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Meditations

Tà eîs éautón

Marcus Aurelius

c. 170–180

Philosophy · Religion

Meditations

Τὰ εἰς ἑαυτόν

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Translated from the Greek by Ether Library

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Marcus Aurelius (121–180)

Translated from the Greek by Ether Library

Written in Greek in the 170s for the author's own use, and first printed at
Zurich in 1559.

A Note on the Translation

This is a complete translation of the notebook that Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome from 161 to 180, kept for himself in Greek. It is made directly from the Greek, and no earlier English version was used as its basis; the public-domain translations of George Long (1862) and Meric Casaubon (1634) were looked at only where the sense of the Greek is in doubt. The source is the text edited by J. H. Leopold (Oxford, 1908), in the digital transcription published by the Perseus Digital Library at Tufts University.

The manuscripts head the work *Tὰ εἰς ἑαυτόν*, “to himself.” The English title, *Meditations*, is the one by which the book has long been known. Its twelve books and the chapter numbers within them come from later editors, not from Marcus, and both are kept. Long chapters are divided where Leopold divides them, and each of the 533 paragraphs that result appears here as one paragraph. Two short notes of place, at the end of Books One and Two, stand on their own lines as they do in the manuscripts.

Marcus speaks to himself as “you,” to remind rather than to instruct. The English keeps his second person, his commands, his clipped notes and his long arguments, and avoids the cadence of a sermon. Book One has no verbs in the Greek (“From my grandfather Verus: decency and an even temper”), and the English keeps that form.

The key words of his Stoic vocabulary are rendered the same way throughout. The *hēgemonikon*, the part of the soul that judges, assents, and moves to act, is “the ruling center”; the *daimōn* is “the spirit within”; *logos* is “reason,” *phantasia* “impression,” *hypolēpsis* “judgment,” *dogmata* “principles,” *koinōnikos* “social.” Where the Greek is damaged, a gap is marked ⟨...⟩ and words supplied by editors stand in the same brackets.

Names are given in their usual English forms, and the spelling is American. The 115 notes are the translator’s. They identify people, quotations, and damaged passages, and offer no commentary.

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Book One

1 From my grandfather Verus: ¹ decency and an even temper.

2 From what was said and remembered of my father: ² modesty and manliness.

3 From my mother: ³ reverence for the gods and generosity; holding back not only from doing wrong but even from thinking of it; and a simple way of living, far from the habits of the rich.

4 From my great-grandfather: ⁴ that I did not go to the public schools but had good teachers at home, and that I learned that on such things one should spend freely.

5 From my tutor: not to become a Green or a Blue at the races, or a partisan of the light shields or the heavy shields at the games; ⁵ to put up with hardship and need little; to do my own work and keep out of other people's business; and to be slow to listen to slander.

6 From Diognetus: ⁶ not to get worked up over trifles; to disbelieve what wonder-workers and sorcerers say about spells and the driving out of spirits and the like; not to keep fighting quails or be carried away by that sort of thing; to put up with plain speaking; to become at home in philosophy, and to hear first Bacchius, then Tandasis and Marcianus; to write dialogues as a boy; and to want a camp bed and a hide to sleep on, and whatever else belongs to the Greek training.

7 From Rusticus: ⁷ the impression that my character needed correcting and care; not to be sidetracked into a sophist's ambitions,

writing treatises on doctrine, giving little sermons to stir people up, or putting on a dazzling display of the man of discipline or the man of good works; to keep clear of rhetoric, poetry, and fine phrases; not to walk around the house in formal dress or do anything of the kind; to write letters simply, like the one he wrote to my mother from Sinuessa; to be ready to make peace and be reconciled with those who have lost their temper with me or done me wrong, as soon as they themselves are willing to come back; to read carefully, not settling for a rough grasp of the whole, and not to be quick to agree with people who talk too much; and to have come across the notes of the lectures of Epictetus,⁸ which he gave me from his own library.

8 From Apollonius:⁹ freedom, and a resolve that leaves nothing whatever to chance; to look to nothing else, not even for a moment, but reason; to be always the same, in sharp pain, at the loss of a child, in long illness; to have seen plainly, in a living example, that the same man can be most intense and yet relaxed; not to be irritable in explaining things; to have seen a man who clearly counted his experience and skill in teaching doctrines as the least of his gifts; and to have learned how to accept what pass for favors from friends without being lowered by them and without letting them pass unnoticed.

9 From Sextus:¹⁰ kindness; the example of a household governed by a father; the idea of living according to nature; dignity without pretense; close attention to the needs of friends; patience with the uneducated and with those who hold opinions without thinking them through; an easy accord with everyone, so that his company was more pleasant than any flattery, while the very people he was with held him, at that moment, in the deepest respect; the ability to find, with understanding and method, the principles necessary for life, and to set them in order; never showing even a trace of anger or any other passion, but being at once wholly free

of passion and full of affection; praise without noise; great learning without display.

10 From Alexander the grammarian:¹¹ not to find fault; not to pounce scornfully on people who let slip a foreign word or a solecism or an ugly sound, but to bring in, deftly, just the expression that ought to have been used, by way of an answer, or of agreeing, or of discussing the matter itself rather than the word, or by some other tactful reminder of that kind.

11 From Fronto:¹² to notice what envy and double-dealing and hypocrisy go with a tyrant; and that the people we call patricians are, on the whole, somehow short of natural affection.

12 From Alexander the Platonist:¹³ not to say to anyone often, or without need, or to write in a letter, “I have no time”; and not to keep excusing myself in this way, pleading the press of business, from the duties we owe to those we live with.

13 From Catulus:¹⁴ not to brush aside a friend’s complaint, even if it happens to be unreasonable, but to try to restore the old footing; to speak of my teachers with heartfelt praise, as is told of Domitius and Athenodotus; and a true love of children.

14 From my brother Severus:¹⁵ love of family, love of truth, love of justice; that through him I came to know Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dion, and Brutus,¹⁶ and formed the idea of a state with one law for all, governed on equal terms and with equal freedom of speech, and of a monarchy that respects above all the freedom of its subjects; from him also a steady and constant regard for (philosophy); doing good and giving generously; hopefulness, and confidence that my friends love me; openness toward those he happened to censure; and that his friends had no need to guess what he wanted or did not want: it was plain.

15 From Maximus:¹⁷ self-mastery, and not being swept about by anything; good cheer in all circumstances, illness among them; a

character well tempered, gentle and dignified; doing the work at hand without complaint; that everyone believed that what he said he meant, and that whatever he did he did with no ill intent. Never surprised, never startled; never in a hurry or hanging back, never at a loss, never downcast or putting on a smile, nor again angry or suspicious; generous, forgiving, truthful; the look of a man who was straight rather than one who had been straightened; that no one ever thought himself looked down on by him, nor would anyone have dared to think himself his better; and a gracious wit.

16 From my father:¹⁸ mildness, and unshaken firmness in decisions reached after careful inquiry; no vanity about what pass for honors; love of work and perseverance; a ready ear for anyone with something to offer for the common good; giving each man his due, and not to be moved from it; knowing from experience when to tighten the reins and when to let them go.

Putting a stop to love affairs with boys; his sense of fellowship; letting his friends off from always dining with him or going with him on his journeys, and those who had been kept away by some business always found him the same; his careful and patient inquiry in council, never breaking off the search early because first impressions satisfied him; holding on to his friends, never tiring of them and never infatuated; self-sufficiency in everything, and cheerfulness.

Foresight far ahead, and arranging the smallest matters in advance without making a drama of it; acclamations and all flattery checked in his reign; constant watch over what the empire needed, careful keeping of its funds, and patience under the blame this brought him; no superstition about the gods, and with men no courting of the people, no trying to please, no playing to the crowd, but sober and steady in everything, never vulgar, never chasing novelty.

The things that make life comfortable, of which fortune gave him plenty, he used without vanity and also without apology, so that when they were there he took them as they came, and when they were not he did not miss them. No one could have called him a sophist, or a smart-mouthed house slave, or a pedant, but a mature man, complete, above flattery, able to look after his own affairs and those of others.

Besides this, he honored those who were true philosophers, without reproaching the others, but without being led astray by them either; he was easy to be with, and gracious, though never cloyingly so; he took reasonable care of his body, not as a man who clings to life, nor to look well, nor yet neglecting it, but so that through his own attention he seldom needed a doctor, or medicines, or salves.

Above all, he gave way without envy to people who had some special gift, for speaking, say, or knowledge of law or custom or anything else, and joined in their efforts, so that each might win the credit his own talents deserved; and though he did everything according to ancestral custom, he did not try to be seen doing even this, keeping to ancestral custom.

Then too, he was not easily moved or restless, but content to stay with the same places and the same things; after his attacks of headache he came back at once, fresh and vigorous, to his usual work; he had few secrets, very few and very rare, and those only on matters of state; he was sensible and measured in staging public shows, in building, in largesse, and the like, as befits a man who looks to what has to be done and not to the credit that comes of doing it.

He did not bathe at odd hours, had no passion for building, gave no thought to fancy food, or to the weave and color of his clothes, or to the good looks of his slaves. His clothes were brought up from his villa below at Lorium; at Lanuvium, mostly a plain tunic;

the way he treated the tax collector at Tusculum who begged his pardon; and his whole manner was like that.¹⁹

Nothing harsh in him, nothing implacable, nothing violent, nothing of which anyone could ever say, “He’s working up a sweat”; but everything thought out piece by piece, as if at leisure, calmly, in order, with vigor, all of a piece. What is remembered of Socrates would fit him: that he could both abstain from and enjoy the things that most people are too weak to abstain from and too self-indulgent in enjoying.²⁰

To be strong enough to hold out in the one and keep sober in the other is the mark of a man whose soul is complete and unconquerable, as was seen in the illness of Maximus.

17 From the gods: that I had good grandparents, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good companions at home, kinsmen, friends, nearly all of them good; and that I never stumbled into wronging any of them, although I had the kind of disposition that, given the chance, might have led me to do something of the sort; it was the gods’ kindness that no train of circumstances came along to expose me.

That I was not brought up any longer with my grandfather’s concubine; that I kept the bloom of my youth, and did not become a man before my time, but even put it off for a while.

That I was placed under a ruler and father who was to take all my vanity out of me and bring me to see that it is possible to live at court without needing bodyguards or embroidered robes or torches and statues and the like, and all that pomp; that one can live very nearly like a private citizen without being any the meaner or any the slacker for it in doing what a ruler must do for the common good.

That I had such a brother,²¹ whose character could rouse me to take care of myself, and who also gave me joy with his respect and affection; that my children were not born dull, or deformed in

body. That I made no further progress in rhetoric and poetry and the other pursuits that might perhaps have held me fast, if I had seen myself getting on easily in them.

That I was quick to raise those who brought me up to the rank they seemed to want, and did not put it off in the hope that, since they were still young, I would do it later. That I came to know Apollonius, Rusticus, Maximus.

That I have had clear and frequent impressions of what life according to nature is like, so that, as far as it depends on the gods and on their gifts, their help, their inspiration, nothing now prevents me from living according to nature; and if I still fall short of it, the fault is mine, for not heeding the reminders of the gods, their all but spoken lessons.

That my body has held out so long in such a life; that I did not touch Benedicta or Theodotus,²² and that later, when I did fall into the passions of love, I was cured; that though I was often angry with Rusticus, I did nothing more that I would have regretted; that my mother, who was to die young, nevertheless spent her last years with me.

That whenever I wanted to help someone who was poor or in some other need, I was never told that I had no money to do it with; and that I never fell into a like need myself, so as to have to take from another; that my wife²³ is what she is, so obedient, so loving, so unaffected; that I had no shortage of good tutors for my children.

That remedies were given me in dreams, among others against spitting blood and dizziness, and this at Caieta, as if by an oracle;²⁴ that when I set my heart on philosophy I did not fall into the hands of some sophist, or sit down to write treatises, or analyze syllogisms, or busy myself with the phenomena of the sky. For all these things “need the help of the gods and of fortune.”

Among the Quadi, on the Granua.²⁵

1. Marcus Annius Verus, three times consul, who brought Marcus up in his house after his father's early death.
2. Marcus Annius Verus the younger, praetor, who died when Marcus was a small child.
3. Domitia Lucilla, heiress of a wealthy family.
4. Probably his mother's grandfather, Lucius Catilius Severus.
5. The Greens and the Blues were rival factions at the chariot races; the *parmularii* (light shields) and *scutarii* (heavy shields) were two classes of gladiators, and the crowd took sides over them too.
6. A teacher of Marcus's boyhood, said to have taught him painting. Bacchius, Tandasis, and Marcianus are otherwise unknown philosophers.
7. Quintus Junius Rusticus, a Stoic philosopher, Marcus's teacher and later his adviser.
8. Epictetus wrote nothing; his pupil Arrian took down his lectures, known as the *Discourses*.
9. Apollonius of Chalcedon, a strict Stoic, summoned to Rome by Antoninus Pius to teach Marcus.
10. Sextus of Chaeronea, a philosopher, grandson (or nephew) of Plutarch.
11. Alexander of Cotiaeum, a scholar of Homer.
12. Marcus Cornelius Fronto, the leading Latin orator of the day and Marcus's teacher in rhetoric; their letters survive.
13. Alexander of Seleucia, a Platonist and orator, later Marcus's secretary for Greek correspondence.
14. Cinna Catulus, a Stoic. Athenodotus is said to have been Fronto's teacher; Domitius is unknown.
15. Probably the Peripatetic Claudius Severus, whose son married Marcus's daughter. Marcus had no brother by birth, and the word is disputed.
16. Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus, Stoic senators put to death under Nero and Vespasian; Cato the Younger, who opposed Julius Caesar; Dion of

Syracuse, who fought the tyrant Dionysius; Marcus Brutus, Caesar's assassin.

[17.](#) Claudius Maximus, a Stoic, governor of Africa.

[18.](#) His adoptive father, the emperor Antoninus Pius (reigned 138–161).

[19.](#) The Greek of this passage is damaged and its sense uncertain; “tax collector” reads *telōnēs* for the transmitted *phelōnēs*. Lorium, west of Rome, was the imperial villa where Antoninus grew up and died; Lanuvium and Tusculum are towns in the Alban Hills.

[20.](#) Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.3.

[21.](#) His adoptive brother Lucius Verus, co-emperor with Marcus from 161 until his death in 169.

[22.](#) Unknown; probably members of the household.

[23.](#) Faustina the Younger, daughter of Antoninus Pius, married to Marcus in 145.

[24.](#) The text is corrupt; “as if by an oracle” reads *chrēsmōi* for the transmitted *chrēsēi*. Caieta is a coastal town in Latium.

[25.](#) The Quadi were a Germanic people north of the Danube, in what is now Moravia and Slovakia; the Granua is probably the river Hron. Marcus fought them in the early 170s.

Book Two

1 Say to yourself first thing in the morning: today I shall meet people who are meddling, ungrateful, insolent, treacherous, envious, unsociable. All this has come upon them through their ignorance of what is good and what is bad. But I have seen the nature of the good, that it is beautiful, and of the bad, that it is ugly, and the nature of the wrongdoer himself, that he is my kin, not because we share the same blood or seed, but because we share in the same mind and the same portion of the divine; and so I cannot be harmed by any of them, for no one can involve me in what is ugly; nor can I be angry with my kinsman or hate him. We were born to work together, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. To work against one another, then, is against nature; and to be vexed with someone and turn away from him is to work against him.

2 Whatever it is that I am, it is flesh, a little breath, and the ruling center.¹ Let your books go; stop being pulled about. That is not granted you. Instead, as a man already dying, despise the flesh: blood and bits of bone and a little web, a woven net of nerves, veins, arteries. Look too at the breath, what kind of thing it is: wind, and never the same wind, but every moment breathed out and sucked in again. The third, then, is the ruling center. Think of it this way: you are an old man; do not let this part be a slave any longer, do not let it be jerked like a puppet by unsocial impulses any longer, do not let it any longer resent what fate gives it now or shrink from what is to come.

3 The works of the gods are full of providence. The works of chance are not apart from nature, or from the spinning and weaving together of the things that providence governs. Everything flows from there. Then there is what is necessary, and what is good for the whole universe, of which you are a part. And for every part of nature, what the nature of the whole brings, and what serves to preserve it, is good. And the universe is preserved by change, by the changes of the elements as well as by those of the things compounded from them. Let this be enough for you; let these be your principles. As for your thirst for books, throw it away, so that you do not die grumbling, but truly at peace, and grateful to the gods from your heart.

4 Remember how long you have been putting these things off, and how many times you have been given a period of grace by the gods and not made use of it. It is time now, at last, to see what universe you are a part of, and from what governor of the universe you have flowed out as an emanation; and that a limit has been set to your time, and if you do not use it to clear the clouds from your mind, it will be gone, and you will be gone, and it will not come again.

5 Every hour, set your mind firmly, as a Roman and a man, on doing what is in hand with exact and unaffected dignity, with affection, freedom, and justice, and on giving yourself a rest from all other impressions. And you will give yourself that rest if you do each act as if it were the last of your life, free of all aimlessness, of every passionate turning away from the commands of reason, of pretense, self-love, and discontent with what has been allotted you. You see how few the things are which a man needs to master to live a life that flows well and is like the life of the gods; for the gods will ask nothing more of the one who keeps them.

6 Go on, insult yourself, insult yourself, my soul! But you will have no more time to honor yourself. Each person has one life, and

yours is nearly finished, while you show no respect for yourself but place your own happiness in the souls of others.

7 Do things that happen outside you distract you? Then give yourself the time to learn something more that is good, and stop wandering about. But you must guard against the other kind of drifting as well. For those who are tired of life, and have no target at which to aim every impulse and, in a word, every impression, talk nonsense in their actions too.

8 No one is easily found to be unhappy for not attending to what goes on in another person's soul; but those who do not follow the movements of their own soul are bound to be unhappy.

9 Always remember these things: what the nature of the whole is, and what my own nature is, and how this one stands to that one, and what kind of a part it is of what kind of a whole; and that no one can prevent you from always doing and saying what accords with the nature of which you are a part.

10 Theophrastus,² comparing wrongdoings as one might compare them in a general way, says like a true philosopher that the wrongs done through desire are graver than those done through anger. For the angry man seems to turn away from reason with a certain pain and an unnoticed contraction; but the one who does wrong through desire, being overcome by pleasure, seems somehow more dissolute and more womanish in his wrongdoing. He was right, then, and spoke in a way worthy of philosophy, when he said that the wrong done with pleasure deserves greater blame than the wrong done with pain. And on the whole the one is more like a man who has been wronged first and has been driven to anger by pain; the other has set out to do wrong of his own accord, carried away to do something by desire.

11 Do every act, say every word, think every thought as one who might leave life this very moment. As for departing from among men, if there are gods, it is nothing to fear, for they would not

involve you in anything bad; and if there are none, or if they do not care about human affairs, what is it to me to live in a universe empty of gods or empty of providence? But they do exist, and they do care about human affairs; and they have put it wholly in a man's power not to fall into the things that are truly bad. And if there were anything bad among the rest, they would have provided for that too, so that it would be in everyone's power not to fall into it. But how could something that does not make a man worse make a man's life worse? The nature of the whole would not have overlooked this, either through ignorance, or knowing it but unable to guard against it or correct it; nor would it have made so great a mistake, through lack of power or lack of skill, as to let good and bad things fall to good and bad people alike, without distinction. But death and life, fame and obscurity, pain and pleasure, wealth and poverty, all these fall alike to good and bad people, being neither beautiful nor ugly. So they are neither good nor bad.

12 How quickly all things vanish: the bodies themselves in the universe, the memory of them in time. What all the things of sense are like, and above all those that lure us with pleasure, or frighten us with pain, or are trumpeted abroad by vanity: how cheap they are, how contemptible, how sordid, how perishable and dead. This is for the faculty of the mind to consider. What are they, these people whose opinions and voices give us our good name? What is dying? And that if one looks at it by itself, and with analysis takes apart the images that cling to it, one will no longer think it anything but a work of nature; and anyone who fears a work of nature is a child. And this is not only a work of nature but also something that serves it. How a man touches god, and with what part of himself, and when that part of the man is in what condition.

13 Nothing is more wretched than the man who goes around everything in a circle, and "searches," as the poet says, "the things beneath the earth,"³ and tries by guesswork to find out what is in

the souls of his neighbors, and does not see that it is enough to attend only to the spirit within himself⁴ and to serve it truly. And to serve it is to keep it pure of passion, and of aimlessness, and of discontent with what comes from gods and men. For what comes from the gods deserves reverence for their goodness; what comes from men deserves our love, because they are our kin, and sometimes too, in a way, our pity, for their ignorance of good and bad; this is a disability no less than the one that robs us of telling white from black.

14 Even if you were going to live three thousand years, or thirty thousand, still remember that no one loses any other life than the one he is living, and lives no other than the one he loses. So the longest and the shortest come to the same thing. For the present is the same for all, and so what passes away is the same, and what is lost turns out to be a mere instant. No one can lose either the past or the future: how could anyone take from him what he does not have? Remember these two things, then. One, that all things from eternity are of the same form and come round again in cycles, and that it makes no difference whether a man sees the same things for a hundred years or two hundred or for an infinite time. The other, that the one who lives longest and the one who will die soonest lose the same thing. For it is only the present that a man can be deprived of, since that is all he has, and no one loses what he does not have.

15 That everything is judgment. What was said to Monimus the Cynic is plain enough;⁵ plain too is the use of the saying, if one takes what is good in it as far as it is true.

16 The soul of a man insults itself above all when it becomes, as far as it can, an abscess and a sort of tumor on the universe; for to be vexed at anything that happens is to break away from nature, in which the natures of all other things are each contained as parts. Second, when it turns away from any person, or even moves

against him meaning to harm him, as the souls of angry people do. Third, it insults itself when it is overcome by pleasure or pain. Fourth, when it plays a part and does or says anything falsely and insincerely. Fifth, when it lets any act or impulse of its own go at no target, but acts at random and without thought, whereas even the smallest things ought to be done with reference to the end. And the end of rational creatures is to follow the reason and law of the most venerable city and commonwealth.

17 Of human life, the time is a point, the substance is flowing, the perception dim, the composition of the whole body subject to rot, the soul a whirl, fortune hard to read, fame uncertain. In short, all that belongs to the body is a river, all that belongs to the soul a dream and smoke, life a war and a stranger's stay, and posthumous fame oblivion. What then can see us through? One thing and only one: philosophy. And that means keeping the spirit within unviolated and unharmed, master of pleasures and pains, doing nothing at random, nothing falsely or with pretense, not needing anyone else to do or not do anything; accepting, besides, all that happens and is allotted, as coming from the same place from which the spirit itself came; and, above all, waiting for death with a kindly mind, as nothing but the dissolving of the elements of which every living thing is composed. And if there is nothing to fear for the elements themselves in each one's constantly changing into another, why should anyone look with dread on the change and dissolution of them all? It is according to nature; and nothing according to nature is bad.

At Carnuntum.⁶

1. The *hēgemonikon*: in Stoic thought, the part of the soul that judges, assents, and gives rise to impulse.

[2.](#) Aristotle's pupil and successor (fourth to third century BC). The work quoted is lost.

[3.](#) Pindar, quoted by Plato, *Theaetetus* 173e.

[4.](#) The *daimōn*: the divine portion in each person, nearly the same in this book as the ruling center or the mind.

[5.](#) Monimus, a pupil of Diogenes, is said to have called all judgment *typhos*, smoke or vanity (Diogenes Laertius 6.83, quoting the comic poet Menander).

[6.](#) A Roman legionary base on the Danube, between modern Vienna and Bratislava; Marcus's headquarters for several years of the Marcomannic Wars.

Book Three

1 We ought to consider not only that life is being spent day by day and that less of it is left, but also this: that if a man lives longer, it is far from certain that his mind will still be equal to understanding things, and to the kind of contemplation that aims at knowledge of things divine and human. For if he begins to wander in his wits, breathing and eating and having impressions and impulses and all the rest of it will not fail him; but the power to make use of himself, to measure out exactly every part of his duty, to analyze what appears to him, to judge whether the time has come to take his own leave of life, and all the other things that badly need a well-trained reason, these are snuffed out first. We must hurry, then, not only because we come closer to death every moment, but also because our understanding of things and our grasp of them give out before we do.

2 We should also notice things like this: that even what comes about as a by-product of nature's works has something pleasing and attractive about it. When bread is baked, for instance, some parts of it split open; and these cracks, which are in a way contrary to the baker's intention, are somehow becoming, and stir the appetite in a way of their own. Figs, too, burst open when they are ripest; and in olives ripe on the tree, the very nearness to rotting gives the fruit a beauty of its own. Ears of grain bending down, the lion's wrinkled brow, the foam streaming from the mouth of a boar, and many other things, if one looked at them by themselves, are far from lovely; and yet, because they follow on the works of nature, they add to their beauty and give us pleasure. So that any-

one who has a feeling for the things that come about in the whole, and a deeper understanding of them, will find hardly anything, even among those that follow by way of consequence, that does not fall pleasingly into place. Such a man will look at the real gaping jaws of wild beasts with no less pleasure than at the imitations painters and sculptors show us; he will be able to see a kind of ripeness and bloom in an old woman or an old man, and to look at the charm of the young with chaste eyes; and many such things will come to him, things that do not convince everyone, but only one who has become truly at home with nature and her works.

3 Hippocrates cured many diseases, then fell ill himself and died. The Chaldeans foretold the deaths of many, and then their own fate caught up with them. Alexander and Pompey and Gaius Caesar,¹ after razing whole cities to the ground so many times and cutting down many tens of thousands of horse and foot in battle, they too departed this life at last. Heraclitus, after so much speculating about the burning of the universe, had his insides filled with water, and died smeared with cow dung. Lice killed Democritus, and another kind of lice killed Socrates.² What does it all mean? You went aboard, you made the voyage, you have come into port: get off. If it is into another life, there is nothing empty of gods even there. If it is into a state without feeling, you will cease to be at the mercy of pains and pleasures, and to slave for a vessel so much worse than what serves in it: for the one is mind and spirit, the other earth and gore.

4 Do not waste what is left of your life in thinking about other people, unless you do it with some reference to the common good (for you are depriving yourself of other work). That is: thinking about what so-and-so is doing and why, what he is saying, what he has in mind, what he is plotting, and all such things, makes you stray from watching over your own ruling center.

We must, then, keep out of the chain of our thoughts whatever is random and pointless, and above all whatever is meddlesome and malicious; and we must train ourselves to have only those thoughts about which, if someone suddenly asked, "What are you thinking now?" you could answer at once and frankly, "This, and that"; so that from your answer it would be plain at once that everything in you is simple and kind and fit for a social being, one who cares nothing for pleasures or for any images of enjoyment at all, or for rivalry, or envy and suspicion, or anything else you would blush to admit you had in your mind.

For a man like this, one who no longer puts off taking his place among the best, is a kind of priest and servant of the gods, making use of what is enshrined within him, which keeps the man unstained by pleasures, unwounded by any pain, untouched by any insult, untouched by any wickedness; a wrestler in the greatest of contests, not to be thrown by any passion; dyed deep with justice; welcoming with his whole soul all that happens and is allotted to him; and only rarely, and not without some great necessity for the common good, thinking about what another person is saying or doing or thinking. For he makes only his own affairs the matter of his activity,³ and he keeps constantly in mind what has been spun for him out of the whole; and his own actions he makes fine, and what befalls him he is convinced is good. For the lot assigned to each is carried along with him and carries him along.

He remembers, too, that all rational beings are kin, and that to care for all men is in keeping with man's nature, but that we should not hold to the opinion of all, only of those who live in agreement with nature. As for those who do not live so, he keeps always in mind what sort of people they are at home and away from home, by night and by day, and what sort of people they mix with. So he takes no account even of the praise of such people, who are not even pleased with themselves.

5 Do not act unwillingly, or selfishly, or without examining what you do, or with second thoughts pulling you back; do not dress up your thought in fine phrases; do not talk too much or take on too much. Further, let the god within you be the guardian of a living being who is a man, mature in years, a citizen, a Roman, and a ruler, who has taken up his post like one waiting for the signal to retreat from life, ready to go, needing no oath and no man as witness. And let there be cheerfulness in you, and no need of help from outside, and no need of the peace that others give. You must stand up straight, not be held up straight.

6 If you find in human life anything better than justice, truth, self-control, courage, and, in a word, than your mind's being content with itself, where it makes you act according to right reason, and content with fate, in what is allotted to you without your choosing; if, I say, you see anything better than this, turn to it with your whole soul and enjoy the best you have found. But if nothing appears better than the very spirit that dwells in you, which has brought its own impulses under its control, and examines its impressions, and has drawn itself away, as Socrates used to say, from the persuasions of the senses, and has submitted itself to the gods, and cares for men; if you find everything else smaller and cheaper than this, give no room to anything else, for once you lean toward it and are drawn aside, you will no longer be able, without distraction, to honor above all that good which is properly yours. For it is not right that anything of a different kind should stand against the good of reason and of the citizen: the praise of the many, for instance, or office, or wealth, or the enjoyment of pleasures. All these, even if they seem to fit in for a little while, suddenly take control and carry us away. But you, I say, simply and freely choose the better, and hold on to it. "But the better is what is useful." If it is useful to you as a rational being, keep to it; but if it

is useful to you as an animal, say so, and keep your judgment without vanity; only make sure you conduct the inquiry soundly.

7 Never value as useful to yourself anything that will one day force you to break faith, to give up your self-respect, to hate anyone, to suspect, to curse, to play the hypocrite, to desire anything that needs walls and curtains. For the man who has chosen before all else his own mind and spirit and the rites of its virtue makes no tragic scene, does not groan, will need neither solitude nor a crowd; most important, he will live neither chasing nor fleeing; and whether he will have the use of his soul enclosed in his body for a longer stretch of time or a shorter, he does not care in the least. Even if he must depart this moment, he will go as readily as he would do any other thing that can be done with modesty and decency, guarding against this one thing all his life: that his thought should ever take a turn unfit for a thinking and civic being.

8 In the mind of a man who has been disciplined and thoroughly cleansed you would find nothing festering, nothing foul, no sore beneath a scar. Nor does fate catch his life unfinished, as one might say of a tragic actor who leaves the stage before the play is ended and played out. There is nothing servile in him, nothing affected, nothing clinging, nothing cut off, nothing to answer for, nothing hiding in a hole.

9 Revere your power of judgment. On it everything depends, so that there may never be in your ruling center a judgment out of keeping with nature and with the constitution of a rational being. And this promises freedom from hasty judgment, fellowship with men, and obedience to the gods.

10 Throw away everything else, then, and hold on to these few things only; and remember also that each of us lives only this present moment, this instant; all the rest has been lived already or is uncertain. Small, then, is the time each one lives; small the little

corner of the earth he lives in; small too the longest fame after death, and even that passed on by a succession of little men who will very soon be dead, who do not know even themselves, much less someone who died long ago.

11 To the aids already mentioned let one more be added: always make a definition or a sketch of whatever presents itself to your mind, so as to see what sort of thing it is in its substance, stripped bare, whole and in all its parts, and to say to yourself its proper name, and the names of the things it was compounded from and into which it will be dissolved. For nothing so enlarges the mind as being able to examine methodically and truly each thing that comes before us in life, and always to look at things in such a way as to grasp at the same time what kind of universe this is, what use this thing serves in it, what worth it has for the whole, and what for man, a citizen of the highest city, of which all other cities are like households; what it is, what it is composed of, and how long it is meant to last, this thing that is now making an impression on me, and what virtue I need to meet it: gentleness, courage, trustworthiness, simplicity, self-sufficiency, and the rest. So in each case we must say: this has come from god; this from the drawing of lots, the weaving together of the threads, some such coincidence and chance; this from my fellow tribesman, kinsman, and companion, who does not know, however, what is in accord with his nature. But I do know; so I treat him kindly and justly, by the natural law of fellowship, while at the same time, in indifferent things, I aim to give him what he deserves.

12 If you do the work at hand following right reason, earnestly, vigorously, kindly, with no sideline, keeping your own spirit pure and standing straight, as if you had to give it back at any moment; if you hold to this, expecting nothing and avoiding nothing, but content with acting now according to nature and with heroic

truthfulness in all you say and utter, you will live well. And there is no one who can prevent this.

13 As doctors always keep their instruments and scalpels at hand for emergencies, so keep your principles ready for understanding things divine and human, and for doing everything, even the smallest, as one who remembers the bond between the two. For you will not do anything human well without referring it at the same time to the divine, nor the other way round.

14 Wander no longer. You are not going to read your little notebooks, or the deeds of the ancient Romans and Greeks, or the extracts from their writings that you were putting aside for your old age. Hurry, then, to the end; throw away empty hopes, and come to your own rescue, if you care for yourself at all, while you still can.

15 They do not know how many meanings there are in stealing, sowing, buying, keeping quiet, seeing what must be done; which is not done with the eyes, but with another kind of sight.

16 Body, soul, mind. To the body belong sensations, to the soul impulses, to the mind principles. To take the stamp of impressions belongs to cattle as well; to be jerked like a puppet by impulses belongs to wild beasts as well, and to effeminate men, and to Phalaris and Nero;⁴ to have the mind as a guide to what appear to be duties belongs as well to those who do not believe in the gods, and to those who betray their country, and to those who do whatever they like once they have shut their doors. If, then, all the rest is shared with the people I have named, what remains proper to the good man is to love and welcome what happens to him and is spun for him by fate; not to defile the spirit enshrined within his breast, nor trouble it with a mob of impressions, but to keep it serene, following god in good order, saying nothing contrary to the truth, doing nothing contrary to justice. And if all men refuse to believe that he lives simply, modestly, and cheerfully, he is not

angry with any of them, nor does he turn aside from the road that leads to the end of life, at which he must arrive pure, calm, ready to go, fitted to his lot without any forcing.

[1.](#) Hippocrates, the Greek physician of the fifth century BC; the Chaldeans, Babylonian astrologers; Alexander the Great; Pompey and Julius Caesar, generals of the late Roman Republic.

[2.](#) Heraclitus, the philosopher of fire and flux, was said to have died of dropsy after plastering himself with dung as a cure. Death by lice is usually told of Pherecydes, not Democritus; the “other lice” that killed Socrates are his accusers.

[3.](#) The text is damaged here; this is its likely sense.

[4.](#) Phalaris, tyrant of Acragas in Sicily in the sixth century BC, said to have roasted men alive in a bronze bull; Nero, emperor 54–68.

Book Four

1 When the master within us is in accord with nature, it stands toward events in such a way that it always adapts easily to what is possible and given. It wants no fixed material; it moves toward its aims with a reservation, and whatever is brought in to oppose it, it turns into material for itself, as a fire does when it masters what falls on it. A little lamp would have been put out by these things; but a blazing fire very quickly makes its own whatever is heaped on it, and consumes it, and from that very material rises higher.

2 Do nothing at random, nor otherwise than according to a principle that perfects the art.

3 People look for retreats for themselves, in the country, by the sea, in the mountains; and you too are given to longing for such things above all. But this is altogether the mark of an ordinary man, when you can retreat into yourself at any hour you like. For nowhere does a man retreat to more quiet or more freedom from trouble than into his own soul, especially one who has things within him such that, when he looks into them, he is at once completely at ease; and by ease I mean nothing but good order. Give yourself this retreat constantly, then, and renew yourself. And let the principles be brief and basic which, as soon as you meet them, will be enough to wash away all distress and send you back without resentment to the things you return to.

For what is it you resent? The wickedness of men? Recall the conclusion that rational beings were born for one another, that bearing with them is part of justice, that they do wrong against their will, and how many people have already lived in enmity, sus-

picion, hatred, and fighting, and been laid out and burned to ash; and stop, at last. Or do you resent what is allotted to you from the whole? Remind yourself of the alternative: either providence or atoms; and of all the arguments proving that the universe is a kind of city. Or will the things of the body still lay hold of you? Consider that the mind, once it has drawn itself apart and learned its own power, does not mix with the breath moving gently or roughly; and remember all the rest that you have heard and agreed to about pain and pleasure.

Or will a little fame distract you? Look at how quickly everything is forgotten, at the void of endless time on either side of us, at the emptiness of applause, at how changeable and undiscerning are those who seem to speak well of us, and how narrow the place in which it is confined. For the whole earth is a point, and how small a corner of it is this place where we live! And here, how many are there who will praise you, and what kind of people are they?

So remember, from now on, to retreat into this little plot of land that is yourself; and above all do not let yourself be pulled about or be strained, but be free, and look at things as a man, as a human being, as a citizen, as a mortal creature. And among the things most ready to hand, to which you will turn, let there be these two. One, that things do not touch the soul, but stand outside it, unmoved, and our troubles come only from the judgment within. The other, that all these things you see will change in a moment and be no more; and think constantly of how many changes you have yourself already witnessed. The universe is change, life is judgment.

4 If the mind is common to us, so is reason, by which we are rational beings. If so, the reason that commands us what to do and not to do is common too. If so, the law is common too. If so, we are fellow citizens. If so, we share in some kind of commonwealth. If

so, the universe is a kind of city. For in what other shared commonwealth could anyone say the whole human race shares? And it is from there, from this common city, that our very mind and reason and sense of law come; or where else from? For just as the earthy part of me has been portioned out from some earth, and the watery from another element, and the breath from some source, and the hot and fiery from a source of its own (for nothing comes from nothing, just as nothing goes back into nothing), so the mind too has come from somewhere.

5 Death is, like birth, a mystery of nature: a combining of the same elements, a dissolving into the same. Nothing at all to be ashamed of, for it is not out of keeping with a thinking being or contrary to the plan of its constitution.

6 These things come about of necessity from people of this kind; to wish it otherwise is to wish that the fig tree had no juice. In any case, remember this: within a very short time both you and he will be dead, and soon not even your names will be left.

7 Take away the judgment, and “I have been harmed” is taken away; take away “I have been harmed,” and the harm is taken away.

8 What does not make a man worse than he was does not make his life worse either, and does not harm him, outside or within.

9 The nature of what is beneficial has been compelled to do this.

10 That “everything that happens, happens rightly.” Watch closely and you will find it so. I do not mean only in the sense of sequence, but in the sense of justice, as if by someone who gives each thing its due. Keep watching, then, as you have begun, and whatever you do, do it with this, with being good, in the sense in which good is properly understood. Keep to this in every action.

11 Do not judge things as the man who insults you judges them, or as he wants you to judge them, but see them as they really are.

12 You must always have these two rules ready. One, to do only what the reason of the ruling and lawgiving power suggests for the good of men. The other, to change your mind if someone is there to correct you and lead you away from some opinion. But the change must always come from being convinced that something is just or for the common good, and the reasons you are moved by must be of this kind only, not that something looked pleasant or would bring you credit.

13 “Do you have reason?” “I do.” “Then why not use it? If it is doing its own work, what more do you want?”

14 You came into being as a part. You will vanish into what gave you birth; or rather, you will be taken up, by way of change, into its seed principle.

15 Many grains of incense on the same altar. One falls first, another later; it makes no difference.

16 Within ten days you will seem a god to those very people to whom you now seem a beast and an ape, if you go back to your principles and to the worship of reason.

17 Do not act as if you were going to live ten thousand years. Your fate hangs over you. While you live, while you can, become good.

18 How much leisure a man gains who does not look at what his neighbor said or did or thought, but only at what he himself is doing, so that this very thing may be just and holy, or, as befits a good man,¹ not to look around at black characters, but to run straight along the line, not swerving.

19 The man who is excited about fame after death does not imagine that each of those who remember him will very soon die too, and then the one who succeeds him, until the whole memory goes out, passing along through people who flare up and are snuffed out. But suppose that those who will remember you are immortal, and the memory immortal: what is that to you? And I do

not say it is nothing to the dead, but what is praise to the living, except perhaps for some practical purpose? For you are letting go of nature's gift now at the wrong time, clinging to some other argument.²

20 Everything that is beautiful in any way is beautiful in itself, and ends in itself, with praise no part of it. What is praised becomes neither worse nor better for it. I say this also of things that are called beautiful in the common way, such as material objects and works of art. (What need has the truly beautiful of anything? No more than law, no more than truth, no more than kindness or modesty.) Which of these is beautiful because it is praised, or spoiled because it is blamed? Does an emerald become worse than it was if it is not praised? Or gold, ivory, purple, a lyre, a little knife, a flower, a shrub?

21 If souls live on, how does the air make room for them from all eternity? How does the earth make room for the bodies of those who have been buried for so many ages? For just as here, after these bodies have lasted for some time, their change and dissolution make room for other dead, so the souls that have moved into the air remain together for a time, and then they change and are diffused and kindled, being taken up into the seed principle of the whole, and in this way they make room for the souls that come to live there after them. This is how one might answer, supposing that souls live on. But we should consider not only the multitude of bodies buried in this way, but also that of the animals eaten every day by us and by the other animals. For what a number are consumed and in a sense buried in the bodies of those who feed on them! And yet there is room for them, because they are turned into blood, because they are changed into air or fire. How does one inquire into the truth of this? By dividing into the material and the causal.

22 Do not wander off, but in every impulse give what is just, and in every impression keep to what is clearly grasped.

23 Everything suits me that suits you, O universe. Nothing is too early for me or too late that comes in due time for you. Everything is fruit to me that your seasons bring, O nature. All things come from you, all things are in you, all things go back to you. The poet says, “Dear city of Cecrops”;³ will you not say, “Dear city of Zeus”?

24 “Do little,” he says, “if you want to be at peace.”⁴ Is it not better to do what is necessary, and whatever the reason of a creature born for the city requires, and as it requires? For this brings not only the peace that comes from doing things well, but also the peace that comes from doing few things. Most of what we say and do is unnecessary; take it away, and you will have more leisure and less disturbance. So at each step you must remind yourself: “Is this one of the unnecessary things?” And we must cut away not only unnecessary actions but unnecessary impressions as well; then no superfluous actions will follow in their train.

25 Try how the life of the good man goes for you, the man who is pleased with what is allotted to him from the whole and is content with just action of his own and a kindly disposition.

26 You have seen those things; now look at these. Do not disturb yourself; make yourself simple. Someone does wrong? He does wrong to himself. Something has happened to you? Good. Everything that happens was fated for you from the whole and spun for you from the beginning. In short, life is short. Gain from the present, with sound reasoning and justice. Be sober, at ease.

27 Either an ordered cosmos or a jumble mixed together. But surely a cosmos.⁵ Or can there be some order in you, and disorder in the whole? And this when all things are so distinct and yet so spread through one another and in sympathy?

28 A black character, a womanish character, a stubborn character, beastly, bovine, childish, stupid, false, buffoonish, huckstering, tyrannical.

29 If he is a stranger in the universe who does not know what is in it, no less a stranger is he who does not know what happens in it. An exile, the man who flees the reason of the city; blind, the man who shuts the eye of the mind; a beggar, the man who needs another and does not have from himself all that is useful for life; an abscess on the universe, the man who breaks away and separates himself from the reason of our common nature by being discontented with what happens (for it is nature that brings this, as it brought you too); a splinter of the city, the man who splits his own soul off from the soul of rational beings, which is one.

30 One man practices philosophy without a tunic, another without books. Here is another, half naked: "I have no bread," he says, "and I abide by reason."—And I have no food from my studies, and I abide.

31 Love the little craft you have learned, and rest in it; and go through the rest of your life as one who has entrusted all that is his to the gods with his whole soul, and who makes himself neither tyrant nor slave of any man.

32 Think, for example, of the times of Vespasian,⁶ and you will see all the same things: people marrying, raising children, falling sick, dying, waging war, feasting, trading, farming, flattering, putting on airs, suspecting, plotting, praying for someone to die, grumbling at their lot, falling in love, hoarding, longing for consulships, for kingdoms. Well, that life of theirs is nowhere now. Move on again to the times of Trajan: again all the same things; that life too is dead. In the same way look over the other records of the ages and of whole nations, and see how many strained every nerve and soon fell and were dissolved into the elements. Above all, call to mind those you yourself have known who were pulled about by

empty things, neglecting to do what was in keeping with their own constitution, to hold on to it tightly and be content with it. And here you must remember that the attention given to each action has its own value and proportion; for then you will not lose heart, if you do not spend more time than is fitting on lesser things.

33 The words that were once in common use are now obsolete; so too the names of those who were once much celebrated are now, in a way, obsolete: Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, Dentatus,⁷ and a little later Scipio and Cato, then Augustus too, then Hadrian and Antoninus. All things fade quickly and turn into legend, and soon complete oblivion buries them. And I say this of those who shone in some astonishing way; as for the rest, as soon as they have breathed their last, they are “unseen, unheard of.”⁸ And what, after all, is eternal remembrance? A thing wholly empty. What, then, is there that deserves our effort? This one thing: a just mind, social actions, speech that never lies, and a disposition that welcomes all that happens as necessary, as familiar, as flowing from a source and spring of the same kind.

34 Give yourself up willingly to Clotho,⁹ letting her spin you into whatever things she pleases.

35 Everything lasts a day, both what remembers and what is remembered.

36 Watch constantly how all things come about by change, and get used to thinking that the nature of the whole loves nothing so much as changing the things that are and making new things like them. For everything that exists is in a way the seed of what will come from it; but you think of seeds only as what is cast into the earth or the womb, and that is the thought of a very ordinary man.

37 You will soon be dead, and you are still not simple, not untroubled, not free of the suspicion that you can be harmed from outside, not kindly toward everyone, nor do you yet place wisdom in acting justly alone.

38 Look into their ruling centers, the wise ones too, and see what they avoid and what they pursue.

39 What is bad for you does not exist in another's ruling center, or in any turn or alteration of your surroundings. Where, then? Where the part of you is that forms judgments about bad things. Let it not form the judgment, and all is well. Even if what is closest to it, your poor body, is cut, burned, festering, rotting, still let the part that judges these things keep quiet; that is, let it judge that nothing is bad or good which can happen equally to a bad man and to a good one. For what happens equally to the man who lives against nature and to the man who lives according to nature is neither according to nature nor against nature.

40 Think constantly of the universe as one living being, with one substance and one soul; and how everything goes back to one perception, the perception of this being; and how it does everything by one impulse; and how all things are joint causes of all that happens; and what the spinning and weaving of the thread are like.

41 You are a little soul carrying a corpse, as Epictetus used to say.

42 It is nothing bad for things to be in the process of change, and nothing good for them to come into being as a result of change.

43 Time is a kind of river of things that come to be, a violent current. As soon as each thing has been seen, it has been swept past, and another is being carried by, and that too will be swept away.

44 Everything that happens is as usual and familiar as the rose in spring and fruit in summer. So too illness, death, slander, plotting, and everything that delights or grieves fools.

45 What follows is always akin to what went before. It is not like an enumeration of separate items that merely has its compelled order, but a rational connection; and as the things that exist are

arranged in harmony, so the things that come to be show not mere succession but a wonderful kinship.

46 Always remember Heraclitus's saying: "The death of earth is to become water, and the death of water to become air, and of air fire, and the other way round."¹⁰ Remember too the man "who forgets where the road leads"; and that "they are at odds with that with which they are most constantly in touch," the reason that governs the whole; and that "the things they meet every day seem strange to them"; and that "we must not act and speak like men asleep," for in sleep too we think we act and speak; and that we must not act "like children of our parents," that is, simply as we have been taught.

47 If one of the gods told you that you would die tomorrow, or in any case the day after, you would not make much of whether it was the day after rather than tomorrow, unless you were utterly mean-spirited; for how much is the difference? In the same way, do not think it any great thing whether it is after many years or tomorrow.

48 Think constantly how many doctors have died, after knitting their brows so often over the sick; how many astrologers, after foretelling the deaths of others as if it were some great thing; how many philosophers, after holding forth endlessly about death or immortality; how many heroes, after killing many; how many tyrants, after wielding power over men's lives with terrible insolence, as if they were immortal; how many whole cities have, so to speak, died: Helice, Pompeii, Herculaneum,¹¹ and countless others. Go over, too, all those you have known, one after another: one buried another and then was laid out himself, and another buried another, and all in a short time. In short, always look at human things as short-lived and cheap: yesterday a little slime, tomorrow a mummy or ashes. Pass through this tiny span of time, then, in accordance with nature, and come to your rest content, as an olive

falls when it is ripe, blessing the earth that bore it and thanking the tree that made it grow.

49 Be like the headland on which the waves break constantly; it stands firm, and around it the swelling waters are lulled to sleep. “I am unlucky, because this has happened to me.” Not at all: “I am lucky, because, though this has happened to me, I go on without distress, neither crushed by the present nor afraid of what is coming.” For such a thing could have happened to anyone, but not everyone would have gone on without distress in it. Why then is that a misfortune rather than this good fortune? Do you call anything at all a misfortune for a man that is not a failure of man’s nature? And do you think something is a failure of man’s nature that is not contrary to the will of his nature? What then? You have learned what that will is. Does what has happened prevent you from being just, magnanimous, self-controlled, sensible, slow to judge, truthful, modest, free, and all the rest, through whose presence man’s nature has what is its own? Remember, then, whenever something leads you to distress, to use this principle: not “This is a misfortune,” but “To bear it nobly is good fortune.”

50 An ordinary but effective help toward despising death is to recall those who clung stubbornly to life. What more did they gain than those who died young? Surely they are all lying somewhere now, Cadicianus, Fabius, Julianus, Lepidus,¹² or anyone like them, who carried many to their graves and then were carried out themselves. All in all, the interval is small, and this too is drained out through how many troubles, in what company, in what a poor body! So do not make anything of it. Look at the yawning gulf of time behind you, and the other infinity before. In this, what difference is there between an infant three days old and a man who lived three generations?

51 Always run by the short road; and the short road is the one according to nature: to say and do everything in the soundest way.

For such a purpose frees you from toil and dithering, from all scheming and showing off.

[1.](#) The text is damaged. Some editors read “as Agathon says,” after the Athenian tragic poet of the fifth century BC.

[2.](#) The sense of this sentence is uncertain, and many think the text corrupt; it is translated here as it stands.

[3.](#) Athens, named for its legendary first king Cecrops; probably a line of Aristophanes.

[4.](#) Democritus, fragment 3.

[5.](#) The Greek *kosmos* means both “order” and “universe”; the chapter plays on both.

[6.](#) Vespasian (reigned 69–79) and Trajan (98–117), emperors before Marcus’s time.

[7.](#) Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, and Dentatus were heroes of early Rome; Scipio and Cato, famous generals and statesmen of the Republic; Augustus, the first emperor; Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, Marcus’s immediate predecessors.

[8.](#) Homer, *Odyssey* 1.242.

[9.](#) One of the three Fates, the one who spins the thread of life.

[10.](#) The sayings in this chapter come from Heraclitus (fragments 76 and 71–74).

[11.](#) Helice, a city in Achaea swallowed by the sea after an earthquake in 373 BC; Pompeii and Herculaneum, buried by Vesuvius in AD 79.

[12.](#) Apparently people who lived to a great age; none can be identified with certainty. The “man of three generations” recalls Homer’s Nestor, who outlived three generations.

Book Five

1 At dawn, when you are reluctant to get up, have this thought ready: I am getting up to do the work of a human being. Why then am I irritable, if I am going out to do what I was born for, what I was brought into the world to do? Or was I made for this, to lie under the blankets and keep myself warm? “But this is more pleasant.” Were you born for pleasure, then? In short, were you born to be acted on, or to act? Do you not see the little plants, the little sparrows, the ants, the spiders, the bees doing their own work, each helping in its own way to put the universe in order? And then you do not want to do the work of a human being? You do not hurry to do what is in keeping with your nature? “But one needs rest too.” I agree. Nature has set limits to this, though, as she has set limits to eating and drinking; and yet you go beyond the limits, beyond what is enough; but in your actions, no longer: there you stay well within what you could do. For you do not love yourself; if you did, you would love your nature and what it wants. Those who love their own crafts wear themselves out over the work, unwashed and unfed. Do you honor your own nature less than the engraver honors engraving, or the dancer dancing, or the money-lover money, or the vain man his little bit of fame? These people, when they are caught up in it, would rather not eat or sleep than fail to advance the things they care about; and do social acts seem to you cheaper, and less worth the effort?

2 How easy it is to push away and wipe out every impression that is troublesome or foreign, and at once to be in perfect calm.

3 Judge yourself worthy of every word and deed that is in accord with nature, and do not let the criticism or talk of others that may follow distract you. If it was right to do or say it, do not think yourself unworthy of it. Those people have their own ruling center and follow their own impulse. Do not look around at those things, but go straight on, following your own nature and the common nature; and the road of both is one.

4 I walk on through what is according to nature until I fall and come to rest, breathing out my last into this air from which I breathe in every day, falling onto this earth from which my father gathered his seed, my mother her blood, my nurse her milk; from which for so many years I have been fed and watered day by day; which bears me as I tread on it and make so many uses of it.

5 They cannot admire you for quickness of wit. So be it. But there are many other things of which you cannot say, "I have no gift for it." Show those qualities, then, which are wholly in your power: sincerity, dignity, endurance of hardship, indifference to pleasure, not complaining of your lot, needing little, kindness, freedom, plainness, no idle talk, greatness of mind. Do you not see how many qualities you could show already, for which there is no excuse of lacking talent or aptitude, and yet you still choose to stay below? Or are you compelled by lack of talent to grumble, to be stingy, to flatter, to blame your poor body, to fawn, to show off, to toss your soul about so much? No, by the gods; you could have been rid of all this long ago, and only, if at all, be charged with being rather slow and dull of understanding. And this too must be worked on, without ignoring your slowness or taking pleasure in it.

6 One man, when he has done someone a good turn, is quick to put the favor down to his account. Another is not quick to do that, but still, in his own mind, he thinks of the other as his debtor, and he knows what he has done. A third in a way does not even know

what he has done, but is like a vine that has borne grapes and asks for nothing more once it has borne its own fruit. A horse that has run, a dog that has tracked, a bee that has made honey, and a man who has done good does not cry it out, but goes on to the next, as a vine goes on to bear grapes again in season. So one should be among those who do this, in a way, without noticing.—Yes, but one must notice this very thing; for it is the mark of a social being, he says, to perceive that he is acting socially, and, by Zeus, to want his fellow to perceive it too.—What you say is true, but you misunderstand what I am saying now; and so you will be one of those I mentioned first, for they too are led astray by a plausible argument. But if you are willing to understand what I am saying, do not be afraid that for this reason you will neglect any social act.

7 A prayer of the Athenians: “Rain, rain, dear Zeus, on the fields and the plains of the Athenians.” Either we should not pray at all, or we should pray like this, simply and freely.

8 Just as we say, “Asclepius¹ has prescribed for this man riding, or cold baths, or going barefoot,” so we may say, “The nature of the whole has prescribed for this man sickness, or disability, or loss, or something else of the kind.” For in the first case “prescribed” means something like this: he ordered this for this man as suited to his health; and in the second, what happens to each one has been ordered for him in a way as suited to his fate.

For we say that things “fall in” for us in the same way that craftsmen say that squared stones “fall in” in walls or pyramids, fitting one another in a certain arrangement.² For in all there is one harmony; and just as the universe, a body of this kind, is made up of all bodies, so fate, a cause of this kind, is made up of all causes.

Even quite ordinary people understand what I mean, for they say, “Fate brought him this.” So this was brought to this man, and this was prescribed for this man. Let us accept these things, then,

as we accept what Asclepius prescribes. Many of those too are harsh, but we welcome them in the hope of health.

Let the carrying out and completion of what the common nature sees fit seem to you something of this kind, like your own health; and so welcome everything that happens, even if it seems rather hard, because it leads to that: to the health of the universe and the well-being and success of Zeus. For he would not have brought this to anyone if it did not bring good to the whole; nor does any nature, whatever it may be, bring anything that is not suited to what it governs.

So there are two reasons why you should be content with what happens to you. One, that it happened to you, was prescribed for you, and was related to you in some way, spun for you from above out of the most ancient causes. The other, that even what comes to each one individually is a cause of the well-being, the completion, and, by Zeus, the very continuance of the one who governs the whole. For the whole is maimed if you cut off anything whatever from its connection and continuity, of its causes as of its parts; and you do cut it off, as far as you can, when you are discontented, and in a way you destroy it.

9 Do not be disgusted, or give up, or lose heart, if you do not always manage to do everything from right principles; but when you have been knocked off, come back again, and be glad if most of what you do is worthy of a human being, and love what you are coming back to. Do not come back to philosophy as to a schoolmaster, but as people with sore eyes go back to the sponge and the egg, or another to a poultice, or to a warm compress. For then you will not be making a show of obeying reason, but will rest in it. And remember that philosophy wants only what your nature wants; but you wanted something else, not in accord with nature. For what is more agreeable than these things? Is it not just this that makes pleasure trip us up? But see whether greatness of soul,

freedom, simplicity, kindness, holiness are not more agreeable. For what is more agreeable than wisdom itself, when you consider how sure and smooth in all things is the working of the power to understand and to know?

10 Things are wrapped in such a veil, so to speak, that quite a few philosophers, and not ordinary ones, have thought them altogether beyond our grasp; even the Stoics themselves think them hard to grasp. And every assent of ours is fallible; for where is the man who never changes his mind? Pass on, then, to the objects themselves: how short-lived they are, how cheap, how they could belong to a catamite, a whore, or a thief. Then go on to the characters of those you live with, of whom even the most pleasant is hardly bearable, not to say that a man can hardly bear even himself. In such darkness and dirt, in such a flood of substance and of time, of motion and of things moved, what there is that deserves to be prized or taken seriously at all, I cannot imagine. On the contrary, one must comfort oneself while waiting for natural dissolution, and not chafe at the delay, but rest in these thoughts alone: first, that nothing will happen to me that is not in accord with the nature of the whole; and second, that it is in my power to do nothing against my god and spirit. For no one will force me to go against it.

11 What am I using my soul for now? Ask yourself this at every turn, and examine what you now have in this part that they call the ruling center, and whose soul you have now: a child's? a boy's? a weak woman's? a tyrant's? a beast of burden's? a wild beast's?

12 You can get some idea of what the things the many think good are like from this. If someone has in mind certain things that are truly good, such as good sense, self-control, justice, courage, he could not, with these in mind, listen to the line about "his goods,"³ for it would not fit. But anyone who has in mind what seem good to the many will listen to it, and will readily accept

what the comic poet said as an apt addition. So even the many sense the difference. Otherwise the line would not offend us and be rejected in the first case, while in the case of wealth and the luck that brings luxury or fame we accept it as fitting and witty. Go on, then, and ask whether we should value and think good those things which, when we have them in mind, would fit the line that their owner, with all his riches, "has nowhere left to shit."

13 I am made up of the causal and the material, and neither of these will perish into nothing, just as neither came into being out of nothing. So every part of me will be assigned by change to some part of the universe, and that again will change into another part of the universe, and so on to infinity. By such a change I too came into being, and those who begot me, and so on back into another infinity. For nothing prevents us from saying this, even if the universe is governed by limited cycles.

14 Reason and the art of reasoning are powers sufficient to themselves and to the works that belong to them. They start from their own first principle and make their way to the end set before them; that is why actions of this kind are called "right actions," as marking the rightness of the road.

15 None of those things should be called a man's that do not belong to a man as a man. They are not demanded of a man, nor does human nature promise them, nor are they perfections of human nature. So neither does man's end lie in them, nor what completes that end, the good. Besides, if any of them belonged to a man, it would not belong to him to despise them and rise up against them, nor would the man who shows that he does not need them be praised, nor would a man who denies himself any of them be good, if they were good. As it is, the more a man strips himself of these things or others like them, or bears being stripped of any of them, the better he is.

16 As your repeated impressions are, so will your mind be; for the soul is dyed by its impressions. Dye it, then, with a constant stream of impressions like these: for instance, that where it is possible to live, it is possible to live well; and it is possible to live at court; so it is possible to live well at court. And again: that each thing is drawn toward that for which it was made; and its end lies in what it is drawn toward; and where its end is, there too is what benefits it and what is good for it; so the good of a rational being is fellowship. For it was shown long ago that we were born for fellowship. Or was it not plain that the lower things exist for the sake of the higher, and the higher for one another? And living things are higher than lifeless ones, and rational beings higher than living ones.

17 To pursue the impossible is madness; and it is impossible that bad people should not do things of this kind.

18 Nothing happens to anyone that he is not by nature able to bear. The same things happen to another, and either because he does not know that they have happened, or because he wants to show his greatness of mind, he stays steady and unhurt. It is shameful, then, that ignorance and the wish to please should be stronger than wisdom.

19 Things themselves do not touch the soul in any way at all; they have no way into the soul, and cannot turn it or move it. The soul alone turns and moves itself, and whatever judgments it sees fit to make, it makes the things presented to it accord with them.

20 In one respect man is the thing nearest to us, in so far as we must do good to men and bear with them. But in so far as some of them stand in the way of my proper work, man becomes for me one of the indifferent things, no less than the sun or the wind or a wild beast. These may hinder some action of mine, but they are no hindrance to my impulse and disposition, because of the reservation and the power of turning things round. For the mind turns

round and converts every obstacle to its action into a means to its aim; what hinders a work becomes a help to that work, and what stands in the road helps us along that road.

21 Honor what is most powerful in the universe; and that is what makes use of all things and directs all things. In the same way honor what is most powerful in you; and that is akin to the other. For in you too it is this that makes use of the rest, and your life is governed by it.

22 What does not harm the city does not harm the citizen either. Whenever you have the impression that you have been harmed, apply this rule: if the city is not harmed by this, neither am I. And if the city is harmed, you must not be angry, but show the one who harms the city what he has overlooked.

23 Think often of how swiftly the things that are and the things that come to be are carried past and swept away. For substance is like a river in perpetual flow, its activities in constant change, its causes in countless variations, and hardly anything stands still, not even what is close at hand. And there is the infinite gulf of past and future, in which all things vanish. How is a man not a fool, then, who in the midst of these things is puffed up, or pulled about, or complains, as if something had troubled him for any length of time?

24 Remember the whole of substance, of which you have a very small share; and the whole of time, of which a brief and momentary span has been marked out for you; and fate, and how small a part of it you are.

25 Someone does wrong to me? That is his concern. He has his own disposition, his own activity. I have now what the common nature wants me to have now, and I do what my own nature wants me to do now.

26 Let the ruling and governing part of your soul be unmoved by the smooth or rough motions of the flesh. Let it not mix with

them, but let it mark off its own bounds and confine those affections to their parts. But when they spread up into the mind by that other sympathy, as happens in a body that is one, then you must not try to resist the sensation, for it is natural; but let the ruling center not add of itself the judgment that it is good or bad.

27 “Live with the gods.” And he lives with the gods who constantly shows them that his soul is content with what is allotted to it, and does all that the spirit wishes, the spirit Zeus has given to each of us as guardian and guide, a fragment of himself. And this is each one’s mind and reason.

28 Are you angry with the man whose armpits smell? Are you angry with the man whose breath stinks? What will it do for you? He has such a mouth, he has such armpits; such a smell is bound to come from such things.—But the man has reason, they say, and can understand, if he gives it thought, what offends.—Good for you! Then you have reason too: move his rational disposition with your rational disposition; show him, remind him. If he listens, you will cure him, and there is no need for anger. Neither a tragic actor nor a whore.

29 As you intend to live when you have left this life, so you can live here. And if they do not allow it, then leave life itself, but as one who suffers nothing bad. “There is smoke, and I leave.”⁴ Why do you think it a great matter? But as long as nothing like this drives me out, I remain free, and no one will prevent me from doing what I want; and what I want is what is in accord with the nature of a rational and social being.

30 The mind of the whole is social. At any rate, it has made the lower things for the sake of the higher, and has fitted the higher to one another. You see how it has subordinated, coordinated, given each its due, and brought the best things together into agreement with one another.

31 How have you behaved until now toward gods, parents, brothers, wife, children, teachers, tutors, friends, relatives, servants? Can you say of all of them until now, “He did no one any wrong in deed or word”?⁵ And remember what you have been through, and what you have had the strength to endure; and that the story of your life is now complete and your service finished; and how many beautiful things you have seen, how many pleasures and pains you have looked down on, how many honors you have passed by, to how many ungrateful people you have been kind.

32 Why do unskilled and ignorant souls confound the skilled and the knowing? Which soul, then, is skilled and knowing? The one that knows the beginning and the end, and the reason that runs through all substance and governs the whole through all eternity in fixed cycles.

33 In no time at all, ashes or a skeleton, and either a name or not even a name; and a name is a sound and an echo. And the things prized in life are empty, rotten, and petty; puppies snapping at each other, quarrelsome children, laughing and then crying the next minute. And faith and modesty and justice and truth have fled “to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth.”⁶ What, then, still keeps you here, if the objects of sense are changeable and never stand still, and the senses dim and easily misled, and the poor soul itself a vapor rising from blood, and a good name among such people empty? What then? You wait, at peace, for extinction or removal. And until the time for that comes, what is enough? What else but to revere and praise the gods, to do good to men, to bear with them and keep clear of them; and as for all that lies within the bounds of your poor flesh and breath, to remember that it is neither yours nor in your power.

34 You can always have a good flow of life, if you can keep to the right road, if you can think and act along the road. These two things are common to the soul of god, of man, and of every ratio-

nal being: not to be hindered by another, and to find the good in a just disposition and just action, and to end your desire there.

35 If this is neither my vice nor an act of my vice, and the common good is not harmed, why am I troubled about it? And what is the harm to the common good?

36 Do not be carried away wholesale by the impression, but help people as far as you can and as they deserve, even if their loss is in indifferent things; do not, however, imagine it is a harm, for that is a bad habit. But as the old man, when he went away, asked for his foster child's top, remembering that it was a top, so do here as well. So it is, then, when you are crying out on the rostra: man, have you forgotten what these things were?—Yes, but they mean a great deal to these people.—Is that a reason for you to be a fool too? “I was once a fortunate man, wherever I was overtaken.” But “fortunate” means having given yourself a good portion; and good portions are good turnings of the soul, good impulses, good actions.⁷

[1.](#) The god of healing. The Greek verb for “prescribed” also means “arranged together,” and Marcus plays on both senses.

[2.](#) The Greek *symbainein* means both “to happen” and “to fit together.” Later in the chapter “brought” (*pherein*) and “bring good” (*sympherein*) make a similar play.

[3.](#) A line from an unknown comedy, of which Marcus quotes only the beginning and the end. The Greek *agatha* means both “good things” and “possessions.”

[4.](#) Epictetus's image (*Discourses* 1.25.18): if the room fills with too much smoke, one can simply go out.

[5.](#) Homer, *Odyssey* 4.690, said by Penelope of Odysseus.

[6.](#) Hesiod, *Works and Days* 197, where Shame and Righteous Indignation abandon mankind.

7. The second half of this chapter is damaged and its sense uncertain; the story of the old man and the top is otherwise unknown.

Book Six

1 The substance of the whole is obedient and pliant, and the reason that governs it has in itself no cause for doing harm; for it has no malice, and does nothing maliciously, and nothing is harmed by it. All things come about and are completed according to it.

2 Do not care whether you are cold or warm when you are doing what is right, whether you are drowsy or have had enough sleep, whether people speak ill of you or praise you, whether you are dying or doing something else. For dying too is one of the acts of life; so here too it is enough to do well what is at hand.

3 Look within. Do not let the particular quality or the worth of anything escape you.

4 All the things that exist will very soon change, and either be turned to vapor, if substance is one, or else be scattered.

5 The governing reason knows its own disposition, and what it is making, and in what material.

6 The best way of defending yourself is not to become like them.

7 Delight in one thing and rest in it: in passing from one social act to another social act, remembering god.

8 The ruling center is what wakes itself and turns itself, and makes itself whatever it wishes to be, and makes everything that happens appear to it as it wishes.

9 Each thing is accomplished according to the nature of the whole; certainly not according to some other nature, whether one that surrounds it from outside, or one contained within it, or one hanging apart outside it.

10 Either a stew, entanglement, and scattering, or unity, order, and providence. If the former, why do I even want to spend my time in such a random jumble and mess? Why should I care about anything but how I shall at last “become earth”?¹ And why am I disturbed? The scattering will come upon me whatever I do. But if the latter, I revere, I stand firm, I trust in what governs.

11 When you are forced by circumstances to be, as it were, thrown into confusion, return quickly to yourself, and do not stay out of rhythm longer than you must; you will be more in control of the harmony by constantly returning to it.

12 If you had a stepmother and a mother at the same time, you would attend to your stepmother, and yet you would constantly go back to your mother. This is what the court and philosophy are to you now. Go back to philosophy often and rest in her; it is because of her that the court seems bearable to you, and you bearable in it.

13 When we have meat and other such food before us, how good it is to take the impression that this is the corpse of a fish, and this the corpse of a bird or a pig; and again, that the Falernian is a little juice from a bunch of grapes, and the purple robe some sheep’s wool dyed in a shellfish’s blood; and as for sexual intercourse, that it is the rubbing of a bit of gut and the spurting out, with a sort of spasm, of a little mucus. How good these impressions are, getting to the things themselves and going right through them, so that one sees what kind of things they are! We must do this all through life: where things seem most worthy of our trust, strip them bare and see how cheap they are, and take away the story on which they pride themselves. For vanity is a terrible deceiver, and just when you think you are most engaged with serious things, then above all it bewitches you. See, at any rate, what Crates says about Xenocrates himself.²

14 Most of the things the multitude admires come down to the most general kind, things held together by mere cohesion or by

growth: stones, timber, fig trees, vines, olives. Those admired by people a little more refined come down to things held together by a living soul, such as flocks and herds. Those admired by people more cultivated still, to things held together by a rational soul, though not the universal one, but rational in so far as it is skilled in some craft or clever in some other way, or simply because they own a crowd of slaves. But the man who honors a soul that is rational, universal, and civic no longer turns to any of the others, but above all keeps his own soul in a rational and social condition and motion, and works together with what is akin to him to this end.

15 Some things are hurrying to come into being, others to be gone; and of what is coming into being, part is already extinct. Flux and change renew the universe without end, as the unbroken course of time makes infinite eternity always new. In this river, then, what is there among the things rushing by that anyone should prize, when he cannot stand still on any of them? It is as if someone began to love one of the little sparrows flying past, and it is already out of sight. Even the life of each of us is something of this kind, like the vapor from blood and the breath drawn from the air. For as it is to draw in the air once and give it back, which we do every moment, so it is to give back the whole power of breathing, which you got when you were born yesterday or the day before, to the place from which you first drew it.

16 It is not transpiring like plants that is to be prized, or breathing like cattle and wild beasts, or taking the stamp of impressions, or being jerked like a puppet by impulses, or herding together, or feeding; for that is on a par with getting rid of the waste of our food. What, then, is to be prized? Being clapped? No. So not being clapped by tongues either; for the praise of the many is a clapping of tongues. So you have let go of fame as well. What is left to be prized? This, I think: to move and to hold back according to your

own constitution, the goal to which all pursuits and crafts lead. For every craft aims at this, that what it has made should be fit for the work it was made for. The planter and the vine dresser, the trainer of colts, the keeper of dogs, all look for this. And the bringing up of children, and teaching, what do they strive for? Here, then, is what is to be prized; and if this is well, you will not seek to get any of the other things for yourself. Will you not stop prizing many other things too? If not, you will be neither free, nor self-sufficient, nor free from passion. For you will be bound to envy, to be jealous, to suspect those who can take those things away, to plot against those who have what you prize. In short, anyone who lacks any of those things is bound to be in turmoil, and besides that to find much fault with the gods. But respect and honor for your own mind will make you pleasing to yourself, in harmony with your fellows, and in accord with the gods, that is, praising all that they assign and have ordained.

17 Up, down, in a circle: these are the motions of the elements. But the motion of virtue is in none of these; it is something more divine, and it goes on its way well, by a road hard to understand.

18 What a thing it is that they do! They will not speak well of the people who live in their own time and with them, yet they set great store by being spoken well of by those who will come after them, whom they have never seen and never will see. That is close to grieving because those who came before you did not speak well of you.

19 If something is hard for you to accomplish, do not suppose it is impossible for a man; but if something is possible for a man and proper to him, consider it within your reach too.

20 In the gymnasium someone has scratched us with his nails, or butted us with his head and given us a bruise; but we make no fuss, take no offense, and do not suspect him afterward of plotting against us. We do keep an eye on him, though not as an enemy or

with suspicion, but stepping aside with good will. Let it be like this in the rest of life too: let us overlook much in those who are, as it were, our sparring partners. For it is possible, as I said, to step aside, and neither suspect nor hate.

21 If anyone can prove to me and show me that I am wrong in what I think or do, I will gladly change; for I seek the truth, by which no one was ever harmed. The one who is harmed is the one who persists in his own deception and ignorance.

22 I do my own duty; other things do not distract me. For they are either lifeless, or without reason, or gone astray and ignorant of the road.

23 Treat the animals that have no reason, and in general things and objects, generously and freely, as one who has reason dealing with things that have none; but treat men, since they have reason, as fellows. And in all things call on the gods. And do not trouble yourself over how long you will be doing this; even three hours spent like this are enough.

24 Alexander of Macedon and his mule driver came to the same thing when they died: either they were taken up into the same seed principles of the universe, or they were scattered alike into atoms.

25 Think how many things, bodily and mental alike, are happening in each of us at the same time, in the same instant; and so you will not be surprised if many more things, or rather all things that come into being, exist at the same time in the one and all that we call the universe.

26 If someone asks you how the name Antoninus is spelled, will you strain your voice and pronounce each letter? Then what if they get angry, will you get angry back? Will you not rather go on calmly and count out each of the letters? So here too remember that every duty is made up of certain parts. You must keep to these, without being flustered or meeting the annoyance of others

with annoyance of your own, and finish methodically what is before you.

27 How cruel it is not to let people go after what seems to them proper to them and to their advantage! And yet in a way you do not allow them to do this when you are indignant that they do wrong; for they are surely drawn to what is, as they think, proper to them and to their advantage.—But it is not so.—Then teach them and show them, without being indignant.

28 Death is rest from the pulls of sense, from being jerked like a puppet by impulses, from the wanderings of thought, from service to the flesh.

29 It is shameful, in a life in which your body does not give out, for your soul to give out first.

30 Take care not to be turned into a Caesar, not to be dyed in the purple;³ it happens. Keep yourself, then, simple, good, pure, serious, unaffected, a friend of justice, reverent toward the gods, kind, affectionate, strong for the work that befits you. Struggle to remain the man philosophy wanted to make you. Revere the gods, keep men safe. Life is short; there is one harvest of our life on earth: a holy disposition and social acts. Do everything as a pupil of Antoninus:⁴ his energy for whatever was done according to reason, his evenness in everything, his holiness, the serenity of his face, his gentleness, his lack of vanity, his eagerness to grasp things. How he would never let anything pass without first looking into it well and understanding it clearly; how he bore with those who blamed him unjustly without blaming them in return; how he hurried over nothing; how he would not listen to slander; how exact he was in examining characters and actions, and not given to reproach, not easily alarmed, not suspicious, no sophist; how he was content with little, in lodging, bed, clothing, food, service; how hardworking and patient he was; how he could stay at the same task until evening, needing, because of his plain diet, not

even to relieve himself except at the usual hour; his steadiness and constancy in friendship; his patience with those who opposed his views frankly, and his pleasure when someone showed him something better; how reverent he was toward the gods, without superstition. So that your last hour may find you with as good a conscience as his.

31 Sober up and call yourself back; and once you have woken again and realized that it was dreams that troubled you, wide awake once more, look at these things as you looked at those.

32 I am made of a poor body and a soul. To the body all things are indifferent, for it cannot care about anything. To the mind, all things are indifferent that are not its own activities; and all its own activities are in its power. And of these it is concerned only with the present; for its activities to come and its activities past are themselves already indifferent.

33 Labor is not against nature for the hand or the foot, as long as the foot does the work of a foot and the hand the work of a hand. So for a man, as a man, labor is not against nature, as long as he does the work of a man. And if it is not against his nature, it is not bad for him either.

34 What pleasures robbers have enjoyed, and catamites, and parricides, and tyrants!

35 Do you not see how ordinary craftsmen go along with laymen up to a point, but none the less hold on to the reason of their craft and will not bear to depart from it? Is it not shameful if the architect and the doctor respect the reason of their own craft more than a man respects his own reason, which he shares with the gods?

36 Asia and Europe are corners of the universe; every sea a drop of the universe; Athos a little clod of the universe; all of present time a point in eternity. All things are small, changeable, vanishing. All things come from there, starting from that common

ruling center, or else following from it as consequences. And so the lion's gaping jaws, and poison, and every kind of harmfulness, like thorns, like mud, are by-products of those solemn and beautiful things. Do not imagine, then, that they are foreign to what you revere, but reflect on the source of all things.

37 Whoever has seen the present has seen all things, whatever has come about from eternity and whatever will be to infinity; for all things are of one kind and one form.

38 Think often of the bond of all things in the universe and their relation to one another. For in a way all things are woven together, and all are therefore dear to one another; for one thing follows on another in order, because of the tension that moves them, their breathing together, and the unity of their substance.

39 Fit yourself to the things that have fallen to your lot, and love the people with whom it is your lot to live, but truly.

40 An instrument, a tool, a vessel, if it does what it was made for, is in good order, though the one who made it is no longer there. But in things held together by nature, the power that made them is within and remains; so you must respect it all the more, and believe that if you keep yourself and live according to its will, everything is as you would wish it. So too for the whole: its affairs are as it would wish.

41 Whatever thing outside your will you set up as good or bad for yourself, it is inevitable that when you meet with such a bad thing or miss such a good thing you will blame the gods, and hate the men who are, or whom you suspect will be, the cause of your missing it or meeting with it. And we do much wrong because we care about these things. But if we judge only the things in our power to be good and bad, there is no reason left either to accuse god or to take up an enemy's stand against a man.

42 We are all working together toward one end, some knowingly and with understanding, others without realizing it; as

Heraclitus, I think, says that even those who sleep are workers and fellow workers in what goes on in the universe.⁵ One helps in one way, another in another; and even the man who finds fault and tries to oppose and undo what happens helps abundantly; for the universe had need of such a man too. It remains for you to understand among which workers you are placing yourself. For he who governs the whole will in any case make good use of you, and will receive you as a part of his fellow workers and helpers; but see that you are not such a part as the cheap and ridiculous line in the play that Chrysippus mentions.⁶

43 Does the sun think fit to do the work of the rain? Or Asclepius the work of the Fruit-Bearer?⁷ And what about each of the stars? Are they not different, yet working together to the same end?

44 If the gods have taken counsel about me and about what must happen to me, they have taken good counsel; for it is not easy even to imagine a god without counsel. And for what reason would they set out to do me harm? What would they, or the common good, which is their chief concern, gain from it? But if they have not taken counsel about me individually, they have surely taken counsel about the common good, and since these things follow from that, I ought to welcome them and be content with them. And if they take counsel about nothing at all (a thing it is impious to believe, or else let us neither sacrifice nor pray nor swear by them, nor do any of the other things we do in the belief that the gods are present and live among us), if indeed they take counsel about nothing that concerns us, then it is open to me to take counsel about myself, and my concern is with what benefits me. And what benefits each is what accords with his own constitution and nature; and my nature is rational and civic. My city and coun-

try, as Antoninus,⁸ is Rome; as a man, the universe. What benefits these cities, then, is alone good for me.

45 Whatever happens to each benefits the whole. That should have been enough. But if you look carefully you will also see, as a rule, that whatever benefits one man benefits other men too. But here take “benefit” in the more common sense, as applied to indifferent things.

46 Just as the shows in the amphitheater and such places grate on you, because the same things are always being seen, and the sameness makes the spectacle tedious, so it is with the whole of life; for everything, up and down, is the same and comes from the same things. How long, then?

47 Think constantly of all kinds of men, of every calling and of every nation, who are dead; so that you come down even to Philistion, Phoebus, and Origanion.⁹ Now pass on to the other kinds of people. We must change our home to the place where there are so many great orators, so many solemn philosophers, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Socrates, so many heroes of old, so many generals and tyrants after them; and besides these Eudoxus, Hipparchus, Archimedes,¹⁰ other sharp natures, high-minded, hardworking, cunning, self-willed, mockers of this perishable and short-lived human life itself, like Menippus and others of his kind. Think of all of these, that they have long been lying in the ground. What harm is that to them? And what of those whose names are not even mentioned? One thing here is worth a great deal: to live out your life with truth and justice, kindly toward liars and the unjust.

48 When you want to cheer yourself, think of the good qualities of those who live with you: the energy of one, the modesty of another, the generosity of a third, and something else in another. For nothing is so cheering as the images of the virtues shining out

in the characters of those who live with us, and meeting together as many as possible at once. So keep them ready at hand.

49 You are not upset, are you, that you weigh so many pounds and not three hundred?¹¹ Then do not be upset that you must live so many years and no more. As you are content with the amount of substance marked out for you, so be content with the time.

50 Try to persuade them, but act even against their will when the reason of justice leads that way. But if someone uses force to obstruct you, turn to acceptance and freedom from distress, and use the obstacle for another virtue; and remember that your impulse was made with a reservation, and that you did not aim at the impossible. At what, then? At an impulse of just this kind. And that you achieve; the things we were moved toward are coming about.

51 The lover of fame thinks another's activity his own good; the lover of pleasure, his own feelings; the man of sense, his own action.

52 It is possible to form no judgment about this, and not to be troubled in your soul; for things in themselves have no power by nature to create our judgments.

53 Train yourself to attend to what is being said by another without your mind wandering, and as far as you can, get inside the soul of the speaker.

54 What does not benefit the hive does not benefit the bee.

55 If the sailors spoke ill of their helmsman, or the sick of their doctor, would they have anything else in mind but how he himself could bring about the safety of those on board, or the health of those he is treating?

56 How many of those with whom I came into the world have already left it!

57 To people with jaundice honey seems bitter, to people bitten by mad dogs water is a terror, and to small children a ball is a

beautiful thing. Why then am I angry? Or do you think that a false belief has less power than bile in the jaundiced or venom in the man bitten by a mad dog?

58 No one will prevent you from living according to the reason of your own nature; nothing will happen to you against the reason of the common nature.

59 What sort of people they are whom men want to please, and for what gains, and by what actions! How quickly time will cover all things, and how many it has covered already!

[1.](#) From Homer, *Iliad* 7.99: “May you all become water and earth.”

[2.](#) Crates the Cynic and Xenocrates, Plato’s pupil and later head of the Academy. Crates’ remark has not survived.

[3.](#) The Greek verb, *apokaisarousthai*, is apparently Marcus’s coinage; the “dye” is the imperial purple.

[4.](#) His adoptive father and predecessor, Antoninus Pius.

[5.](#) Heraclitus, fragment 75, known only from this passage.

[6.](#) The Stoic Chrysippus said that a coarse line in a comedy, worthless in itself, contributes to the whole play (Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 14).

[7.](#) *Karpophoros*, a title of Demeter, goddess of grain.

[8.](#) Antoninus was also Marcus’s own name as emperor (Marcus Aurelius Antoninus).

[9.](#) Unknown; apparently people of Marcus’s circle who had recently died.

[10.](#) Eudoxus and Hipparchus, astronomers; Archimedes, the mathematician; Menippus, a Cynic writer who mocked human affairs.

[11.](#) The Greek *litra* is the Roman pound, about twelve ounces.

Book Seven

1 What is vice? It is what you have often seen. And with everything that happens, have this ready: this is what you have often seen. Up and down you will find the same things, the things that fill the histories of ancient times, of the times between, of recent days, the things that fill our cities and our houses now. There is nothing new. All things are familiar, and all things are short-lived.

2 How else can your principles die, unless the impressions that answer to them are put out? And it is in your power to keep fanning them into flame. I can form the judgment I ought about this; and if I can, why am I disturbed? What is outside my mind is nothing at all to my mind. Learn this, and you stand straight. You can come back to life: look at things again as you used to see them; for in that lies coming back to life.

3 The empty pomp of a procession, plays on the stage, flocks, herds, fights with spears, a bone thrown to puppies, a crumb into a fishpond, the toiling and burden-bearing of ants, the scurrying of frightened mice, puppets jerked on strings. You must stand among these things good-humoredly and without disdain, but keep in mind that each man is worth just as much as the things he cares about.

4 In speech you must follow what is said, word by word, and in every impulse what is happening; in the one case see at once what end it refers to, in the other watch for what is meant.

5 Is my mind equal to this, or not? If it is, I use it for the work as a tool given me by the nature of the whole. If not, either I give way to someone who can do the work better, unless for some reason it

is not right to do so, or I do it as best I can, taking on someone who can, with the help of my ruling center, do what is timely and useful for the common good. For whatever I do, by myself or with another, must aim only at this: what is useful and fitting for the community.

6 How many who were once much celebrated have already been given over to oblivion; and how many who celebrated them have long since disappeared!

7 Do not be ashamed to be helped. Your task is to do what falls to you, like a soldier in an assault on a wall. What then if you are lame and cannot climb onto the battlements by yourself, but can do it with another's help?

8 Do not let the future disturb you. You will come to it, if you must, carrying the same reason that you now use for the present.

9 All things are woven together, and the bond is holy; hardly anything is alien to anything else. For they have been ranged side by side, and together they make up the same ordered universe. For there is one universe made of all things, one god pervading all things, one substance, one law, one reason common to all thinking beings, and one truth; if indeed there is also one perfection for all beings that are of the same kind and share in the same reason.

10 Everything material very soon vanishes into the substance of the whole; every cause is very soon taken up into the reason of the whole; and the memory of everything is very soon buried in time.

11 For a rational being the same act is according to nature and according to reason.

12 Straight, not straightened.

13 What the limbs of the body are in a single whole, rational beings are in separate bodies, made to work together as one. You will grasp this more clearly if you often say to yourself, "I am a member of the system of rational beings." But if you change one letter and say you are only a part,¹ you do not yet love men from

the heart; doing good does not yet delight you for its own sake; you still do it merely as the proper thing, not yet as doing good to yourself.

14 Let whatever likes fall from outside on those parts of me that can be affected by its falling. They will complain, if they like, those parts that are affected. But I, unless I judge that what has happened is bad, am not yet harmed; and it is in my power not to judge so.

15 Whatever anyone does or says, I must be good; as if gold or emerald or purple were always saying, "Whatever anyone does or says, I must be emerald and keep my own color."

16 The ruling center does not disturb itself; I mean, it does not frighten itself into desire. And if someone else can frighten it or grieve it, let him do so; it will not of itself, by its own judgment, turn itself in such directions. Let the poor body take care, if it can, that it suffers nothing, and let it say so if it suffers. But the little soul that fears, that grieves, that forms judgments about these things at all, will suffer nothing; for you will not bring it to such a judgment. The ruling center, as far as it is concerned, needs nothing, unless it creates a need for itself; and in the same way it is undisturbed and unhindered, unless it disturbs and hinders itself.

17 Happiness is a good spirit, or a good ruling center.² What are you doing here, then, imagination? Go away, by the gods, as you came; I have no need of you. You have come in your old way. I am not angry with you; only go away.

18 Is someone afraid of change? What can come about without change? What is dearer or more proper to the nature of the whole? Can you have a hot bath unless the firewood changes? Can you be fed unless your food changes? Can any other useful thing be done without change? Do you not see, then, that your own change is just the same, and just as necessary to the nature of the whole?

19 All bodies pass through the substance of the whole as through a torrent, of one nature with the whole and working with it, as our limbs work with one another. How many a Chrysippus, how many a Socrates, how many an Epictetus has time already swallowed up! Let the same thought come to you with every man and every thing whatever.

20 One thing only troubles me: that I myself may do something that man's constitution does not want, or in a way it does not want, or something it does not want now.

21 Soon you will have forgotten all things; soon all things will have forgotten you.

22 It is proper to man to love even those who stumble. This comes about if it occurs to you that they are your kin, and that they do wrong through ignorance and against their will, and that soon both of you will be dead; and above all, that he has not harmed you, for he has not made your ruling center worse than it was before.

23 The nature of the whole, using the substance of the whole like wax, has now molded a little horse; then it melts it down and uses its material for a little tree, then for a little man, then for something else; and each of these lasted for a very short time. It is nothing terrible for a box to be broken up, just as there was nothing good in its being put together.

24 An angry look on the face is utterly against nature; when it is often put on, the beauty of the face dies in it, or is at last extinguished, so that it cannot be kindled again at all. Try to understand from this very fact that it is contrary to reason. For if even the awareness of doing wrong is gone, what reason is left for living?

25 All that you see, the nature that governs the whole will change in a moment, and make other things out of their substance, and again other things out of the substance of those, so that the universe may always be young.

26 When someone does you wrong, consider at once what judgment of good or bad led him to do it. When you see that, you will pity him, and be neither surprised nor angry. For either you yourself still think the same thing good as he does, or something like it; then you must forgive him. Or else you no longer think such things good or bad; then you will more easily be kind to one who sees wrongly.

27 Do not think of what you do not have as if it were already yours, but count up the best of what you do have, and on their account remind yourself how you would long for them if you did not have them. At the same time be careful not to get into the habit, by delighting in them so, of prizing them so highly that you will be disturbed if you ever lose them.

28 Draw back into yourself. The rational ruling center is by nature content with itself when it does what is just, and in that very act has calm.

29 Wipe out the impression. Stop the puppet-jerking. Mark off the present moment. Recognize what is happening to you or to another. Divide and analyze the object into the causal and the material. Think of your last hour. Leave the wrong another has done where the wrong was done.

30 Keep your attention on what is being said. Let your mind enter into what is happening and what is causing it.

31 Make yourself bright with simplicity and modesty, and with indifference to what lies between virtue and vice. Love the human race. Follow god. The philosopher says, "All things by convention, and in reality only the elements"; but it is enough to remember that all things are by law. That is little enough already.³

32 On death: either a scattering, if there are atoms; or, if there is unity, either extinction or a change of place.

33 On pain: what is unbearable takes us away; what lasts is bearable. And the mind keeps its own calm by withdrawing, and

the ruling center is none the worse. As for the parts that are injured by the pain, let them, if they can, declare their opinion of it.

34 On fame: look at their minds, what they are like, and what they avoid and what they pursue. And remember that as sand dunes, heaped one upon another, hide the earlier ones, so in life what went before is very quickly covered by what came after.

35 “Do you think that a mind which has greatness of spirit and contemplates all time and all substance can think human life of great account? ‘Impossible,’ he said. Then such a man will not think death anything terrible either? ‘Not in the least.’”⁴

36 “It is a king’s part to do well and be spoken ill of.”⁵

37 It is shameful that the face should obey the mind, taking on whatever expression and composure the mind commands, while the mind itself does not shape and compose itself.

38 We must not be angry with things; they do not care at all.⁶

39 May you give joy to the immortal gods and to us.

40 To reap life like a ripe ear of grain, and one is, and another is not.

41 If I and my two sons are neglected by the gods, this too has its reason.

42 For the good and the just are on my side.

43 No joining in their wailing, no throbbing.

44 “But I would give this man a just reply: You are wrong, my friend, if you think that a man who is good for anything at all should weigh the risk of life or death, and not consider only this, when he acts, whether he is doing what is just or unjust, the deeds of a good man or a bad one.”⁷

45 “For this is the truth of the matter, men of Athens: wherever a man takes his stand, thinking it best, or is placed by his commander, there, I believe, he must stay and face the danger, taking

nothing into account, neither death nor anything else, before disgrace.”

46 “But, my good friend, consider whether nobility and goodness are something other than saving and being saved. For a man who is truly a man must let go of this business of living for however long a time, and not cling to life, but leave these things to god, and believe the women when they say that no one can escape his fate, and then consider how he may best live the time he has to live.”

47 Watch the courses of the stars as if you were running round with them, and think constantly of the changes of the elements into one another; for thoughts of these things wash away the filth of life on the ground.

48 Plato puts it well. Whoever talks about men should look at earthly things as if from somewhere high above: herds, armies, farms, weddings, divorces, births, deaths, the noise of the law courts, deserted places, all the various foreign peoples, festivals, mourning, markets, the whole medley, an order made out of opposites.

49 Look back at the past, at so many changes of empire. You can foresee the future too; for it will be of exactly the same kind, and cannot step out of the rhythm of what happens now. So to study human life for forty years is the same as to study it for ten thousand. What more will you see?

50 What was born of earth goes back to earth, / what sprang from seed of the upper air / returns to the vault of heaven.⁸ Or else this is a dissolving of the tangles among the atoms, and some such scattering of the elements that cannot be affected.

51 With food and drink and magic spells / turning the channel aside so as not to die. <...> / The wind that blows from the gods / we must endure, in toil without complaint.⁹

52 A better wrestler, but not more social, or more modest, or better ordered in what happens, or kinder toward the oversights of his neighbors.

53 Where a work can be done according to the reason that is common to gods and men, there is nothing to fear. For where it is possible to get benefit through an activity that goes well and proceeds according to our constitution, there no harm need be suspected.

54 Everywhere and always it is in your power to be content, with reverence, with what is happening now, to deal justly with the people who are with you now, and to work with skill on the impression you have now, so that nothing slips in that you have not clearly grasped.

55 Do not look around at the ruling centers of others, but look straight at where nature is leading you: the nature of the whole through what happens to you, and your own nature through what you must do. Each must do what follows from his constitution. The other things have been made for the sake of rational beings, as in everything else the lower are for the higher, and rational beings for one another. The leading thing in man's constitution, then, is the social. Second, not giving way to the affections of the body; for it is proper to rational and thinking motion to mark off its own bounds and never be overcome by the motion of the senses or of impulse, both of which are animal; the thinking motion wants to be first and not be mastered by them. And rightly so, for it is made by nature to use all of them. Third, in a rational constitution, freedom from hasty judgment and from deception. Let the ruling center hold on to these and go straight ahead, and it has what is its own.

56 As one who has died and whose life has run its course until now, you must live the rest that is left to you, as a bonus, according to nature.

57 Love only what happens to you and is spun for you by fate. For what could suit you better?

58 In everything that happens, keep before your eyes those to whom the same things happened, and who then were vexed, thought it strange, complained. Where are they now? Nowhere. Well then, do you want to be like them? Will you not leave these alien turns to those who cause them and are turned by them, and give yourself wholly to the question of how to use these things? For you will use them well, and they will be material for you. Only pay attention, and want to be good in your own eyes in everything you do. And remember both: (that the action is what matters), and that what the action is about is indifferent.¹⁰

59 Dig within. Within is the spring of good, and it can always well up, if you always dig.

60 The body too must be steady, and not sprawl, either in motion or at rest. For as the mind gives the face an expression of composure and grace, so we should require something like this of the whole body. But all this must be kept without affectation.

61 The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing, in that it must stand ready and firm to meet what comes, even the unforeseen.

62 Consider constantly who these people are whose testimony you want, and what ruling centers they have. Then you will neither blame those who stumble unwillingly nor need their testimony, when you look into the springs of their judgment and impulse.

63 "Every soul," he says, "is deprived of the truth against its will."¹¹ So too of justice, of self-control, of kindness, of everything of the kind. It is most necessary to remember this constantly; for you will be gentler toward everyone.

64 With every pain have this ready: that it is not shameful, and does not make the mind that steers you worse; for it does not damage it either as rational or as social. In most pains let

Epicurus's saying help you too: that pain is neither unbearable nor endless, if you remember its limits and do not add to it with your own opinion. And remember this as well: that many things which are the same as pain annoy us without our noticing it, such as drowsiness, being overheated, having no appetite. When you are put out by one of these, then, say to yourself that you are giving in to pain.

65 See that you never feel toward the inhuman as the inhuman feel toward men.

66 How do we know that Telauges was not of a better disposition than Socrates?¹² It is not enough that Socrates died a more glorious death, and argued more skillfully with the sophists, and spent the night in the frost with more endurance, and, when ordered to arrest the man from Salamis, thought it nobler to refuse, and “swaggered in the streets”; about which last one might well wonder, if it was true. What we must look at is this: what kind of soul Socrates had, and whether he could be content with being just toward men and holy toward the gods, not vexed at random by wickedness, nor yet a slave to anyone's ignorance, not taking what is allotted to him from the whole as something strange, nor enduring it as unbearable, nor letting his mind share the feelings of his poor flesh.

67 Nature did not so blend you into the compound as not to allow you to mark off your own bounds and keep what is yours under your own control. For it is very possible to be a godlike man and be recognized by no one. Remember this always; and this too, that living happily depends on very few things. And just because you have given up hope of becoming a logician or a natural scientist, do not despair of being free, modest, social, and obedient to god.

68 To live out your life without being forced, in the greatest cheerfulness, even if all men shout what they like against you, even

if wild beasts tear apart the limbs of this lump of clay that has grown around you. For what in all this prevents the mind from keeping itself in calm, in true judgment of what is around it, and in ready use of what is put before it? So that judgment can say to what meets it, "This is what you are in substance, though in opinion you appear something else"; and use can say to what comes to hand, "You are what I was looking for." For the present is always for me material for rational and civic virtue, and, in a word, for the art of man or of god. For everything that happens is made familiar to god or man, and is neither new nor hard to handle, but well known and easy to work with.

69 This is the perfection of character: to live each day as if it were the last, without agitation, without torpor, without pretense.

70 The gods, who are immortal, do not resent having to bear with so many bad people, and such bad people, through all that age of time; more than that, they care for them in every way. And you, who are on the point of stopping, are you weary of it, and that when you are one of the bad yourself?

71 It is absurd not to escape your own vice, which is possible, but to try to escape the vice of others, which is impossible.

72 Whatever the rational and civic power finds to be neither intelligent nor social, it rightly judges to be beneath it.

73 When you have done good and another has been done good, why do you look, like fools, for a third thing besides, to be thought to have done good, or to get a return?

74 No one grows tired of being benefited; and to benefit is to act according to nature. Do not grow tired, then, of being benefited, while you benefit others.

75 The nature of the whole set out to make the universe. Now either everything that happens follows as a consequence, or even the most important things, those toward which the ruling center

of the universe directs its own impulse, are without reason. Remembering this will make you calmer about many things.

[1.](#) In Greek, “member” or “limb” is *melos* and “part” is *meros*: the two words differ by one letter.

[2.](#) The Greek *eudaimonia* is made of *eu*, “good,” and *daimōn*, “spirit.”

[3.](#) Democritus. He meant *nomisti*, “by convention”; Marcus takes the word as “by law.” The last words of the chapter are uncertain.

[4.](#) Plato, *Republic* 6.486a.

[5.](#) Said by Antisthenes (Diogenes Laertius 6.3).

[6.](#) Chapters 38 to 42 are lines of verse: 38 from Euripides’ *Bellerophon*, 40 from his *Hypsipyle*, 41 from his *Antiope*, 42 from Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 661. The source of 39 is unknown.

[7.](#) 44 is from Plato, *Apology* 28b; 45 from *Apology* 28d; 46 from *Gorgias* 512d–e. The passage cited in 48 is not found in Plato’s surviving works.

[8.](#) Euripides, from the lost *Chrysippus*.

[9.](#) The first two lines are from Euripides, *Suppliant Women* 1110–1111; the others from an unknown tragedy. Part of the text is lost.

[10.](#) The text is damaged. Leopold prints *diaphoron*, “what matters”; it is read here as *adiaphoron*, “indifferent,” as the sense requires, and a phrase is supplied.

[11.](#) Plato, often quoted by Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.28.4).

[12.](#) Telauges was said to be the son of Pythagoras. The episode of Leon of Salamis is told in Plato, *Apology* 32c; “swaggered in the streets” is from Aristophanes, *Clouds* 362.

Book Eight

1 This too helps against vanity: that you can no longer have lived your whole life, or at least your life from youth on, as a philosopher; it has become plain to many others, and to yourself, that you are far from philosophy. You are in confusion, then, so that it is no longer easy for you to win the name of philosopher; and your station in life works against it as well. If, then, you have truly seen where the matter lies, let go of what you will seem to be, and be content if you can live the rest of your life, however long it is, as your nature wants. Consider, then, what it wants, and let nothing else distract you. For you have learned by experience how much you have wandered about without finding the good life anywhere: not in syllogisms, not in wealth, not in fame, not in enjoyment, nowhere. Where is it, then? In doing what man's nature requires. How, then, will you do it? By having principles from which your impulses and actions spring. What principles? Principles about good and bad: that nothing is good for a man that does not make him just, self-controlled, brave, and free, and nothing bad that does not make him the opposite of these.

2 With every action ask yourself: How does this sit with me? Shall I regret it? A little while and I am dead, and all is gone. What more do I want, if what I am doing now is the work of a thinking and social being, under the same law as god?

3 Alexander and Gaius and Pompey, what are they beside Diogenes and Heraclitus and Socrates? These men saw into things, and their causes, and their matter, and their ruling centers were at

one with what they saw. But as for the others, how many things they had to look after, and to how many they were slaves!

4 That they will go on doing the same things just the same, even if you burst.

5 First, do not be disturbed; for all things are according to the nature of the whole, and in a little while you will be no one, nowhere, like Hadrian and Augustus. Then look steadily at the matter and see it as it is, and remembering that you must be a good man, and what man's nature demands, do it without turning aside, and say what seems to you most just; only say it kindly, modestly, and without pretense.

6 The nature of the whole has this work: to move what is here to there, to change it, to take it up from here and carry it there. All things are turnings, so that there is no need to fear anything new; all things are familiar; and the shares too are equal.

7 Every nature is content with itself when it goes on its way well; and a rational nature goes on its way well when it gives assent to no impression that is false or unclear, directs its impulses only to social acts, has desires and aversions only for things in our power, and welcomes everything allotted by the common nature. For it is a part of that nature, as the nature of a leaf is a part of the nature of the plant; except that the nature of the leaf is part of a nature that is without perception and without reason and can be hindered, while man's nature is part of a nature that cannot be hindered, a thinking and just nature, since it gives to each thing an equal and fitting share of time, substance, cause, activity, and circumstance. But look, not whether you find one thing equal to one thing in every case, but whether all of this one taken together equals all of that one taken as a whole.

8 You cannot read. But you can check your insolence; you can rise above pleasures and pains; you can be above your little fame;

you can keep from being angry with the stupid and ungrateful, and even care for them.

9 Let no one hear you any longer finding fault with life at court; and do not hear yourself.

10 Regret is a kind of reproach to oneself for having let something useful pass; and what is useful must be something good, and must be the concern of the truly good man. But no truly good man would regret having let a pleasure pass. So pleasure is neither useful nor good.

11 What is this thing in itself, in its own constitution? What is its substance and matter, what its cause? What does it do in the universe? How long does it last?

12 When you are reluctant to wake up, remind yourself that it is in keeping with your constitution and with human nature to perform social acts, whereas sleeping is shared with the animals that have no reason. And what is according to each one's nature is more proper to it, more natural, and so more pleasing as well.

13 Constantly, and with every impression if possible, apply natural science, the study of the passions, and logic.

14 Whoever you meet, say to yourself at once: What principles does this man hold about good and bad? For if he holds such and such principles about pleasure and pain and what causes them, about fame and obscurity, death and life, it will not seem strange or surprising to me if he does such and such things; and I shall remember that he is compelled to act as he does.

15 Remember that just as it is shameful to be surprised that a fig tree bears figs, so it is to be surprised that the universe bears the things it bears. And it is shameful for a doctor to be surprised that a man has a fever, or for a helmsman that the wind is against him.

16 Remember that changing your mind and following someone who sets you right is just as much an act of freedom. For it is your

own activity, carried out according to your own impulse and judgment, and indeed according to your own mind.

17 If it is in your power, why do you do it? If it is in another's, whom do you blame? The atoms, or the gods? Both are madness. Blame no one. If you can, set him right; if you cannot, set the thing itself right; and if you cannot do that either, what is the use of blaming? For nothing should be done without a purpose.

18 What dies does not fall out of the universe. If it stays here, it also changes here and is dissolved into its own elements, which are the elements of the universe and yours. And these change too, and do not grumble.

19 Everything has come into being for some purpose, a horse, a vine. Why are you surprised? Even the Sun will say, "I came into being for some work," and so will the rest of the gods. For what, then, did you? For pleasure? See whether the thought will hold.

20 Nature aims at the ending of each thing no less than at its beginning and its course, like a man throwing up a ball. What good is it to the ball to go up, or bad to come down, or even to have fallen? What good is it to the bubble to hold together, or bad to burst? The same with a lamp.

21 Turn it inside out and see what it is like; what it becomes when old, when sick, when debauched. Short-lived are both the one who praises and the one praised, the one who remembers and the one remembered. And all this in a corner of this region; and not even here do all agree, nor does anyone agree with himself; and the whole earth is a point.

22 Attend to what is before you, whether it is a thing or a principle or an action or a meaning. You deserve what you are suffering: you would rather become good tomorrow than be good today.

23 Am I doing something? I do it with reference to the good of men. Does something happen to me? I accept it with reference to

the gods and to the source of all things, from which all that happens is woven together.

24 What bathing seems to you: oil, sweat, dirt, greasy water, all of it disgusting. Such is every part of life and every object in it.

25 Lucilla buried Verus, then Lucilla was buried; Secunda buried Maximus, then Secunda; Epitynchanus buried Diotimus, then Epitynchanus; Antoninus buried Faustina, then Antoninus.¹ So it goes with all. Celer buried Hadrian, then Celer. And those sharp-witted men, the prophets or the vain ones, where are they? Sharp-witted men such as Charax, and Demetrius the Platonist, and Eudaemon, and anyone like them. All short-lived, all long dead; some not remembered even for a short while, others turned into legends, others faded even from legend. Remember these things, then: that your little compound must either be scattered, or your little breath be put out, or move and be set somewhere else.

26 A man's joy is to do what is proper to a man. And what is proper to a man is goodwill toward his own kind, disdain for the motions of the senses, discernment among plausible impressions, and contemplation of the nature of the whole and of what happens according to it.

27 Three relations: one to the vessel that surrounds you; one to the divine cause from which all things happen to all; one to those who live with you.

28 Pain is either bad for the body (then let the body say so), or for the soul. But the soul can keep its own clear sky and calm, and not judge that it is bad. For every judgment and impulse and desire and aversion is within, and nothing bad climbs up there.

29 Wipe out your impressions, saying constantly to yourself: Now it is in my power that there should be no wickedness in this soul, no desire, no disturbance of any kind; but seeing all things as they are, I use each according to its worth. Remember this power, which you have by nature.

30 Speak, in the senate or to anyone at all, with decorum, without affectation. Use sound speech.

31 The court of Augustus: wife, daughter, grandsons, stepsons, sister, Agrippa, kinsmen, intimates, friends, Areius, Maecenas,² doctors, priests: death of a whole court. Then go on to the others ⟨...⟩, not the death of one man, as of the Pompeys. And that inscription on the tombs, “The last of his line”: reflect how anxious those before him were to leave a successor, and then someone had to be the last; here again the death of a whole family.

32 You must build up your life action by action, and be content if each one achieves its end as far as it can; and no one can prevent it from achieving its end.—But something outside will stand in the way.—Nothing will stand in the way of acting justly, with self-control, and with good sense. Some other activity, perhaps, will be hindered; but by accepting the hindrance itself and by changing over sensibly to what is given, another action at once takes its place, one that will fit into the building of which we are speaking.

33 Receive without pride, let go without struggle.

34 If you have ever seen a hand cut off, or a foot, or a head severed, lying somewhere apart from the rest of the body: such does a man make himself, as far as he can, when he refuses to accept what happens and cuts himself off, or does something unsocial. You have thrown yourself out somewhere from the unity of nature; you were born a part, and now you have cut yourself off. But here is the beautiful thing: it is in your power to unite yourself again. God has allowed this to no other part, once it has been separated and cut off, to come together again. But consider the kindness with which he has honored man: he has put it in his power not to be broken off from the whole in the first place, and when he has been broken off, to come back and grow together again and take up once more his place as a part.

35 Just as the nature of rational beings has given each rational being nearly all its other powers, so we have received this power from it too:³ that as that nature turns round whatever stands in its way and opposes it, and puts it in its place in fate, and makes it a part of itself, so the rational being can make every hindrance material for itself, and use it for whatever it was aiming at.

36 Do not let the picture of your whole life overwhelm you. Do not think over all the troubles, of what kind and how many, that are likely to come, but in each present one ask yourself: What is there in this that is unbearable and beyond endurance? You will be ashamed to say. Then remind yourself that it is neither the future nor the past that weighs on you, but always the present; and the present shrinks, if you mark it off by itself and confront your mind, if it cannot hold out against this one thing on its own.

37 Do Pantheia or Pergamus still sit by the tomb of Verus?⁴ Or Chabrias or Diotimus by Hadrian's? Absurd. And if they did sit there, would the dead know it? And if they knew, would they be pleased? And if they were pleased, would those mourners be immortal? Were they not fated, they too, first to become old women and old men, and then to die? And when the mourners were dead, what would their masters have done then? All this is stink and gore in a bag.

38 If you can see sharply, see, he says, and judge most wisely.

39 In the constitution of a rational being I see no virtue that rebels against justice; but against pleasure I see one: self-control.

40 If you take away your judgment about what seems to pain you, you yourself stand in perfect safety.—Who is “yourself”?—Reason.—But I am not reason.—So be it. Then let reason not pain itself; and if some other part of you is in a bad way, let it form its own judgment about itself.

41 Hindrance of sensation is bad for an animal nature; hindrance of impulse is likewise bad for an animal nature. And there is

something else that likewise hinders and is bad for the constitution of a plant. So hindrance of the mind is bad for a thinking nature. Apply all this to yourself. Do pain or pleasure lay hold of you? Let sensation see to it. Has an obstacle come in the way of your impulse? If your impulse was without reservation, that is already bad for you as a rational being; but if you take the common view, you are not yet harmed or hindered. As for what is proper to the mind, no one else can hinder it; for neither fire, nor steel, nor a tyrant, nor slander, nor anything else touches it, when it has become “a sphere, round, rejoicing in its solitude.”⁵

42 I do not deserve to pain myself; for I have never willingly pained another.

43 Different things delight different people. What delights me is to keep my ruling center sound, not turning away from any man or from anything that happens to men, but looking at everything with kindly eyes, accepting it, and using each thing according to its worth.

44 See that you give yourself this present time. Those who would rather pursue fame after death do not reckon that the people then will be just like these who annoy them now; and they too will die. What is it to you, anyway, if those people echo with such voices, or hold such an opinion of you?

45 Take me up and throw me where you like. There too I shall have my spirit kindly, that is, content, if it is and acts in keeping with its own constitution. Is this worth it, that my soul should be in a bad way because of it, and be worse than itself, cringing, craving, shrinking, cowering? What will you find that is worth that?

46 Nothing can happen to any man that is not a human accident, nor to an ox that is not natural to an ox, nor to a vine that is not natural to a vine, nor to a stone that is not proper to a stone. If, then, what happens to each thing is what is usual and natural to

it, why should you resent it? The common nature has brought you nothing you cannot bear.

47 If you are pained by something outside you, it is not that thing which troubles you but your own judgment of it; and it is in your power to wipe that judgment out at once. And if something in your own disposition pains you, who prevents you from correcting your principle? And in the same way, if you are pained that you are not doing something that seems sound to you, why not do it rather than be pained?—But something stronger stands in the way.—Then do not be pained; the cause of its not being done does not lie with you.—But it is not worth living if this is not done.—Then leave life, kindly, as one who dies while doing it, and at peace with the things that stand in the way.

48 Remember that the ruling center becomes invincible when it withdraws into itself and is content with itself, doing nothing it does not want to do, even if its stand is unreasonable. What then when it judges something with reason and after careful thought? That is why the mind free from passions is a citadel. Man has nothing stronger to which he can flee and be safe from capture ever after. The man who has not seen this is ignorant; the man who has seen it and does not flee to it is unfortunate.

49 Say nothing more to yourself than what the first impressions report. It has been reported that so-and-so speaks ill of you. That has been reported; but that you have been harmed has not been reported. I see that my child is sick. I see it; but that he is in danger, I do not see. So always stay with first impressions, and add nothing of your own from within, and nothing happens to you. Or rather, add something, as one who knows each of the things that happen in the universe.

50 A bitter cucumber? Throw it away. Brambles in the path? Step aside. That is enough. Do not add, “Why did these things come into the world at all?” For you will be laughed at by a student

of nature, as you would be laughed at by a carpenter or a shoemaker if you found fault because you saw shavings and scraps from their work in the shop. And yet they have somewhere to throw them; but the nature of the whole has nothing outside itself. The wonder of her craft is that, having set her own bounds, she changes into herself everything within her that seems to be decaying and growing old and useless, and from these very things makes new ones again; so that she needs no substance from outside, and wants no place to throw out what is rotten. She is content with her own space, her own material, and her own craft.

51 Do not be sloppy in your actions, or muddled in your conversation, or adrift in your impressions; do not let your soul be wholly dragged down or sent leaping out of itself; and do not be so busy that you have no time for life. They kill you, they cut you up, they hound you with curses. What has that to do with your mind remaining pure, sane, self-controlled, just? It is as if someone stood by a clear, sweet spring and cursed it; it would not stop welling up with drinkable water; and if he threw mud in it, or dung, it would very quickly scatter them and wash them away and not be stained at all. How then will you have an ever-flowing spring and not a well? By guarding yourself every hour for freedom, with kindness, simplicity, and modesty.

52 He who does not know what the universe is does not know where he is. He who does not know what he was born for does not know who he is, or what the universe is. And he who has missed either of these could not even say what he himself was born for. What, then, do you think of the man who avoids or pursues the praise of those who applaud, who do not know where they are or who they are?

53 Do you want to be praised by a man who curses himself three times an hour? Do you want to please a man who does not

please himself? Does a man please himself who regrets nearly everything he does?

54 Do not merely breathe in harmony with the air that surrounds you, but now think in harmony with the mind that surrounds all things. For the power of mind is poured out everywhere and pervades all things for anyone able to draw it in, no less than the air for anyone able to breathe.

55 Vice in general does no harm to the universe; and vice in the individual does no harm to another, but is harmful only to the one who has been given the power to be rid of it as soon as he chooses.

56 To my will, my neighbor's will is as indifferent as his poor breath and his poor flesh. For however much we were made for one another, each of our ruling centers has its own authority. Otherwise my neighbor's vice would be bad for me, which god did not see fit to allow, so that my misfortune should not depend on another.

57 The sun seems to be poured down, and it is indeed poured out everywhere, but not poured away. For this pouring is a stretching out; its beams are called *aktines* from their being stretched out, *ekteinesthai*.⁶ You can see what a beam is if you watch the sunlight entering a darkened room through a narrow opening. It stretches in a straight line, and as it were props itself against any solid object it meets that cuts off the air beyond; there it stops, and does not slip or fall. Such should be the pouring and spreading of the mind: never a pouring away, but a stretching out; and it should not strike violently or furiously against the obstacles it meets, nor fall down, but stand and light up what receives it. For what does not let the light through will deprive itself of its brightness.

58 He who fears death fears either the loss of all sensation or a different kind of sensation. But if you have no sensation any more,

you will feel nothing bad; and if you acquire a different kind of sensation, you will be a different kind of living being, and will not cease to live.

59 Men have come into being for the sake of one another. So either teach them or bear with them.

60 An arrow moves one way, the mind another. Yet the mind, both when it is being cautious and when it is circling around some inquiry, is moving straight on none the less, toward its object.

61 Enter into the ruling center of each man; and let every other man enter into your own.

[1.](#) Lucilla, Marcus's mother, and Verus, her husband, Marcus's father; Secunda, wife of Maximus (1.15); Faustina the Elder, wife of Antoninus Pius; Celer, a rhetorician and secretary to Hadrian. The others are unknown.

[2.](#) Agrippa, Augustus's son-in-law and right-hand man; Areius, his court philosopher; Maecenas, his friend and adviser. Part of the text is lost after "the others."

[3.](#) The opening of this chapter is damaged and lacks a verb; one is supplied from the sense.

[4.](#) Lucius Verus, Marcus's co-emperor, not the Verus of 8.25. Pantheia and Pergamus were of his circle; Chabrias and Diotimus, of Hadrian's.

[5.](#) Empedocles.

[6.](#) Marcus derives the Greek word for "rays" from the verb "to stretch out."

Book Nine

1 Whoever does wrong is impious. For since the nature of the whole has made rational beings for the sake of one another, to benefit each other according to their worth and in no way to harm, the man who goes against her will is clearly impious toward the eldest of the gods.¹ And the liar too is impious toward the same goddess. For the nature of the whole is the nature of the things that are; and the things that are have kinship with all that exists. She is also called truth, and is the first cause of all things that are true.

So the man who lies willingly is impious, in so far as by deceiving he does wrong; and the man who lies unwillingly, in so far as he is out of tune with the nature of the whole, and in so far as he brings disorder by fighting against the nature of the universe. For he fights against it who is carried, of himself, toward what is contrary to the truth; he had received from nature the starting points, and by neglecting them he is now unable to tell false from true. And further, the man who pursues pleasures as good and avoids pains as bad is impious. For such a man must often find fault with the common nature for assigning things to bad and good people against their deserts, since bad people are often in the midst of pleasures and own what produces them, while good people meet with pain and what produces it.

Further, the man who fears pains will sometimes fear what is going to happen in the universe, and that is already impious. And the man who pursues pleasures will not keep from wrongdoing,

and that is plainly impious. Toward those things to which the common nature is indifferent (for she would not have made both if she were not indifferent to both), those who want to follow nature, being of one mind with her, should be indifferent too. Whoever, then, is not himself indifferent to pain and pleasure, or death and life, or fame and obscurity, which the nature of the whole makes use of indifferently, is clearly impious.

And when I say the common nature makes use of these indifferently, I mean that they happen indifferently, in due sequence, to the things that come into being and follow on them, by a certain original impulse of providence, by which, from a beginning, it set out to make this ordered world, gathering together certain principles of what was to be, and marking off the powers that generate substances and their changes and successions of this kind.

2 It would be the mark of a finer man to leave the world without having tasted lying, or pretense of any kind, or luxury, or vanity. But to breathe one's last when one has had one's fill of them is the next best course. Or have you chosen to sit down beside vice, and has not even experience yet persuaded you to flee from the plague? For corruption of the mind is a plague far worse than any such tainting and change of the air that surrounds us. That is a plague to animals as animals; this to men as men.

3 Do not despise death, but be content with it, as this too is one of the things nature wants. For as it is to be young and to grow old, to grow up and reach your prime, to get teeth and a beard and gray hair, to beget, to be pregnant, to give birth, and all the other natural works that the seasons of life bring, so too is dissolution. This, then, is what a reasoning man does: not to be careless or impatient or contemptuous toward death, but to wait for it as one of the works of nature; and as you now wait for the child to come out of your wife's womb, so to await the hour when your little soul will fall out of this sheath. And if you want a plain rule that touches

the heart, nothing will make you so ready for death as to consider the things you are about to leave, and the characters among whom your <soul> will no longer be entangled.² Not that you should take offense at them; you should care for them and bear with them gently; but remember that your release will not be from men who share your principles. That alone, if anything, could pull you back and hold you in life, if you were allowed to live with those who have made the same principles their own. But as it is, you see how wearing it is to live out of tune with those you live with, so that you say: "Come quickly, death, in case I too forget myself."

4 He who does wrong does wrong to himself; he who acts unjustly acts unjustly to himself, making himself bad.

5 Often a man does wrong by not doing something, not only by doing something.

6 It is enough: your present judgment, if it grasps things clearly; your present action, if it is social; your present disposition, if it is content with all that happens from the cause outside you.

7 Wipe out the impression. Check the impulse. Quench the desire. Keep the ruling center in your own power.

8 Among the animals without reason one soul is divided; among the rational, one thinking soul is portioned out; just as there is one earth for all things earthy, and we see by one light and breathe one air, all of us who have sight and life.

9 All things that share in something common hasten toward their kind. Everything earthy tends toward earth; everything watery flows together; the airy likewise, so that barriers and force are needed to keep them apart. Fire moves upward because of the elemental fire, and is so ready to be kindled together with all fire here that all matter, if it is a little drier than usual, catches fire easily, because there is less mixed in it to prevent its burning. So too everything that shares in the common thinking nature hastens just as much toward what is akin to it, or even more. For the

higher it is than the rest, the more ready it is to blend and mingle with what is its own. Thus among the creatures without reason we find at once swarms and herds, the rearing of young, and something like love; for there were souls in them already, and the force that draws things together was found heightened in the higher, as it was not in plants or in stones or wood. Among rational creatures there are states and friendships and households and assemblies, and in war, treaties and truces. And among things still higher, a kind of unity exists even among things set far apart, as among the stars. So the ascent to the higher can produce sympathy even among things that are far apart. See, then, what is happening now: only the thinking creatures have now forgotten their eagerness for one another and their tendency to come together; here alone the flowing together is not seen. And yet, though they flee, they are overtaken; for nature prevails. You will see what I mean if you watch: you would sooner find something earthy that touches nothing earthy than a man cut off from all men.

10 Man and god and the universe all bear fruit; each bears it in its own season. Custom has properly applied the word to the vine and things like it, but that is nothing. Reason too bears fruit, both for all and for itself, and from it come other things of the same kind as reason itself.

11 If you can, teach them better. If not, remember that kindness was given you for this. The gods too are kind to such people, and even help them in some things, to health, wealth, fame; so good are they. You can be so too; or tell me, who prevents you?

12 Work, not as one who is wretched, nor as one who wants to be pitied or admired; want one thing only: to move and to hold back as civic reason requires.

13 Today I escaped from all my troubles; or rather, I threw them out. For they were not outside, but within, in my judgments.

14 All these things are familiar by experience, short-lived in time, foul in their matter. All is now as it was in the days of those we have buried.

15 Things stand outside the door, by themselves, knowing nothing about themselves and declaring nothing. What, then, declares about them? The ruling center.

16 Not in being acted on, but in acting, lies the good and bad of a rational and civic being, as also his virtue and vice lie not in being acted on but in acting.

17 For a stone thrown into the air it is nothing bad to come down, nor anything good to have gone up.

18 Go through to their ruling centers, deep within, and you will see what judges you are afraid of, and what judges they are of themselves.

19 All things are in change. You yourself are in constant alteration, and in some respect decay; and so is the whole universe.

20 Another's wrong you must leave where it is.

21 The ending of an activity, the cessation of an impulse or a judgment, is a kind of death; nothing bad. Now pass on to the ages of life, childhood, boyhood, youth, old age; for every change in these is a death too. Is it anything terrible? Now pass on to your life under your grandfather, then under your mother, then under your father; and finding many other deaths and changes and endings, ask yourself: Is it anything terrible? So neither is the ending and ceasing and change of your whole life.

22 Hurry to your own ruling center, and to that of the whole, and to that of this man. To your own, to make it a just mind; to that of the whole, to remember what you are a part of; to this man's, to discern whether it is ignorance or design, and at the same time to reckon that it is akin to you.

23 As you yourself help to complete a civic system, so let every action of yours help to complete a civic life. Any action of yours,

then, that does not refer, directly or remotely, to the social end, tears your life apart and does not let it be one, and is seditious, like a man in a commonwealth who for his part breaks away from its harmony.

24 Children's tantrums and games, and "little souls carrying corpses";³ so that the Visit to the Dead⁴ strikes one as more vivid.

25 Go to the quality of the cause, mark it off from the material, and look at it; then mark off also the time, the longest that this particular thing can by nature last.

26 You have put up with countless troubles because you were not content with your ruling center doing what it was made to do. Enough!

27 When another blames you or hates you, or people say such things of you, go to their little souls, go in, and see what kind of people they are. You will see that you need not strain yourself to make them think anything of you. But you must be kind to them; for by nature they are your friends. And the gods help them in all sorts of ways, by dreams, by oracles, to the very things they care about.

28 The cycles of the universe are the same, up and down, from age to age. And either the mind of the whole sets itself in motion for each thing (if so, accept what it sets in motion), or it set itself in motion once, and the rest follows as consequence; and why strain yourself? For in a way it is atoms or indivisible bits.⁵ In short: if god, all is well; if chance, do not you be governed by chance too. Soon the earth will cover us all; then the earth too will change, and the things that come from it will change to infinity, and those again to infinity. Anyone who thinks of the waves of change and alteration that follow one upon another, and how fast they come, will despise everything mortal.

29 The substance of the whole is a torrent; it carries everything along. How cheap, too, are these little men who busy themselves

with public affairs and think they are acting like philosophers! Full of snot.—Man, what then? Do what nature asks now. Set to work, if it is given you, and do not look around to see if anyone will know. Do not hope for Plato's republic, but be content if the smallest thing goes forward, and think of the outcome even of this as no small thing. For who will change their principles? And without a change of principles, what is there but the slavery of men who groan and pretend to obey? Go on, then, and tell me about Alexander and Philip and Demetrius of Phalerum.⁶ They will see whether they saw what the common nature wanted, and trained themselves accordingly. But if they played the tragic hero, no one has condemned me to imitate them. The work of philosophy is simple and modest. Do not lead me away into pompous vanity.

30 Look from above at the countless herds, the countless rites, voyages of every kind in storm and calm, the differences of things coming into being, being together, passing away. Think too of the life lived long ago by others, and the life that will be lived after you, and the life now lived among the barbarian peoples; and how many do not even know your name, and how many will very soon forget it, and how many who perhaps praise you now will very soon blame you; and that neither memory nor fame nor anything else at all is worth a word.

31 Calm in what happens from the cause outside you; justice in what you do from the cause within you: that is, impulse and action that end in this very thing, acting socially, since this is according to your nature.

32 You can strip away many superfluous troubles that lie wholly in your judgment, and you will at once make a great deal of room for yourself by taking in the whole universe in your thought, and considering eternity, and thinking of the swift change of each thing in particular: how short the time from birth to dissolution,

how vast the gulf before birth, and equally infinite the time after dissolution.

33 All that you see will very soon perish, and those who have watched it perish will very soon perish themselves; and the man who dies in extreme old age will be brought to the same state as the one who died before his time.

34 What are their ruling centers like, what do they care about, and for what reasons do they love and honor? Imagine you see their little souls naked. When they think they harm you by their blame or help you by their praise, what conceit!

35 Loss is nothing but change. And in this the nature of the whole delights, by which all things come about well, have come about in the same way from eternity, and will be other things of the same kind to infinity. Why, then, do you say that all things came about badly and all things will always be bad, and that among so many gods no power was ever found to set them right, but the universe has been condemned to be held fast in endless evils?

36 The rottenness of the matter underlying each thing: water, dust, bits of bone, stink. Or again: marble, a callus of the earth; gold and silver, its dregs; clothing, bits of hair; purple, blood; and everything else the same. And the breath too is another such thing, changing from these into those.

37 Enough of this wretched life, this grumbling, this aping.—Why are you disturbed? What is new in this? What drives you out of yourself? The cause? Look at it. The matter? Look at it. Beyond these there is nothing. But toward the gods too, now at last, become simpler and better. It is the same to study these things for a hundred years as for three.

38 If he did wrong, the harm lies there. But perhaps he did not.

39 Either all things spring from one thinking source, as in one body, and the part should not find fault with what happens for the good of the whole; or there are atoms, and nothing but a stew and

a scattering. Why, then, are you disturbed? Say to your ruling center: Are you dead, are you corrupted, have you turned into a beast, are you playing a part, are you one of the herd, are you grazing?

40 Either the gods have no power, or they have power. If they have no power, why do you pray? But if they have power, why not pray rather that they give you the power not to fear any of these things, or desire any of them, or be grieved at any of them, rather than that any of them should be there or not be there? For surely, if they can help men, they can help them in this too. But perhaps you will say: "The gods put these things in my power." Then is it not better to use what is in your power as a free man than to strain after what is not in your power like a slave, and abjectly? And who told you that the gods do not help us even in what is in our power? Begin, at any rate, to pray about these things, and you will see. One man prays, "How may I sleep with that woman?" You: "How may I not desire to sleep with her?" Another: "How may I be rid of that man?" You: "How may I not want to be rid of him?" Another: "How may I not lose my little child?" You: "How may I not be afraid of losing him?" In short, turn your prayers this way, and see what happens.

41 Epicurus says: "In my illness my conversations were not about the sufferings of my poor body, nor did I talk of such things," he says, "to those who came to see me; but I went on discussing the chief points of natural philosophy, and dwelling on this very question: how the mind, while sharing in such movements of the flesh, remains undisturbed and keeps its own good. Nor did I give the doctors a chance," he says, "to put on airs as if they were doing something great, but my life went on well and happily."⁷ Do the same as he did, then, in illness, if you are ill, and in any other circumstance. For not to abandon philosophy in whatever befalls us, and not to join in the chatter of the uneducated and of those ignorant of nature, is a principle common to every school. Attend only

to what you are doing now and to the instrument with which you are doing it.

42 When you are offended by someone's shamelessness, ask yourself at once: Is it possible that there should be no shameless people in the world? It is not possible. Then do not ask for the impossible. This man too is one of those shameless people who must exist in the world. Have the same thought ready for the rogue, the faithless man, and every kind of wrongdoer. For as soon as you remember that it is impossible for the race of such people not to exist, you will be kinder toward each of them.

It is useful, too, to think at once what virtue nature has given man to meet this wrong. For she has given gentleness as an antidote against the unkind man, and some other power against another. And in any case you can teach the man who has gone astray; for every wrongdoer misses the mark he aims at, and has gone astray. And how have you been harmed? You will find that none of those you are angry with has done anything by which your mind was going to be made worse.

And it is there that what is bad and harmful for you has its whole existence. What is new or strange in an uneducated man acting like an uneducated man? See whether you should not rather blame yourself for not expecting him to do this wrong. For reason gave you the means to think that he was likely to do this wrong, and yet you forgot it, and you are surprised that he has done it.

Above all, when you complain of someone as faithless or ungrateful, turn to yourself. For the fault is plainly yours, if you trusted that a man of such a disposition would keep faith, or if, when you did a kindness, you did not do it as complete in itself, and in such a way as to have received at once, from the act itself, its whole fruit. What more do you want, when you have done a man good? Is it not enough that you have done something according to your nature, but you look for a reward for it? As if the eye

asked for a return for seeing, or the feet for walking. For just as these were made for some purpose, and by working according to their own constitution have what is their own, so man, who is made by nature to do good, whenever he does some good, or otherwise helps in indifferent things, has done what he was made for, and has what is his own.

[1.](#) Nature, the nature of the whole; the Greek word *physis* is feminine, hence “goddess.”

[2.](#) There is a gap in the text; editors commonly supply “soul.”

[3.](#) A saying of Epictetus, quoted in 4.41 with “little soul” for “little souls.”

[4.](#) The *Nekyia*, Book Eleven of Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus calls up the shades of the dead.

[5.](#) The text of this sentence is damaged and its sense uncertain.

[6.](#) Demetrius of Phalerum, an Athenian statesman and philosopher who governed Athens for ten years under Macedonian patronage at the end of the fourth century BC.

[7.](#) Apparently from a letter of Epicurus.

Book Ten

1 Will you ever, my soul, be good and simple and one and naked, plainer to see than the body that surrounds you? Will you ever taste a loving and affectionate disposition? Will you ever be full and lacking nothing, longing for nothing and desiring nothing, living or lifeless, for the enjoyment of pleasures? Nor time, in which to enjoy them longer? Nor a place, or a country, or a mild climate? Nor agreeable company? But will you be content with your present state, and take pleasure in all that is present, and convince yourself that you have everything, that it all comes to you from the gods, that all is well with you and will be well, whatever pleases them and whatever they are going to give for the preservation of the perfect living being, the good and just and beautiful, which begets all things and holds them together and contains and embraces them as they are dissolved for the birth of others like them? Will you ever be such as to live as a fellow citizen with gods and men, so as neither to find any fault with them nor be condemned by them?

2 Watch what your nature requires, as one governed by nature alone. Then do it and accept it, unless your nature as a living being is going to be made worse by it. Next you must watch what your nature as a living being requires, and accept all of it, unless your nature as a rational living being is going to be made worse by it. And the rational is at once also the civic. Use these rules, then, and do not busy yourself with anything else.

3 Everything that happens either happens in such a way that you are born to bear it, or in such a way that you are not born to

bear it. If it happens to you in a way you are born to bear, do not resent it, but bear it as you were born to. If it happens in a way you are not born to bear, do not resent it either; for it will perish when it has consumed you. But remember that you are born to bear everything that your own judgment can make bearable and enduring, by thinking that it is to your advantage or your duty to do so.

4 If he is mistaken, teach him kindly and show him what he has overlooked. If you cannot, blame yourself, or not even yourself.

5 Whatever happens to you was being prepared for you from eternity; and the weaving of causes was spinning together, from everlasting, your existence and this event.

6 Whether atoms or nature, let it be laid down first that I am a part of the whole that is governed by nature; second, that I am in some way akin to the parts that are of the same kind as myself. For remembering these things, in so far as I am a part I shall not be discontented with anything that is allotted from the whole. For nothing is harmful to the part that benefits the whole; for the whole contains nothing that does not benefit it. All natures have this in common, and the nature of the universe has this besides, that it cannot be compelled by any cause outside it to produce anything harmful to itself. By remembering, then, that I am a part of such a whole, I shall be content with everything that comes about; and in so far as I am in some way akin to the parts of my own kind, I shall do nothing unsocial, but rather aim at the good of my kind, and direct every impulse of mine to the common benefit, and turn it away from the opposite. If these things are done so, life must flow well, as you would think the life of a citizen flows well who goes on through actions that profit his fellow citizens and welcomes whatever the city assigns to him.

7 The parts of the whole, all that the universe contains by nature, must perish; let this be said in the sense of "be changed."

But if this were by nature both bad and necessary for them, the whole would not be well managed, with its parts going toward change and made to perish in various ways. Did nature herself set out to do harm to her own parts, and make them liable to harm and bound to fall into harm, or did such things happen without her knowing? Both are incredible. And if someone even leaves nature out and explains these things by saying that it is just how they are, even so it is absurd to say at once that the parts of the whole are such as to change, and at the same time to be surprised or vexed as if it were something against nature, especially since the dissolution is into the very things each was made of. For it is either a scattering of the elements from which it was compounded, or a turning of the solid into the earthy and of the breath into the airy, so that these too are taken up into the reason of the whole, whether it is burned up in a cycle or renewed by everlasting exchanges. And do not imagine that the solid and the breath belong to you from your first coming into being. All of it came in as an influx, yesterday or the day before, from food and the air you breathe. So it is this that you took in that changes, not what your mother bore. And suppose that it binds you closely to your particular self; that, I think, is nothing against what is being said now.

8 When you have given yourself these names, good, modest, truthful, mindful, of one mind, high-minded,¹ take care that you are never renamed; and if you lose these names, come back to them quickly. And remember that “mindful” was meant to signify discerning attention to each thing and a mind that does not wander; “of one mind,” the willing acceptance of what the common nature assigns; “high-minded,” the raising of the thinking part above the smooth or rough motions of the flesh, above fame and death and all such things.

If, then, you keep yourself in these names, without longing to be called by them by others, you will be a different man and will

enter on a different life. For to go on being such as you have been until now, and to be torn and defiled in such a life, is the mark of a man utterly insensible and clinging to life, like those half-eaten fighters with wild beasts who, covered with wounds and gore, still beg to be kept until tomorrow, to be thrown in that state to the same claws and teeth.

Put yourself aboard these few names, then. If you can stay in them, stay, as if you had moved to some Isles of the Blessed. But if you feel that you are falling out of them and not holding your ground, go boldly into some corner where you will hold it; or else leave life altogether, not in anger, but simply, freely, and modestly, having done this one thing at least in your life, to have left it so.

But to remember these names it will help you greatly to remember the gods, and that they do not want to be flattered, but want all rational beings to become like them; and want the fig tree to do the work of a fig tree, the dog of a dog, the bee of a bee, and man of a man.

9 Mime, war, fluster, torpor, slavery: day by day they will wipe out those holy principles of yours, all those you imagine and let pass without studying nature. You must see and do everything in such a way that the practical is accomplished and at the same time the contemplative is exercised, and the self-confidence that comes from knowledge of each thing is kept, unnoticed but not hidden. When will you enjoy simplicity? When dignity? When the knowledge of each thing: what it is in substance, what place it has in the universe, how long it is meant to last, what it is made of, to whom it can belong, and who can give it and take it away?

10 A spider is proud of catching a fly; one man of catching a hare, another a sprat in his net, another boars, another bears, another Sarmatians.² Are they not robbers, if you examine their principles?

11 Acquire a method of studying how all things change into one another, and attend to it constantly, and train yourself in this part. For nothing so enlarges the mind. Such a man has put off the body, and, thinking that he will very soon have to leave all these things and depart from among men, he has given himself wholly to justice in what he does himself, and to the nature of the whole in all else that happens. What anyone will say or think about him or do against him does not even enter his mind; he is content with these two things, that he acts justly in what he is doing now and loves what is now allotted to him. He has put away all busyness and all pursuits, and wants nothing but to go straight on by the law, and in going straight to follow god.

12 What need is there for guessing, when you can see what must be done? If you see it, go on that way kindly, without turning back. If you do not see it, hold back and take the best advice. And if other things oppose this, go on according to the means at hand, after careful thought, holding to what seems just. For it is best to achieve that, since failure is failure in that. The man who follows reason in everything is at once at leisure and ready to act, at once cheerful and composed.

13 Ask yourself as soon as you wake: Will it make any difference to you if another blames what is just and right? It will make no difference. Have you forgotten what those who puff themselves up in praising and blaming others are like in bed, what they are like at table, what they do, what they avoid and what they pursue, what they steal and what they snatch, not with hands and feet but with the most precious part of themselves, which, when it wills, becomes faith, modesty, truth, law, a good spirit?

14 To nature, who gives all things and takes them back, the educated and modest man says: "Give what you will; take back what you will." And he says it not in defiance, but simply in obedience and goodwill to her.

15 Little is left of this. Live as on a mountain. It makes no difference whether there or here, if one lives everywhere in the universe as in a city. Let men see, let them observe, a true man living according to nature. If they cannot bear him, let them kill him; that is better than living as they do.

16 No more talking at all about what kind of man the good man should be, but be one.

17 Picture constantly the whole of time and the whole of substance, and that every particular thing, in substance, is a fig seed, and in time, a turn of the drill.

18 Attending to each thing that exists, think of it as already dissolving and changing, and as it were rotting or scattering, or however each is by nature meant to die.

19 What they are like when they eat, sleep, couple, go to stool, and the rest. Then what they are like when they play the man and give themselves airs, or are angry and rebuke others from on high. And a little while ago how many they were slaves to, and for what! And in a little while they will be in the same state.

20 What the nature of the whole brings to each is to the advantage of each, and to its advantage at the time when she brings it.

21 "Earth loves the rain, and the solemn air loves";³ and the universe loves to make whatever is going to be. So I say to the universe: "I love along with you." And is this not what is meant by the saying that this or that "loves to happen"?⁴

22 Either you live here, and are already used to it; or you go away, and that was your wish; or you die, and have finished your service. Besides these there is nothing. So be of good cheer.

23 Let it always be clear that the country is just like this, and how everything here is the same as on the top of a mountain, or by the sea, or wherever you like. For you will find exactly what Plato says: "fencing a fold on the mountain," he says, "and milking the bleating flocks."⁵

24 What is my ruling center to me? What am I making of it now, and for what am I using it now? Is it empty of mind? Is it cut loose and torn away from fellowship? Is it so melted into the poor flesh and blended with it that it turns as the flesh turns?

25 He who runs away from his master is a runaway. And the law is a master, so he who breaks the law is a runaway. But he too who grieves or is angry or afraid does not want something to have happened, or to be happening, or to happen, of what has been ordained by the one who governs all things, who is law, allotting to each what falls to him.⁶ So he who is afraid or grieves or is angry is a runaway.

26 A man has deposited seed in a womb and gone away, and then another cause takes it over and works on it and completes a child. From such a thing, such a result! Again, he has sent food down his throat, and then another cause takes it over and makes sensation and impulse, and in short life and strength and other things (how many, and what!). Look, then, at these things that come about in such concealment, and see the power, as we see the power that weighs things down and the power that carries them up, not with our eyes, but no less clearly.

27 Think constantly how all things such as happen now happened before too, and think of them as happening again. And set before your eyes whole dramas and scenes of the same kind, all you have known from your own experience or from older history: the whole court of Hadrian, the whole court of Antoninus, the whole court of Philip, of Alexander, of Croesus. For all those were just like these, only with other actors.

28 Picture everyone who grieves or is discontented at anything as like the little pig at the sacrifice, kicking and squealing. Like it too is the man who groans in silence, alone on his little bed. Think of our bondage, and that only to the rational being is it given to follow willingly what happens; mere following is necessary for all.

29 Pausing over each single thing you do, ask yourself whether death is terrible because it deprives you of this.

30 When you take offense at someone's wrongdoing, turn at once to yourself and reflect what similar wrong you do yourself: for instance, thinking money a good thing, or pleasure, or a little fame, and so on. For by attending to this you will quickly forget your anger, when this thought comes to you as well: that he is under compulsion. What else can he do? Or, if you can, take away from him what compels him.

31 When you see Satyrion, think of Socraticus or Eutyches or Hymen; when you see Euphrates, think of Eutychion or Silvanus; when you see Alciphron, think of Tropaeophorus; when you see Severus, think of Crito or Xenophon;⁷ and when you look at yourself, think of one of the Caesars; and in every case, the counterpart. Then let this thought come to you as well: Where are they now? Nowhere, or wherever. For in this way you will see human things constantly as smoke and nothing, especially if you remember too that what has once changed will never again exist in all infinite time. Why then do you strain? Why is it not enough for you to pass through this brief time in good order? What material and subject for work you are running away from! For what are all these things but exercises for a reason that has seen what is in life accurately and with an understanding of nature? Stay, then, until you have made these things too your own, as a strong stomach makes everything its own, as a blazing fire makes flame and light of whatever you throw into it.

32 Let no one be able to say truly of you that you are not simple, or that you are not good; but let anyone who thinks any such thing of you be a liar. And all this is in your power. For who prevents you from being good and simple? Only resolve to live no longer if you will not be such a man; for reason does not choose that you should live if you are not.

33 With this material, what is the soundest thing that can be done or said? Whatever it is, it is in your power to do it or say it; and do not make excuses as if you were prevented. You will not stop groaning until you feel that what luxury is to pleasure-lovers, that is what doing what is proper to man's constitution is to you, in whatever material is put before you and comes your way. For you must regard as an enjoyment everything that you can do according to your own nature.

And you can do it everywhere. A roller is not given everywhere to move with its own motion, nor water, nor fire, nor any of the other things governed by a nature or a soul without reason; for many things block them and stand in their way. But mind and reason can go through every obstacle, as they are made by nature and as they will.

Set before your eyes this ease with which reason will be carried through all things, as fire upward, as a stone downward, as a roller down a slope, and ask for nothing more. For the other obstacles either concern only the poor body, a corpse, or else, without our judgment and the surrender of reason itself, they do not crush us or do any harm at all.

Otherwise the one who suffers them would at once become bad. In all other made things, whatever bad happens to any of them, the thing that suffers it becomes worse for it; but here, if one may say so, a man becomes even better and more praiseworthy by making right use of what befalls him. In short, remember that nothing harms one who is by nature a citizen that does not harm the city, and nothing harms the city that does not harm the law; and none of these so-called misfortunes harms the law. And what does not harm the law does not harm the city or the citizen.

34 For one who has been bitten by true principles even the briefest and most commonplace saying is enough to remind him to be free of grief and fear; such as: "Leaves, some the wind scatters

on the ground: / so are the generations of men.”⁸ Leaves too are your children; leaves too these people who cry out so convincingly and praise you, or on the other side curse you, or quietly blame and mock you; leaves likewise those who will pass on your fame after you. For all these “come into being in the season of spring”; then the wind throws them down; then the forest puts out others in their place. To be short-lived is common to them all; but you flee and pursue everything as if it would last forever. A little while and you will close your eyes; and soon someone else will be mourning the man who carried you to your grave.

35 The healthy eye should see everything visible, and not say, “I want green things”; for that is the mark of a sore eye. The healthy hearing and sense of smell should be ready for everything that can be heard and smelled; and the healthy stomach should be the same toward all food, as a mill toward everything it was made to grind. So too the healthy mind should be ready for everything that happens. The mind that says, “Let my children be safe,” and “Let everyone praise whatever I do,” is an eye that wants green things, or teeth that want soft things.

36 No one is so fortunate that there will not be some standing by when he dies who welcome the evil that is happening. Was he earnest and wise? Will there not be someone at the very end saying to himself, “Now at last we can breathe again, free of this schoolmaster. He was not hard on any of us, but I felt that he silently condemned us”? So much for the earnest man; but in our case, how many other things there are for which many would like to be rid of us! You will think of this, then, when you are dying, and you will go more easily, reasoning: I am leaving a life in which my very companions, for whom I struggled so much, prayed so much, took so much thought, these very people want me gone, hoping perhaps for some relief from it. Why, then, should anyone cling to a longer stay here? Do not for this reason go away less kindly

toward them, but keep your own way, friendly and well-disposed and gracious; and not as one torn away; but as, when a man dies a good death, his little soul slips easily out of the body, so should your departure from them be. For nature bound you and joined you to them, but now she is loosing you. I am loosed as from my own people, yet not dragged away, but without force; for this too is one of the things according to nature.

37 Make it a habit, as far as you can, whenever anyone does anything, to ask yourself: What is his reference in doing this? But begin with yourself, and examine yourself first.

38 Remember that what pulls the strings is that which is hidden within: that is speech, that is life, that, if one must say it, is the man. Never picture along with it the vessel that surrounds it, and these little organs molded around it. They are like an axe, differing only in that they grow on the body. For without the cause that moves them and holds them back, these parts are of no more use than the shuttle to the weaver, the pen to the writer, or the whip to the driver.

[1.](#) The three Greek words (*emphrōn*, *symphrōn*, *hyperphrōn*) are all formed from *phrēn*, “mind,” with prefixes meaning “in,” “with,” and “above.”

[2.](#) A nomadic people beyond the Danube, against whom Marcus fought in the 170s.

[3.](#) Euripides, a fragment, also quoted by Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.1.

[4.](#) The Greek verb *philei*, “loves,” is also used for “tends to”: what “tends to happen” is taken literally as what “loves to happen.”

[5.](#) Plato, *Theaetetus* 174d–e, where a king shut up in his walled city is compared to a herdsman in a mountain fold.

[6.](#) A play on *nomos*, “law,” and *nemein*, “to allot.”

[7.](#) Euphrates was a Stoic philosopher of the late first and early second century; Severus may be the Severus of 1.14. Most of the others cannot be identified.

[8.](#) Homer, *Iliad* 6.147–149, the source also of “come into being in the season of spring” below.

Book Eleven

1 The properties of the rational soul: it sees itself, it analyzes itself, it makes itself whatever it wants to be, it reaps itself the fruit it bears (whereas the fruits of plants, and what corresponds to them in animals, are reaped by others), it reaches its own end wherever the limit of life comes upon it. It is not as with a dance or a play and the like, where the whole performance is left incomplete if anything cuts it short; but in every part, and wherever it is overtaken, it makes what it set before itself full and complete, so that it can say, "I have what is mine." Further, it goes round the whole universe and the void that surrounds it, and its shape, and stretches out into the infinity of time, and takes in and understands the periodic rebirth of all things, and sees that those who come after us will see nothing new, and that those before us saw nothing more, but that in a way a man of forty, if he has any mind at all, has seen all that has been and all that will be, since it is all of one kind. Proper to the rational soul too are love of neighbor, truth, modesty, and valuing nothing above itself, which is proper to law as well. So right reason and the reason of justice do not differ at all.

2 You will despise delightful singing and dancing and the all-in fight if you break up the melody into its single notes and ask yourself about each one: Am I overcome by this? You will be ashamed to say yes. Do the same with dancing, for each movement or pose, and the same with the all-in fight. In short, except for virtue and what comes from virtue, remember to go straight to the parts, and

by dividing them come to despise them; and apply the same to the whole of life.

3 What a soul that is which is ready, if it must be released from the body now, to be either extinguished or scattered or to survive! But let this readiness come from its own judgment, not from mere obstinacy, like the Christians,¹ but after reflection, and with dignity, and so as to persuade another, without theatrics.

4 I have done something for the common good: then I have been benefited. Let this thought always be ready to meet you, and never stop.

5 What is your craft? To be good. And how is this done well except by doctrines, some about the nature of the whole, others about the proper constitution of man?

6 First, tragedies were brought on to remind us of what happens, and that it is in the nature of things to happen so, and that what delights you on the stage you should not find hard to bear on the greater stage. For you see that these things must be brought to pass in this way, and that even those who cry out “Alas, Cithaeron!”² have to bear them. And some useful things are said by the playwrights, such as this above all: “If I and my two sons are neglected by the gods, this too has its reason”; and again: “We must not be angry with things”; and: “To reap life like a ripe ear of grain”;³ and so on. After tragedy the Old Comedy was brought on, with a schoolmaster’s frankness, usefully reminding us, by its very plain speaking, to be free of vanity; and Diogenes too took over something of this kind for the same end. After this consider what the Middle Comedy was taken up for, and then the New, which little by little sank into the skill of mere imitation. That some useful things are said by these writers too is well known; but the whole aim of this kind of poetry and drama, what end did it look to?

7 How clearly it comes home to you that no other condition of life is so suited for practicing philosophy as this one in which you

now find yourself!

8 A branch cut off from the branch next to it cannot help being cut off from the whole tree. So too a man severed from one man has fallen away from the whole community. Now a branch is cut off by someone else; but a man separates himself from his neighbor by hating him and turning away, and does not know that he has at the same time cut himself off from the whole commonwealth. But here is the gift of Zeus, who founded the community: it is possible for us to grow together again with the one next to us, and again to help complete the whole. But if this kind of separation happens often, it makes the part that breaks away hard to unite and restore. In short, the branch that has grown with the tree from the beginning and stayed breathing with it is not like the one grafted on again after being cut off, whatever the gardeners say. Grow on the same stem, but do not hold the same principles.

9 Those who stand in your way as you go forward according to right reason will not be able to turn you from sound action; so do not let them knock you out of your kindness toward them either. Guard yourself equally on both sides: not only in steady judgment and action, but also in gentleness toward those who try to hinder you or are otherwise hard to deal with. For to be angry with them is a weakness too, just as much as to give up the action and give in, cowed. Both are deserters alike: the one who has been frightened, and the one who has made himself a stranger to his natural kinsman and friend.

10 "No nature is inferior to art"; for the arts imitate natures. If so, the most perfect and most comprehensive nature of all would not fall short of the inventiveness of art. And all arts make the lower things for the sake of the higher; so too, then, does the common nature. And here is the origin of justice, and from justice the other virtues come into being. For justice will not be preserved if

we care about indifferent things, or are easily deceived, hasty in judgment, and changeable.

11 If the things whose pursuit and avoidance trouble you do not come to you, but in a way you go to them, then let your judgment about them keep still, and they will stay at rest, and you will not be seen either pursuing or avoiding them.

12 The soul is a sphere true to its own form when it neither reaches out toward anything nor shrinks inward, neither spreads out nor sinks down, but shines with a light by which it sees the truth of all things and the truth within itself.

13 Will someone despise me? That is his concern. Mine is that I shall not be found doing or saying anything that deserves contempt. Will he hate me? That is his concern. But I shall be kind and well disposed toward everyone, and ready to show this very man what he has overlooked, not in reproach, nor as making a show of my patience, but sincerely and kindly, like the great Phocion,⁴ unless he was pretending. For the inside should be like this, and the gods should see a man not disposed to be angry at anything or to complain. For what harm is it to you if you are now doing what is proper to your nature, and accepting what is now timely for the nature of the whole, a man intent on bringing about, by whatever means, what is for the common good?

14 Despising one another, they fawn on one another; and wanting to get the better of one another, they bow down to one another.

15 How rotten and false is the man who says, "I have decided to deal with you straightforwardly." What are you doing, man? There is no need to announce it. It will show itself. It ought to be written on your forehead. It rings out in the voice at once, it shines out in the eyes at once, as the beloved knows everything at once from a lover's glance. The simple and good man should be altogether like this, like a man who smells of the goat, so that whoever stands

near him notices it as soon as he comes close, whether he will or no. But studied simplicity is a knife.⁵ Nothing is more shameful than the friendship of the wolf; avoid that above all. The good and simple and kind man has these qualities in his eyes, and they do not go unnoticed.

16 To live the best of lives: the power for this lies in the soul, if one is indifferent to indifferent things. And one will be indifferent to them if one looks at each of them both in its parts and as a whole, and remembers that none of them produces in us a judgment about itself, or comes to us; they stay still, and it is we who produce judgments about them and, as it were, write them in ourselves, when we need not write them, and when, if they have slipped in unnoticed, we can wipe them out at once. Remember, too, that such attention will be needed for only a short time, and then life will be over. Besides, what is so hard about these things being as they are? If they are according to nature, be glad of them, and let them be easy for you; if against nature, look for what is according to your own nature and hurry toward it, even if it brings no fame. For everyone is forgiven for seeking his own good.

17 Where each thing has come from, and of what elements each is composed, and into what it is changing, and what it will be like when it has changed, and that it will suffer nothing bad.

18 First: what my relation to them is, and that we were born for one another; and, from another point of view, that I was born to stand at their head, as a ram over the flock or a bull over the herd. Go back to first principles: if not atoms, then nature governs the whole; if so, the lower things exist for the sake of the higher, and the higher for one another. Second: what sort of people they are at table, in bed, and so on; above all, what compulsions their principles put on them, and with what vanity they do these very things.

Third: that if they are doing these things rightly, we should not be vexed; and if not rightly, it is plainly against their will and in

ignorance. For every soul is deprived unwillingly, as of the truth, so too of the power to treat each man as he deserves. At any rate, they are pained to hear themselves called unjust, ungrateful, grasping, in short, wrongdoers toward their neighbors. Fourth: that you yourself do wrong in many things and are another like them; and even if you refrain from some wrongs, you still have the disposition to commit them, even if it is cowardice or the wish for a good name or some such vice that keeps you from wrongs like theirs.

Fifth: that you do not even know for certain that they are doing wrong; for many things are done for some purpose, and in short one must learn a great deal before one can pronounce with certainty on another's action. Sixth: when you are very angry, or even exasperated, that human life is but a moment, and in a little while we have all been laid out. Seventh: that it is not their actions that trouble us, for those lie in their own ruling centers, but our own judgments. Take them away, then, and be willing to let go of your judgment that this is something terrible, and your anger is gone. How, then, will you take them away? By reflecting that it is not shameful to you. For unless what is shameful is the only bad thing, you too must do much wrong, and become a robber and everything else.

Eighth: how much more grievous are the angers and sorrows that such things bring on than the very things at which we are angry and sorrowful. Ninth: that kindness is invincible, if it is sincere and not a forced smile or a pretense. For what will the most insolent man do to you if you go on being kind to him, and, if the chance comes, gently advise him and quietly show him a better way at the very moment when he is trying to do you harm? "No, my son; we were born for something else. I shall not be harmed; it is you who are being harmed, my son." And show him tactfully and in general terms that this is so, that not even bees do this, nor any

creatures born to live in herds. But you must do it without irony or reproach, but affectionately and without rancor in your soul; not as in a school, nor so that someone standing by may admire you, but to him alone, even if others are present.

Remember these nine heads as if you had received them as gifts from the Muses, and begin at last to be a man while you live. And you must guard equally against being angry with them and flattering them; for both are unsocial and lead to harm. And when you are angry, have this ready: that to be enraged is not manly, but that gentleness and mildness, as they are more human, so they are more manly; and that strength and sinew and courage belong to the gentle man, not to the one who is indignant and discontented. For the nearer it is to freedom from passion, the nearer it is to strength. As grief is a sign of weakness, so is anger; both have been wounded and have given in.

And if you like, take a tenth gift from the leader of the Muses:⁶ that to expect bad men not to do wrong is madness, for it is to want the impossible. But to allow them to be such toward others, and to expect them not to wrong you, is unfeeling and tyrannical.

19 There are four turnings of the ruling center above all that you must constantly watch for, and wipe out when you detect them, saying in each case: "This impression is not necessary"; "This undoes fellowship"; "What you are about to say does not come from yourself" (and count it among the most absurd things not to speak from yourself). The fourth is when you will reproach yourself because this is the work of the more divine part in you being overcome and bowing down to the less honorable and mortal part, the body and its rough or smooth motions.

20 Your breath and all the fiery part mingled in you, though by nature they tend upward, nevertheless obey the order of the whole and are held here in the compound. And all the earthy and watery part in you, though it tends downward, is nevertheless

raised up and stands in a position not natural to it. So even the elements obey the whole when they have been posted somewhere by force, and remain there until the signal for dissolution sounds again from there. Is it not shameful, then, that only your thinking part should be disobedient and resent its post? And yet nothing is laid on it by force, but only what is according to its nature; and still it does not bear it, but is carried the opposite way. For its movement toward wrongdoing, self-indulgence, anger, grief, and fear is nothing but the movement of something breaking away from nature. And when the ruling center resents anything that happens, then too it deserts its post. For it was made for holiness and piety no less than for justice. For these too are forms of good fellowship, and indeed older than just dealings.

21 “He who does not always have one and the same aim in life cannot be one and the same throughout his life.” What has been said is not enough unless you add what that aim must be. For just as the judgment about all the things that seem good in one way or another to the majority is not uniform, but only about certain things, that is, those that concern the common good, so we must set before ourselves the aim that is social and civic. For the man who directs all his own impulses toward this will make all his actions alike, and so will always be the same.

22 The mountain mouse and the house mouse, and the house mouse’s terror and scurrying.⁷

23 Socrates used to call the opinions of the many Lamias, bogeys to frighten children.

24 The Spartans at their festivals set the seats for strangers in the shade, and sat down themselves wherever they happened to be.

25 Socrates to Perdiccas,⁸ on why he would not go to him: “So that I may not perish by the worst of deaths,” that is, that I may not receive kindness and be unable to return it.

26 In the writings of the Epicureans⁹ there was a precept to keep constantly in mind someone of the men of old who had practiced virtue.

27 The Pythagoreans: look at the sky at dawn, to remind ourselves of those beings who always do their own work in the same way and by the same rules, and of their order, their purity, their nakedness. For a star has no veil.

28 What Socrates was like with a sheepskin wrapped around him, when Xanthippe had taken his cloak and gone out; and what Socrates said to his friends, who were embarrassed and drew back when they saw him dressed like that.

29 In writing and reading you will not lead before you have been led. Much more so in life.

30 You were born a slave; reason is not yours to share.

31 And my own heart laughed within me.

32 They will blame virtue, speaking harsh words.¹⁰

33 To look for a fig in winter is madness. So is the man who looks for his child when it is no longer given.

34 When you kiss your child, Epictetus said, you should say under your breath, “Tomorrow perhaps you will die.”—Those are words of ill omen.—Nothing is of ill omen, he said, that signifies a work of nature. Or else it is of ill omen too that the ears of grain are reaped.

35 The unripe grape, the ripe bunch, the raisin: all changes, not into what is not, but into what is not yet.

36 No one can rob us of our will: Epictetus’s saying.

37 We must find an art of assent, he said, and in the field of the impulses keep our attention alert, so that they may be subject to reservation, social, and in proportion to the worth of things; and we must keep wholly away from desire, and have aversion for none of the things that are not in our power.

38 It is no ordinary matter, then, he said, that the contest is about, but whether we are to be mad or not.

39 Socrates used to say: “What do you want? To have the souls of rational beings or of irrational ones?”—“Of rational beings.”—“Of what rational beings? Sound or base?”—“Sound.”—“Then why do you not seek them?”—“Because we have them.”—“Then why do you fight and quarrel?”

[1.](#) The only mention of Christians in the book. Some scholars think “like the Christians” a later note in the margin that crept into the text.

[2.](#) Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* 1391: Oedipus, learning the truth of his fate, cries out to the mountain on which he was exposed as an infant.

[3.](#) All from lost tragedies of Euripides: the *Antiope*, the *Bellerophon*, and the *Hypsipyle*. They are also quoted at 7.41, 7.38, and 7.40.

[4.](#) Athenian general and statesman of the fourth century BC; condemned to death unjustly, he told his son to bear no grudge against the Athenians.

[5.](#) The Greek *skalmē* is a Thracian knife; some editors read *skambē*, “a crooked stick.” “The friendship of the wolf,” from the fable of the wolf that made peace with the sheep, means false friendship.

[6.](#) Apollo.

[7.](#) The fable of the country mouse and the town mouse, told also by Horace, *Satires* 2.6.

[8.](#) Perdiccas II, king of Macedon. Other sources name his son Archelaus as the king who invited Socrates.

[9.](#) The manuscripts read “the Ephesians”; Leopold prints the conjecture “the Epicureans.”

[10.](#) 11.31 is Homer, *Odyssey* 9.413, where Odysseus laughs inwardly after tricking the Cyclops; 11.32 adapts Hesiod, *Works and Days* 186. The source of 11.30 is unknown.

Book Twelve

1 All those things you pray to reach by a roundabout road, you can have now, if you do not grudge them to yourself. That is, if you leave all the past behind, and entrust the future to providence, and direct the present alone toward holiness and justice. Toward holiness, so that you love what is allotted to you; for nature brought it to you, and you to it. Toward justice, so that you speak the truth freely and without evasion, and do what accords with law and with the worth of things. And let nothing hinder you, neither another's wickedness, nor opinion, nor talk, nor even the sensations of the poor flesh that has grown around you; let the part that suffers see to that. If, then, whenever you come near your departure, you leave everything else behind and honor only your ruling center and the divine within you, and are afraid not of ceasing to live some day but of never beginning to live according to nature, you will be a man worthy of the universe that begot you, and you will cease to be a stranger in your own country, wondering at what happens every day as if it were unexpected, and hanging on this thing and that.

2 God sees all ruling centers stripped of their material vessels and husks and impurities. For with his own thinking part alone he touches only what has flowed and been drawn off from himself into them. If you too get into the habit of doing this, you will rid yourself of much distraction. For the man who does not look at the poor flesh that surrounds him will surely not waste his time gazing at clothes and house and fame and all such trappings and stage scenery.

3 There are three things of which you are composed: a poor body, a little breath, a mind. Of these the first two are yours in so far as you must take care of them; the third alone is properly yours. If you separate from yourself, that is, from your mind, all that others do or say, and all that you yourself have done or said, and all that troubles you as something to come, and all that belongs to the body that surrounds you or to the breath that has grown with it, without your choosing, and all that the whirl of outside things sweeps around, so that the power of the mind, set free from fate, may live pure and released by itself, doing what is just, willing what happens, and saying what is true; if, I say, you separate from this ruling center the things that cling to it from the passions, and the things of time to come or time past, and make yourself, in Empedocles' words, "a sphere, round, rejoicing in its circular solitude,"¹ and practice living only the life you are living, that is, the present; then you can live the time that remains until death undisturbed, kindly, and at peace with your own spirit.

4 I have often wondered how it is that every man loves himself more than all others, yet sets less value on his own opinion of himself than on the opinion of others. If a god stood beside a man, or a wise teacher, and told him to think and plan nothing within himself that he would not speak aloud as soon as he thought it, he would not bear it for a single day. So much more do we respect what our neighbors will think of us than what we think of ourselves.

5 How is it that the gods, who have ordered all things well and with love for mankind, have overlooked this one thing: that some men, and very good ones, who have had as it were the closest dealings with the divine and been most intimate with it through holy acts and sacred rites, once they have died, do not come into being again, but are extinguished altogether? If this is indeed so, be sure that if it ought to have been otherwise, the gods would

have made it so. For if it were just, it would also be possible; and if it were according to nature, nature would have brought it about. From its not being so, then, if it is not so, be assured that it ought not to have been so. For you see for yourself that in asking this question you are pleading your case with god; and we would not be arguing like this with the gods if they were not most good and most just. And if so, they would not have let anything in the ordering of the universe be neglected unjustly and unreasonably.

6 Practice even what you despair of mastering. For the left hand, which is idle for other tasks for lack of practice, holds the reins more firmly than the right; for it is practiced in this.

7 In what state, body and soul, should death find us? The shortness of life; the yawning gulf of time behind and before; the frailty of all matter.

8 To look at the causes stripped of their husks; at the references of actions; at what pain is, what pleasure, what death, what fame; who is to blame for his own lack of leisure; how no one is hindered by another; that everything is judgment.

9 In using your principles you must be like the all-in fighter, not the gladiator. The gladiator puts down the sword he uses and picks it up again; the other always has his hand, and needs only to make a fist.

10 See things as they are, dividing them into matter, cause, reference.

11 What power man has: to do nothing but what god will praise, and to accept all that god assigns him. What follows from nature.

12 We must not blame the gods, for they do no wrong, willingly or unwillingly; nor men, for they do none except unwillingly. So we must blame no one.

13 How absurd and how much a stranger is the man who is surprised at anything that happens in life!

14 Either the necessity of fate and an order not to be transgressed, or a providence that can be appeased, or a confusion of chance without a ruler. If an order that cannot be transgressed, why do you resist? If a providence that allows itself to be appeased, make yourself worthy of help from the divine. If a confusion without a guide, be glad that in such a flood you have in yourself a ruling mind; and if the flood carries you away, let it carry off the poor flesh, the little breath, the rest; it will not carry off the mind.

15 Or does the light of a lamp shine until it is put out and not lose its brightness, while the truth and justice and self-control in you will be put out before you are?

16 When someone gives you the impression that he has done wrong: How do I know that this is wrong? And if he has done wrong, that he has condemned himself, and so this is like tearing at his own face. That the man who does not want the bad man to do wrong is like one who does not want the fig tree to have juice in its figs, or babies to cry, or the horse to neigh, or whatever else is inevitable. What else can he do, with such a disposition? If you are so sharp, then, cure it.

17 If it is not right, do not do it; if it is not true, do not say it. For let your impulse be <...>²

18 Always look at the whole, at what exactly this thing is that is making the impression on you, and unfold it by dividing it into cause, matter, reference, and the time within which it must come to an end.

19 Realize at last that you have in yourself something better and more divine than the things that cause the passions and, in a word, jerk you about like a puppet. What is my mind now? Fear? Suspicion? Desire? Something else of the kind?

20 First, nothing at random or without reference. Second, refer your actions to nothing but the social end.

21 That in a little while you will be no one, nowhere, and none of the things you now see, nor any of those now living. For all things are made by nature to change and turn and perish, so that others may come into being in their turn.

22 That everything is judgment, and judgment is in your power. Take away your judgment, then, when you like, and, as for a sailor who has rounded the headland, there is calm, all still, and a bay without waves.

23 Any single activity whatever that ceases at the proper time suffers nothing bad by having ceased; nor has the one who did it suffered anything bad by this very fact, that it has ceased. In the same way, then, the sum of all our actions, which is life, if it ceases at the proper time, suffers nothing bad by this very fact, that it has ceased; nor is the one who brought this series to an end at the proper time badly off. The proper time and the limit are set by nature, sometimes by our own nature, as in old age, but in any case by the nature of the whole, through the change of whose parts the whole universe stays always young and in its prime. And whatever benefits the whole is always beautiful and in season. The ending of life, then, is not bad for each of us, since it is not shameful, being outside our choice and not unsocial; and it is good, since it is timely for the whole, and benefits it, and is carried along with it. For so too a man is carried by god, when he is carried along the same road as god, and toward the same things in his judgment.³

24 You must have these three thoughts ready. First, in what you do, whether it is done neither at random nor otherwise than Justice herself would have done it; and as for what happens from outside, that it happens either by chance or by providence; and we must neither blame chance nor accuse providence. Second, what each thing is like from seed to the coming of soul, and from the coming of soul to the giving back of soul, and of what things it is compounded and into what it is dissolved. Third, that if you were

suddenly lifted up into the air and looked down on human affairs and all their variety, you would despise them, seeing at the same time how great is the space all around inhabited by the beings of the air and the upper air; and that however often you were lifted up, you would see the same things: the sameness, the shortness of life. And this is what we are proud of!

25 Throw out your judgment, and you are saved. Who, then, prevents you from throwing it out?

26 When you are vexed at anything, you have forgotten this: that all things happen according to the nature of the whole; and this, that the wrong done is another's; and further this, that everything that happens has always happened so, and will happen so, and is happening so now everywhere; and this, how close is the kinship of each man with the whole human race, a fellowship not of blood or seed but of mind. You have forgotten, too, that each man's mind is god and has flowed from there; that nothing is anyone's own, but even our child, our body, and our very soul have come from there; that everything is judgment; that each of us lives only the present, and loses only that.

27 Constantly call to mind those who were angry beyond measure at something, those who reached the height of fame, or of misfortune, or of hatred, or of any fortune whatever. Then stop and think: Where is all that now? Smoke and ashes and a story, or not even a story. And let every instance of this kind come to mind too: Fabius Catullinus in the country, Lusius Lupus in his gardens, Stertinus at Baiae, Tiberius on Capri, Velius Rufus,⁴ and, in short, any eagerness about anything joined with conceit. And how cheap is all that straining, and how much more like a philosopher it is, in the material given you, to show yourself just, self-controlled, and a follower of the gods, and to do so simply. For the pride that is proud of having no pride is the hardest to bear of all.

28 To those who ask, “Where have you seen the gods, or how have you made sure that they exist, that you worship them so?”: First, they are visible even to the eye.⁵ Second, I have not seen my own soul either, and yet I honor it. So too with the gods: from what I experience of their power in each case, from that I know that they exist, and I revere them.

29 The salvation of life is to see each thing whole, what it is in itself, what its matter is, what its cause; to do what is just with your whole soul, and to speak the truth. What remains but to enjoy life, joining one good deed to another so as to leave not even the smallest gap between them?

30 There is one light of the sun, even though it is broken up by walls, mountains, countless other things. There is one common substance, even though it is broken up into countless bodies, each with its own quality. There is one soul, even though it is broken up among countless natures with their own limits. There is one thinking soul, even though it seems to be divided. The other parts of the things I have named, such as breaths and material objects, are without sensation and have no kinship with one another; and yet they too are held together by what unifies and by the weight that draws them to the same place. But mind reaches out in its own way to what is of its own kind and joins with it, and the feeling of fellowship is not cut off.

31 What do you want? To go on breathing? Or to feel? To have impulses? To grow? To stop growing again? To use your voice? To think? Which of these seems to you worth longing for? But if each of them is easy to despise, go on to the last: to follow reason and god. But it conflicts with this to value those things, and to be grieved if death is going to deprive you of them.

32 How small a part of infinite and yawning time has been portioned out to each of us; for it vanishes very soon into eternity. How small a part of the whole of substance; how small a part of

the whole of soul; on how small a clod of the whole earth you crawl. Considering all this, imagine nothing to be great but this: to act as your own nature leads, and to suffer what the common nature brings.

33 How does the ruling center use itself? For everything lies in this. The rest, whether it is within your will or outside it, is dead bodies and smoke.

34 What most rouses us to despise death is that even those who judged pleasure good and pain bad nevertheless despised it.⁶

35 For the man to whom only what is timely is good, to whom it is all one whether he performs more actions in accord with right reason or fewer, to whom it makes no difference whether he looks on the universe for a longer time or a shorter, for him death too is nothing to fear.

36 Man, you have been a citizen in this great city. What difference does it make to you whether for five years or for three? What is according to the laws is equal for all. What is there to fear, then, if it is not a tyrant or an unjust judge who sends you out of the city, but nature, who brought you in? It is as if the magistrate who engaged a comic actor were to dismiss him from the stage.⁷ —But I have not spoken my five acts, only three.—You are right; but in life three acts are the whole play. For it is he who decides when it is complete who was once the cause of the composition and is now the cause of the dissolution; you are the cause of neither. Go, then, at peace; for he who releases you is at peace.

[1.](#) Empedocles, fragments 27–28, describing the perfect sphere the universe becomes when Love has united all things.

[2.](#) The text breaks off here. Some editors supply “in your own power.”

[3.](#) The Greek plays on *pherein*, “to carry”: “benefits” (*sympheron*), “carried along with” (*sympheromenon*), and “carried by god” (*theophorētos*), a word that usually

means “possessed by a god.”

[4.](#) Apart from the emperor Tiberius, who spent his last years shut away on Capri, these men cannot be identified with certainty; they were apparently Romans known for retirement or luxury. Baiae was a luxurious resort on the Bay of Naples.

[5.](#) The sun and the stars, which the Stoics held to be gods.

[6.](#) The Epicureans.

[7.](#) At Rome games and plays were put on by magistrates; Marcus's Greek calls him a *stratēgos*, the Greek word for a praetor.

Colophon

Meditations

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