and evil and of what is neither good nor evil; wisdom is knowledge of what we ought to choose, what we ought to beware of, and what is indifferent; justice...; magnanimity as the knowledge or habit of mind which makes one superior to anything that happens, whether good or evil equally; continence as a disposition never overcome in that which concerns right reason, or a habit which no pleasures can get the better of; endurance as a knowledge or habit which suggests

what we are to hold fast to, what not, and what is indifferent; presence of mind as a habit prompt to find out what is meet to be done at any moment; good counsel as knowledge by which we see what to do and how to do it if we would consult our own interests.

Similarly, of vices some are primary, others subordinate: e.g., folly, cowardice, injustice, profligacy are accounted primary; but incontinence, stupidity, ill-advisedness subordinate. Further, they hold that the vices are forms of ignorance of those things whereof the corresponding virtues are the knowledge.

Good in general is that from which some advantage comes, and more particularly what is either identical with or not distinct from benefit. Whence it follows that virtue itself and whatever partsake of virtue is called good in these three senses—viz. as being (1) the source from which benefit results; or (2) that in respect of which benefit results, e.g., the virtuous act; or (3) that by the agency of which benefit results, e.g., the good man who partsake in virtue.

Another particular definition of good which they give is “the natural perfection of a rational being qua rational.” To this answers virtue and, as being partakers of virtue, virtuous acts and good men; as also its supervening accessories, joy and gladness and the like. So with evils: either they are vices, folly, cowardice, injustice, and the like; or things which partake of vice, including vicious acts and wicked persons as well as their accompaniments, despair, moroseness, and the like.

Again, some goods are goods of the mind and others external, while some are neither mental nor external. The former include the virtues and virtuous acts; external goods are such as having a good country or a good friend, and the prosperity of such. Whereas to be good and happy oneself is of the class of goods neither mental nor external. Similarly of things evil some are mental evils, namely, vices and vicious actions; others are outward evils, as to have a foolish country or a foolish friend and the unhappiness of such; other evils again are neither mental nor outward, e.g., to be yourself bad and unhappy.

Again, goods are either of the nature of ends or they are the means to these ends, or they are at the same time end and means. A friend and the advantages derived from him are means to good, whereas confidence, high-spirit, liberty, delight, gladness, freedom from pain, and every virtuous act are of the nature of ends.

The virtues (they say) are goods of the nature at once of ends and of means. On the one hand, in so far as they cause happiness they are means, and on the other hand, in so far as they make it complete, and so are themselves part of it, they are ends. Similarly of evils some are of the nature of ends and some of means, while others are at once both means and ends. Your enemy and the harm he does you are means; consternation, abasement, slavery, gloom, despair, excess of grief, and every vicious action are of the nature of ends. Vices are evils both as ends and as means, since in so far as they cause misery they are means, but in so far as they make it complete, so that they become part of it, they are ends.

Of mental goods some are habits, others are dispositions, while others
while accomplishments or avocations are matters of habit, and activities as such or exercise of faculty neither the one nor the other. And in general there are some mixed goods: e.g., to be happy in one's children or in one's old age. But knowledge is a pure good. Again, some goods are permanent like the virtues, others transitory like joy and walking-exercise.

All good (they say) is expedient, binding, profitable, useful, serviceable, beautiful, beneficial, desirable, and just or right. It is expedient, because it brings about things of such a kind that by their occurrence we are benefited. It is binding, because it causes unity where unity is needed; profitable, because it defrays what is expended on it, so that the return yields a balance of benefit on the transaction. It is useful, because it secures the use of benefit; it is serviceable, because the utility it affords is worthy of all praise. It is beautiful, because the good is proportionate to the use made of it; beneficial, because by its inherent nature it benefits; choiceworthy, because it is such that to choose it is reasonable. It is also just or right, insomuch as it is in harmony with law and tends to draw men together.

The reason why they characterize the perfect good as beautiful is that it has in full all the "factors" required by nature or has perfect proportion. Of the beautiful there are (say they) four species, namely, what is just, courageous, orderly and wise; for it is under these forms that fair deeds are accomplished. Similarly there are four species of the base or ugly, namely, what is unjust, cowardly, disorderly, and unwise. By the beautiful is meant properly and in an unique sense that good which renders its possessors praiseworthy, or briefly, good which is worthy of praise; though in another sense it signifies a good aptitude for one's proper function; while in yet another sense the beautiful is that which lends new grace to anything, as when we say of the wise man that he alone is good and beautiful.

And they say that only the morally beautiful is good. So Hecato in his treatise On Goods, book iii., and Chrysippus in his work On the Morally Beautiful. They hold, that is, that virtue and whatever partakes of virtue consists in this: which is equivalent to saying that all that is good is beautiful, or that the term "good" has equal force with the term "beautiful," which comes to the same thing. "Since a thing is good, it is beautiful; now it is beautiful, therefore it is good." They hold that all goods are equal and that all good is desirable in the highest degree and admits of no lowering or heightening of intensity. Of those things that are, some, they say, are good, some are evil, and some neither good nor evil (that is, morally indifferent).

Goods comprise the virtues of prudence, justice, courage, temperance, and the rest; while the opposites of these are evils, namely, folly, injustice, and the rest. Neutral (neither good nor evil, that is) are all those things which neither benefit nor harm a man: such as life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, fair fame and noble birth, and their opposites, death, disease, pain, ugliness, weakness, poverty, ignominy, low birth, and the like. This Hecato affirms in his De fine. book viii., and also Apollodorus in his Ethics, and Chrysippus. For, say they, such things (as life, health, and pleasure) are not in themselves goods but are morally indifferent, though falling under the species or subdivision "things preferred." For as the property of hot is to warm, not to cool, so the property of good is to benefit, not to injure; but wealth and health do no more benefit than injure, therefore neither wealth nor health is good. Further, they say that that is not good of which both good and bad use can be made; but of wealth and health both good and bad use can be made; therefore wealth and health are not goods. On the other hand, Posidonius maintains that these things too are among goods. Hecato in the ninth book of his treatise On Goods, and Chrysippus in his work On Pleasure, deny that pleasure is a good either; for some pleasures are disgraceful, and nothing disgraceful is good. To benefit is to set in motion or sustain in accordance with virtue; whereas to harm is to set in motion or sustain in accordance with vice.

The term "indifferent" has two meanings: in the first it denotes the things which do not contribute either to happiness or to misery, as wealth, fame, health, strength, and the like; for it is possible to be happy without having these, although, if they are used in a certain way, such use of them tends to happiness or misery. In quite another sense those things are said to be indifferent which are without the power of stirring inclination or aversion; e.g., the fact that the number of hairs on one's head is odd or even or whether you hold out your finger straight or bent. But it was not in this sense that the things mentioned above were termed indifferent, they being quite capable of exciting inclination or aversion. Hence of these latter some are taken by preference, others are rejected, whereas indifference in the other sense affords no ground for either choosing or avoiding.

Of things indifferent, as they express it, some are "preferred," others "rejected." Such as have value, they say, are "preferred," while such as have negative, instead of positive, value are "rejected." Value they define as, first, any contribution to harmonious living, such as attaches to every good; secondly, some faculty or use which indirectly contributes to the life according to nature: which is as much as to say "any assistance brought by wealth or health towards living a natural life"; thirdly, value is the full equivalent of an appraiser, as fixed by an expert acquainted with the facts—as when it is said that wheat exchanges for so much barley with a mule thrown in.

Thus things of the preferred class are those which have positive value, e.g., amongst mental qualities, natural ability, skill, moral improvement, and the like: among bodily qualities, life, health, strength, good condition, soundness of organs, beauty, and so forth; and in the sphere of external things, wealth, fame, noble birth, and the like. To the class of things "rejected" belong, of mental qualities, lack of ability, want of skill, and the like; among bodily qualities, death, disease, weakness, being out of condition, mutilation, ugliness, and the like; in the sphere of external things, poverty, ignominy, low birth, and so forth. But again there are things belonging to neither class; such are not preferred, neither are they rejected.

Again, of things preferred some are preferred for their own sake, some for the sake of something else, and others again both for their own sake and for the sake of something else. In the first of these cases
belong natural ability, moral improvement, and the like; to the second
wealth, noble birth, and the like; to the last strength, perfect faculties,
soundness of bodily organs. Things are preferred for their own sake
because they accord with nature; not for their own sake, but for the sake
of something else, because they secure not a few utilities. And similarly
with the class of things rejected under the contrary heads.

Furthermore, the term Duty is applied to that for which, when done,
a reasonable defence can be adduced, e.g. harmony in the tenor of
life’s process, which indeed pervades the growth of plants and animals.
For even in plants and animals, they hold, you may discern fitness of
behaviour.

Zeno was the first to use this term kathikon of conduct. Erymologically
it is derived from kata tinas bekein, i.e. reaching as far as, being up to,
or incumbent on so and so. And it is an action in itself adapted to nature’s
arrangements. For of the acts done at the prompting of impulse some,
they observe, are fit and meet, others the reverse, while there is a third
class which is neither the one nor the other.

Befitting acts are all those which reason prevails with us to do; and this
is the case with honouring one’s parents, brothers and country, and
intercourse with friends. Unbefitting, or contrary to duty, are all acts
that reason deprecates, e.g. to neglect one’s parents, to be indifferent
to one’s brothers, not to agree with friends, to disregard the interests
of one’s country, and so forth. Acts which fall under neither of the fore-
going classes are those which reason neither urges us to do nor forbids,
such as picking up a twig, holding a style or a scraper, and the like.

Again, some duties are incumbent unconditionally, others in certain
circumstances. Unconditional duties are the following: to take proper
care of health and one’s organs of sense, and things of that sort. Duties
imposed by circumstances are such as maiming oneself and sacrifice
of property. And so likewise with acts which are violations of duty.
Another division is into duties which are always incumbent and those
which are not. To live in accordance with virtue is always a duty, whereas
dialectic by question and answer or walking-exercise and the like are
not at all times incumbent. The same may be said of the violations of
duty. And in things intermediate also there are duties: as that boys
should obey the attendants who have charge of them.

According to the Stoics there is an eight-fold division of the soul:
the five senses, the faculty of speech, the intellectual faculty, which is
the mind itself, and the generative faculty, being all parts of the soul.
Now from falsehood there results perversion, which extends to the mind;
and from this perversion arise many passions or emotions, which are
causes of instability. Passion, or emotion, is defined by Zeno as an ir-
 rational and unnatural movement in the soul, or again as impulse in
excess:

The main, or most universal, emotions, according to Hecato in his
treatise On the Passions, book ii., and Zeno in his treatise with the same
title, constitute four great classes: grief, fear, desire or craving, pleasure.
They hold the emotions to be judgements, as is stated by Chrysippus
in his treatise On the Passions: avarice being a supposition that money
is a good, while the case is similar with drunkenness and profligacy and

And grief or pain they hold to be an irrational mental contraction.
Its species are pity, envy, jealousy, rivalry, heaviness, annoyance, dis-
trust, anguish, distraction. Pity is grief felt at undeserved suffering:
envy, grief at others’ prosperity; jealousy, grief at the possession by an-
other of that which one desires for oneself; rivalry, pain at the possession
by another of what one has oneself. Heaviness or vexation is grief which
weighs us down, annoyance that which coops us up and straitens us
for want of room, distress a pain brought on by anxious thought that
lasts and increases, anguish painful grief, distraction irrational grief,
rasing and hindering us from viewing the situation as a whole.

Fear is an expectation of evil. Under fear are ranged the following
emotions: terror, nervous shrinking, shame, consternation, panic, mental
agony. Terror is a fear which produces fright; shame is fear of disgrace;
nervous shrinking is a fear that one will have to act; consternation is
fear due to a presentation of some unusual occurrence; panic is fear with
pressure exercised by sound; mental agony is fear felt when some issue
is still in suspense.

Desire or craving is irrational appetency, and under it are ranged the
following states: want, hatred, contentiousness, anger, love, wrath, re-
sentment. Want, then, is a craving when it is baulked and, as it were,
cut off from its object, but kept at full stretch and attracted towards it
in vain. Hatred is a growing and lasting desire or craving that it should
go ill with somebody. Contentiousness is a craving or desire connected
with partisanship; anger a craving or desire to punish one who is thought
to have done you an undeserved injury. The passion of love is a craving
from which good men are free; for it is an effort to win affection due to
the visible presence of beauty. Wrath is anger which has long rankled
and has become malicious, waiting for its opportunity, as is illustrated
by the lines:

Even though for the one day he swallow his anger, yet doth he still
keep his displeasure thereafter in his heart, till he accomplish it. 

Resentment is anger in an early stage.

Pleasure is an irrational elation at the accruing of what seems to be
choiceworthy; and under it are ranged ravishment, malevolent joy,
delight, transport. Ravishment is pleasure which charms the ear. Ma-
levolent joy is pleasure at another’s ills. Delight is the mind’s prop-
ulsion to weakness, its name in Greek (terpsis) being akin to trepsis or
turning. To be in transports of delight is the melting away of virtue.

And as there are said to be certain infirmities in the body, as for in-
stance gout and arthritic disorders, so too there is in the soul love of
fame, love of pleasure, and the like. By infirmity is meant disease ac-
companied by weakness; and by disease is meant a fond imagining of
something that seems desirable. And as in the body there are tendencies
to certain maladies such as colds and diarrhoea, so it is with the soul,
there are tendencies like enviousness, pitifulness, quarrelsomeness,
and the like.
Also they say that there are three emotional states which are good, namely, joy, caution, and wishing. Joy, the counterpart of pleasure, is rational elation; caution, the counterpart of fear, rational avoidance; for though the wise man will never feel fear, he will yet use caution. And they make wishing the counterpart of desire (or craving). Inasmuch as it is rational appetency. And accordingly, as under the primary passions are classed certain others subordinate to them, so too is it with the primary eupathies or good emotional states. Thus under wishing they bring well-wishing or benevolence, friendliness, respect, affection; under caution, reverence and modesty; under joy, delight, mirth, cheerfulness.

Now they say that the wise man is passionless, because he is not prone to fall into such inactivity. But they add that in another sense the term apathy is applied to the bad man, when, that is, it means that he is callous and relentless. Further, the wise man is said to be free from vanity; for he is indifferent to good or evil report. However, he is not alone in this, there being another who is also free from vanity, he who is ranged among the rash, and that is the bad man. Again, they tell us that all good men are austere or harsh, because they neither have dealings with pleasure themselves nor tolerate those who have. The term harsh is applied, however, to others as well, and in much the same sense as a wine is said to be harsh when it is employed medicinally and not for drinking at all.

Again, the good are genuinely in earnest and vigilant for their own improvement, using a manner of life which banishes evil out of sight and makes what good there is in things appear. At the same time they are free from pretence; for they have stripped off all pretence or 'make-up' whether in voice or in look. Free too are they from all business cares, free from pretence; for they have stripped off all pretence or make-up themselves nor tolerate those who have. The term harsh is applied, however, to others as well, and in much the same sense as a wine is said to be harsh when it is employed medicinally and not for drinking at all.

And the wise man, they say, will offer prayers, and ask for good things: for they have a something divine within them; whereas the bad man is godless. And yet of this word—godless or ungodly—there are two senses, one in which it is the opposite of the term "godly;" the other denoting the man who ignores the divine altogether: in this latter sense, as they note, the term does not apply to every bad man. The good, it is added, are also worshippers of God; for they have acquaintance with the rites of the gods, and piety is the knowledge of how to serve the gods. Further, they will sacrifice to the gods and they keep themselves pure; for they avoid all acts that are offences against the gods, and the gods think highly of them: for they are holy and just in what concerns the gods. The wise too are the only priests; for they have made sacrifices their study, as also the building of temples, purifications, and all the other matters appertaining to the gods.

The Stoics approve also of honouring parents and brothers in the second place next after the gods. They further maintain that parental affection for children is natural to the good, but not to the bad. It is one of their tenets that sins are all equal: so Chrysippus in the fourth book of his Ethical Questions, as well as Persaeus and Zeno. For if one truth is not more true than another, neither is one falsehood more false than another, and in the same way one deceit is not more so than another, nor sin than sin. For he who is a hundred furlongs from Canopus and who is only one furlong away are equally not in Canopus, and so too he who commits the greater sin and he who commits the less are equally not in the path of right conduct. But Heraclides of Tarsus, who was the disciple of Antipater of Tarsus, and Athenodorus both assert that sins are not equal.

Again, the Stoics say that the wise man will take part in politics, if nothing hinders him—so, for instance, Chrysippus in the first book of his work On Various Types of Life—since thus he will restrain vice and promote virtue. Also (they maintain) he will marry, as Zeno says in his Republic, and beget children. Moreover, they say that the wise man will never form mere opinions, that is to say, he will never give assent to anything that is false; that he will also play the Cynic, Cynicism being a short cut to virtue, as Apollodorus calls it in his Ethics; that he will even turn cannibal under stress of circumstances. They declare that he alone is free and bad men are slaves. Freedom being power of independent action, whereas slavery is privation of the same: though indeed there is also a second form of slavery consisting in subordination, and a third which implies possession of the slave as well as his subordination: the correlative of such servitude being lordship; and this too is evil. Moreover, according to them not only are the wise free, they are also kings; kingship being irresponsible rule, which none but the wise can maintain: so Chrysippus in his treatise vindicating Zeno's use of terminology. For he holds that knowledge of good and evil is a necessary attribute of the ruler, and that no bad man is acquainted with this science. Similarly the wise and good alone are fit to be magistrates, judges, or orators, whereas among the bad there is not one so qualified. Furthermore, the wise are infallible, not being liable to error. They are also without offence: for they do no hurt to others or to themselves. At the same time they are not pitiful and make no allowance for anyone: they never relax the penalties fixed by the laws, since indulgence and pity and even equitable consideration are marks of a weak mind, which affects kindness in place of chastising. Nor do they deem punishments too severe. Again, they say that the wise man never wonders at any of the things which appear extraordinary, such as Charon's mephitic caverns, ebbs of the tide, hot springs or fiery eruptions. Nor yet, they go on to say, will the wise man live in solitude: for he is naturally made for society and action. He will, however, submit to training to augment his powers of bodily endurance.

And the wise man, they say, will offer prayers, and ask for good things from the gods: so Posidonius in the first book of his treatise On Duties, and Hecato in his third book On Paradoxes. Friendship, they declare,
exists only between the wise and good, by reason of their likeness to one another. And by friendship they mean a common use of all that has to do with life, wherein we treat our friends as we should ourselves. They argue that a friend is worth having for his own sake and that it is a good thing to have many friends. But among the bad there is, they hold, no such thing as friendship, and thus no bad man has a friend. Another of their tenets is that the unwise are all mad, inasmuch as they are not wise but do what they do from that madness which is the equivalent of their folly.

Furthermore, the wise man does all things well, just as we say that Ismenias plays all airs on the flute well. Also everything belongs to the wise. For the law, they say, has conferred upon them a perfect right to all things. It is true that certain things are said to belong to the bad, just as what has been dishonestly acquired may be said, in one sense, to belong to the state, in another sense to those who are enjoying it.

They hold that the virtues involve one another, and that the possessor of one is the possessor of all, inasmuch as they have common principles, as Chrysippus says in the first book of his work On Virtues, Apollodorus in his Physics according to the Early School, and Hecato in the third book of his treatise On Virtues. For if a man be possessed of virtue, he is at once able to discover and to put into practice what he ought to do. Now such rules of conduct comprise rules for choosing, enduring, staying, and distributing; so that if a man does some things by intelligent choice, some things with fortitude, some things by way of just distribution, and some steadily, he is at once wise, courageous, just, and temperate. And each of the virtues has a particular subject with which it deals, as, for instance, courage is concerned with things that must be endured, practical wisdom with acts to be done, acts from which one must abstain, and those which fall under neither head. Similarly each of the other virtues is concerned with its own proper sphere. To wisdom are subordinate good counsel and understanding; to temperance, good discipline and orderliness; to justice, equality and fair-mindedness; to courage, constancy and vigour.

It is a tenet of theirs that between virtue and vice there is nothing intermediate, whereas according to the Peripatetics\(^2\) there is, namely, the state of moral improvement. For, say the Stoics, just as a stick must be either straight or crooked, so a man must be either just or unjust. Nor again are there degrees of justice and injustice; and the same rule applies to the other virtues. Further, while Chrysippus holds that virtue can be lost, Cleanthes maintains that it cannot. According to the former it may be lost in consequence of drunkenness or melancholy; the latter takes it to be inalienable owing to the certainty of our mental apprehension. And virtue in itself they hold to be worthy of choice for its own sake. At all events we are ashamed of bad conduct as if we knew that nothing is really good but the morally beautiful. Moreover, they hold that it is in itself sufficient to ensure well-being; thus Zeno, and Chrysippus in the first book of his treatise On Virtues, and Hecato in the second book of his treatise On Goods: "For if magnanimity by itself alone can raise us far above everything, and if magnanimity is but a part of virtue, then too virtue as a whole will be sufficient in itself for well-being—despising all things that seem troublesome." Panaetius, however, and Posidonius deny that virtue is self-sufficing: on the contrary, health is necessary, and some means of living and strength.

Another tenet of theirs is the perpetual exercise of virtue, as held by Cleanthes and his followers. For virtue can never be lost, and the good man is always exercising his mind, which is perfect. Again, they say that justice, as well as law and right reason, exists by nature and not by convention: so Chrysippus in his work On the Morally Beautiful. Neither do they think that the divergence of opinion between philosophers is any reason for abandoning the study of philosophy, since at that rate we should have to give up life altogether: so Posidonius in his Exhortations. Chrysippus allows that the ordinary Greek education is serviceable.

It is their doctrine that there can be no question of right as between man and the lower animals, because of their unlikeliness. Thus Chrysippus in the first book of his treatise On Justice, and Posidonius in the first book of his De officio. Further, they say that the wise man will feel affection for the youths who by their countenance show a natural endowment for virtue. So Zeno in his Republic, Chrysippus in book i. of his work On Modes of Life, and Apollodorus in his Ethics.

Their definition of love is an effort toward friendliness due to visible beauty appearing, its sole end being friendship, not bodily enjoyment. At all events, they allege that Thrasonides, although he had his mistress in his power, abstained from her because she hated him. By which it is shown, they think, that love depends upon regard, as Chrysippus says in his treatise Of Love, and is not sent by the gods. And beauty they describe as the bloom or flower of virtue.

Of the three kinds of life, the contemplative, the practical, and the rational, they declare that we ought to choose the last, for that a rational being is expressly produced by nature for contemplation and for action. They tell us that the wise man will for reasonable cause make his own exit from life, on his country's behalf or for the sake of his friends, or if he suffer intolerable pain, mutilation, or incurable disease. It is also their doctrine that amongst the wise there should be a community of wives with free choice of partners, as Zeno says in his Republic and Chrysippus in his treatise On Government and not only they, but also Diogenes the Cynic and Plato. Under such circumstances we shall feel paternal affection for all the children alike, and there will be an end of the jealousies arising from adultery. The best form of government they hold to be a mixture of democracy, kingship, and aristocracy (or the rule of the best).

Such, then, are the statements they make in their ethical doctrines, with much more besides, together with their proper proofs: let this, however, suffice for a statement of them in a summary and elementary form.

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*Peripatetics literally means "persons in the habit of walking about." The name was applied to followers of Aristotle's philosophy because of Aristotle's habit of walking along pleasant shaded paths with his disciples while discussing philosophy.*
Comments on Zeno the Stoic

The ethics of Stoicism are originally and essentially, not a doctrine of virtue, but merely a guide to a rational life, the end and aim of which is happiness through peace of mind. Virtuous conduct appears in it as it were merely by accident, as the means, not the end. Therefore the ethical theory of Stoicism is in its whole nature and point of view fundamentally different from the ethical systems which lay stress directly upon virtue, such as the doctrines of the Vedas, of Plato, of Christianity, and of Kant.  

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER (1818)

The Stoic School, whose founder, Zeno, was a disciple of Antisthenes, gradually built up a theory of moral life which has on the whole weathered the storms of time with great success. It largely dominated later antiquity by its imaginative and emotional power. It gave form to the aspirations of early Christianity. It lasts now as the nearest approach to an acceptable system of conduct for those who do not accept revelation, but still keep some faith in the Purpose of Things.  

GILBERT MURRAY (1925)

It should be insisted that the greatest practical inheritance the Greeks left in philosophy was not the splendour of Plato, or the vast erudition of Aristotle, but the practical systems of Zeno and Epicurus, and the scepticism of Pyrrho. In our own day every man is either a Stoic, an Epicurean, or a Sceptic.  

J. P. MAHAFFY (1896)

When Stoicism, led by its founder Zeno, argued that nothing matters but duty, and that it is to be found in following the purposes of the Cosmos, he eliminated the emotions, even pity, because they disturb the rational calm which should be the end of life. Stoicism might produce its martyrs to duty, but it hardly produced full human beings.

C. M. BOWRA (1957)

Cleanthes

Cleanthes was Zeno's successor as head of the Stoic school in Athens. Aside from some poetry versifying Stoic beliefs, very little of his writing has survived. However, we do know that he devoted a good deal of energy to showing how Heraclitus' theories about physics, adapted by Zeno to provide a scientific basis for the Stoic ethical system, could be used to demonstrate the validity of the Stoic idea of deity. His main contribution to Stoicism, which was not so much philosophical as theological, was his emphasis on the religious implications of the Stoic conception of the divine principle that governed the universe. Cleanthes, so far as we can tell, was chiefly responsible for combining the Stoic conceptions of "creative fire," adapted by Zeno from Heraclitus' conception of fire as one of the primary elements of the universe, and of logos, the idea of reason itself, into the single broader conception of "spirit," the divine force in the universe and in men. This idea had a striking impact on the development not only of Stoicism but of all subsequent Western thought. Cleanthes' ways of thinking are revealed in his "Hymn to Zeus," a short poem but the most important work of his extant. It is characteristic of the religious temper he imparted to Stoicism as well as of his ardent attempts to resolve philosophy, physics, and theology into one harmonious whole.

Hymn to Zeus

O God most glorious, called by many a name,  
Nature's great King, through endless years the same;  
Omnipotence, who by thy just decree  
Controllest all, hail, Zeus, for unto thee  
Befooves thy creatures in all lands to call.  
We are thy children, we alone, of all  
On earth's broad ways that wander to and fro,  
Bearing thine image wheresoe'er we go.  
Wherefore with songs of praise thy power I will forth show.  
Lo! yonder heaven, that round the earth is wheeled,  
Follows thy guidance, still to thee doth yield  
Glad homage; thine unconquerable hand  
Such flaming minister, the levin-brand,  
Wieldeth, a sword two-edged, whose deathless might  
Pulsates through all that Nature brings to light.
Vehicle of the universal Word, that flows
Through all, and in the light celestial glows
Of stars both great and small. O King of Kings
Through ceaseless ages, God, whose purpose brings
To birth, whate'er on land or in the sea
Is wrought, or in high heaven's immensity;
Save what the sinner works infatuate.
Nay, but thou knowest to make crooked straight:
Chaos to thee is order: in thine eyes
The unloved is lovely, who did'st harmonize
Things evil with things good, that there should be
One Word through all things everlastingly.
One Word—whose voice alas! the wicked spurn;
Insatiate for the good their spirits yearn:
Yet seeing see not, neither hearing hear
God's universal law, which those revere,
By reason guided, happiness who win.
The rest, unreasoning, diverse shapes of sin
Self-prompted follow: for an idle name
Vainly they wrestle in the lists of fame:
Others inordinately Riches woo,
Or dissolute, the joys of flesh pursue.
Now here, now there they wander, fruitless still,
For ever seeking good and finding ill.
Zeus the all-bountiful, whom darkness shrouds,
Whose lightning lightens in the thunder clouds;
Thy children save from error's deadly sway:
Vouchsafe that unto knowledge they attain;
For thou by knowledge art made strong to reign
O'er all, and all things rulest righteously.
So by thee honoured, we will honour thee
Praising thy works continually with songs,
As mortals should; nor higher meed belongs
E'en to the gods, than justly to adore
The Universal law for evermore.

Comments / on Cleanthes

The universe he [Cleanthes] considered a living being, with God as its
soul. . . .

MOSES HADAS (1961)

The belief in the deity, which in the fragments of Zeno's teaching appears
merely formal and argumentative, becomes in the verse of Cleanthes
ardent and dominating.

E. V. ARNOLD (1911)
in Virgil's *Aeneid*. With this poem, Virgil (70–19 B.C.) initiated the tradition of the “secondary” epic: that is, he not only conceptualized the human ideals of his society in a hero (which was the main purpose of the “primary” epic as established by Homer), but he modified these ideals accord with philosophical considerations of the nature, function, and purpose of the society itself. Virgil uses a legendary story of the founding of Rome by Aeneas, a Trojan briefly mentioned by Homer but credited in later tradition with escaping from Troy, wandering about the Mediterranean world, and eventually establishing a kingdom in Italy which ultimately became Rome. But as Virgil tells it, Aeneas does not simply wander aimlessly; he is destined to reach Italy; he does not set up a kingdom haphazardly, he establishes a dominion suitable for its destiny as ruler of the world. Virgil has combined the Stoic conception of destiny, of a purposeful orderly design in the operations of the universe, with the Roman sense of national greatness—illustrating the identification which the Romans made between the Stoic idea of world order and their own attempt to impose order, namely, Roman rule, upon the world. Aeneas embodies the Stoic virtues appropriate to an ideal Roman as Virgil saw them; but even more, he is, as Virgil calls him, “destiny’s darling,” the agent of divine forces working to establish the universal supremacy of Rome.

Most of what we know about Middle Stoicism as a philosophical system has come down to us secondhand. Very little of Panaetius' or Posidonius' original work has survived; but in the writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero we do have an account of their ideas, closer to them in time than Diogenes Laerius to Zeno and much superior in style. Cicero is one of the great figures in Roman history—a statesman, orator, philosopher, and writer who had considerable influence on his own time and enormous impact on the subsequent development of Western culture. He stands as a classic representative of the Roman republican spirit, and his writing has served for centuries as the model of Latin prose style. His reputation during the Renaissance cast him as the embodiment of the ideal of classical civilization: a statesman concerned with legitimacy in government, a moral philosopher concerned with men's fulfilling their potential as members of society, a writer concerned with clarity of thought and cogency of expression. In our own time Cicero's reputation as a philosopher has been somewhat modified. He is recognized not as an original thinker but as a skillful expositor of Greek thought, the first significant Roman spokesman for the philosophic attitudes that characterized Roman civilization. Although some of his work has been lost, a considerable amount of it is still extant, including enough of his philosophical writings to present a reasonably full exposition of Stoic philosophy as it was understood by a thoughtful, aristocratic Roman man of affairs during the first century B.C.

This quality of his thinking is well illustrated in his essay *On Old Age*, a philosophic dialogue examining the practical applications of Stoic objectivity in creating a full, satisfactory life. Cicero conceived the dialogue as taking place among three eminent Romans of the preceding century, in the year 150 B.C., when Cato, the chief speaker, was eighty-four years old and Laelius and Scipio, the other two speakers, were both in early middle age. The ideas voiced by Cato are based on Stoic thought, but the practical achievements of Stoicism are demonstrated in the person of Cato himself—in the serene detachment with which a well-stocked and perceptive mind can view the circumstances of human existence.

### On Old Age

2. SCIPIO: Many a time have I in conversation with my friend Gaius Laelius here expressed my admiration, Marcus Cato, of the eminent, nay perfect, wisdom displayed by you indeed at all points, but above everything because I have noticed that old age never seemed a burden to you, while to most old men it is so hateful that they declare themselves under a weight heavier than Aetna.

CATO: Your admiration is easily excited, it seems, my dear Scipio and Laelius. Men, of course, who have no resources in themselves for securing a good and happy life find every age burdensome. But those who look for all happiness from within can never think anything bad which nature makes inevitable. In that category before anything else comes old age, to which all wish to attain, and at which all grumble when attained. Such is Folly's inconsistency and unreasonableness! They say that it is stealing upon them faster than they expected. In the first place, who compelled them to hug an illusion? For in what respect did old age steal upon manhood faster than manhood upon childhood? In the next place, in what way would old age have been less disagreeable to them if they were in their eight-hundredth year than in their eightieth? For their past, however long, when once it was past, would have no consolation for a stupid old age. Wherefore, if it is your wont to admire my wisdom—and I would that it were worthy of your good opinion and of my own surname of Sapiens— it really consists in the fact that I follow Nature, the best of guides, as I would a god, and am loyal to her commands. It is not likely, if she has written the rest of the play well, that she has been careless about the last act like some idle poet. But after all some "last" was inevitable, just as to the berries of a tree and the fruits of the earth there comes in the fulness of time a period of decay and fall. A wise man will not make a grievance of this. To rebel against nature—is not that to fight like the giants with the gods?

LAELIUS: And yet, Cato, you will do us a very great favour (I venture to speak for Scipio as for myself) if—since we all hope, or at least wish, to become old men—you would allow us to learn from you in good time before it arrives, by what methods we may most easily acquire the strength to support the burden of advancing age.

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From *Letters and Treatises*, translated by E. S. Shuckburgh. This material reprinted with the kind permission of Crowell Collier and Macmillan, Inc.
CATO: I will do so without doubt, Laelius, especially if, as you say, it will be agreeable to you both.

LELIUS: We do wish very much, Cato, if it is no trouble to you, to be allowed to see the nature of the bourne which you have reached after completing a long journey, as it were, upon which we too are bound to embark.

3. CATO: I will do the best I can, Laelius. It has often been my fortune to hear the complaints of my contemporaries—like will to like, you know, according to the old proverb—complaints to which men like C. Salinator and Sp. Albinus, who were of consular rank and about my time, used to give vent. They were, first, that they had lost the pleasures of the senses, without which they did not regard life as life at all; and, secondly, that they were neglected by those from whom they had been used to receive attentions. Such men appear to me to lay the blame on the wrong thing. For if it had been the fault of old age, then these same misfortunes would have befallen me and all other men of advanced years. But I have known many of them who never said a word of complaint against old age; for they were only too glad to be freed from the bondage of passion, and were not at all looked down upon by their friends. The fact is that the blame for all complaints of that kind is to be charged to character, not to a particular time of life. For old men who are reasonable and neither cross-grained nor churlish find old age tolerable enough: whereas unreason and churlishness cause uneasiness at every time of life.

LELIUS: It is as you say, Cato. But perhaps some one may suggest that it is your large means, wealth, and high position that make you think old age tolerable: whereas such good fortune only falls to few.

CATO: There is something in that, Laelius, but by no means all. For instance, the story is told of the answer of Themistocles\(^4\) in a wrangle with a certain Seriphian, who asserted that he owed his brilliant position to the reputation of his country, not to his own. "If I had been a Seriphian," said he, "even I should never have been famous, nor would you if you had been an Athenian." Something like this may be said of old age. For the philosopher himself could not find old age easy to bear in the depths of poverty, nor the fool feel it anything but a burden though he were a millionaire. You may be sure, my dear Scipio and Laelius, that the arms best adapted to old age are culture and the active exercise of the virtues. For if they have been maintained at every period—if one has lived much as well as long—the harvest they produce is wonderful, not only because they never fail us even in our last days (though that in itself is supremely important), but also because the consciousness of a well-spent life and the recollection of many virtuous actions are exceedingly delightful.

5. ... Yet it is after all true that everybody cannot be a Scipio or a Maximus,\(^5\) with stormings of cities, with battles by land and sea, with wars in which they themselves commanded, and with triumphs to recall.

Besides this there is a quiet, pure, and cultivated life which produces a calm and gentle old age, such as we have been told Plato's was, who died at his writing-desk in his eighty-first year; or like that of Isocrates,\(^6\) who says that he wrote the book called *The Panegyric* in his ninety-fourth year, and who lived for five years afterwards; while his master Gorgias of Leontini completed a hundred and seven years without ever relaxing his diligence or giving up work. When some one asked him why he consented to remain so long alive—"I have no fault," said he, "to find with old age." That was a noble answer, and worthy of a scholar. For fools impute their own frailties and guilt to old age, contrary to the practice of Ennius\(^7\). ... In the lines—

Like some brave steed that oft before
The Olympic wreath of victory bore,
Now by the weight of years oppressed,
Forgets the race, and takes his rest—

he compares his own old age to that of a high-spirited and successful race-horse. And him indeed you may very well remember.

The fact is that when I come to think it over, I find that there are four reasons for old age being thought unhappy: First, that it withdraws us from active employments; second, that it enfeebles the body; third, that it deprives us of nearly all physical pleasures; fourth, that it is the next step to death. Of each of these reasons, if you will allow me, let us examine the force and justice separately.

6. Old age withdraws us from active employments. From which of them?

Do you mean from those carried on by youth and bodily strength? Are there then no old men's employments to be after all conducted by the intellect, even when bodies are weak? So then Q. Maximus did nothing; nor L. Aemilius—your father, Scipio, and my excellent son's father-in-law! So with other old men—the Fabricii, the Curii and Coruncani—when they were supporting the State by their advice and influence, they were doing nothing! To old age Appius Claudius\(^8\) had the additional disadvantage of being blind; yet it was he who, when the Senate was inclining towards a peace with Pyrrhus and was for making a treaty, did not hesitate to say what Ennius has embalmed in the verses:

Whither have swerved the souls so firm of yore?
Is sense grown senseless? Can feet stand no more?

And so on in a tone of the most passionate vehemence. You know the poem, and the speech of Appius himself is extant. Now, he delivered it seventeen years after his second consulship, there having been an interval of ten years between the two consulships, and he having been censor before his previous consulship. This will show you that at the

\(^{1}\)Athenian statesman of the early fifth century B.C., who commanded the Athenian forces in their victory over the Persians in the great naval battle of Salamis.

\(^{2}\)Famous Roman generals of the third century B.C.

\(^{3}\)Athenian orator and rhetorician, 436–338 B.C.

\(^{4}\)The first great Roman poet, 239–169 B.C.

\(^{5}\)Roman statesman who flourished around the end of the fourth and beginning of the third centuries B.C.
time of the war with Pyrrhus he was a very old man. Yet this is the
story handed down to us.

There is therefore nothing in the arguments of those who say that
old age takes no part in public business. They are like men who would
say that a steersman does nothing in sailing a ship, because, while some
of the crew are climbing the masts, others hurrying up and down the
gangways, others pumping out the bilge water, he sits quietly in the
stern holding the tiller. He does not do what young men do; never­
theless he does what is much more important and better. The great
affairs of life are not performed by physical strength, or activity, or
nimbleness of body, but by deliberation, character, expression of opinion.
Of these old age is not only not deprived, but, as a rule, has them in
a greater degree. Unless by any chance I, who as a soldier in the ranks,
as military tribune, as legate, and as consul have been employed in
various kinds of war, now appear to you to be idle because not actively
engaged in war. But I enjoin upon the Senate what is to be done, and
how. Carthage has long been harbouring evil designs, and I accordingly
proclaim war against her in good time. I shall never cease to entertain
fears about her till I hear of her having been levelled with the ground....
And if those qualities had not resided in us seniors, our ancestors would
never have called their supreme council a Senate. At Sparta, indeed,
those who hold the highest magistracies are in accordance with the fact
actually called "elders." But if you will take the trouble to read or
listen to foreign history, you will find that the mightiest States have been
brought into peril by young men, have been supported and restored
by old. The question occurs in the poet Naevius's9 Sport:

Pray, who are those who brought your State
With such despatch to meet its fate?

There is a long answer, but this is the chief point:

A crop of brand-new orators we grew,
And foolish, paltry lads who thought they knew.

For of course rashness is the note of youth, prudence of old age.

7. But, it is said, memory dwindles. No doubt, unless you keep it
in practice, or if you happen to be somewhat dull by nature. Themistocles
had the names of all his fellow-citizens by heart. Do you imagine that
in his old age he used to address Aristides as Lysimachus? For my part,
I know not only the present generation, but their fathers also, and their
grandfathers. Nor have I any fear of losing my memory by reading tomb­
stones, according to the vulgar superstition. On the contrary, by reading
them I renew my memory of those who are dead and gone. Nor, in
point of fact, have I ever heard of any old man forgetting where he had
hidden his money. They remember everything that interests them: when
to answer to their bail, business appointments, who owes them money;

8. That remark about the old man is better than the following:

If age brought nothing worse than this,
It were enough to mar our bliss,
That he who lives for many years
Sees much to shun and much for tears.

Yes, and perhaps much that gives him pleasure too. Besides, as to sub­
jects for tears, he often comes upon them in youth as well.

A still more questionable sentiment in the same Caecilius is:

No greater misery can of age be told
Than this: be sure, the young dislike the old.

9Both words are formed from the root sen-, meaning "old."
9Roman poet of the third century B.C. 
*Caecilius Statius, a comic playwright contemporary with Cato.
Delight in them is nearer the mark than dislike. For just as old men, if they are wise, take pleasure in the society of young men of good parts, and as old age is rendered less dreary for those who are courted and liked by the youth, so also do young men find pleasure in the maxims of the old, by which they are drawn to the pursuit of excellence. Nor do I perceive that you find my society less pleasant than I do yours. But this is enough to show you how, so far from being listless and sluggish, old age is even a busy time, always doing and attempting something, of course of the same nature as each man's taste had been in the previous part of his life. Nay, do not some even add to their stock of learning? We see Solon, for instance, boast in his poems that he grows old "daily learning something new." Or again in my own case, it was only when an old man that I became acquainted with Greek literature, which in fact I absorbed with such avidity—in my yearning to quench, as it were, a long-continued thirst—that I became acquainted with the very facts which you see me now using as precedents. When I heard what Socrates had done about the lyre I should have liked for my part to have done that too, for the ancients used to learn the lyre but, at any rate, I worked hard at literature.

9. Nor, again, do I now miss the bodily strength of a young man (for that was the second point as to the disadvantages of old age) any more than as a young man I missed the strength of a bull or an elephant. You should use what you have, and whatever you may chance to be doing, do it with all your might. What could be weaker than Milo of Croton's exclamation? When in his old age he was watching some athletes practising in the course, he is said to have looked at his arms and to have exclaimed with tears in his eyes: "Ah well! these are now as good as dead." Not a bit more so than yourself, you trifler! For at no time were you made famous by your real self, but by chest and biceps. Sex. Aelius never gave vent to such a remark, nor, many years before him, Titus Coruneanios, nor, more recently, P. Crassus—all of them learned juris-consults in active practice, whose knowledge of their profession was maintained to their last breath. I am afraid an orator does lose vigour by old age, for his art is not a matter of the intellect alone, but in lungs and bodily strength. Though as a rule that musical ring in the voice even grunts a little as one grows old—certainly I have not yet lost it, and you see my years. Yet after all the style of speech suitable to an old man is the quiet and unemotional, and it often happens that the chastened and calm delivery of an old man eloquent secures a hearing. If you cannot attain to that yourself, you might still instruct a Scipio and a Laelius. For what is more charming than old age surrounded by the enthusiasm of youth? Shall we not allow old age even the strength to teach the young, to train and equip them for all the duties of life? And what can be a nobler employment? For my part, I used to think Publius and Gnaeus Scipio and your two grandfathers, L. Aemilius and P. Africanus, fortunate men when I saw them with a company of young nobles about them. Nor should we think any teachers of the fine arts otherwise than happy, however much their bodily forces may have decayed and failed. And yet that same failure of the bodily forces is more often brought about by the vices of youth than of old age; for a dissolute and intemperate youth hands down to old age in a worn-out state. . . . Don't you see in Homer how frequently Nestor talks of his own good qualities? For he was living through a third generation; nor had he any reason to fear that upon saying what was true about himself he should appear either over vain or talkative. For, as Homer says, "from his lips flowed discourse sweeter than honey," for which sweet breath he wanted no bodily strength. And yet, after all, the famous leader of the Greeks nowhere wishes to have ten men like Ajax, but like Nestor: if he could get them, he feels no doubt of Troy shortly falling.

10. But to return to my own case: I am in my eighty-fourth year. I could wish that I had been able to make the same boast as Cyrus; but, after all, I can say this: I am not indeed as vigorous as I was as a private soldier in the Punic war, or as quaestor in the same war, or as consul in Spain, and four years later when as a military tribune I took part in the engagement at Thermopylae under the consul Manius Acilius Glabrio; but yet, as you see, old age has not entirely destroyed my muscles, has not quite brought me to the ground. The Senate-house does not find all my vigour gone, nor the rostra, nor my friends, nor my clients, nor my foreign guests. For I have never given in to that ancient and much-praised proverb:

Old when young
Is old for long.

For myself, I had rather be an old man a somewhat shorter time than an old man before my time. Accordingly, no one up to the present has wished to see me, to whom I have been denied as engaged. But, it may be said, I have less strength than either of you. Neither have you the strength of the centurion T. Pontius: is he the more eminent man on that account? Let there be only a proper husbanding of strength, and let each man proportion his efforts to his powers. Such an one will assuredly not be possessed with any great regret for his loss of strength. At Olympia Milo is said to have stepped into the course carrying a live ox on his shoulders. Which then of the two would you prefer to have given you—bodily strength like that, or intellectual strength like that of Pythagoras? In fine, enjoy that blessing when you have it; when it is gone, don't wish it back—unless we are to think that young men should wish their childhood back, and those somewhat older their youth! The course of life is fixed, and nature admits of its being run in one way, and only once; and to each part of our life there is something specially seasonable; so that the feebleness of children, as well as the high spirit of youth, the soberness of maturer years, and the ripe wisdom of old age—all have a certain natural advantage which should be

[1]Persian prince of the late fifth century B.C., whom Xenophon served as a general and later described in his historical writings. On his deathbed, at a very advanced age, Cyrus claimed that he never perceived his old age to have become weaker than his youth.
I have defended I am at this particular time getting into shape for public

of antiquity. The speeches delivered in all the celebrated cases which possibly become old body in mind he never will. I am now engaged a young man who has something of the old man in him, so do I an old talk to properly right. I do not attach to any one. For as could be as old as age IS respectable just as long as it asserts itself, mainly family, indeed, ancestral custom and discipline were in full vigour. The slaves feared him, his sons were in awe of him, all loved him. In that merely an influence? but an absolute command over his family: his bow, and never gave in to old age by growing slack. He maintained not he was both old and blind. For he kept his mind at full stretch like a five daughters, that great establishment, and all those clients, though them, even so senile folly—usually called imbecility—applies to old men; but yet, as it is not all young men that are so, but the bad set among old age. Young men are more frequently wanton and dissolute than old do these things, yet I should enjoy my sofa—imagining the very operations which I was now unable to perform. But what makes me capable of doing this is my past life. For a man who is always living in the midst of these studies and labours does not perceive when old age creeps upon him. Thus, by slow and imperceptible degrees life draws to its end. There is no sudden breakage; it just slowly goes out.

11. Bodily strength is wanting to old age; but neither is bodily strength demanded from old men. Therefore, both by law and custom, men of my time of life are exempt from those duties which cannot be supported without bodily strength. Accordingly not only are we not forced to do what we cannot do; we are not even obliged to do as much as we can. But, it will be said, many old men are so feeble that they cannot perform any duty in life of any sort or kind. That is not a weakness to be set down as peculiar to old age: it is one shared by ill health. How feeble was the son of P. Africanus, who adopted you! What weak health he had, or rather no health at all! If that had not been the case, we should have had in him a second brilliant light in the political horizon; for wonder, then, that old men are eventually feeble, when even young men old age and make up for its drawbacks by taking pains. We must fight it as we should an illness. We must look after our health, use moderate exercise, take just enough food and drink to recruit, but not to overload, our strength. Nor is it the body alone that must be supported, but the intellect and soul much more. For they are like lamps: unless you feed them with oil, they too go out from old age. Again, the body is apt to get gross from exercise; but the intellect becomes nimble by exercising itself. For what Caecilius means by "old dotards of the comic stage" are the cedulous, the forgetful, and the slipshod. These are faults that do not attach to old age as such, but to a sluggish, spiritless, and sleepy old age. Young men are more frequently wanton and dissolute than old men; but yet, as it is not all young men that are so, but the bad set among them, even so senile folly—usually called imbecility—applies to old men of unsound character, not to all. Appius governed four sturdy sons, five daughters, that great establishment, and all those clients, though he was both old and blind. For he kept his mind at full stretch like a bow, and never gave in to old age by growing slack. He maintained not merely an influence, but an absolute command over his family: his slaves feared him, his sons were in awe of him, all loved him. In that family, indeed, ancestral custom and discipline were in full vigour. The fact is that old age is respectable just as long as it asserts itself, maintains its proper rights, and is not enslaved to any one. For as I admire a young man who has something of the old man in him, so do I an old one who has something of a young man. The man who aims at this may possibly become old in body—in mind he never will. I am now engaged in composing the seventh book of my Origins. I collect all the records of antiquity. The speeches delivered in all the celebrated cases which I have defended I am at this particular time getting into shape for pub-
if we must grant pleasure something, since we do not find it easy to resist its charms,—for Plato, with happy inspiration, calls pleasure "vice's bait," because of course men are caught by it as fish by a hook,—yet, although old age has to abstain from extravagant banquets, it is still capable of enjoying modest festivities. ... To begin with, I have always remained a member of a "club"—clubs, you know, were established in my quaeestorship on the reception of the Magna Mater from Ida. So I used to dine at their feast with the members of my club—on the whole with moderation, though there was a certain warmth of temperament natural to my time of life; but as that advances there is a daily decrease of all excitement. Nor was I, in fact, ever wont to measure my enjoyment even of these banquets by the physical pleasures they gave more than by the gathering and conversation of friends. For it was a good idea of our ancestors to style the presence of guests at a dinner-table—seeing that it implied a community of enjoyment—a convivium, "a living together." It is a better term than the Greek words which mean "a drinking together," or, "an eating together." For they would seem to give the preference to what is really the least important part of it.

14. For myself, owing to the pleasure I take in conversation, I enjoy even banquets that begin early in the afternoon, and not only in company with my contemporaries—of whom very few survive—but also with men of your age and with yourselves. I am thankful to old age, which has increased my avidity for conversation, while it has removed that for eating and drinking. But if anyone does enjoy these—not to seem to have proclaimed war against all pleasure without exception, which is perhaps a feeling inspired by nature—I fail to perceive even in these very pleasures that old age is entirely without the power of appreciation. For myself, I take delight even in the old-fashioned appointment of master of the feast; and in the arrangement of the conversation, which according to ancestral custom is begun from the last place on the left-hand couch when the wine is brought in; as also in the cups which, as in Xenophon's banquet, are small and filled by driblets; and in the contrivance for cooling in summer, and for warming by the winter sun or winter fire. These things I keep up even among my Sabine countrymen, and every day have a full dinner-parry of neighbours, which we prolong as far into the night as we can with varied conversation.

But you may urge—there is not the same tingling sensation of pleasure in old men. No doubt; but neither do they miss it so much. For nothing gives you uneasiness which you do not miss. That was a fine answer of Sophocles to a man who asked him, when in extreme old age, whether he was still a lover. "Heaven forbid!" he replied; "I was only too glad to escape from that, as though from a boorish and insane master." To men indeed who are keen after such things it may possibly appear disagreeable and uncomfortable to be without them; but to jaded appetites it is pleasanter to lack than to enjoy. However, he cannot be said to lack who does not want: my contention is that not to want is the pleasanter thing.

But even granting that youth enjoys these pleasures with more zest; in the first place, they are insignificant things to enjoy, as I have said; and in the second place, such as age is not entirely without, if it does not possess them in profusion. Just as a man gets greater pleasure from Ambivius Turprio, if seated in the front row at the theatre than if he was in the last, yet, after all, the man in the last row does get pleasure, so youth, because it looks at pleasures at closer quarters, perhaps enjoys itself more, yet even old age, looking at them from a distance, does enjoy itself well enough. Why, what blessings are these—that the soul, having served its time, so to speak, in the campaigns of desire and ambition, rivalry and hatred, and all the passions, should live in its own thoughts, and, as the expression goes, should dwell apart! Indeed, if it has in store any of what I may call the food of study and philosophy, nothing can be pleasanter than an old age of leisure. ...  

17. ... For the crowning grace of old age is influence. How great was that of L. Caecilius Metellus? How great that of Attius Calatinus, over whom the famous epitaph was placed, "Very many classes agree in deeming this to have been the very first man of the nation!" The line cut on his tomb is well known. It is natural, then, that a man should have had influence, in whose praise the verdict of history is unanimous. Again, in recent times, what a great man was Publius Crassus, Pontifex Maximus, and his successor in the same office, M. Lepidus! I need scarcely mention Paulus or Africanus, or, as I did before, Maximus. It was not only their senatorial utterances that had weight: their least gesture had it also. In fact, old age, especially when it has enjoyed honours, has an influence worth all the pleasures of youth put together.

18. But throughout my discourse remember that my panegyric applies to an old age that has been established on foundations laid by youth. From which may be deduced what I once said with universal applause, that it was a wretched old age that had to defend itself by speech. Neither white hairs nor wrinkles can at once claim influence in themselves: just as a man gets greater pleasure from Metellus and Calatinus were both prominent Roman statesmen of the third century B.C., interpreting divine signs, the "auspices," in regard to any official public undertaking.  

17 "Political power."

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13. The establishment in Roman religious rites of the worship of the Great Mother, corresponding to the worship of Rhea, a Greek goddess who represented the fruitfulness of nature and whose main shrine was on Mt. Ida.
be compared with the reward of influence? Those who have employed it with distinction appear to me to have played the drama of life to its end, and not to have broken down in the last act like unpractised players.

But, it will be said, old men are fretful, fidgety, ill-tempered, and disagreeable. If you come to that, they are alsoavaricious. But these are faults of character, not of the time of life. And, after all, fretfulness and the other faults I mentioned admit of some excuse—not, indeed, a complete one, but one that may possibly pass muster: they think themselves neglected, looked down upon, mocked. Besides, with bodily weakness every rub is a source of pain. Yet all these faults are softened both by good character and good education. Illustrations of this may be found in real life, as also on the stage in the case of the brothers in the *Adelphi*. What harshness in the one, what gracious manners in the other! The fact is that, just as it is not every wine, so it is not every life, that turns sour from keeping. Serious gravity I approve of in old age, but, as in other things, it must be within due limits: bitterness I can in no case approve. What the object of senile avarice may be I cannot conceive. For can there be anything more absurd than to seek more journey money, the less there remains of the journey?

19. There remains the fourth reason, which more than anything else appears to torment men of my age and keep them in a flutter—the nearness of death, which, it must be allowed, cannot be far from an old man. But what a poor dotard must he be who has not learnt in the course of so long a life that death is not a thing to be feared? Death, that is either to be totally disregarded, if it entirely extinguishes the soul, or is even to be desired, if it brings him where he is to exist for ever. A third alternative, at any rate, cannot possibly be discovered. Why then should I be afraid if I am destined either not to be miserable after death or even to be happy? After all, who is such a fool as to feel certain—however young he may be—that he will be alive in the evening? Nay, that time of life has many more chances of death than ours. Young men more easily contract diseases; their illnesses are more serious; their treatment has to be more severe. Accordingly, only a few arrive at old age. If that were not so, life would be conducted better and more wisely—than for old men to die? A thing, indeed, which also befalls young men, though nature revolts and fights against it. Accordingly, the death of young men seems to me like putting out a great fire with a deluge of water; but old men die like a fire going out because it has burnt down of its own nature without artificial means. Again, just as apples when unripe are torn from trees, but when ripe and mellow drop down, so it is violence that takes life from young men, ripeness from old. This ripeness is so delightful to me, that, as I approach nearer to death, I seem as it were to be sightig land, and to be coming to port at last after a long voyage.

20. Again, there is no fixed borderline for old age, and you are making a good and proper use of it as long as you can satisfy the call of duty and disregard death. The result of this is, that old age is even more confident and courageous than youth. That is the meaning of Solon's answer to the tyrant Pisistratus. When the latter asked him what he relied upon in opposing him with such boldness, he is said to have replied, "On my old age." But that end of life is the best, when, without the intellect or senses being impaired, Nature herself takes to pieces her own work which she also put together. Just as the builder of a ship or a house can break them up more easily than any one else, so the nature that knit together the human frame can also best unfasten it. Moreover, a thing freshly glued together is always difficult to pull asunder; if old, this is easily done.

The result is that the short time of life left to them is not to be grasped at by old men with greedy eagerness, or abandoned without cause. Pythagoras forbids us, without an order from our commander, that is, God, to desert life's fortress and outpost. Solon's epitaph, indeed, is that of a wise man, in which he says that he does not wish his death to be unaccompanied by the sorrow and lamentations of his friends.

*A comedy by Terence, a Roman comic playwright contemporary with Catull.*
He wants, I suppose, to be beloved by them. But I rather think Ennius says better:

None grace me with their tears, nor weeping loud
Make sad my funeral rites!

He holds that a death is not a subject for mourning when it is followed by immortality.

Again, there may possibly be some sensation of dying—and that only for a short time, especially in the case of an old man: after death, indeed, sensation is either what one would desire, or it disappears altogether. But to disregard death is a lesson which must be studied from our youth up; for unless that is learnt, no one can have a quiet mind. For we certainly must, and that too without being certain whether it may not be this very day. As death, therefore, is hanging over our head every hour, how can a man ever be unshaken in soul if he fears it?

... As a general truth, as it seems to me, it is weariness of all pursuits that creates weariness of life. There are certain pursuits adapted to childhood: do young men miss them? There are others suited to early manhood: does that settled time of life called "middle age" ask for them? There are others, again, suited to that age, but not looked for in old age. There are, finally, some which belong to old age. Therefore, as the pursuits of the earlier ages have their time for disappearing, so also have those of old age. And when that takes place, a satori of life brings on the ripe time for death.

21. For I do not see why I should not venture to tell you my personal opinion as to death, of which I seem to myself to have a clearer vision in proportion as I am nearer to it. I believe, Scipio and Laelius, that your fathers—those illustrious men and my dearest friends—are still alive, and that too with a life which alone deserves the name. For as long as we are imprisoned in this framework of the body, we perform a certain function and laborious work assigned us by fate. The soul, in fact, is of heavenly origin, forced down from its home in the highest, and, so to speak, buried in earth, a place quite opposed to its divine nature and its immortality. But I suppose the immortal gods have sown souls broadcast in human bodies, that there might be some to survey the world, and while contemplating the order of the heavenly bodies to imitate it in the unvarying regularity of their life. Nor is it only reason and arguments that have brought me to this belief, but the great fame and authority of the most distinguished philosophers. I used to be told that Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans—almost natives of our country, who in old times had been called the Italian school of philosophers—never doubted that we had souls drafted from the universal Divine intelligence. I used besides to have pointed out to me the discourse delivered by Socrates on the last day of his life upon his immortality of the soul—Socrates who was pronounced by the oracle at Delphi to be the wisest of men. I need say no more. I have convinced myself, and I hold—in view of the rapid movement of the soul, its vivid memory of the past and its prophetic knowledge of the future, its many accomplishments, its vast range of knowledge, its numerous discoveries—

—that a nature embracing such varied gifts cannot itself be mortal. For since the soul is always in motion and yet has no external source of motion, for it is self-moved, I conclude that it will also have no end to its motion, because it is not likely ever to abandon itself. Again, since the nature of the soul is not composite, nor has in it any admixture that is not homogeneous and similar, I conclude that it is indivisible, and, if indivisible, that it cannot perish. It is again a strong proof of men knowing most things before birth, that when mere children they grasp innumerable facts with such speed as to show that they are not then taking them in for the first time, but remembering and recalling them. This is roughly Plato's argument.

22. Once more in Xenophon we have the elder Cyrus on his deathbed speaking as follows:—

"Do not suppose, my dearest sons, that when I have left you I shall be nowhere and no one. Even when I was with you, you did not see my soul, but knew that it was in this body of mine from what I did. Believe then that it is still the same, even though you see it not. The honours paid to illustrious men had not continued to exist after their death, had the souls of these very men not done something to make us retain our recollection of them beyond the ordinary time. For myself, I never could be persuaded that souls while in mortal bodies were alive, and died directly they left them; nor, in fact, that the soul only lost all intelligence when it left the unintelligent body. I believe rather that when, by being liberated from all corporeal admixture, it has begun to be pure and undefiled, it is then that it becomes wise. And again, when man's natural frame is resolved into its elements by death, it is clearly seen whither each of the other elements departs: for they all go to the place from which they came: but the soul alone is invisible alike when present and when departing. Once more, you see that nothing is so like death as sleep. And yet it is in sleepers that souls most clearly reveal their divine nature; for they foresee many events when they are allowed to escape and are left free. This shows what they are likely to be when they have completely freed themselves from the fetters of the body. Wherefore, if these things are so, obey me as a god. But if my soul is to perish with my body, nevertheless do you do me from awe of the gods, who guard and govern this fair universe, preserve my memory by the loyalty and piety of your lives."

23. Such are the words of the dying Cyrus. I will now, with your good leave, look at home. No one, my dear Scipio, shall ever persuade me that your father Paulus and your two grandfathers Paulus and Africanus, or the father of Africanus, or his uncle, or many other illustrious men not necessary to mention, would have attempted such lofty deeds as to be remembered by posterity, had they not seen in their minds that future ages concerned them. Do you suppose—to take an old man's privilege of a little self-praise—that I should have been likely to undertake such heavy labours by day and night, at home and abroad, if I had been destined to have the same limit to my glory as to my life? Had it not been much better to pass an age of ease and repose without any labour or exertion? But my soul, I know not how, refusing to be kept down, ever fixed its eyes upon future ages, as though from a con-
viction that it would begin to live only when it had left the body. But had it not been the case that souls were immortal, it would not have been the souls of all the best men that made the greatest efforts after an immortality of fame.

Again, is there not the fact that the wisest man ever dies with the greatest cheerfulness, the most unwise with the least? Don’t you think that the soul which has the clearer and longer sight sees that it is starting for better things, while the soul whose vision is dimmer does not see it? For my part, I am transported with the desire to see your fathers, who were the object of my reverence and affection. Nor is it only those whom I knew that I long to see; it is those also of whom I have been told and have read, whom I have myself recorded in my history. When I am setting out for that, there is certainly no one who will find it easy to draw me back, or boil me up again like second Pelios. Nay, if some god should grant me to renew my childhood from my present age and once more to be dying in my cradle, I would firmly refuse; nor should I in truth be willing, after having, as it were, run the full course, to be recalled from the winning-crease to the barriers. For what blessings has life to offer? Should we not rather say what labour? But granting that it has, at any rate it has after all a limit to enjoyment or to existence. I don’t wish to deprecate life, as many men and good philosophers have often done; nor do I regret having lived, for I have done so in a way that lets me think that I was not born in vain. But I quit life as I would an inn, not as I would a home. For nature has given us a place of entertainment, not of residence.

Oh glorious day when I shall set out to join that heavenly conclave and company of souls, and depart from the turmoil and impurities of this world! For I shall not go to join only those whom I have before mentioned, but also my son Caro, than whom no better man was ever born, nor one more conspicuous for piety. His body was burnt by me, though mine ought, on the contrary, to have been burnt by him; but his spirit, not abandoning, but ever looking back upon me, has certainly gone whither he saw that I too must come. I was thought to bear that loss heroically, not that I really bore it without distress, but I found my own consolation in the thought that the parting and separation between us was not to be for long.

It is by these means, my dear Scipio,—for you said that you and Laelius were wont to express surprise on this point,—that my old age sits lightly on me, and is not only not oppressive but even delightful. But if I am wrong in thinking the human soul immortal, I am glad to be wrong; nor will I allow the mistake which gives me so much pleasure to be wrested from me as long as I live. But if when dead, as some insignificant philosophers think, I am to be without sensation, I am not afraid of dead philosophers deriding my errors. Again, if we are not to be immortal, it is nevertheless what a man must wish—to have his life end at its proper time. For nature puts a limit to living as to everything else. Now, old age is as it were the playing out of the drama, the full fatigue of which we should shun, especially when we also feel that we have had more than enough of it.

This is all I had to say on old age. I pray that you may arrive at it, that you may put my words to a practical test.
he left no writings; but his lectures had great popularity among people from many different classes of society. One devoted listener was the historian Arrian, who, in his Discourses of Epictetus, has provided us with what amounts to a stenographic record of the philosopher's teachings. The Discourses have the rambling, discursive, repetitive quality of material delivered orally. However, from his lecture notes, Arrian also prepared a Manual, a concise summary of the essence of Epictetus' doctrines, which provides a compact but comprehensive survey of late Stoic thought as voiced by Epictetus.

Manual

1. Of things some are in our power, and others are not. In our power are opinion, movement towards a thing, desire, aversion (turning from a thing); and in a word, whatever are our own acts: not in our power are the body, property, reputation, offices (magisterial power), and in a word, whatever are not our own acts. And the things in our power are by nature free, not subject to restraint nor hindrance: but the things not in our power are weak, slavish, subject to restraint, in the power of others. Remember then that if you think the things which are by nature slavish to be free, and the things which are in the power of others to be your own, you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, you will blame both gods and men: but if you think that only which is your own to be your own, and if you think that what is another's, as it really is, belongs to another, no man will ever compel you, no man will hinder you, you will never blame any man, you will accuse no man, you will do nothing against your will, no man will harm you, you will have no enemy, for you will not suffer any harm.

If then you aim at such great things, remember that you must not attempt to lay hold of them with a small effort; but you must leave alone some things entirely, and postpone others for the present. But if you wish for these great things, and also power and wealth, perhaps you will not gain even these because you aim also at the former: certainly you will fail in those things through which alone happiness and freedom are secured. Straightway then practice saying to every harsh appearance, "You are an appearance, and in no manner what you appear to be." Then examine it by the rules which you possess, and by this first and chiefly, whether it relates to the things which are in our power or to the things which are not in our power: and if it relates to anything which is not in our power, be ready to say, that it does not concern you.

2. Remember that desire contains in it the hope of obtaining that which you desire; and the hope in aversion is that you will not fall into that which you attempt to avoid: and he who fails in his desire is unfortunate; and he who falls into that which he would avoid is unhappy. If then you attempt to avoid only the things contrary to nature which are within your power, you will not be involved in any of the things which you would avoid. But if you attempt to avoid disease or death or poverty, you will be unhappy. Take away then aversion from all things which are not in our power, and transfer it to the things contrary to nature which are in our power. But destroy desire completely for the present. For if you desire anything which is not in our power, you must be unfortunate: but of the things in our power, and which it would be good to desire, nothing yet is before you. But employ the power of moving toward an object and retiring from it; and these powers indeed only slightly and with exceptions and with remission.

3. In everything which pleases the soul, or supplies a want, or is loved, remember to add this: what is the nature of each thing, beginning from the smallest? If you love an earthen vessel, say it is an earthen vessel which you love; for when it has been broken, you will not be disturbed. If you are kissing your child or wife, say that it is a human being whom you are kissing, for when the wife or child dies, you will not be disturbed.

4. When you are going to take in hand any act, remind yourself what kind of an act it is. If you are going to bathe, place before yourself what happens in the bath: some splashing the water, others pushing against one another, others abusing one another, and some stealing: and thus with more safety you will undertake the matter, if you say to yourself, "I now intend to bathe, and to maintain my will in a manner conformable to nature." And so you will do in every act: for thus if any hindrance to bathing shall happen, let this thought be ready: "It was not this only that I intended, but I intended also to maintain my will in a manner conformable to nature." And so you will do in every act: for thus if any hindrance to bathing shall happen, let this thought be ready: "It was not this only that I intended, but I intended also to maintain my will in a manner conformable to nature; but I shall not maintain it so, if I am vexed at what happens."

5. Men are disturbed not by the things which happen, but by the opinions about the things: for example, death is nothing terrible, for if it were, it would have seemed so to Socrates. The opinion about death, that it is terrible, is the terrible thing. When then we are impeded or disturbed or grieved, let us never blame others, but ourselves, that is, our opinions. It is the act of an ill-instructed man to blame others for his own bad condition; it is the act of one who has begun to be instructed, to lay the blame on himself; and of one whose instruction is completed, neither to blame another, nor himself.

6. Be not elated at any excellence which belongs to another. If a horse when he is elated should say, "I am beautiful," one might endure it. But when you are elated, and say, "I have a beautiful horse," you must know that you are elated at having a good horse. What then is your own? The use of appearances. Consequently when in the use of appearances you are conformable to nature, then be elated, for then you will be elated at something good which is your own.
7. As on a voyage when the vessel has reached a port, if you go out to get water, it is an amusement by the way to pick up a shell-fish or some bulb, but your thoughts ought to be directed to the ship, and you ought to be constantly watching if the captain should call, and then you must throw away all those things, that you may not be bound and pitched into the ship like sheep: so in life also, if there be given to you instead of a little bulb and a shell a wife and child, there will be nothing to prevent you from taking them. But if the captain should call, run to the ship, and leave all those things without regard to them. But if you are old, do not even go far from the ship, lest when you are called you make default.

8. Seek not that the things which happen should happen as you wish, but wish the things which happen to be as they are, and you will have a tranquil flow of life.

9. Disease is an impediment to the body, but not to the will, unless the will itself chooses. Lameness is an impediment to the leg, but not to the will. And add this reflection on the occasion of everything that happens; for you will find it an impediment to something else, but not to yourself.

10. On the occasion of every accidental event that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and inquire what power you have for turning it to use. If you see a fair man or a fair woman, you will find that the power to resist is continence. If pain be presented to you, you will find that it is endurance. If it be abusive words, you will find it to be patience. And if you have been thus formed to the proper habit, the appearances will not carry you along with them.

11. Never say about anything, "I have lost it," but say "I have restored it." Is your child dead? It has been restored. Is your wife dead? She has been restored. Has your estate been taken from you? Has not then this also been restored? "But he who has taken it from me is a bad man." But what is it to you, by whose hands the giver demanded it back? So long as he may allow you, take care of it as a thing which belongs to another, as travelers do with their inn.

12. If you intend to improve, throw away such thoughts as these: "If I neglect my affairs, I shall not have the means of living; unless I chastise my slave, he will be bad." For it is better to die of hunger and so to be released from grief and fear than to live in abundance with perturbation; and it is better for your slave to be bad than for you to be unhappy. Begin then from little things. Is the oil spilled? Is a little wine stolen? Say on the occasion, "At such price is sold freedom from perturbation; at such price is sold tranquillity, but nothing is got for nothing." And when you call your slave, consider that it is possible that he does not hear; and if he does hear, that he will do nothing which you wish. But matters are not so well with him, that it should be in his power for you to be not disturbed.

13. If you would improve, submit to be considered without sense and foolish with respect to externals. Wish to be considered to know nothing: and if you shall seem to some to be a person of importance, distrust yourself. For you should know that it is not easy both to keep your will in a condition conformable to nature and to secure external things: but if a man is careful about the one, it is an absolute necessity that he will neglect the other.

14. If you would have your children and your wife and your friends live forever, you are silly; for you would have the things which are not in your power to be in your power, and the things which belong to others to be yours. So if you would have your slave to be free from faults, you are a fool; for you would have badness not to be badness, but something else. But if you wish not to fail in your desires, you are able to do that. Practice then this which you are able to do. He is the master of every man who has the power over the things which another person wishes or does not wish, the power to confer them on him or to take them away. Whoever then wishes to be free, let him neither wish for anything nor avoid anything which depends on others; if he does not observe this rule, he must be a slave.

15. Remember that in life you ought to behave as at a banquet. Suppose that something is carried round and is opposite to you. Stretch out your hand and take a portion with decency. Suppose that it passes by you. Do not detain it. Suppose that it is not yet come to you. Do not send your desire forward to it, but wait till it is opposite to you. Do so with respect to children, with respect to a wife, with respect to magisterial offices, with respect to wealth, and you will be one time a worthy partner of the banquets of the gods. But if you take none of the things which are set before you, and even despise them, then you will be not only a fellow-banqueter with the gods, but also a partner with them in power. For by acting thus Diogenes and Heracleitus and those like them were deservedly divine, and were so called.

16. When you see a person weeping in sorrow either when a child goes abroad or when he is dead, or when the man has lost his property, take care that the appearance do not hurry you away with it, as if he were suffering in external things. But straightway make a distinction in your own mind, and be in readiness to say, "It is not that which has happened that afflicts this man, for it does not afflict another, but it is the opinion about this thing which afflicts the man." So far as words then do not be unwilling to show him sympathy, and even if it happens so, to lament with him. But take care that you do not lament internally also.

17. Remember that you are an actor in a play of such a kind as the author may choose; if short, of a short one; if long, of a long one: if he wishes you to act the part of a poor man, see that you act the part naturally; if the part of a lame man, of a magistrate, of a private person, do the same. For this is your duty, to act well the part that is given to you; but to select the part, belongs to another.

18. When a raven has croaked inauspiciously, let not the appearance hurry you away with it; but straightway make a distinction in your mind and say, "None of these things is signified to me, but either to my poor body, or to my small property, or to my reputation, or to my children or to my wife: but to me all significations are auspicious if I choose.

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1Greek philosophers of the fourth century B.C.
For whatever of these things results, it is in my power to derive benefit from it.

19. You can be invincible, if you enter into no contest in which it is not in your power to conquer. Take care then when you observe a man honored before others or possessed of great power or highly esteemed for any reason, not to suppose him happy, and be not carried away by the appearance. For if the nature of the good is in our power, neither envy nor jealousy will have a place in us. But you yourself will not wish to be a general or senator or consul, but a free man; and there is only one way to this, to despire the things which are not in our power.

20. Remember that it is not he who reviles you or strikes you who insults you, but it is your opinion about these things as being insulting. When then a man irritates you, you must know that it is your own opinion which has irritated you. Therefore especially try not to be carried away by the appearance. For if you once gain time and delay, you will more easily master yourself.

21. Let death and exile and every other thing which appears dreadful be daily before your eyes; but most of all death: and you will never think of anything mean nor will you desire anything extravagantly.

22. If you desire philosophy, prepare yourself from the beginning to be ridiculed, to expect that many will sneer at you, and say, "He has all at once returned to us as a philosopher; and whence does he get this supercilious look for us?" Do you not show a supercilious look; but hold on to the things which seem to you best as one appointed by God to this station. And remember that if you abide in the same principles, these men who first ridiculed will afterward admire you; but if you shall have been overpowered by them, you will bring on yourself double ridicule.

23. If it should ever happen to you to be turned to externals in order to please some person, you must know that you have lost your purpose in life. Be satisfied then in everything with being a philosopher; and if you wish to seem also to any person to be a philosopher, appear so to yourself, and you will be able to do this.

24. Let these thoughts afflict you: "I shall live unhonored and be nobody anywhere." For if want of honor is an evil, you cannot be in evil through the means of another any more than you can be involved in anything base. Is it then your business to obtain the rank of a magistrate, or to be received at a banquet? By no means. How then can this be want of honor? And how will you be nobody nowhere, when you ought to be somebody in those things only which are in your power, in which indeed it is permitted to you to be a man of the greatest worth?

But your friends will be without assistance! What do you mean by being without assistance? They will not receive money from you, nor will you make them Roman citizens. Who then told you that these are among the things which are in our power, and not in the power of others? And who can give to another what he has not himself?

"Acquire money then," your friends say, "that we also may have something." "If I can acquire money and also keep myself modest, and faithful and magnanimous, point out the way, and I will acquire it. But if you ask me to lose the things which are good and my own, in order that you may gain the things which are not good, see how unfair and silly you are. Besides, which would you rather have, money or a faithful and modest friend? For this end then rather help me to be such a man, and do not ask me to do this by which I shall lose that character."

"But my country," you say, "as far as it depends on me, will be without my help." I ask again, what help do you mean? It will not have porticoes or baths through you. And what does this mean? For it is not furnished with shoes by means of a smith, nor with arms by means of a shoemaker. But it is enough if every man fully discharges the work that is his own: and if you provided it with another citizen faithful and modest, would you not be useful to it? Yes. Then you also cannot be useless to it. "What place then," you say, "shall I hold in the city?"

Whatever you can, if you maintain at the same time your fidelity and modesty. But if when you wish to be useful to the state, you lose these qualities, what profit could you be to it, if you were made shameless and faithless?

25. Has any man been preferred before you at a banquet, or in being saluted, or in being invited to a consultation? If these things are good, you ought to rejoice that he has obtained them: but if bad, be not grieved because you have not obtained them; and remember that you cannot, if you do not do the same as they in order to obtain what is not in our power, be considered worthy of the same things. For how can a man obtain an equal share with another when he does not visit a man's doors as that other man does, when he does not attend him when he goes abroad, as the other man does; when he does not flatter him as another does? You will be unjust then and insatiable, if you do not part with the price for which those things are sold, and if you wish to obtain them for nothing. Well, what is the price of lettuces? An obolus perhaps. If then a man gives up the obolus, and receives the lettuces, and if you do not give up the obolus and do not obtain the lettuces, do not suppose that you receive less than he who has got the lettuces; for as he has the lettuces, so you have the obolus which you did not give. In the same way then in the other matter also you have not been invited to a man's feast, for you did not give to the host the price at which the supper is sold; but he sells it for flattery, he sells it for personal attention. Give then the price, if it is for your interest. But if you wish both not to give the price and to obtain the things, you are insatiable and silly. Have you nothing then in place of the supper? You have indeed, you have the not-flattering of him whom you did not choose to flatter; you have the not-enduring of the man when he enters the room.

26. We may learn the will of nature from the things in which we do not differ from one another; for instance, when your neighbor's slave has broken his cup, or anything else, we are ready to say forthwith, "It is one of the things which happen." You must know then that when your cup also is broken, you ought to think as you did when your neighbor's cup was broken. Transfer this reflection to greater things also. Is another man's child or wife dead? There is no one who would

A coin of small denomination. Epictetus is making a point that would be conveyed today by mentioning a dime or a quarter.
not say, "This is an event incident to man." But when a man's own child or wife is dead, forthwith he calls out, "Woe to me, how wretched I am." But we ought to remember how we feel when we hear that it has happened to others.

27. As a mark is not set up for the purpose of missing the aim, so neither does the nature of evil exist in the world.

28. If any person was intending to put your body in the power of any man whom you fell in with on the way, you would be vexed: but that you put your understanding in the power of any man whom you meet, so that if he should revile you, it is disturbed and troubled, are you not ashamed at this?

29. In every act observe the things which come first, and those which follow it; and so proceed to the act. If you do not, at first you will approach it with alacrity, without having thought of the things which will follow; but afterward, when certain ugly things have shown themselves, you will be ashamed. A man wishes to conquer at the Olympic games. I also wish indeed, for it is a fine thing. But observe both the things which come first, and the things which follow; and then begin the act. You must do everything according to rule, eat according to strict orders, abstain from delicacies, exercise yourself as you are bid at appointed times, in heat, in cold; you must not drink cold water, nor wine as you choose; in a word, you must deliver yourself up to the exercise master as you do to the physician, and then proceed to the contest. And sometimes you will strain the hand, put the ankle out of joint, swallow much dust, sometimes be flogged, and after all this be defeated. When you have considered all this, if you still choose, go to the contest. If you do not, you will behave like children, who at one time play at wrestlers, another time at flute players, again as gladiators, then as trumpeters, then as tragic actors; so you also will be at one time an athlete, at another a gladiator, then a rhetorician, then a philosopher, but with your whole soul you will be nothing at all; but like an ape you imitate everything that you see, and one thing after another pleases you. For you have not undertaken anything with consideration, nor have you surveyed it well; but carelessly and with cold desire. Thus some who have seen a philosopher and having heard one speak, as Euphrates speaks—and who can speak as he does?—they wish to be philosophers themselves also. My man, first of all consider what kind of thing it is; and then examine your own nature to see if you are able to sustain the character. Do you wish to be a pentathlete or a wrestler? Look at your arms, your thighs, examine your loins. For different men are formed by nature for different things. Do you think that if you do these things, you can eat in the same manner, drink in the same manner, and in the same manner loathe certain things? You must pass sleepless nights, endure toil, go away from your kinsmen, be despised by a slave, in everything have the inferior part, in honor, in office, in the courts of justice, in every little matter. Consider these things, if you would exchange for them freedom from passions, liberty, tranquillity. If not, take care that, like little children, you be not now a philosopher, then a servant of the publicans, then a rhetorician, then a procurator for Caesar. These things are not consistent. You must be one man, either good or bad. You must either cultivate your own ruling faculty, or external things; you must either exercise your skill on internal things or on external things; that is, you must either maintain the position of a philosopher or that of a common person.

30. Duties are universally measured by relations. Is a man a father? The parent is to take care of him, to yield to him in all things, to submit when he is reproachful, when he inflicts blows. But suppose that he is a bad father. Were you then by nature made akin to a good father? No; only to a father. Does a brother wrong you? Maintain then your own position toward him, and examine not what he is doing, but what you must do so that your will shall be conformable to nature. For another will not damage you, unless you choose; but you will be damaged only then when you shall think that you are damaged. In this way then you will discover your duty in relation to a neighbor, to a citizen, to a general, if you become accustomed to contemplate these relationships.

31. As to piety toward the Gods you must know that this is the chief thing: to have right opinions about them, to think that they exist, and that they administer the Universe well and justly. And you must fix yourself in this principle: to obey them, and yield to them in everything which happens, and voluntarily to follow it as being accomplished by the wisest intelligence. For if you do so, you will never either blame the Gods, nor will you accuse them of neglecting you. And it is not possible for this to be done in any other way than by withdrawing from the things which are not in our power, and by placing the good and the evil only in those things which are in our power. For if you think that any of the things which are not in our power is good or bad, it is absolutely necessary that when you do not obtain what you wish and fall into those things which you do not wish, you will find fault and hate those who are the cause of them; for every animal is formed by nature to fly from the things which appear harmful and the things which are the cause of the harm, but to follow and admire the things which are useful and the causes of the useful. It is impossible then for a person who thinks that he is harmed to be delighted with that which he thinks to be the cause of the harm, as it is also impossible to be pleased with the harm itself. For this reason also a father is reviled by his son, when he is reproachful, when he inflicts blows. But suppose that he gives no part to his son of the things which are considered to be good. It was this which made Polynices and Eteocles enemies, the opinion that royal power was a good. It is for this reason that the cultivator of the earth reviles the gods, for this reason the sailor does, and the merchant, and for this reason those who lose their wives and their children. For where the useful is, there also piety is. Consequently he who takes care to desire as he ought and to avoid as he ought, at the same time also cares after piety. But to make libations and to sacrifice and to offer first fruits according to the custom of our fathers, purely and not meanly nor carelessly nor scantily nor above our ability, is a thing which belongs to all to do.

A notable Stoic philosopher who flourished early in the second century A.D.

In ancient Greek tradition, the sons of Oedipus, who killed each other during a quarrel over their inheritance of the kingship of Thebes.
Comments / on Epictetus

A novice or one unacquainted with true philosophy he [Epictetus] will hardly stir or affect, but when a man has made some progress or is already far advanced, it is amazing how Epictetus stirs him up, and though he is always touching some tender spot, yet he gives delight also. . . .

JUSTUS LIPSIUS (1605)

Like the religions of the time, though they were so different in their conclusions, [Epictetus'] emphasis on choice and purpose represents a move away from Greek rationalism, a shift of emphasis from knowledge to nonintellectual qualities. Although the world was in Stoic theory well ordered, its actual appearance presented a complexity so many-sided as to appear meaningless, and in this uncongenial confusion—though in tougher, less easily consoling vein than the religions—helped men maintain their self-respect.

MICHAEL GRANT (1960)

[The Stoics perfected the theory of equanimity and independence at the cost of the practice, for they reduced everything to a mental process, and by arguments, such as are presented in the first chapter of Epictetus, sophisticated themselves into all the amenities of life. But in doing so they left out of account that everything to which one is accustomed becomes a need, and therefore can only be given up with pain; that the will does not allow itself to be played with, cannot enjoy without loving the pleasures; that a dog does not remain indifferent if one draws a piece of meat through its mouth, and neither does a wise man if he is hungry; and that there is no middle path between desiring and renouncing.

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER (1818)

Epictetus was a man of warm feelings and clear head; his addresses . . . serve admirably to stimulate the domestic virtues and to keep alive the religious spirit; but his teaching lacks the force which befits the training of a statesman or a king. . . . [He] makes it clear that the true philosopher is not (as many believe the Stoics to hold) a man devoid of natural feeling, but on the contrary affectionate and considerate in all the relations of life.

E. V. ARNOLD (1911)

Of all pagan teachers his [Epictetus'] doctrine stands closest to the teachings of Jesus. . . .

MOSES HADAS (1954)

Marcus Aurelius

121–180 A.D.

The development of Late Stoicism into a medium for personal edification, which is evident in the teachings of Epictetus, reaches its culmination in the writings of Marcus Aurelius, a nobleman who was the Roman emperor for the last two decades of his life. As historians of philosophy like to point out, the universal attraction and individualistic quality of late Stoic thought are probably best demonstrated by the fact that of its two foremost exponents one was a slave at Rome and the other was the ruler of the Roman Empire.

The very nature of Marcus Aurelius' writings testify to the personal quality of his work: they consist of twelve books of philosophic meditations not intended for publication but addressed simply To Himself. They constitute a sort of spiritual diary in which he expressed the ideas that helped shape his inner life, ideas derived from Stoic philosophy but tempered by his own personality. In this form they have always struck a responsive chord in men likewise concerned with the development of their inner life. The strength that these ideas exerted in Marcus Aurelius is evident from the external circumstances under which he wrote these books, circumstances that are nowhere mentioned or even hinted at in them. At the same time that he was examining his private existence, writing to himself about the abiding truths of human experience as he understood them, he was, in his public capacity as emperor of Rome, leading his troops against wild Germanic tribes in the harsh winter of northern Europe. The only recognition he gives to these circumstances in his books is an occasional indication of where one of them was written. As a Roman emperor, he led troops and fought wars; as a Stoic philosopher, he apparently classed such matters among "things indifferent" and simply ignored them when considering the nature of his spiritual being.

To Himself

Book XII

1. All those things at which you wish to arrive by a circuitous road you can have now, if you do not refuse them to yourself. And this means, if you will take no notice of all the past, and trust the future to providence, and direct the present only conformably to piety and justice. Conformably to piety, that you may be content with the lot which is assigned to you, for nature designed it for you and you for it. Conformably to justice, that you may always speak the truth freely and without disguise, and do the things which are agreeable to law and according to the worth of each. And let neither another man's wickedness hinder you, nor opinion nor voice, nor yet the sensations of the poor flesh.

which has grown about you; for the passive part will look to this. If then, whatever the time may be when you shall be near to your departure, neglecting everything else you shall respect only your ruling faculty and the divinity within you, and if you shall be afraid not because you must some time cease to live, but if you shall fear never to have begun to live according to nature—then you will be a man worthy of the universe which has produced you, and you will cease to be a stranger in your native land, and to wonder at things which happen daily as if they were something unexpected, and to be dependent on this or that.

2. God sees the ruling principles of all men bared of the material vesture and rind and impurities. For with his intellectual part alone he touches the intelligence only which has flowed and been derived from himself into these bodies. And if you also use yourself to do this, you will rid yourself of much trouble. For he who regards not the poor flesh which envelops him, surely will not trouble himself by looking after raiment and dwelling and fame and such like externals and show.

3. The things are three of which you are composed—a little body, a little breath, intelligence. Of these the first two are yours, so far as it is your duty to take care of them; but the third alone is properly yours. Therefore if you shall separate from yourself, that is, from your understanding, whatever others do or say, and whatever you have done or said yourself, and whatever future things trouble you because they may happen, and whatever in the body which envelops you or in the breath which is by nature associated with the body and attached to you independent of your will, and whatever the external circumambient vortex whirls round, so that the intellectual power exempt from the things of fate can live pure and free by itself, doing what is just and accepting what happens and saying the truth: if you will separate, I say, from this ruling faculty the things which are attached to it by the impressions of sense, and the things of time to come and of time that is past, and will make yourself like Empedocles’ sphere;

All round, and in its joyous rest reposing;

and if you shall strive to live only what is really your life, that is, the present—then you will be able to pass that portion of life which remains for you up to the time of your death, free from perturbations, nobly, and obedient to your own daemon.

4. I have often wondered how it is that every man loves himself more than all the rest of men, but yet sets less value on his own opinion of himself than on the opinion of others. If then a god or a wise teacher should present himself to man and bid him to think of nothing and to design nothing which he would not express as soon as he conceived it, he could not endure it even for a single day. So much more respect

1. Philosopher and scientist of the fifth century B.C., whose conceptions included the idea of a spherical universe.

2. Two of the many different kinds of professional fighters who performed in Roman arenas. The pancratiasts fought bareheaded, using a combination of boxing and wrestling skills; the gladiators fought with swords.
If then there is an invincible necessity, why do you resist? But if there is a Providence which allows itself to be propitiated, make yourself worthy of the help of the divinity. But if there is a confusion without a governor, be content that in such a tempest you have in yourself a certain ruling intelligence. And even if the tempest carry you away, let it carry away the poor flesh, the poor breath, everything else; for the intelligence at least it will not carry away.

15. Does the light of the lamp shine without losing its splendor until it is extinguished; and shall the truth which is in you and justice and temperance be extinguished?

16. When a man has presented the appearance of having done wrong, say, "How then do I know if this is a wrongful act? And even if he has done wrong, how do I know that he has not condemned himself? and so this is like tearing his own face. Consider that he who would not have the bad man do wrong, is like the man who would not have the fig tree to bear juice in the figs and infants to cry and the horse to neigh, the bad man do wrong, is like the man who would not have the fig tree to bear juice in the figs and infants to cry and the horse to neigh, and whatever else must of necessity be. For what must a man do who has such a character?" If then you are irritable, cure this man's disposition.

17. If it is not right, do not do it: if it is not true, do not say it.

18. In everything always observe what the thing is which produces for you an appearance, and resolve it by dividing it into the formal, the material, the purpose, and the time within which it must end.

19. Perceive at last that you have in you something better and more divine than the things which cause the various affects, and as it were pull you by the strings. What is there now in my mind? Is it fear, or suspicion, or desire, or anything of the kind?

20. First, do nothing inconsiderately, nor without a purpose. Second, make your acts refer to nothing else than to a social end.

21. Consider that before long you will be nobody and nowhere, nor will any of the things exist which you now see, nor any of those who are now living. For all things are formed by nature to change and be turned and to perish in order that other things in continuous succession may exist.

22. Consider that everything is opinion, and opinion is in your power. Take away then, when you choose, your opinion, and like a mariner, who has doubled the promontory, you will find calm, everything stable, and a waveless bay.

23. Any one activity whatever it may be, when it has ceased at its proper time, suffers no evil because it has ceased; nor does he who has done this act suffer any evil for this reason that the act has ceased. In like manner then the whole which consists of all the acts, which is our life, if it cease at its proper time, suffers no evil for the reason that it has ceased; nor has he who has terminated this series at the proper time been ill dealt with. But the proper time and the limit nature fixes, sometimes as in old age the peculiar nature of man, but always the universal nature, by the change of whose parts the whole universe continues ever young and perfect. And everything which is useful to the universal is always good and in season. Therefore the termination of life for every man is no evil, because it is not shameful, since it is both independent of the will and not opposed to the general interest, but good, since it is seasonable and profitable to and congruent with the universal. He is moved by the deity who is moved in the same manner with the deity and moved toward the same things in his mind.

24. These three principles you must have in readiness. In the things which you do, do nothing either inconsiderately or otherwise than as justice herself would act; but with respect to what may happen to you from without, consider that it happens either by chance or according to Providence, and you must neither blame chance nor accuse Providence. Second, consider what every being is from the seed to the time of its receiving a soul, and from the reception of a soul to the giving back of the same, and of what things every being is compounded and into what things it is resolved. Third, if you should suddenly be raised up above the earth, and should look down on human things, and observe how great the variety is, and at the same time also should see at a glance how great is the number of beings who dwell all around in the air and the ether, consider that as often as you should be raised up, you would see the same things, sameness of form and shortness of duration. Are these things to be proud of?

25. Cast away opinion: you are saved. Who then hinders you from casting it away?

26. When you are troubled about anything, you have forgotten this: that all things happen according to the universal nature; and forgotten this: that a man's wrongful act is nothing to you. And further you have forgotten this: that everything which happens, always happened so and will happen so, and now happens so everywhere; forgotten this too, how close is the kinship between a man and the whole human race, for it is a community, not of a little blood or seed, but of intelligence. And you have forgotten this too: that every man's intelligence is a god, and is an efflux of the deity; and forgotten this: that nothing is a man's own, but that his child and his body and his very soul came from the deity; forgotten this: that everything is opinion; and lastly you have forgotten that every man lives the present time only, and loses only this.

27. Constantly bring to your recollection those who have complained greatly about anything, those who have been most conspicuous by the greatest fame or misfortunes or enmities or fortunes of any kind: then think where are they all now? Smoke and ash and a tale, or not even a tale. And let there be present on your mind also everything of this sort, how Fabius Catullinus lived in the country, and Lucius Lupus in his gardens, and Stertinius at Baiae, and Tiberius at Capri and Rufus at Velia; and in fine think of the eager pursuit of anything conjoined with pride; and how worthless everything is after which men violently strain; and how much more philosophical it is for a man in the opportunities presented to him to show himself just, temperate, obedient to the gods, and to do this with all simplicity: for the pride which is proud of its want of pride is the most intolerable of all.

28. To those who ask, Where have you seen the gods or how do you comprehend that they exist and so worship them, I answer, in the first place, they may be seen even with the eyes; in the second place neither have I seen even my own soul and yet I honor it. Thus then with respect to the gods, from what I constantly experience of their power I comprehend that they exist and I venerate them.
29. The safety of life is this, to examine everything all through, what it is itself, what is its material, what the formal part, with all your soul to do justice and to say the truth. What remains except to enjoy life by joining one good thing to another so as not to leave even the smallest intervals between.

30. There is one light of sun, though it is interrupted by walls, mountains, and other things infinite. There is one common substance, though it is distributed among countless bodies which have their several qualities. There is one soul, though it is distributed among infinite natures and individual limitations. There is one intelligent soul, though it seems to be divided. Now in the things which have been mentioned all the other parts, such as those which are air and matter, are without sensation and have no fellowship: and yet even these parts the intelligent principle holds together and the gravitation toward the same. But intellect in a peculiar manner tends to that which is of the same kind, and combines with it, and the feeling for communion is not interrupted.

31. What do you wish? To continue to exist? Well, do you wish to have sensation? movement? growth? and then again to grow? to use your speech? to think? What is it that of all these things which seems to you worth desiring? But if it is easy to set little value on all these things, turn to that which remains, which is to follow reason and God. But it is inconsistent with honoring reason and God to be troubled because by death a man will be deprived of the other things.

32. How small a part of boundless and unfathomable time is assigned to every man? for it is very soon swallowed up in the eternal. And how small a part of the whole substance? and how small a part of the universal soul? and on what a small clod of the whole earth you creep? Reflecting on all this consider nothing to be great, except to act as your nature leads you, and to endure that which the common nature brings.

33. How does the ruling faculty make use of itself? for all lies in this. But everything else, whether it is in the power of your will or not, is only lifeless ashes and smoke.

34. This reflection is most adapted to move us to contempt of death—that even those who think pleasure to be a good and pain an evil still have despised it.

35. The man to whom the only good is that which comes in due season, and to whom it is the same thing whether he has done more or fewer acts conformable to right reason, and to whom it makes no difference whether he contemplates the world for a longer or a shorter time—for this man neither is death a terrible thing.

36. Man, you have been a citizen in this great world state: what difference does it make to you whether for five years or three? for that which is conformable to the laws is just for all. Where is the hardship then, if no tyrant nor yet an unjust judge sends you away from the state, but nature who brought you into it? the same as if a praetor who has employed an actor dismisses him from the stage. "But I have not finished the five acts, but only three of them." You say well, but in life the three acts are the whole drama; for what shall be a complete drama is determined by him who was once the cause of its composition, and now of its dissolution: but you are the cause of neither. Depart then satisfied, for he also who releases you is satisfied.

Comments / on Marcus Aurelius

We do not go to Aurelius to learn what Stoic doctrine was; this is taken for granted throughout the book; but we can see how it affected a man in whom the intellectual outlook was after all foreshortened by sympathies and yearnings which had grown up in his nature. The traditional criticism of the school as being harsh, unsympathetic, unfeeling, breaks to pieces as we read these "thoughts"; rather we find an excess of emotion, a surrender to human weakness. A study of Stoicism based on the work of Aurelius alone would indeed give us but a one-sided picture; but a study in which they were omitted would certainly lack completeness.

E. V. ARNOLD (1911)

All readers of Marcus Aurelius' To Himself have been impressed by the author's saintliness. . . . Countless moderns have cherished Marcus' book, but it is notable that men of action—Frederick the Great, Maximilian of Bavaria, Captain John Smith of Virginia, and "Chinese" Gordon—have been particularly attached to it.

MOSES HADAS (1954)

Marcus Aurelius has always shattered derogatory criticism, because his appeal to the resources of pure, selfless conscience is at once so sublime and so infinitely pathetic.

R. M. WENLEY (1924)

Some critics account To Himself . . . [as] merely the morbid haverings of a priggish mind torturing itself by its own introspective irresolution.

R. H. BARROW (1949)

Stoicism preached as a duty the taking of an active part in public affairs if opportunity arose. . . . Despite the part, judicious and otherwise, which they thus played from time to time in the affairs of the State (their most famous public man was of course Marcus Aurelius), Stoicism was a strongly individual philosophy, and its chief aim was the good of the individual's soul.

H. J. ROSE (1948)