Meditations

MARCUS AURELIUS

AD 121–180

Meditations

Τὰ εἰς ἑαυτόν

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



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Meditations · Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180)

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INTRODUCTION

Marcus Aurelius ruled the Roman Empire from AD 161 to 180, much of it from army camps on the Danube frontier. In the evenings he wrote notes to himself, in Greek, on how to live: how to face difficult people, pain, anger, loss and death.

He never meant them to be read. The Greek title means simply "to himself." They became one of the most loved books of philosophy ever written.

Book I

Marcus lists what he learned from his family, teachers, friends and the gods.

1.1 From my grandfather Verus: good character and freedom from anger.

1.2 From the reputation of my father and what I remember of him: modesty and manliness.

1.3 From my mother: reverence for the gods and generosity; refraining not only from doing wrong but even from entertaining the thought of it; and simplicity in her way of living, far removed from the habits of the rich.

1.4 From my great-grandfather: not to go to the public schools, but to have good teachers at home, and to understand that on such things one ought to spend generously.

1.5 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 in the arena; to put up with hard work and need little; to do things for myself and not meddle in other people's business; and to be slow to listen to slander.[1]

1.6 From Diognetus: not to get worked up over trivial things; to disbelieve what miracle-workers and sorcerers say about incantations, driving out spirits, and the like; not to keep fighting quails or get excited about such things; to put up with frank speech; to become at home with philosophy, and to attend the lectures first of Baccheius, then of Tandasis and Marcianus; to

1 Greens and Blues were the rival chariot-racing factions; the light-shield and heavy-shield men were two types of gladiator, each with its own fans.

write dialogues as a boy; and to want a camp bed and an animal skin, and whatever else belongs to the Greek discipline.[2]

1.7 From Rusticus: to form the idea that my character needed correcting and looking after; not to be sidetracked into a sophist's ambitions, or into writing treatises on theory, or delivering little sermons of exhortation, or making a show, to dazzle people, of the man of rigorous self-discipline or of tireless good works; to keep away from rhetoric, poetry, and elegant phrasing; not to walk around the house in formal dress, or do things of that kind; to write letters simply, like the one he himself wrote to my mother from Sinuessa; to be easily recalled and easily reconciled with those who have lost their temper or given offense, as soon as they themselves are willing to come back; to read carefully and not be satisfied with a rough general grasp, nor be quick to agree with people who just talk around a subject; and to come across the notes of Epictetus, which he shared with me from his own collection.[3]

1.8 From Apollonius: freedom, and a steadiness that leaves nothing, beyond all doubt, 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 illnesses; to see plainly, in a living example, that the same man can be both intensely earnest and relaxed; not to be irritable when explaining things; to see a man who clearly counted his experience and skill in passing on his teachings as the least of his good qualities; and to learn how to accept what pass for favors from friends, without being made beholden by them or letting them go by unacknowledged.

1.9 From Sextus: kindliness; the example of a household governed by its father; the idea of living in accordance with nature; dignity without pretense; an attentive concern for his friends' needs; patience with ordinary people and with those who hold opinions without thinking them through; getting on well with

2 Quail-fighting was a popular betting sport; the plank bed and skin were the austere gear of a philosopher's training.

3 Epictetus, the former slave turned Stoic teacher, whose lectures were written up by his pupil Arrian.

everyone, so that his company was more agreeable than any flattery, while those very people held him in the deepest respect at that very moment; a methodical, comprehending way of discovering and ordering the principles needed for life; never showing even a hint of anger or any other passion, but being at once entirely free of passion and full of affection; speaking well of people, but quietly; and great learning, without display.[4]

1.10 From Alexander the grammarian: not to be a fault-finder; not to pounce reproachfully on people who come out with an outlandish word, a solecism, or a jarring expression, but deftly to bring in just the expression that should have been used, by way of an answer, or a shared confirmation, or a joint consideration of the matter itself rather than the wording, or by some other such tactful reminder.

1.11 From Fronto: to take note of what malice, duplicity, and hypocrisy come with tyranny, and that on the whole those we call patricians are somehow rather lacking in natural affection.[5]

1.12 From Alexander the Platonist: not often, or without need, to say to anyone or write in a letter, "I'm busy," and not in this way to keep excusing myself from the duties that go with my relationships to those I live with, by pleading pressing business.

1.13 From Catulus: not to shrug off a friend's complaint, even if it happens to be unreasonable, but to try to restore him to his usual footing; to speak warmly of one's teachers, as is recorded of Domitius and Athenodotus; and to love one's children truly.

1.14 From my brother Severus: love of family, love of truth, love of justice; to have come to know, through him, Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dio, Brutus; to form the idea of a state with the same law for all, run on equality and equal freedom of speech, and of a monarchy that values above everything the freedom of its subjects. And from him too: consistency and constancy in his regard for [philosophy]; beneficence and generosity without stint; hopefulness, and confidence that his friends loved him;

4 Sextus of Chaeronea, a philosopher and nephew of Plutarch.
5 Fronto, the leading Latin orator of the day, was Marcus' teacher of rhetoric and lifelong correspondent.

openness toward those who happened to incur his disapproval; and that his friends didn't need to guess what he wanted or didn't want—it was plain.[6]

1.15 From Maximus: self-mastery, and not being swept off course by anything; cheerfulness in every circumstance, illness included; a well-balanced character, gentle and dignified; getting through the tasks in front of him without complaint; that everyone believed he thought what he said, and that whatever he did, he did in good faith. Never amazed or startled; never hurrying or hanging back, never at a loss, downcast, or forcing a smile, or on the other hand angry or suspicious; generous, forgiving, truthful; giving the impression of a man who had not been bent rather than one who had been straightened; that no one would ever have thought himself looked down on by him, nor would have presumed to think himself his better; and his graceful wit.

1.16 From my father: gentleness, and unshakable firmness in decisions reached after careful examination; no vanity about what pass for honors; love of work and perseverance; a ready ear for anyone with something to contribute to the common good; giving each person his due, without being swayed; knowing from experience where tension is needed and where relaxation; putting a stop to love affairs with boys; a sense of community, and releasing his friends from always dining with him or necessarily traveling with him, while those who had stayed behind on some business always found him the same; careful and persistent inquiry in council, not dropping the investigation early, satisfied with first impressions; holding on to his friends, never tiring of them nor going wild over them; self-sufficiency in everything, and cheerfulness;[7] foresight from far off, and arranging even the smallest matters in advance, without theatrics; the way acclamations and all flattery were curbed in his

6 Thrasea and Helvidius opposed Nero and Vespasian; Cato and Brutus opposed Julius Caesar; Dio is probably Dion of Syracuse, opponent of the tyrant Dionysius.
7 "My father" here is Antoninus Pius, Marcus' adoptive father and his predecessor as emperor (138–161).

time; always guarding the empire's needs, husbanding its resources, and putting up with the criticism some people made of such things; no superstition about the gods, and toward people no courting of the crowd, no eagerness to please or appetite for popularity, but sobriety and steadiness in everything, never vulgar or given to novelty; using the things that make life comfortable, which fortune supplied in abundance, without arrogance and at the same time without apology, so that he took them unaffectedly when they were there and didn't miss them when they weren't; that no one could have called him a sophist, or a pert house-slave, or a pedant, but rather a mature man, complete, above flattery, able to take charge of his own affairs and those of others. Besides this, his respect for those who genuinely practiced philosophy, while not reproaching the others, nor yet being easily led astray by them; further, his easy company and charm, never overdone; a reasonable care for his own body—not like someone clinging to life, nor for looks, nor yet neglectful—such that, thanks to his own attention, he very seldom needed doctors, or medicines, or ointments. Above all, his readiness to defer, without envy, to those who had some special ability—in speaking, say, or in knowledge of the laws or customs or other subjects—and to back them eagerly, so that each might win recognition for his own particular strengths; and though he did everything according to ancestral tradition, he did not try to be seen doing even that—preserving ancestral tradition. Moreover, not easily moved or tossed about, but content to stay in the same places and with the same things; after his fits of headache, back at once, fresh and vigorous, to his usual work; not having many secrets, only very few and very rare ones, and those only about public affairs; good sense and moderation in staging public shows, in building projects, in handouts and the like—the conduct of a man who looks to what needs to be done, not to the credit that comes from doing it. No bathing at odd hours; no mania for building; no fussing over his food, the weave and color of his clothes, or the good looks of his slaves. His clothes at Lorium, brought up from

the farmhouse below; at Lanuvium, mostly just a tunic; how he treated the toll-collector at Tusculum who begged his pardon—and all his manner was like that. Nothing harsh, nothing shameless or violent, nothing that would make anyone say he was working up a sweat; everything was thought through, point by point, as if at leisure—calmly, in order, vigorously, consistently. What is recorded 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. To be strong, to hold out, and to stay sober in each case is the mark of a man with a well-balanced, unconquerable soul—as in Maximus' illness.[8]

1.17 From the gods: to have good grandparents, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good household, relatives, friends—nearly all of them; and that I never slipped into offending any of them, although I had the kind of disposition that, given the chance, might well have led me to do something of the sort; it was the gods' kindness that no combination of circumstances arose that would have shown me up. And that I was not brought up any longer with my grandfather's concubine; that I kept the bloom of my youth intact, and did not become a man before my time, but even put it off a little longer. That I was placed under a ruler and father who would strip me of all vanity and bring me to realize that it is possible to live in a palace without needing bodyguards, or embroidered robes, or torches and statues and that sort of pomp, and that one can bring oneself very close to the life of a private citizen without on that account being any meaner or slacker about the things a ruler must do for the common good. That I had a brother whose character could rouse me to take care of myself, and who at the same time delighted me with his respect and affection. That my children were not born dull-witted or physically deformed. That I made no further progress in rhetoric, poetry, and the other pursuits in which I might perhaps have been caught up, had I found myself advancing

8 Lorium, Lanuvium and Tusculum were towns near Rome where Antoninus had country estates.

smoothly.[9] 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 had clear and frequent impressions of what the life in accordance with nature really is, so that, as far as it depends on the gods and on what comes from them—their gifts, help, and inspiration—nothing now prevents me from living in accordance with nature, and if I still fall short of it, that is my own fault, from not heeding the reminders, practically the instructions, of the gods. That my body has held out so long in a life like this. That I never touched Benedicta or Theodotus, and that even later, when I was caught up in the passions of love, I recovered. That, though often angry with Rusticus, I never did anything more that I would have regretted. That my mother, though she was fated to die young, still spent her last years with me.[10] That whenever I wanted to help someone who was poor or otherwise in need, I was never told that there was no money to do it with; and that I myself never fell into a similar need, so as to have to take help from someone else. That my wife is the woman she is—so obedient, so affectionate, so unpretentious. That I had plenty of suitable tutors for my children. That remedies were given to me in dreams, among them against spitting blood and dizziness, and this at Caieta, as if by an oracle. That, when I set my heart on philosophy, I didn't fall in with some sophist, or sit down to writing treatises, or resolving syllogisms, or busying myself with the heavens. For all these things "need the gods' help and fortune." Written among the Quadi, on the Gran.[11]

9 The brother is Lucius Verus, Marcus' adoptive brother and co-emperor from 161 to 169.

10 Benedicta and Theodotus are otherwise unknown, presumably members of the imperial household.

11 The Quadi were a Germanic people north of the Danube; the Gran (Hron) is a tributary in present-day Slovakia, where Marcus was campaigning.

Book II

Marcus prepares for difficult people, reflects on life's brevity, and resolves to live by reason.

2.1 At dawn, tell yourself in advance: today I'll meet someone meddling, ungrateful, insolent, deceitful, envious, unsociable. All this has come upon them because they don't know good from bad. But I have seen the nature of the good, that it is fine, and of the bad, that it is shameful, and the nature of the wrongdoer himself, that he is my kin—not by sharing the same blood or seed, but by sharing in mind and a portion of the divine. So I can't be harmed by any of them, since no one will involve me in anything shameful; nor can I be angry with my kinsman, or hate him. For we were made to work together, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. To work against one another, then, is contrary to nature; and resenting someone and turning away from him is working against him.

2.2 Whatever it is that I am, it's a bit of flesh, a little breath, and the ruling mind. Put away your books; stop being pulled about. It isn't granted you. Instead, as if you were already dying, despise the flesh: gore, bits of bone, a little woven mesh of nerves, veins, and arteries. Look too at what the breath is: wind, and never the same wind, but every moment breathed out and gulped in again. The third, then, is the ruling mind. Think of it this way: you're an old man. Don't let it be a slave any longer, don't let it be jerked about like a puppet by antisocial impulses any longer, don't let it resent what is fated now or be wary of what is to come.

2.3 The works of the gods are full of providence. The works of fortune are not apart from nature, or from the spinning together and interweaving of the things that providence governs. Everything flows from there. Add to this what is necessary, and what benefits the whole universe, of which you are a part. 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 changes—of the elements, and likewise 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 don't die grumbling, but truly at peace, and grateful to the gods from the heart.

2.4 Remember how long you've been putting these things off, and how many times you've been given extra time by the gods and not used it. It's high time you realized what universe you are part of, and from what governor of the universe you have come as an emanation, and that a limit of time has been marked out for you. If you don't use it to clear the clouds away, it will be gone, and you will be gone, and it won't come again.

2.5 Every hour, set your mind firmly, as a Roman and a man, on doing what's in front of you with scrupulous and unaffected dignity, affection, freedom, and justice, and on giving yourself a rest from all other impressions. And you will, if you do each action as if it were the last of your life, free of all aimlessness, of any passionate turning away from the command of reason, of pretense, self-love, and discontent with what has been allotted to you. You see how few things a person needs to master to live a life that flows well and is godlike; for the gods themselves will ask nothing more of someone who keeps to these.

2.6 Go on, degrade yourself, degrade yourself, my soul. You won't have time to honor yourself any more. Each of us has one life, and yours is nearly done—while you show yourself no respect, but stake your own happiness on the souls of others.

2.7 Are you distracted by things that happen from outside? Then give yourself time to learn something good as well, and stop wandering about. But you must also guard against the other

kind of drifting. For they too are triflers, those who wear themselves out with activity in life but have no target at which to aim every impulse and, in short, every impression.

2.8 No one is easily found to be unhappy because he hasn't attended to what goes on in someone else's soul; but those who don't follow the movements of their own soul are bound to be unhappy.

2.9 You must always remember this: what the nature of the whole is, and what mine is, and how this one stands toward that one, and what kind of part it is of what kind of whole; and that no one prevents you from always doing and saying what is in keeping with the nature of which you are a part.

2.10 Theophrastus, in his comparison of wrongdoings—the sort of comparison one might make in everyday terms—says, as a true philosopher, that wrongs done from desire are worse than those done from anger. For the angry man seems to turn away from reason with a certain pain and an inward contraction he may not notice; but the man who does wrong from desire, overcome by pleasure, seems somehow more self-indulgent and more unmanly in his wrongdoing. Rightly, then, and in a way worthy of philosophy, he said that wrong committed with pleasure deserves greater blame than wrong committed with pain. In general, the one is more like a man who has been wronged first and driven by pain into anger; the other has set out to do wrong of his own accord, carried away into acting on desire.[1]

2.11 Do, say, and think everything as someone who could leave life at any moment. Departing from among human beings is nothing to fear if the gods exist, since they would not involve you in anything bad. And if they don't exist, or don't 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 entirely in a person's power not to fall into what is truly bad. And if anything else were bad, they would have provided for that too, so that it would be in everyone's power not to fall into it. But what doesn't

1 Theophrastus was Aristotle's successor as head of his school.

make a person worse—how could that make a person's life worse? The nature of the whole would not have overlooked this—whether through ignorance, or through knowing but being unable to guard against 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 befall good and bad people equally and indiscriminately. Yet death and life, fame and obscurity, pain and pleasure, wealth and poverty—all these befall good people and bad equally, being neither fine nor shameful. So they are neither good nor bad.

2.12 How quickly everything vanishes: the bodies themselves into the universe, the memory of them into eternity. What all the objects of sense are like, especially those that lure us with pleasure, or frighten us with pain, or are trumpeted by vanity—how cheap, contemptible, grimy, perishable, and dead they are: this is for the faculty of intellect to consider. What are these people whose judgments and voices confer reputation? What is dying? And that if one looks at it alone, and by analyzing the concept breaks down the images attached to it, one will no longer think it anything but a work of nature. Anyone who fears a work of nature is a child. And this is not only a work of nature, but one that benefits it. How a human being is in touch with God, and with what part of himself, and in what condition that part of a human being must be when it does so.

2.13 Nothing is more wretched than the man who goes round and round everything, "probing the depths of the earth," as the line goes, and trying to guess what is in his neighbors' souls, without realizing that it's enough to stay with the divinity within him alone and to serve it sincerely. And serving it means keeping it pure of passion, aimlessness, and discontent with what comes from gods and human beings. For what comes from the gods deserves reverence because of their excellence, and what comes from human beings deserves love because of our kinship—though sometimes, in a way, pity too, because of their ignor-

ance of good and bad: a disability no less than the one that robs us of the power to tell white from black.[2]

2.14 Even if you were going to live three thousand years, or thirty thousand, remember all the same that no one loses any other life than the one he is living, nor lives any other than the one he loses. So the longest life and the shortest come to the same thing. For the present is equal for everyone, and so what is lost is equal too, and what is lost turns out to be a mere instant. No one can lose the past or the future: how could anyone take from him what he doesn't have? So you must remember these two things. First, that all things from eternity are of the same kind and come round again in cycles, and it makes no difference whether one sees the same things for a hundred years, or two hundred, or for infinite time. Second, that the longest-lived and the one who will die soonest lose the same. For it is only the present that one is to be deprived of, since that is all one has, and no one loses what he doesn't have.

2.15 That everything is judgment. What was said to the Cynic Monimus is clear enough; and the usefulness of the saying is clear too, if one takes its flavor only as far as it holds true.[3]

2.16 A human soul degrades itself above all when it becomes, as far as it can, an abscess or a sort of tumor on the universe. For to resent anything that happens is a revolt against nature, which contains, each in its part, the natures of all other things. Second, when it turns away from any human being, or even moves against him meaning to harm him, as the souls of angry people do. Third, it degrades 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 action or impulse of its own go at no target, but acts at random and without attention to what it's doing, when even the smallest things ought to be done with reference to the end. And the end for rational

2 The quoted phrase is from Pindar, as cited in Plato's *Theaetetus*.

3 Monimus, a Cynic philosopher, was known for declaring that everything is mere illusion.

creatures is to follow the reason and law of the most venerable of cities and constitutions.

PHILOSOPHY AS THE ONE GUIDE

Marcus lists how fleeting life is and names philosophy, guarding the divinity within, as the only guide.

2.17 Of human life, the time is a point; the substance, flowing; perception, dim; the whole body's composition, quick to rot; the soul, a whirling top; fortune, hard to predict; fame, undiscerning. In short: all things of the body are a river, all things of the soul a dream and a vapor; life is a war and a stay in a foreign land; and fame after death is oblivion. What, then, can see us through? One thing and one alone: philosophy. And that lies in keeping the divinity within unviolated and unharmed, stronger than pleasures and pains, doing nothing at random, nor falsely or with pretense, not needing anyone else to do or not do anything; and further, accepting what happens and is allotted to it as coming from that same place from which it came itself; and above all, awaiting death with a cheerful mind, as nothing but the dissolution of the elements of which each living thing is composed. And if there is nothing terrible for the elements themselves in each constantly changing into another, why should anyone look askance at the change and dissolution of them all? It is in accordance with nature; and nothing in accordance with nature is bad. Written at Carnuntum.[4]

4 Carnuntum was a legionary base on the Danube, east of present-day Vienna.

Book III

Marcus urges himself to act now, while his mind is sound, and to keep his inner divinity pure.

3.1 We must take into account not only that life is being used up day by day and a smaller part of it remains, but also this: if one lives longer, it is uncertain whether the mind will still be equal to understanding things and to the contemplation that aims at knowledge of the divine and the human. For if a person begins to lose his wits, breathing, nourishment, having impressions, impulse, and everything else of that sort won't be lacking; but making use of himself, getting the measure of his duties exactly, analyzing what presents itself, considering whether it's already time to take himself out of life, and everything else of that kind that really needs a well-trained reasoning—these are snuffed out first. So we must hurry, not only because we come nearer to death at every moment, but also because our grasp of things and our ability to follow them give out first.

3.2 We should also watch for things like this: that even what follows incidentally on nature's processes has something pleasing and attractive about it. When bread is baking, for example, some parts split open; and these cracks, which in a way run counter to the baker's intentions, somehow suit it, and in their own way stir the appetite. Again, figs split open when they are ripest; and in olives ripe enough to fall, their very nearness to rotting adds a special beauty to the fruit. And ears of grain bending downward, the lion's wrinkled brow, the foam flowing from a boar's mouth, and much else—looked at on their own, they are far from lovely, yet because they follow on nature's processes,

they add to its adornment and give us pleasure. So if someone has feeling for, and deeper insight into, what goes on in the whole, hardly anything, even among the things that come as side effects, will fail to seem to him to fit together pleasingly in its own way. Such a person will look at the real gaping jaws of wild beasts with no less pleasure than at the imitations painters and sculptors display; he will be able to see with his own temperate eyes a certain ripeness and bloom in an old woman or an old man, and the charm of children; and many such things will strike him—not convincing to everyone, but only to someone who has become truly at home with nature and its works.

3.3 Hippocrates cured many diseases, then fell ill himself and died. The Chaldeans foretold the deaths of many; then fate caught up with them too. Alexander, Pompey and Julius Caesar, after razing whole cities to the ground so many times and cutting down tens of thousands of cavalry and infantry in battle, themselves departed this life in the end. Heraclitus, after all his theorizing about the universe ending in fire, had his insides filled with water and died plastered in cow dung. Lice killed Democritus; lice of another kind killed Socrates. What does it all come to? You got on board, you made the voyage, you've come into port: get off. If it's into another life, nothing is empty of gods there either. If it's into unconsciousness, you'll stop putting up with pains and pleasures, and stop slaving for a vessel so much inferior to what serves it: the one is mind and divinity, the other earth and gore.[1]

3.4 Don't waste what's left of your life on impressions of other people, unless you're relating them to some common benefit. Otherwise you deprive yourself of other work: picturing what so-and-so is doing and why, what he's saying, what he's thinking, what he's scheming, and everything of that sort, makes you stray from watching over your own ruling mind. So in the train of your impressions you should steer clear of whatever is random and pointless, and above all of whatever is meddlesome

1 The Chaldeans were Babylonian astrologers. The "lice of another kind" who killed Socrates are his accusers.

and malicious. Train yourself to think only the sort of thoughts that, if someone suddenly asked you, "What are you thinking about right now?" you could answer frankly and at once, "This and that," so that it would be obvious straight away from your answer that everything in you is simple and kind, fitting for a social being who has no interest in pleasurable or, in a word, self-indulgent fantasies, or in rivalry of any kind, or envy and suspicion, or anything else you'd blush to admit you had in mind. For a man like that, who no longer puts off being counted among the best, is a kind of priest and servant of the gods. He makes use, too, of the power enshrined within him, which keeps the man unstained by pleasures, unwounded by any pain, untouched by any insult, insensible to any wickedness: a contender in the greatest of contests, never to be thrown by any passion; dyed deep in justice; welcoming with his whole soul everything that happens and is allotted to him; and only rarely, and never without some great necessity for the common good, imagining what someone else is saying or doing or thinking. For his own affairs are all he has to act on, and he constantly keeps in mind what is spun for him out of the whole. The first he makes fine; the second he is persuaded are good. For the lot assigned to each person is carried along with him, and carries him along. He remembers, too, that everything rational is akin, and that caring for all human beings is in keeping with human nature—yet one should hold on to the good opinion not of everyone, but only of those who live in agreement with nature. As for those who don't live that way, he never forgets what sort of people they are at home and away from home, by night and by day, and with what sort of people they wallow. So he doesn't take any account of praise from such people, who aren't even pleased with themselves.

3.5 Don't act unwillingly, or without regard for the community, or without examination, or while pulled in opposite directions. Don't let refinement dress up your thinking. Don't be a person of too many words or too many affairs. Further, let the divinity within you be the guardian of a living being that is male,

mature, a statesman, a Roman and a ruler—one who has taken up his post like a man waiting for the signal to withdraw from life, ready to be released, needing no oath and no human witness. Let there be cheerfulness in you, and no need of help from outside, and no need of the calm that others provide. You must stand up straight, not be held up straight.

NOTHING BETTER THAN THE DIVINITY WITHIN

Marcus holds that nothing in life is better than a mind ruled by reason and content with fate.

3.6 If you find anything in human life better than justice, truth, self-control, courage—in short, better than your mind's being satisfied with itself, in the things where it makes you act according to right reason, and satisfied 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've found. But if nothing appears better than the very divinity enshrined within you—which has brought its own impulses under its control, which examines its impressions, which has drawn itself away, as Socrates used to say, from the promptings of the senses, which has placed itself under the gods and cares for human beings—if you find everything else smaller and cheaper than this, give room to nothing else. For once you lean toward it and are swayed, you'll no longer be able to give undistracted priority to that good which is your own and belongs to you. It isn't right for anything of a different kind—the praise of the many, say, or office, or wealth, or the enjoyment of pleasures—to set itself up against the good of reason and community. All these things, even if they seem to fit in for a while, suddenly take over and sweep you away. But you, I say, simply and freely choose the better, and hold on to it. "But the better is what's advantageous." If it's advantageous to you as a rational being, keep to it; if only as an animal, say so, and keep your judgment free of vanity. Just make sure you conduct the examination soundly.

3.7 Never value as being to your advantage anything that will one day force you to break faith, abandon your self-respect, hate someone, suspect, curse, play the hypocrite, or desire something that needs walls and curtains. A person who has chosen above all his own mind and divinity, and the sacred rites of its excellence, makes no tragic scene, doesn't groan, and will need neither solitude nor a crowd. Most important, he will live neither chasing nor fleeing. Whether he is to have the use of his soul, enclosed in the body, for a longer stretch of time or a shorter, doesn't concern him in the least. Even if he must depart right now, he'll go as readily as he would do anything else that can be done with self-respect and decorum, guarding throughout his whole life against this alone: that his mind should ever be in a state unfitting for a thinking, social being.

3.8 In the mind of someone who has been disciplined and thoroughly purified you'd find nothing festering, nothing tainted, no sore hidden under a healed surface. Nor does fate catch his life unfinished, as one might say of a tragic actor who leaves the stage before completing the play and acting it through. And there's nothing servile in him, nothing affected, nothing clinging to others or cut off from them, nothing to answer for, nothing lurking in hiding.

3.9 Revere your faculty of judgment. Everything depends on it: that no judgment should arise in your ruling mind out of keeping with nature and with the constitution of a rational being. This faculty promises freedom from rash judgment, fellowship with human beings, and following the gods.

3.10 So throw everything else away and hold on to these few things alone. Remember, too, that each of us lives only this present moment, this instant; the rest has either been lived already or lies in uncertainty. Small, then, is the time each one lives; small the little corner of the earth where he lives it; small even the longest fame after death—and even that is handed down through a succession of little human beings who will die very soon, and who don't know even themselves, let alone someone long dead.

3.11 To the aids already mentioned let one more be added: always make a definition or outline of whatever impression presents itself, so as to see what sort of thing it is in its essence, stripped bare, whole and through and through, taking it apart piece by piece; and tell yourself its proper name, and the names of the things it was put together from and will be broken down into. For nothing produces greatness of mind so much as being able to examine methodically and truthfully each thing that comes before you in life, and always to look at things in such a way as to consider at the same time what sort of universe this is, what use this thing serves in it, what value it has in relation to the whole, and what value in relation to a human being, a citizen of that highest city of which all other cities are like households. What is it, what is it made of, how long is it by nature going to last—this thing that is now making an impression on me—and what excellence is needed to meet it: gentleness, for example, or courage, trustworthiness, simplicity, self-sufficiency, and the rest? So in each case you should say: this has come from God; this comes by the meeting of events, the intertwined spinning of the thread, some such coincidence and chance; and this comes from a fellow member of my kind, my kinsman and partner, who doesn't, however, know what is in accordance with his nature. But I do know. That's why I treat him kindly and justly, in keeping with the natural law of community—while at the same time aiming at what each thing deserves among the things that are indifferent.[2]

3.12 If you do what's in front of you by following right reason—earnestly, vigorously, kindly, with nothing on the side, keeping the divinity within you pure and upright as if you might have to give it back at any moment—if you hold to this, expecting nothing and avoiding nothing, content with present activity in accordance with nature and with heroic truthfulness in everything you say and utter, you will live well. And there's no one who can stop you.

2 In Stoic terms, "indifferent" things (such as health, wealth or reputation) are those that are neither good nor bad in themselves.

3.13 Just as doctors always keep their instruments and scalpels at hand for emergencies, so you should keep your principles ready for understanding things divine and human, and for doing everything, even the smallest thing, mindful of the bond that ties the two together. For you won't do anything human well without referring it to the divine as well, nor the reverse.

3.14 Stop wandering. You're 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. So hurry to the finish, drop your empty hopes, and come to your own rescue, if you care about yourself at all, while you still can.

3.15 They don't know how many meanings there are in stealing, sowing, buying, keeping quiet, seeing what needs to be done—which isn't done with the eyes but with another kind of sight.

3.16 Body, soul, mind. To the body belong sensations, to the soul impulses, to the mind principles. Being stamped with impressions is something even cattle share; being jerked about like a puppet by impulses belongs even to wild beasts, to the spineless, to Phalaris and Nero; having the mind as a guide to what seem to be one's duties belongs even to people who don't believe in the gods, who betray their country, who do what they do once they've shut their doors. If, then, everything else is shared with the types just mentioned, what remains as distinctive of the good person is to love and welcome whatever happens to him and is spun for him, and not to muddy the divinity enshrined within his breast or disturb it with a mob of impressions, but to keep it serene, following God in an orderly way, saying nothing contrary to the truth and doing nothing contrary to justice.[3] And if everyone distrusts him for living simply, with self-respect and good cheer, he isn't angry with any of them, and he doesn't turn aside from the road that leads to the end of life, where he must arrive pure, calm, ready to be released, fitted to his lot without being forced.

3 Phalaris was a Sicilian tyrant notorious for roasting his victims alive inside a bronze bull; Nero was the Roman emperor.

Book IV

Marcus reflects on retreat into the self, constant change, and the short memory of fame.

4.1 When the power that rules within us is in accordance with nature, it stands toward events in such a way that it always adapts easily to what is possible and given. It has no attachment to any predetermined material; it goes after its primary aims with a reservation, and whatever is brought in to replace them it turns into material for itself—like a fire when it masters what falls into it. A small lamp would have been put out by these things; but a blazing fire very quickly makes what's heaped on it its own, consumes it, and rises higher out of that very stuff.

4.2 Let no action be done at random, or otherwise than according to a principle that completes the art.

THE RETREAT INTO YOURSELF

Marcus reminds himself that he can retreat into his own mind at any hour and find calm there.

4.3 People look for retreats for themselves—houses in the country, beaches, mountains—and you too are in the habit of longing for such things more than anything. But this is all very naive, since you can retreat into yourself at any hour you like. Nowhere can a person retreat to that is quieter or more free from trouble than his own soul—especially someone who has things within him that he need only look into to be at once completely at ease; and by ease I mean nothing other than good order. So give yourself this retreat constantly, and renew your-

self. Let the things you meet there be brief and elementary, enough, as soon as you encounter them, to wash away all your distress and send you back without resentment toward what you're returning to. What is it, after all, that you'll resent? People's wickedness? Go back over the verdict that rational beings exist for one another, that tolerance is part of justice, that people do wrong unwillingly, and how many people before now, after feuding, suspecting, hating and running each other through with spears, have been laid out and reduced to ashes—and stop, at last. Or will you resent what's allotted to you from the whole? Revive the alternative—either providence or atoms—and all the proofs that the universe is a kind of city. Or will the things of the body still get a hold on you? Consider that the mind doesn't mingle with the breath of life, whether it moves smoothly or roughly, once it has withdrawn into itself and recognized its own power; and then consider everything you've heard, and agreed to, about pain and pleasure. Or will a little bit of fame distract you?[1] Look at how quickly everything is forgotten, at the chasm of infinite time on either side, at the hollowness of applause, at the fickleness and poor judgment of those who seem to speak well of you, and at the narrowness of the space in which it's all confined. The whole earth is a point, and how tiny a corner of it is this place we live in! And here, how many people are there who will praise you, and what are they like? So in the end remember to retreat into this little farm that is yourself. Above all, don't be pulled this way and that, don't strain; be free, and look at things as a man, as a human being, as a citizen, as a mortal creature. Among the things most readily at hand for you to look into, let there be these two. First, that things don't touch the soul; they stand outside it, unmoving, and troubles come only from the judgment within. Second, that all these things you see will change almost at once and will be no more. Think constantly of how many changes you yourself have already witnessed. The universe is change; life is judgment.

1 "Providence or atoms": the Stoics held that the universe is governed by providence, the Epicureans that it is a chance collision of atoms.

4.4 If mind is common to us, then so is reason, by which we are rational beings. If so, then the reason that commands what we should or shouldn't do is common too. If so, law too is common. If so, we are citizens. If so, we share in some political community. If so, the universe is a kind of city. For what other common political community could anyone say the whole human race shares in? And it is from there, from this common city, that we get our mind itself, our reason and our sense of law—or where else from? For just as the earthy part of me has been portioned off from some earth, the watery from another element, my breath from some source, and the hot and fiery from a source of its own (since nothing comes from nothing, just as nothing departs into nonexistence), so too the mind has come from somewhere.

4.5 Death, like birth, is a mystery of nature: a combining out of the same elements, a dissolving back into them. Nothing at all to be ashamed of: it isn't out of keeping with the order proper to a thinking being, or contrary to the plan of its constitution.

4.6 Things like this are bound by nature to happen this way, from people like that, of necessity. Anyone who doesn't want it to wants the fig tree not to have sap. In any case, remember this: in a very short time both you and he will be dead, and soon after not even your names will be left.

4.7 Take away the judgment, and "I've been harmed" is taken away. Take away "I've been harmed," and the harm is taken away.

4.8 What doesn't make a person worse than he was doesn't make his life worse either, or harm him, from outside or from within.

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

4.10 That "everything that happens, happens justly"—you'll find it so if you watch carefully. I don't just mean that it follows in due sequence, but that it happens in accordance with justice, as if by someone assigning each thing what it deserves. So keep watching, as you've begun, and whatever you do, do it together

with this: with being good, in the precise sense in which a good person is understood. Preserve this in every action.

4.11 Don't see things the way the person insulting you judges them, or the way he wants you to judge them. See them as they really are.

4.12 You should always have these two kinds of readiness: one, to do only what the reason of the royal and law-giving art suggests for the benefit of human beings; the other, to change your mind if someone is at hand to set you right and lead you away from some notion. But the change should always come from being persuaded that something is just or for the common good—only reasons of that kind—and not because it looked pleasant or popular.

4.13 "Do you have reason?" "I do." "Then why don't you use it? If it's doing its own job, what more do you want?"

4.14 You have existed as a part. You will vanish into what produced you—or rather, through change, you'll be taken back up into its seminal reason.[2]

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

4.16 Within ten days you'll seem a god to the very people who now think you a beast and an ape—if you return to your principles and to reverence for reason.

4.17 Don't act as if you were going to live ten thousand years. What must be hangs over you. While you live, while you can, become good.

4.18 How much free time a person gains who doesn't look at what his neighbor has said or done or thought, but only at what he himself is doing, so that this very thing may be just and holy. As befits the good person, don't glance around at black characters; run straight along the line, without swerving.

4.19 Someone who is excited about fame after death doesn't picture how every one of those who remember him will very soon die too, and then in turn whoever took over from him, until the

2 The Stoics' "seminal reason" is the formative principle of the universe, from which all things grow as from seed.

whole memory is snuffed out as it passes along a line of people who are lit and then go out. But suppose that those who will remember you were immortal, and the memory immortal: what is that to you? And I don't mean that it's nothing to the dead. What is praise to the living, except perhaps for some practical purpose? As it is, you're neglecting nature's gift out of season, clinging to some other account of things hereafter.

4.20 Everything that is beautiful in any way at all is beautiful of itself and complete in itself; praise is no part of it. What is praised, at any rate, becomes neither worse nor better. I say this also of things more commonly called beautiful, such as material objects and works of craftsmanship. (What does the truly beautiful need? No more than law does, no more than truth, no more than kindness or modesty.) Which of these is beautiful because it is praised, or spoiled by being criticized? Does an emerald become worse than it was if it isn't praised? What about gold, ivory, purple, a lyre, a little knife, a little flower, a shrub?

4.21 If souls survive, how has the air made room for them from all eternity? And how does the earth make room for the bodies of those buried over so vast an age? Just as, here, the change and decomposition of those bodies, after they have lasted a certain time, makes room for other corpses, so the souls that move into the air, after holding together for some time, change, are dispersed and kindled, being taken back up into the seminal reason of the whole, and in this way make room for the souls that come to join them there. That is how one might answer on the assumption that souls survive. But we must consider not only the multitude of bodies buried in this way, but also that of the animals eaten every day by us and by other animals. What a number are consumed and in a sense buried in the bodies of those they feed! And yet the space takes them in, through their conversion into blood and their transformation into air or fire. What is the way to investigate the truth of this? A division into the material and the causal.

4.22 Don't be sidetracked. In every impulse, give what is just; in every impression, hold on to what can be clearly grasped.

4.23 Everything that suits you suits me, universe. Nothing that is timely for you is too early or too late for me. Everything your seasons bring is fruit to me, nature. From you are all things, in you all things, to you all things. One writer says, "Dear city of Cecrops"; won't you say, "Dear city of Zeus"?[3]

4.24 "Do little," he says, "if you want to be content." Might it not be better to do what's necessary, and whatever the reason of a naturally social being requires, and in the way it requires? This brings not only the contentment that comes from doing things well, but also the contentment of doing few things. Most of what we say and do isn't necessary; cut it out, and you'll have more free time and less turmoil. So on each occasion you should remind yourself: "Is this one of the unnecessary things?" And you must cut out not only unnecessary actions but unnecessary impressions too; that way superfluous actions won't follow in their train either.[4]

4.25 Try how the life of the good person works for you too—the person who is glad of what is allotted to him from the whole, and content with his own just action and kind disposition.

4.26 You've seen those things; now look at these. Don't trouble yourself; make yourself simple. Someone does wrong? He does wrong to himself. Something has happened to you? Good. Everything that happens was fated and spun for you from the whole, from the beginning. All told, life is short. Make the most of the present, with sound reasoning and justice. Be sober, but relaxed.

4.27 Either an ordered universe or a mixed-up hodgepodge. But it is an order. Or can there be some order in you, and disorder in the whole—and that when all things are so distinct, and yet so spread throughout, and bound in sympathy?

4.28 A black character, a soft character, a stubborn character; savage, bovine, childish, stupid, fake, buffoonish, huckstering, tyrannical.

4.29 If anyone who doesn't know what is in the universe is a stranger in it, no less a stranger is anyone who doesn't know

3 Cecrops was the legendary first king of Athens, so the "city of Cecrops" is Athens.

what happens in it. A fugitive is one who runs away from the reason of the community; blind, one who shuts the eye of the mind; a beggar, one who needs someone else and doesn't have from himself everything that is useful for life. An abscess on the universe is one who stands apart and separates himself from the reason of our common nature by being displeased with what happens—for it is that nature that brings this about, the same nature that brought you about. A splinter of the city is one who splits his own soul off from the soul of rational beings, which is one.

4.30 One man practices philosophy without a tunic, another without a book. Here's another, half naked: "I have no bread," he says, "and I stand by reason." And I have no nourishment from learning, and I stand by it.

4.31 Love the modest craft you've learned, and take your rest in it. Go through the rest of your life as one who has entrusted everything of his to the gods with his whole soul, and has made himself neither tyrant nor slave of any human being.

THE VANISHED GENERATIONS

Marcus recalls past eras and famous men, all now dead and forgotten, to show how brief life is.

4.32 Think, for example, of the times of Vespasian. You'll see all the same things: people marrying, raising children, falling ill, dying, waging war, holding festivals, trading, farming, flattering, being arrogant, suspecting, plotting, praying for others to die, grumbling at their lot, falling in love, hoarding, longing for consulships and kingships. Well, that life of theirs is no longer anywhere. 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 eras and of whole nations, and see how many people strained hard, then soon fell and were dissolved into their elements. Above all you should go back over those you've known yourself, pulling at empty things, neglecting to do what

4 The saying is from the philosopher Democritus.

accords with their own constitution, to hold on to it tightly and be content with it.[5] Here it's essential to remember that the attention given to each action has its own value and proportion. That way you won't lose heart, provided you don't spend more time than is fitting on lesser things.

4.33 Words that were once in common use now need a gloss. So too the names of those once much celebrated now need a gloss, in a way: Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, Dentatus; and, little by little, Scipio and Cato too; then Augustus as well, then Hadrian and Antoninus. Everything quickly fades and turns into legend, and soon complete oblivion buries it. And I'm saying this of those who shone in some remarkable way; as for the rest, as soon as they've breathed their last they are "unseen, unheard of." What, after all, is everlasting remembrance? Utterly empty. What, then, should we put our effort into? Just this: a just mind, actions for the common good, speech that never lies, and a disposition that welcomes everything that happens as necessary, as familiar, as flowing from a source and spring of the same kind.[6]

4.34 Give yourself willingly to Clotho, and let her spin you into whatever events she pleases.[7]

4.35 Everything lasts a day, both the one who remembers and what is remembered.

4.36 Watch constantly how everything comes into being through change, and get used to the thought that the nature of the whole loves nothing so much as changing what exists and making new things like it. Everything that exists is in a way the seed of what will come from it; but you think of seeds only as what is sown into the earth or a womb—and that is very naive.

4.37 Soon you'll be dead, and you're still not simple, not untroubled, not free of the suspicion that you might be harmed from outside, not gracious to everyone, not placing understanding in acting justly alone.

5 Vespasian (emperor AD 69–79) and Trajan (AD 98–117) reigned a few generations before Marcus.

6 Camillus, Caeso, Volesus and Dentatus were heroes of early Rome.

7 Clotho is the Fate who spins the thread of each life.

4.38 Look closely at their ruling minds, even those of the wise: what sort of things they avoid, and what sort they pursue.

4.39 What is bad for you doesn't lie in someone else's ruling mind, nor in any turn or alteration of your surroundings. Where, then? Where the part of you that forms judgments about bad things is. So let it not form that judgment, and all is well. Even if what's closest to it, your poor body, is cut, burned, festers or rots, still let the part that judges about these things keep quiet—that is, let it judge that nothing is bad or good that can happen equally to a bad man and to a good one. For what happens equally to one who lives against nature and to one who lives in accordance with nature is neither in accordance with nature nor against it.

4.40 Keep thinking of the universe as one living being, with one substance and one soul. Consider how everything is taken up into its one perception; how it does everything by one impulse; how all things are joint causes of all that happens; and what the spinning and weaving together of it all is like.

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

4.42 Nothing is bad for things undergoing change, just as nothing is good for things that come into being out of change.

4.43 Time is a kind of river of things coming to be, a violent current. No sooner is each thing seen than it has been swept past, and another is being carried by, and that one too will be carried off.

4.44 Everything that happens is as usual and familiar as the rose in spring and the fruit in summer. So it is with disease, death, slander, plotting, and everything that delights or pains fools.

4.45 What follows always comes as kin to what went before. It isn't like a list of separate items that merely follow one another by necessity; it's a rational connection. And just as the things that exist are arranged together in harmony, so the things that come into being show not bare succession but a wonderful kinship.

4.46 Always remember the saying of Heraclitus: the death of earth is to become water, the death of water to become air, and of air to become fire, and back again. Remember too the man who forgets where the road leads. And that people are at odds with the very thing they're most constantly in contact with—the reason that governs the whole; and that the things they run into every day seem strange to them. And that we mustn't act and speak like people asleep—for even in sleep we think we're acting and speaking. And that we mustn't be like children taking after their parents—that is, simply going by what we've been handed down.[8]

4.47 If one of the gods told you that you would die tomorrow, or at the latest the day after, you wouldn't make much of the difference between the day after and tomorrow—unless you were utterly mean-spirited. How big is the gap? In the same way, don't think it matters much whether it's many years from now or tomorrow.

4.48 Keep thinking of how many doctors have died, after knitting their brows over the sick so often; how many astrologers, after predicting other people's deaths as if it were something momentous; how many philosophers, after holding forth endlessly about death or immortality; how many great warriors, after killing many; how many tyrants, after wielding power over people's lives with terrible arrogance, as if they were immortal. How many whole cities have died, so to speak—Helice, Pompeii, Herculaneum, and countless others. Go through all the people you've known, one after another: one buried this man and then was laid out himself, another buried that one—and all in a short time. For the whole point is always to see human things as short-lived and cheap: yesterday a drop of mucus, tomorrow a mummy or ashes.[9] So pass through this tiny moment of time in accordance with nature, and end it contentedly, as a ripe olive

8 Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC), the philosopher of flux and of the Logos; the chapter strings together phrases from his sayings.

9 Helice, a Greek city, was swallowed by the sea in 373 BC; Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried by Vesuvius in AD 79.

might fall, blessing the earth that bore it and grateful to the tree that grew it.

4.49 Be like the headland that the waves keep breaking against: it stands firm, and around it the churning water is lulled to sleep. "I'm unlucky, because this happened to me." No—rather: "I'm lucky, because though this happened to me, I go on free of distress, neither crushed by the present nor afraid of what's coming." Something like this could have happened to anyone, but not everyone would have gone on free of distress over it. So why is that more a misfortune than this is a good fortune? Do you call anything at all a misfortune for a human being that isn't a failure of human nature? And does something seem to you a failure of human nature if it isn't contrary to what that nature wills? Well then: you've learned what it wills. Does what has happened stop you from being just, great-souled, self-controlled, sensible, careful in judgment, undeceived, modest, free, and all the rest—the qualities whose presence gives human nature all that is its own? From now on, whenever something tempts you toward distress, remember to use this principle: not "this is a misfortune," but "to bear it nobly is good fortune."

4.50 A layman's aid, but an effective one, for despising death: to recall those who clung greedily to life. What did they get more than those who died young? Surely they all lie somewhere now—Cadicianus, Fabius, Julianus, Lepidus, and anyone else like them, who carried many out to burial and then were carried out themselves. All in all, the span is small, and it is drained away through so many troubles, among such people, and in such a feeble body! So don't treat it as anything much. Look at the yawning immensity of time behind you, and the other infinity ahead. In that, what difference is there between a baby of three days and a man of three generations?[10]

4.51 Always run the short way—and the short way is the one in accordance with nature: to say and do everything in the sound-

10 "A man of three generations" renders a word coined from the Homeric epithet of Nestor, the old king who outlived three generations.

est way. A purpose like that frees you from toil and wrangling, from all calculation and showing off.

Book V

Marcus urges himself to rise and do a human being's work and to accept what nature assigns.

5.1 At dawn, when you're reluctant to get up, have this ready: "I'm getting up to do a human being's work. Why am I irritable, then, if I'm going 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." So were you born for pleasure—in short, for being acted on rather than for acting? Don't you see the little plants, the little birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees, doing their own work, each doing its part to hold the world in order? And you don't want to do a human being's work? You don't hurry to what your nature requires? "But one needs rest too." I agree. But nature has set limits to that too, just as she has set limits to eating and drinking. And yet you go beyond the limits, beyond what's enough—but not in your actions: there you stop short of what you could do. You don't love yourself; if you did, you would love your nature and what it wills. People who love their crafts wear themselves out over their work, unwashed and unfed. Do you honor your own nature less than the engraver honors engraving, the dancer dancing, the money-lover money, or the vain man his bit of glory? When they're passionate about something, these people would rather go without food and sleep than stop advancing the things they care about. Do actions that serve the community seem less valuable to you, less worth the effort?

5.2 How easy it is to push away and wipe out every impression that is troubling or alien, and at once be completely calm.

5.3 Judge yourself worthy of every word and deed that is in accordance with nature, and don't be distracted by the criticism or talk of certain people that follows. If it was right to do or say, don't think yourself unworthy of it. Those people have their own ruling minds and follow their own impulses. Don't look around at them; go straight ahead, following your own nature and the common nature—and the road of both is one.

5.4 I go on through what is in accordance with nature until I fall and rest, breathing my last into the air I breathe in every day, and falling onto the earth from which my father gathered his seed, my mother her blood, and my nurse her milk; from which, for so many years, I have been fed and watered every day; which carries me as I tread on it and use it for so many things.

5.5 They can't admire your quick wit. All right—but there are many other things you can't say "I'm not built for." So show those, which are entirely up to you: sincerity, dignity, endurance, indifference to pleasure, not complaining about your lot, needing little, kindness, freedom, simplicity, restraint in speech, greatness of mind. Don't you notice how many things you could already show, where there's no excuse of lack of talent or unfitness, and yet you still willingly stay down below? Or is it because you were badly made by nature that you're forced to grumble, to be stingy, to flatter, to blame your poor body, to fawn, to show off, and to be tossed about so much in your soul? No, by the gods! You could have been rid of all that long ago, and been charged only—if at all—with being rather slow and dull of understanding. And even that must be worked on, not ignored, and not indulged in your sluggishness.

5.6 One person, when he does someone a good turn, is quick to chalk it up as a favor owed. Another isn't quick to do that, but privately he still thinks of the person as his debtor and knows what he has done. A third in a sense doesn't even know what he's done, but is like a vine that has produced 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

human being who has done good doesn't make a fuss about it, but moves on to the next thing, as a vine moves on to bearing grapes again in season. So one should be among those who do this, in a sense, without noticing it. "Yes, but this is exactly what one should notice. For it's characteristic of a social being," he says, "to perceive that he's acting for the community—and, by Zeus, to want his partner to perceive it too." What you say is true, but you're misunderstanding what's being said now. That's why you'll become one of those I mentioned before, for they too are led astray by a kind of logical plausibility. But if you're willing to understand what's actually being said, don't be afraid that it will make you neglect any action that serves the community.

5.7 A prayer of the Athenians: "Rain, rain, dear Zeus, on the fields of the Athenians and on their plains." Either we shouldn't pray at all, or we should pray like this, simply and freely.

WHAT NATURE PRESCRIBES

Marcus compares fate to a doctor's prescription and urges accepting whatever nature assigns as fitting the whole.

5.8 Just as people say, "Asclepius prescribed this man horseback riding, or cold baths, or going barefoot," so we can say, "The nature of the whole prescribed this man disease, or disability, or loss, or something else of the kind." In the first case, "prescribed" means something like this: he assigned this to this man as suited to his health. And in the second, what happens to each person has been assigned to him as suited to his fate. That is how we say these things "fit" us, as builders say that squared stones "fit" in walls or pyramids when they fit together with one another in a certain arrangement. For all in all there is one harmony; and just as the universe is made complete as the body it is out of all bodies, so fate is made complete as the cause it is out of all causes.[1] Even complete laymen understand what I mean, for they say, "It brought this on him." So this was brought on this

1 The Greek verb *symbainein* means both "happen" and "fit together." Asclepius, the healing god, was believed to prescribe treatments to patients at his shrines.

man, and this was prescribed for him. Let's accept these things, then, as we accept what Asclepius prescribes. Many of those prescriptions are harsh too, but we welcome them in the hope of health. Let the accomplishment and fulfillment of what the common nature sees fit seem to you something like your health. Welcome everything that happens in the same way, even if it seems rather harsh, because it leads there—to the health of the universe and to the well-being and success of Zeus. For nature wouldn't have brought this on anyone if it didn't benefit the whole; no nature, whatever it may be, brings anything that isn't suited to what it governs. So there are two reasons to be content with what happens to you. First, because it happened to you, was prescribed for you, and was related to you in some way, spun together with you from above out of the most ancient causes. Second, because what comes to each individually is a cause of the well-being, the fulfillment, and, by Zeus, the very continuance of what governs the whole. For the whole is maimed if you cut off anything at all from its connection and continuity—of its causes just as of its parts. And you do cut it off, as far as it's up to you, whenever you're dissatisfied; in a sense you destroy it.

5.9 Don't be disgusted, or give up, or lose heart if you don't consistently manage to do everything from right principles. When you've been knocked off course, come back again, and be glad if most of what you do is worthy of a human being; and love what you're coming back to. Don't come back to philosophy as to a schoolmaster, but as people with sore eyes turn to the sponge and the egg, or someone else to a poultice or a warm compress. That way you won't be making a show of obeying reason; you'll find rest in it. Remember that philosophy wants only what your nature wants, while you wanted something else, something not in accordance with nature. For what could be more agreeable than these things? Isn't that exactly how pleasure trips us up? But look whether greatness of mind, freedom, simplicity, kindliness, and holiness aren't more agreeable. For what is more agreeable than understanding itself, when you consider how the

faculty of comprehension and knowledge never stumbles and runs smoothly in everything?

5.10 Things are so veiled, in a way, that quite a few philosophers, and no ordinary ones, have thought them completely beyond grasp; even the Stoics themselves think them hard to grasp. And all our assent is liable to change—where is the person who never changes? Move on, then, to the objects themselves: how short-lived and cheap they are, and how they can belong to a debauchee, a prostitute, or a bandit. Next go on to the characters of the people you live with: even the most gracious of them is hard to put up with—not to mention that a person can barely put up with himself. In such darkness and filth, in such a flux of substance and of time, of motion and of things moved, I can't even conceive what could be worth prizing or taking seriously at all.[2] On the contrary, you must comfort yourself and wait for your natural dissolution, and not chafe at the delay, but find rest in these thoughts alone: first, that nothing will happen to me that isn't in accordance with the nature of the whole; second, that it's in my power never to act against the god and the divinity within me—for no one will force me to transgress against it.

5.11 What am I using my soul for right now? Ask yourself this at every turn, and examine what I have right now in this part of me they call the ruling mind, and whose soul I have at the moment. A child's? A teenager's? A woman's? A tyrant's? A farm animal's? A wild beast's?

5.12 You can get a sense of what the things most people consider good are really like from this. If someone had in mind things that are truly good—understanding, self-control, justice, courage—then with those in mind he couldn't bear to hear the line "from all his goods...," because it wouldn't fit. But with what most people consider good in mind, he'll hear it out and readily accept the comic poet's line as aptly said. So even most people sense the difference. Otherwise the line wouldn't offend and be

2 The Skeptics of Plato's Academy held that nothing can be known with certainty; the Stoics, Marcus's own school, held that some impressions can be securely grasped.

rejected in the one case, while in the case of wealth and the lucky trappings of luxury or fame we accept it as fitting and witty. Go on, then, and ask whether we should prize and consider good things which, once you have them in mind, would aptly be followed by the saying that their owner, from sheer abundance, "has nowhere to shit."[3]

5.13 I am made up of a causal element and a material one, and neither 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 in turn will change into another part of the universe, and so on to infinity. It was by change of this kind that I too came into being, and my parents, and so on back into another infinity. Nothing prevents us from saying so, even if the universe is governed in finite cycles.[4]

5.14 Reason and the art of reasoning are faculties sufficient for themselves and for the works that belong to them. They set out from their own starting point and travel toward the goal set before them. That's why such actions are called "right actions": the name points to the rightness of the road.

5.15 None of those things should be called a human being's that don't fall to a human being as a human being. They aren't required of a human being, human nature doesn't promise them, and they aren't fulfillments of human nature. So a human being's end doesn't lie in them either, nor does what completes that end—the good. Besides, if any of them did fall to a human being, it wouldn't be fitting to look down on them and rise up against them; someone who showed he didn't need them wouldn't be praiseworthy; and someone who stinted himself in any of them wouldn't be good—if these things really were goods. As it is, the more a person strips himself of these or things like them, or bears being stripped of any of them, the better he is.

5.16 Your mind will take on the character of the impressions you have most often, for the soul is dyed by its impressions. So

3 The comic poet is Menander (c. 342–290 BC); his joke is that a man is so stuffed with "goods" that he has nowhere left to relieve himself.

dye it with a steady stream of impressions like these. For example: where one can live, one can also live well; one can live at court; therefore one can also live well at court. And again: each thing is drawn toward what it was made for; its end lies in what it is drawn toward; and where its end is, there too is its benefit and its good. Therefore the good of a rational creature is community. That we were born for community was shown long ago. Or wasn't it obvious that the lower exists for the sake of the higher, and the higher for one another? And living things are higher than lifeless ones, and rational things higher than living ones.

5.17 To pursue the impossible is madness; and it's impossible for bad people not to do things of this sort.

5.18 Nothing happens to anyone that he isn't naturally able to bear. The same things happen to someone else, and either because he doesn't realize they've happened, or because he wants to show his greatness of mind, he stays steady and unharmed. It's a terrible thing, then, that ignorance and the wish to please should be stronger than understanding.

5.19 Things themselves don't touch the soul in the least. They have no way into the soul, and they can't turn it or move it. The soul alone turns and moves itself, and whatever judgments it sees fit to make, it makes whatever it encounters conform to them.

5.20 In one respect a human being is what's most closely related to us, insofar as we must do people good and put up with them. But insofar as some people obstruct my proper work, a human being becomes one of the indifferent things to me, no less than the sun, the wind, or a wild animal. These may hinder some activity of mine, but they are no hindrance to my impulse and disposition, because of the reservation and the redirection. For the mind turns every obstacle to its activity around and converts it into what furthers its aim: what holds up this work

4 The Stoics held that the universe is periodically consumed by fire and then reborn, in an endless series of cycles.

becomes an advance in the work, and what blocks this road helps you along it.[5]

5.21 Honor what is most powerful in the universe: that is what uses all things and directs all things. In the same way, honor what is most powerful in yourself, which is akin to it. For in you too it is this that uses everything else, and your life is governed by it.

5.22 What doesn't harm the city doesn't harm the citizen either. Whenever you have the impression that you've been harmed, apply this rule: if the city isn't harmed by this, neither am I. And if the city is harmed, you mustn't get angry, but show the one who harms the city what he's overlooking.

5.23 Think often about how quickly the things that exist and come into being are swept past and carried off. Substance is like a river in unceasing flow; activities are in constant change, causes in countless variations; almost nothing stands still, not even what is close at hand. And there is the boundless gulf of past and future, in which all things vanish. How, then, is he not a fool who gets puffed up about these things, or torn apart, or complains as if something had troubled him for any real time, let alone a long one?

5.24 Remember all of substance, of which you have the tiniest share; and all of time, of which you've been allotted a brief and momentary interval; and fate—what fraction of it are you?

5.25 Someone does me wrong? That's his lookout. 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.

5.26 Let the ruling and sovereign part of your soul remain unmoved by smooth or rough motions in the flesh. Don't let it blend with them; let it mark off its own boundaries and confine those feelings to the body's parts. But when they rise into the mind through that other sympathy, as happens in a body that is one whole, then you mustn't try to resist the sensation, since it

5 "Reservation" is a Stoic technical term: acting with the tacit proviso "if nothing prevents it," so that being blocked is no defeat.

is natural; but the ruling mind must not add, on its own account, the judgment that it is good or bad.

5.27 "Live with the gods." He lives with the gods who continually shows them that his soul is content with what it is allotted, and does whatever the guardian spirit wants—the spirit Zeus has given to each of us as protector and guide, a fragment of himself. And this is each person's mind and reason.

5.28 Are you angry at the man whose armpits stink? Angry at the one with bad breath? What good will it do you? He has that kind of mouth, those kinds of armpits; that kind of smell is bound to come from things like that. "But the man has reason," someone says, "and can figure out, if he pays attention, what's offensive about him." Good for you! Well then, you have reason too. Use your rational disposition to stir his rational disposition: show him, remind him. If he listens, you'll cure him, and there's no need for anger. Neither a tragic actor nor a prostitute.[6]

5.29 As you intend to live once you've left, so you can live here. And if they don't let you, then leave life too—but as someone suffering no harm. "Smoke—so I'm leaving." Why do you think it's a big deal? But as long as nothing like that drives me out, I remain free, and no one will stop me from doing what I want; and what I want is what accords with the nature of a rational and social creature.[7]

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

5.31 How have you behaved so far toward gods, parents, brothers, wife, children, teachers, those who raised you, friends, relatives, household slaves? Can you say of all of them so far that you've "never done anyone a wrong or said one"? Remind your-

6 The closing phrase is an isolated, obscure note; it may mean: don't rant theatrically, and don't pander.

7 A Stoic image used by Epictetus: if the house is too smoky, you walk out—a figure for leaving life when it becomes unlivable.

self too what you've been through, and what you've had the strength to endure; that the story of your life is already complete and your service finished; how many beautiful things you've seen; how many pleasures and pains you've looked down on, how many honors you've passed over, and how many ungrateful people you've been kind to.[8]

5.32 Why do unskilled and ignorant souls throw the skilled and knowing one into confusion? Which soul, then, is skilled and knowing? The one that knows the beginning and the end, and the reason that pervades all substance and manages the whole through all of time in appointed cycles.

5.33 Soon enough you'll be ashes or a skeleton, and either a name or not even a name—and a name is just noise and echo. The things so highly prized in life are empty, rotten, and petty: puppies nipping at each other, quarrelsome children laughing and then suddenly crying. Good faith, decency, justice, and truth have gone "to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth." So what still keeps you here, if the objects of sense are changeable and unstable, the senses dim and easily misled, the poor soul itself a vapor rising from blood, and a good name among such people empty? What, then? You wait graciously for either extinction or transfer. And until that time comes, what is enough?[9] What else but to revere and praise the gods, and to do good to people, to bear with them and forbear; and as for everything within the bounds of your bit of flesh and breath, to remember that it's neither yours nor up to you.

5.34 You can always have your life flow well, if you can also go the right way—if you can also think and act by the right road. These two things are common to the soul of God, of a human being, and of every rational creature: not to be obstructed by another; and to find the good in a just disposition and just action, and to let your desire end there.

8 Adapted from Homer's *Odyssey* (4.690), where Penelope says this of Odysseus.
9 The quotation is from Hesiod's *Works and Days* (197), on the virtues abandoning a degenerate humanity.

5.35 If this is neither a vice of mine nor an activity arising from a vice of mine, and the community isn't harmed, why do I fret about it? And what harm can the community suffer?

5.36 Don't be swept away wholesale by the impression. Help people as far as you can and as they deserve, even if they're losing out in things that are indifferent; but don't imagine that as harm—that's a bad habit. Instead, like the old man who, as he left, asked for his foster child's top, remembering all the while that it was a top—do the same here. Since you end up shouting on the speaker's platform: "Man, have you forgotten what these things are?" "Yes, but these people care so much about them." Is that a reason for you to be a fool too? "Once, wherever it overtook me, I was a man of good fortune." But good fortune means assigning yourself a good lot; and a good lot means good turnings of the soul, good impulses, good actions.[10]

10 The anecdote is otherwise unknown; the old man seems to humor the child's attachment to a toy while knowing it is only a toy.

Book VI

Marcus considers the reason governing the whole, the example of Antoninus, and the kinship of all people.

6.1 The substance of the whole is obedient and pliant, and the reason that governs it has no cause in itself for doing harm, for it has no vice. It does nothing badly, and nothing is harmed by it. Everything comes about and is brought to completion in accordance with it.

6.2 Don't let it make any difference to you whether you're cold or warm when you do what's right, whether drowsy or well rested, whether spoken ill of or praised, whether dying or doing something else. For dying too is one of the actions of life; so here too it's enough to do the present thing well.

6.3 Look within. Don't let the particular quality or the worth of anything slip past you.

6.4 All things that exist will very soon change: they will either be turned to vapor, if substance is one, or be scattered.

6.5 The reason that governs all things knows how it is disposed, what it is making, and out of what material.

6.6 The best way to get back at someone is not to become like them.

6.7 Take delight and find rest in one thing: moving on from one action that serves the community to another action that serves the community, keeping God in mind.

6.8 The ruling mind is what wakes itself up and turns itself around; it makes itself whatever it wants to be, and makes everything that happens appear to it however it wants.

6.9 Each thing is brought to completion in accordance with the nature of the whole—certainly not in accordance with some other nature, whether one that surrounds it from outside, or one contained within it, or one hanging apart outside it.

6.10 Either a jumble, an entanglement and a scattering—or unity, order and providence. If it's the first, why would I even want to linger in such a random mixture, such a mess? Why should I care about anything except how, one day, I'll "turn to earth"? And why am I upset? The scattering will reach me whatever I do. But if it's the second, I revere, I stand steady, and I put my trust in what governs.[1]

6.11 When circumstances force you into something like turmoil, come back to yourself quickly, and don't stay out of rhythm any longer than you must. You'll master the harmony better by constantly returning to it.

6.12 If you had a stepmother and a mother at the same time, you would look after the stepmother, but you would still keep going back to your mother. That's what the court and philosophy are for you now. Come back here often and rest in her. It's thanks to her that things there seem bearable to you, and you seem bearable among them.

6.13 It's like getting the right impression of meat and other such food: this is the corpse of a fish, this the corpse of a bird or a pig. Or again, that Falernian is a little grape juice, and this purple-bordered robe is some sheep's wool dipped in a little shellfish blood. Or, with sex, that it's the rubbing together of a bit of gut and a spasm that squeezes out some mucus. Impressions like these get down to the things themselves and go right through them, so you see what sort of things they really are. That's what you should do throughout your life. Where things present themselves as highly impressive, strip them bare, look hard at how cheap they are, and take away the story they give themselves airs with. For vanity is a formidable deceiver, and just when you think you're most occupied with serious matters,

1 "Turn to earth" echoes Homer (*Iliad* 7.99), where it is a curse: "may you all become water and earth."

that's when it has you most under its spell.[2] See, at any rate, what Crates says about Xenocrates himself.[3]

6.14 Most of the things the crowd admires come down to the most basic kinds: things held together by mere cohesion or by growth—stones, timber, fig trees, vines, olives. What people a little more refined admire comes down to things held together by a soul, like flocks and herds. What still more cultivated people admire comes down to things held together by a rational soul—not the universal one, but a soul that is skilled in some craft or clever in some other way—or simply to owning a crowd of slaves. But someone who honors the rational soul that is universal and made for the city no longer pays attention to anything else. Above all, he keeps his own soul in a rational and social state and motion, and works together with those of his own kind toward this end.

6.15 Some things are hurrying to come into being, others to be gone; and of what is coming into being, part has already been snuffed out. Flows and changes are constantly renewing the universe, just as the unbroken passage of time always makes the endless ages new. In this river, then, what among all the things rushing past would anyone value highly, when there is no standing still on any of them? It would be like starting to love one of the little sparrows flying past—and it's already out of sight. Each person's life is something like this too: like the vapor rising from the blood, or breathing in the air. Drawing in a single breath and giving it back, which we do every moment—that's what it is to give back your whole power of breathing, which you acquired yesterday or the day before at your birth, to the place you first drew it from.

6.16 It isn't transpiring, as plants do, that deserves honor, or breathing, like livestock and wild animals, or being imprinted by impressions, or being jerked about like a puppet by impulse,

2 Falernian was a famous and expensive Italian wine; purple dye, made from shellfish, marked the robes of the Roman elite.

3 Crates the Cynic, known for mockery; Xenocrates, head of Plato's Academy, was famed for his dignity. The remark itself does not survive.

or herding together, or feeding—that's no better than excreting the waste from our food. So what does deserve honor? Being applauded? No. So not being applauded by tongues either—the praise of the many is just a clatter of tongues. So you've given up on your bit of reputation too. What's left that deserves honor? I think it's this: to act and to hold back in accordance with your own constitution. That's where the practices and the crafts lead. Every craft aims at this: that what it has made should be well suited to the work it was made for. The gardener, the vine-dresser, the colt-breaker and the dog-trainer are all after this. And what are child-rearing and teaching striving for? So here is what deserves honor. If this goes well, you won't try to get any of the other things for yourself. Won't you stop honoring many other things as well? If not, you won't be free, or self-sufficient, or untroubled by passion. You'll inevitably envy, be jealous, be suspicious of those who could take those things away, and plot against those who have what you honor. Anyone who lacks any of those things is bound to be in turmoil, and to find a great deal of fault with the gods besides. But respect and honor for your own mind will make you pleasing to yourself, in tune with your fellows, and in harmony with the gods—that is, approving of whatever they allot and ordain.

6.17 Up, down, around in a circle: those are the motions of the elements. But the movement of excellence is none of these. It is something more divine, and it goes on its way prospering along a path hard to comprehend.

6.18 Look at what they do! They won't speak well of the people living at the same time and alongside them, but they set great store by being spoken well of by those who'll come after—people they have never seen and never will. That's close to being upset that the people who came before you didn't speak well of you either.

6.19 If something is hard for you to accomplish, don't assume it's impossible for a human being. If something is possible for a human being and fitting for one, consider it within your reach too.

6.20 In the gymnasium someone scratches us with his nails, or butts his head into us and gives us a bruise. But we don't make a fuss, or take offense, or suspect him afterward of plotting against us. We do keep an eye on him—but not as an enemy or with suspicion; we just step out of his way good-naturedly. Let it be something like this in the rest of life too. Let's overlook a lot from those who are, as it were, our training partners. As I said, it's possible to step aside without suspecting or hating.

6.21 If anyone can refute me and show me that I'm judging or acting wrongly, I'll gladly change. I'm looking for the truth, and no one was ever harmed by the truth. The one who is harmed is the one who persists in his own self-deception and ignorance.

6.22 I do my own duty. Other things don't distract me: they are either lifeless, or without reason, or gone astray and ignorant of the way.

6.23 Treat animals without reason, and things and objects generally, generously and freely, since you have reason and they don't. Treat human beings, since they have reason, as one made for community treats others. In everything, call on the gods. And don't worry about how long you'll be doing this: three hours spent like this is enough.

6.24 Alexander of Macedon and his mule-driver ended up in the same place when they died. Either they were taken back into the same seed-principles of the universe, or they were scattered alike among the atoms.[4]

6.25 Think how many things, bodily and mental alike, are happening in each of us at the same time, in the same split second. Then you won't be surprised if far more things—or rather everything that happens—exist at once in the one and all that we call the universe.

6.26 If someone asks you how the name Antoninus is spelled, will you strain your voice shouting out each letter? And then if they get angry, will you get angry back? Won't you just go on calmly and count out each of the letters? So remember here too

4 The two alternatives are the Stoic view (all things return to the rational "seeds" of the cosmos) and the Epicurean one (all things dissolve into atoms).

that every duty is made up of a certain number of steps. You have to keep to them, without getting flustered or being difficult with those who are difficult with you, and go methodically through what's in front of you.[5]

6.27 How cruel it is not to let people go after what seems to them fitting and advantageous! Yet in a way you are refusing to let them do just that when you get indignant that they do wrong. They are certainly drawn to things as fitting and advantageous to themselves. "But they aren't." Then teach them and show them, without getting indignant.

6.28 Death: a rest from the jolts of the senses, from being jerked about by impulses, from the wanderings of thought, and from service to the flesh.

6.29 It's shameful for your soul to give out first in a life in which your body isn't giving out.

6.30 Take care you don't get Caesarified, don't get dyed in the purple—it happens. So keep yourself simple, good, pure, serious, unaffected, a friend of justice, reverent toward the gods, kind, affectionate, strong for the work that is fitting. Struggle to remain the sort of person philosophy wanted to make you. Revere the gods; look after human beings. Life is short. There is one fruit of earthly life: a holy disposition and actions for the common good.

LEARNING FROM ANTONINUS

Marcus recalls the character and habits of his adoptive father Antoninus as a model to follow.

Do everything as a pupil of Antoninus. Remember his energy in doing what reason required; his evenness in all circumstances; his holiness; the serenity of his face; his gentleness; his freedom from vanity; his eagerness to grasp things. How he would never let anything pass at all before he had looked at it very carefully and understood it clearly. How he put up with those who blamed

5 Antoninus was Marcus' own name as emperor, as well as that of his adoptive father and predecessor, Antoninus Pius.

him unjustly, without blaming them back. How he was never in a hurry about anything. How he wouldn't listen to slander. How he was an exact examiner of people's characters and actions, but not a fault-finder, not timid, not suspicious, not a sophist. How he was satisfied with little—in housing, bedding, clothing, food, servants. How hardworking and patient he was. How he could stay at the same task until evening, because his plain diet meant he didn't even need to relieve himself except at the usual hour. His constancy and steadiness in his friendships. How he put up with those who openly opposed his views, and was glad if anyone showed him something better. How he was reverent toward the gods without superstition. So that your last hour may find you, as it found him, with a clear conscience.

6.31 Sober up and call yourself back. Once you've woken up again and realized it was dreams that were troubling you, look at these things now that you're awake, as you looked at those.

6.32 I'm made of a body and a soul. To the body, everything is indifferent, since it can't tell differences. To the mind, whatever isn't its own activity is indifferent; and whatever is its own activity is all up to it. Even of these, it's concerned only with the present; its future and past activities are themselves already indifferent too.

6.33 Labor is not against nature for the hand or the foot, so long as the foot does a foot's work and the hand a hand's. So for a human being as a human being, labor isn't against nature either, so long as he does a human being's work. And if it isn't against his nature, it isn't bad for him either.

6.34 What pleasures have been enjoyed by robbers, debauchees, parricides, tyrants!

6.35 Don't you see how craftsmen adapt themselves to laymen up to a point, but still hold on to the principles of their craft and won't bear to depart from them? Isn't it terrible if the architect and the doctor respect the principles of their own crafts more than a human being respects his own reason, which he shares with the gods?

6.36 Asia and Europe are corners of the universe; every sea a drop of the universe; Athos a clod of the universe; all of present time a point in eternity. Everything is small, changeable, vanishing. Everything comes from there, setting out from that common ruling mind, or else as a consequence of it. So even the lion's gaping jaws, and poison, and every sort of harm—like thorns, like mud—are by-products of those august and beautiful things. So don't imagine these are alien to what you revere; think instead of the source of all things.[6]

6.37 Whoever has seen the present has seen everything—all that has happened from eternity and all that will be to infinity. For everything is of one kind and one form.

6.38 Think often about how all things in the universe are bound together and related to one another. In a way, all things are woven into each other, and so all are friendly to each other. One thing follows another in order because of the tension that runs through everything, the shared breath, and the unity of substance.

6.39 Fit yourself to the circumstances that have fallen to your lot, and love the people you've been given to share them with—but truly.

6.40 An instrument, a tool, any implement: if it does what it was made for, it's in good shape, even though the one who made it is gone. But with things held together by nature, the power that made them is inside them and stays there. So you should respect it all the more, and believe that if you keep yourself and carry on according to its will, everything is as you would wish. That is how the whole, too, has what is its own as it would wish.

6.41 Whatever outside your choice you set up for yourself as good or bad, when that bad thing befalls you or you miss that good thing, you're bound to blame the gods and hate the people who are, or you suspect will be, responsible for your missing it or its befalling you. We do a lot of wrong because we care about these things. But if we judge only what is up to us to be good and

6 Athos is a mountain in northern Greece.

bad, there's no reason left either to accuse God or to take up an enemy's stance toward a human being.

6.42 We all work together toward one end, some knowingly and with understanding, others without realizing it—just as Heraclitus, I think, says that even sleepers are workers and fellow workers in what happens in the universe. Different people contribute in different ways, and even the one who complains and tries to resist and undo what happens contributes abundantly, since the universe had need of such a person too. So understand which group you are placing yourself in. The one who governs the whole will certainly make good use of you and will receive you as one part of those who work with him and help. But don't you be that kind of part—like the cheap and ridiculous line in the play that Chrysippus mentions.[7]

6.43 Does the sun expect to do the rain's work? Or Asclepius the Fruit-Bearer's? And what about each of the stars? Aren't they different, yet working together toward the same thing?[8]

6.44 If the gods have made plans about me and what must happen to me, they have planned well—it isn't easy even to imagine a god without a plan. And what reason would they have for setting out to harm me? What would they, or the whole community, which is their chief concern, gain from it? And if they haven't made plans about me individually, they have certainly planned for the whole, and I ought to welcome and be content with what happens to me as a consequence of that. But if they plan about nothing at all—which it would be impious to believe, or else let's stop sacrificing and praying and swearing oaths and doing all the other things we do believing the gods are present and living alongside us—if, then, they plan about nothing that concerns us, I can still plan for myself, and it is for me to consider what is to my advantage. What is to each thing's advantage is what accords with its own constitution and nature, and my nature is rational and made for the city. My city and country, as Antoninus, is

7 Chrysippus, the great Stoic, argued that even a crude line in a comedy adds something to the whole play.

8 The "Fruit-Bearer" is a title of the harvest goddess Demeter.

Rome; as a human being, it is the universe. So what benefits these cities is the only good for me.

6.45 Whatever happens to each individual is to the advantage of the whole. That would be enough. But if you watch closely you will also see, as a general rule, that what benefits one human being benefits other human beings too. Here, though, take "advantage" in its more ordinary sense, as applied to things that are neither good nor bad.

6.46 The shows in the amphitheater and places like that grate on you because you always see the same things, and the sameness makes the spectacle tiresome. Feel that way about the whole of life, too. Up and down, everything is the same and comes from the same things. How long, then?

6.47 Keep thinking of people of every kind, of every occupation and from every nation, who are dead—so that the thought goes all the way down to Philistion, Phoebus and Origanion. Now move on to the other sorts. We have to go over to where there are so many formidable orators, so many august philosophers—Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Socrates—so many heroes of old, so many later generals and tyrants. And besides these, Eudoxus, Hipparchus, Archimedes, other sharp natures, great-minded, hardworking, crafty, headstrong, mockers of this perishable, fleeting human life itself, like Menippus and all his sort. Think of all these: that they've long been lying in the ground. What's so terrible in that for them? Or for those whose names aren't even mentioned at all? One thing here is worth a great deal: to live out your life with truth and justice, kind even to liars and the unjust.[9]

6.48 When you want to cheer yourself up, think of the good qualities of the people you live with: this one's energy, that one's modesty, another's generosity, and something else in someone else. Nothing is as cheering as the images of excellence showing in the characters of those who live with us, crowding together as much as possible. So keep them at hand.

9 Philistion, Phoebus and Origanion are otherwise unknown, apparently nobodies. Eudoxus and Hipparchus were astronomers; Menippus was a satirical Cynic.

6.49 You aren't upset, are you, that you weigh so many pounds and not three hundred? Then don't be upset that you have so many years to live and no more. Just as you are content with the amount of matter allotted to you, be the same about time.

6.50 Try to persuade them, but act even against their will when the principle of justice leads you that way. If someone uses force to stand in your way, though, switch to accepting it without distress, and use the obstacle to exercise a different excellence. Remember that your impulse was conditional, and that you weren't reaching for the impossible. For what, then? For an impulse of just that kind. And that you do achieve. What we set out to do is taking place.

6.51 The lover of fame thinks his own good lies in someone else's activity; the lover of pleasure, in what he himself undergoes; the person with sense, in his own action.

6.52 You can have no judgment about this at all, and not be troubled in your soul. Things themselves have no nature capable of producing our judgments.

6.53 Get into the habit of paying close attention to what another person says, and as far as you can, get inside the speaker's mind.

6.54 What isn't good for the hive isn't good for the bee either.

6.55 If sailors spoke badly of their helmsman, or patients of their doctor, would they be paying attention to anything but how he could achieve safety for those on board or health for those in his care?

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

6.57 To people with jaundice honey tastes bitter; to people bitten by a rabid dog water is terrifying; to little children a ball is beautiful. So why am I angry? Or do you think error has less power than bile in the jaundiced, or venom in someone bitten by a rabid dog?

6.58 No one will stop you from living in accordance with the reason of your own nature. Nothing will happen to you contrary to the reason of universal nature.

6.59 What sort of people they want to please, for what gains, and by what actions! How quickly eternity will cover everything —and how much it has covered already.

Book VII

Marcus finds nothing new in human affairs and gathers quotations on death, fortune and virtue.

7.1 What is vice? It's what you've seen many times. With everything that happens, keep this thought at hand: this is what you've seen many times. Up and down, you'll find the same things everywhere. The histories are full of them—ancient, middle and recent—and so are cities and households now. Nothing is new. Everything is both familiar and short-lived.

7.2 How else can your principles die, unless the impressions that correspond to them are extinguished? And it's up to you to keep fanning them back into flame. I can form the judgment I should about this. If I can, why am I upset? What lies outside my mind is nothing at all to my mind. Learn this and you stand upright. You can come back to life. Look at things again as you used to see them. That's what coming back to life is.

7.3 The empty fuss of a procession, plays on the stage, flocks, herds, sham fights with spears, a bone thrown to puppies, a crumb into a fishpond, ants toiling and hauling loads, mice scurrying about in a panic, puppets jerked on strings. You have to stand among all this good-naturedly, without snorting in contempt. But keep in mind that each person is worth just as much as the things he takes seriously.

7.4 In conversation, follow what is said word by word; in action, follow what is done impulse by impulse. In the second case, see at once what goal it is aimed at; in the first, watch out for what is meant.

7.5 Is my mind up to this or not? If it is, I use it for the task as a tool given by the nature of the whole. If it isn't, either I give the task up to someone who can do it better—unless it's my duty for some other reason—or I do it as best I can, taking on as a helper someone who, with the aid of my ruling mind, can do what is timely and useful for the community now. Whatever I do, by myself or with another, has to aim at this alone: what is useful for the community and fits in well with it.

7.6 How many who were much celebrated have already been handed over to oblivion; and how many who celebrated them are long gone.

7.7 Don't be ashamed of being helped. Your task is to do the job in front of you, like a soldier storming a wall. So what if you're lame and can't climb up onto the battlements alone, but can with someone else's help?

7.8 Don't let the future trouble you. You'll come to it, if you must, bringing the same reason you now use for the present.

7.9 All things are woven together, and the bond is sacred; hardly anything is foreign to anything else. They have been arranged together and together 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 intelligent creatures, and one truth—if there is indeed also one perfection for creatures of the same kind that share the same reason.

7.10 Everything material vanishes very quickly into the substance of the whole; every cause is very quickly taken back into the reason of the whole; and the memory of everything is very quickly buried in eternity.

7.11 For a rational creature, the same act is in accordance with nature and in accordance with reason.

7.12 Upright—not held upright.

7.13 What the limbs are in a single body, rational beings are in separate ones: they are made for a single work together. You'll grasp this better if you often say to yourself, "I am a limb of the body made up of rational beings." But if you call yourself a mere

part—changing just one letter—you don't yet love people from the heart. Doing good doesn't yet delight you for its own sake. You still do it simply as the proper thing, not yet as doing good to yourself.[1]

7.14 Let whatever wants to happen from outside happen to the things that can be affected by it. Those affected can complain, if they want. But unless I judge that what has happened is bad, I haven't been harmed yet. And I can decline to judge it so.

7.15 Whatever anyone does or says, I have to be good—just as gold or emerald or purple might always say: "Whatever anyone does or says, I have to be emerald and keep my own color."

7.16 The ruling mind doesn't disturb itself. I mean, for instance, it doesn't frighten itself into desire. If someone else can frighten or grieve it, let him. It won't turn itself that way by its own judgment. Let the body take care, if it can, that it doesn't suffer anything, and let it say so if it does. But the little soul that feels fear and grief, the part that forms judgments about these things at all, will suffer nothing—you won't lead it into any such judgment. In itself the ruling mind lacks nothing, unless it creates a need for itself. In the same way it is untroubled and unhindered, unless it troubles and hinders itself.

7.17 Happiness is a good guardian spirit, or a good ruling mind. So what are you doing here, impression? Go away, for heaven's sake, the way you came. I don't need you. You've come out of old habit. I'm not angry with you—just go.[2]

7.18 Is someone afraid of change? But what can come about without change? What is dearer or more natural to the nature of the whole? Can you take a hot bath unless the firewood changes? Can you be nourished unless your food changes? Can anything else useful be accomplished without change? Don't you see, then, that your own changing is just the same, and just as necessary to the nature of the whole?

1 The Greek wordplay is between *melos*, "limb," and *meros*, "part," which differ by a single letter.

2 A play on words: the Greek for happiness, *eudaimonia*, literally means having a good *daimon*, or guardian spirit.

7.19 Through the substance of the whole, as through a torrent, all bodies pass, of one nature with the whole and working together with it, as our limbs do with each other. How many a Chrysippus, how many a Socrates, how many an Epictetus has eternity already swallowed up! Let the same thought strike you about every person and every thing whatever.

7.20 Only one thing troubles me: that I myself might do something that the human constitution doesn't want, or in a way it doesn't want, or that it doesn't want now.

7.21 Soon you will have forgotten everything; soon everything will have forgotten you.

7.22 It is characteristic of human beings to love even those who stumble. This happens if it occurs to you that they are your kin, that they do wrong out of ignorance and against their will, that soon you will both be dead, and above all that he hasn't harmed you: he hasn't made your ruling mind worse than it was before.

7.23 The nature of the whole takes the whole of substance like wax and molds a little horse out of it now; then it melts that down and uses its material for a little tree, then for a little human being, then for something else. Each of these lasts a very short time. It is nothing terrible for a box to be broken up, just as it was nothing good for it to be put together.

7.24 An angry look on the face is thoroughly against nature. When it happens often, your expression keeps dying away, and finally it is extinguished, so that it can't be rekindled at all. Try to understand from this very fact that anger is against reason. If even the awareness of doing wrong is going to disappear, what reason is left for living?

7.25 Everything you see will very soon be changed by the nature that governs the whole. Out of their substance it will make other things, and out of the substance of those, others again, so that the universe may always be young.

7.26 When someone does you some wrong, consider at once what he took to be good or bad when he did it. Once you see that, you'll pity him, and you'll feel neither surprise nor anger. For either you yourself still take the same thing to be good as he

does, or something of the same kind, and so you must forgive him. Or, if you no longer take such things to be good and bad, you'll find it easier to be kind to someone who sees them wrongly.

7.27 Don't think of what you don't have as if you already had it. Instead, pick out the very best of what you do have, and because of them remind yourself how much you would long for them if they weren't there. At the same time, though, be careful that in enjoying them this way you don't get into the habit of prizing them so highly that you'd be thrown into turmoil if you ever lost them.

7.28 Draw yourself in upon yourself. The rational ruling mind is by nature content with itself when it acts justly, and in that very fact it finds its calm.

7.29 Wipe out the impression. Stop the jerking of the puppet strings. Mark off the present moment of time. Recognize what is happening, whether to you or to someone else. Divide and separate the thing before you into its causal and its material parts. Think of your final hour. Leave the wrong another has done right there, where the wrong has its being.

7.30 Keep your mind running alongside what is being said. Let your thought enter into what is happening and into what is making it happen.

7.31 Make yourself shine with simplicity, self-respect, and indifference toward whatever lies between excellence and vice. Love the human race. Follow God. He says, "All things are by convention; in reality there are only the elements." But it's enough to remember that all things are governed by law. That already leaves very little.[3]

7.32 On death: either dispersal, if we are atoms; or, if we are a unity, either extinction or a change of dwelling.

7.33 On pain: what is unbearable carries us off; what lasts can be borne. The mind keeps its own calm by withdrawing, and the

ruling mind is none the worse for it. As for the parts injured by the pain, let them speak up about it, if they can.

7.34 On fame: look at their minds—what they are like, what they run from, what they chase. And remember that just as sand dunes, heaped one upon another, bury the ones before, so in life what came earlier is very quickly covered over by what comes after.

SAYINGS FROM PLATO AND THE POETS

Marcus collects quotations from Plato, Euripides and others on death, fortune and the good life.

7.35 "Then a mind endowed with greatness, and with a view of all time and all being—do you think it will regard human life as anything great?" "Impossible," he said. "So such a person won't consider death anything to fear either?" "Not in the least."[4]

7.36 "It is kingly to do good and be spoken ill of."[5]

7.37 It's shameful for the face to be obedient, taking on whatever expression and composure the mind commands, while the mind cannot give itself its own expression and composure.

7.38 "We should not rage at things; they don't care at all."[6]

7.39 "May you bring joy to the immortal gods and to us."

7.40 "Life must be reaped like a ripe ear of grain: one to live, another not."

7.41 "If I and my two children are neglected by the gods, there is a reason for this too."

7.42 "For the good and the just are on my side."

7.43 No joining in others' laments, no racing pulse.

7.44 "But I would give him a just reply: 'You are wrong, my friend, if you think that a man who is worth anything at all

3 "He" is probably Democritus, the atomist, who held that qualities like sweet and bitter exist only by convention while in reality there are only atoms and void; Marcus plays on the word for "convention," which can also mean "law." The text here is uncertain.

4 Plato, *Republic* 486a.

5 A saying attributed to Antisthenes, a follower of Socrates.

should weigh the risk of living or dying, instead of looking at one thing only when he acts: whether what he does is just or unjust, the work of a good man or a bad one.'"[7]

7.45 "For this is how it truly is, men of Athens: wherever someone stations himself, believing it to be best, or is stationed by his commander, there, it seems to me, he must stay and face the danger, taking nothing into account—not death, not anything else—ahead of disgrace."[8]

7.46 "But, my good friend, consider whether nobility and goodness might be something other than saving others and being saved. For perhaps a true man should let go of this—living for any particular length of time—and not cling to life. He should leave these matters to the god, trust the women's saying that no one can escape his fate, and then consider how he may live the time he has left as well as possible."[9]

7.47 Watch the courses of the stars as if you were running along with them, and keep constantly in mind the changes of the elements into one another. Impressions like these wash away the grime of life down on the ground.

7.48 A fine saying of Plato's. And indeed whoever talks about human beings should look down on earthly things as if from some point high above: herds, armies, farms, weddings, divorces, births, deaths, the uproar of the law courts, deserted lands, foreign peoples of every kind, festivals, mourning, markets—the whole medley, an order made out of opposites.

7.49 Look back over the past: so many changes of empire. You can foresee the future too, for it will be entirely of the same kind, and it can't break out of the rhythm of what happens now. So it's all the same whether you observe human life for forty years or for ten thousand. What more will you see?

7.50 "What grows from earth goes back to earth, and what springs from heavenly seed returns again to the vault of

6 This and the next several entries are lines of verse Marcus copied out, several of them from lost plays of Euripides.
7 Plato, *Apology* 28b: Socrates speaking at his trial.
8 Plato, *Apology* 28d.
9 Plato, *Gorgias* 512d–e.

heaven." Or else it is this: a loosening of the entanglements among the atoms, and some such scattering of the elements, which feel nothing.[10]

7.51 "With food and drink and spells, trying to turn the channel aside, so as not to die." ... "The wind that blows from the gods we must endure, toiling without lament."[11]

7.52 Better at throwing his man, yes—but not more social, not more modest, not better disciplined in what befalls him, not more kindly toward his neighbors' oversights.

7.53 Where a task can be carried out in accordance with the reason shared by gods and human beings, there is nothing to fear. For where you can gain benefit through activity that goes smoothly and proceeds in keeping with your constitution, there is no harm to be suspected.

7.54 Everywhere and always it's up to you to be reverently content with what is happening now, to treat the people in front of you justly, and to work with care on the impression before you, so that nothing slips in that hasn't been firmly grasped.

7.55 Don't look around at other people's ruling minds. Look straight at where nature is leading you—both the nature of the whole, through what happens to you, and your own nature, through what you have to do. Each thing must do what follows from its constitution. Everything else has been constituted for the sake of rational beings—just as in every other case the lower exists for the sake of the higher—while rational beings exist for the sake of one another. So the leading principle in the human constitution is being social; second comes refusing to give in to the body's sensations. For it is the special mark of rational and intelligent motion to mark off its own bounds and never be overcome by the motions of sense or of impulse, since both of those are animal. Intelligent motion wants to be first and not to be mastered by them—and rightly so, since by nature it is made to make use of them all. Third in the rational constitution is free-

10 The verses are from a lost play of Euripides (*Chrysippus*).

11 Two verse quotations, the first from Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, with a gap in the text between them.

dom from rashness and from being deceived. Let the ruling mind hold fast to these and go straight on its way, and it has what belongs to it.

7.56 As someone already dead, whose life went only up to now, you should live the rest as a bonus, in accordance with nature.

7.57 Love only what happens to you, what is spun into your thread. What could suit you better?

7.58 With each thing that happens, keep before your eyes those to whom the same things happened, and who were aggrieved, bewildered, resentful. And now where are they? Nowhere. Well then? Do you want to be like them? Why not leave other people's shifts of mood to those who stir them up and are stirred by them, and give yourself wholly to the question of how to use these things? For you'll use them well, and they'll be material for you. Just pay attention, and want to be good in your own eyes in everything you do. And remember both points, since what the action is concerned with also makes a difference.

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

7.60 The body too should be firm and steady, not sprawling, whether in motion or at rest. Just as the mind shows itself in the face, keeping it composed and seemly, the same should be required of the whole body. But all this must be maintained without affectation.

7.61 The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing, in that it must stand ready and unshaken against whatever comes at it, even the unforeseen.

7.62 Keep asking yourself who these people are whose approval you want, and what sort of ruling minds they have. Then you won't blame those who stumble unwillingly, nor will you need their testimony, once you look into the sources of their judgments and impulses.

7.63 "Every soul," he says, "is deprived of truth against its will." And so too of justice, self-control, kindness, and everything of

that kind. It's absolutely essential to remember this constantly, for it will make you gentler toward everyone.[12]

7.64 With every pain, have this ready at hand: it isn't shameful, and it doesn't make the mind at the helm any worse, since it does not damage the mind either insofar as it is rational or insofar as it is social. With most pains, let Epicurus' saying help you too: that pain is neither unbearable nor endless, if you remember its limits and don't add to it with your opinion. And remember this as well: many things that are really the same as pain escape our notice even though they irritate us—drowsiness, for instance, or being too hot, or having no appetite. So when you're annoyed by one of these, tell yourself that you're giving in to pain.[13]

7.65 Take care that you never feel toward the inhuman the way the inhuman feel toward human beings.

7.66 How do we know that Telauges wasn't better in character than Socrates? It's not enough that Socrates died a more glorious death, argued more deftly with the sophists, showed more endurance spending whole nights out in the frost, and, when ordered to arrest the man from Salamis, was thought to have defied the order more nobly; or that he "swaggered through the streets"—which is the point one might most question, if it were even true. No, what we must look at is this: what kind of soul Socrates had, and whether he could be content with being just toward human beings and pious toward the gods, neither vexed at vice without reason nor a slave to anyone's ignorance, neither receiving anything allotted him by the whole as something alien nor enduring it as unbearable, nor letting his mind share in the feelings of his poor flesh.[14]

7.67 Nature didn't blend you into the compound so thoroughly that you can't mark yourself off and keep what is yours under

12 A saying drawn from Plato and often quoted by Epictetus, the Stoic teacher Marcus admired.

13 Epicurus (341–270 BC) founded the Epicurean school, the Stoics' chief rival.

your own control. It is entirely possible to become a godlike man and be recognized by no one. Always remember this, and this too: that living happily depends on very little. And don't, just because you've given up hope of becoming a logician or a natural philosopher, therefore despair of being free, modest, social, and obedient to God.

7.68 To live out your life under no compulsion, in the deepest peace of heart, even if everyone shouts whatever they like at you, even if wild beasts tear apart the limbs of this lump of kneaded clay that has grown up around you. For in all this, what prevents the mind from keeping itself in calm, in a true judgment of what surrounds it, and in a ready use of what is put in its way? So that judgment says to whatever confronts it, "This is what you are in essence, however you may appear in people's opinion," and use says to whatever falls into its hands, "You're just what I was looking for." For the present is always material for me for rational and civic excellence—in short, for the art proper to a human being or to God. Everything that happens is made familiar to God or to a human being; it is neither new nor hard to handle, but well known and easy to work with.

7.69 This is what perfection of character means: to live each day as if it were your last, without agitation, without torpor, without pretense.

7.70 The gods, immortal as they are, don't resent having to put up, through such an immensity of time, with so many worthless people of such a kind; on top of that, they even care for them in every way. And you, who are about to stop at any moment, are you giving up—and that while you're one of the worthless yourself?

7.71 It's absurd not to run from your own vice, which is possible, but to run from other people's, which is impossible.

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14 Telauges was a son of Pythagoras and the title character of a dialogue by Aeschines, a follower of Socrates; the "man from Salamis" is Leon, whom the Thirty Tyrants ordered Socrates to arrest. "Swaggered through the streets" quotes Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

7.72 Whatever the rational and civic faculty finds to be neither intelligent nor social, it rightly judges inferior to itself.

7.73 When you have done good and someone else has received it, why look for a third thing besides, as fools do—to be seen to have done good, or to get something in return?

7.74 No one tires of being benefited, and benefiting others is an action in accordance with nature. So don't tire of being benefited while you benefit others.

7.75 The nature of the whole set out to make a universe. So now either everything that happens follows as a consequence, or even the most important things—those toward which the ruling mind of the universe directs its own impulse—are without reason. Remembering this will make you calmer about many things.

Book VIII

Marcus reflects on doing his proper work, meeting others' faults patiently, and the mind as a citadel.

8.1 This too helps against vanity: that you can no longer have lived your whole life—or at least your life since youth—as a philosopher. It has become plain to many others, and to you yourself, that you are far from philosophy. So you've made a mess of it, and it's no longer easy for you to win the reputation of a philosopher; your position in life works against it too. If, then, you have truly seen where the matter lies, let go of what you'll seem to be, and be content if you live the rest of your life, however long it is, as your nature wants. So understand what it wants, and let nothing else distract you. You know from experience how much you've wandered without finding the good life anywhere—not in logical arguments, not in wealth, not in fame, not in enjoyment, nowhere. Where is it, then? In doing what human nature requires. How, then, will you do this? By holding principles from which your impulses and actions come. What principles? About good and bad: that nothing is good for a human being that doesn't make him just, self-controlled, brave, and free, and nothing bad that doesn't make him the opposite of these.

8.2 With each action, ask yourself: How does this sit with me? Won't I regret it? A little while and I'm dead, and everything is gone. What more do I want, if what I'm doing now is the work of a being that is intelligent, social, and under the same law as God?

8.3 Alexander, Gaius, and Pompey—what are they next to Diogenes, Heraclitus, and Socrates? These men saw things, their causes and their matter, and their ruling minds were consistent. As for the others—how much to worry about, how much to be slaves to![1]

8.4 They'll keep on doing the same things all the same, even if you burst.

8.5 First, don't be troubled: everything happens in accordance with the nature of the whole, and in a little while you'll be no one and nowhere, just like Hadrian and Augustus. Next, look steadily at the matter and see it for what it is, and, remembering that you must be a good human being and what human nature requires, do that without turning aside, and speak as seems most just to you—only kindly, modestly, and without hypocrisy.

8.6 The nature of the whole has this work to do: to move what is here to there, to change things, to pick them up from here and carry them there. All is change—but not so that we need fear anything new. Everything is familiar, and the allotments, too, are equal.

8.7 Every nature is content with itself when it is on its proper course. A rational nature is on its proper course when it gives no assent to any impression that is false or unclear, directs its impulses only to social actions, confines its desires and aversions to what is in our power, and welcomes everything allotted to it by the common nature. For it is part of that nature, as the nature of a leaf is part of the nature of the plant—except that there the nature of the leaf is part of a nature that lacks perception and reason and can be impeded, while human nature is part of a nature that cannot be impeded, and is intelligent and just, since it gives each thing its equal and deserved share of time, substance, cause, activity, and circumstance. But don't look to see whether you'll find each single item equal to its counterpart in every case; look instead at whether everything belonging to one thing, taken together, is equal to all that belongs to another, taken as a whole.

1 Gaius is Julius Caesar; Diogenes is the Cynic philosopher.

8.8 You can't get to your reading. But you can hold back arrogance. You can rise above pleasures and pains. You can be above petty fame. You can keep from getting angry at the unfeeling and the ungrateful—and, beyond that, even care for them.

8.9 Let no one hear you complaining about life at court any more—not even yourself.

8.10 Regret is a kind of self-reproach for having let something useful slip by. But what is useful must be something good, and something a truly good man should care about. Yet no truly good man would regret having let some pleasure slip by. Pleasure, then, is neither useful nor good.

8.11 What is this thing in itself, in its own constitution? What is its substance and matter, what is its cause, what is it doing in the universe, and how long does it last?

8.12 When you find it hard to get up out of sleep, remind yourself that performing social actions is in keeping with your constitution and with human nature, while sleeping is something we share even with irrational animals. And what is in keeping with each thing's nature is more its own, more natural to it, and indeed more pleasant.

8.13 Constantly, and with every impression if possible, apply the study of nature, of the passions, and of logic.

8.14 Whoever you meet, say to yourself at once: What principles does this person hold about good and bad? For if he holds such-and-such principles about pleasure and pain and what produces each, and about fame, disgrace, death, and life, then it will seem nothing surprising or strange to me if he does such-and-such things, and I'll remember that he is compelled to act this way.

8.15 Remember that just as it's shameful to be surprised when a fig tree bears figs, so it is to be surprised when the universe bears the things it is made to bear. For a doctor or a helmsman, too, it's shameful to be surprised that a patient has a fever or that a headwind has sprung up.

8.16 Remember that changing your mind and following someone who corrects you is no less an act of freedom. For the

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

8.17 If it's up to you, why do you do it? If it's up to someone else, whom are you blaming—the atoms or the gods? Both are madness. No one is to be blamed. If you can, correct the person; if you can't do that, correct the thing itself; and if you can't do that either, what use is blaming to you any more? Nothing should be done without purpose.

8.18 What dies doesn't fall out of the universe. If it stays here, it also changes here and is dissolved into its own components, which are the elements of the universe and your own. And they change too, and don't grumble.

8.19 Each thing 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. Then what were you made for? For pleasure? See whether the idea holds up.

8.20 Nature has aimed at the ending of each thing no less than at its beginning and its course, like someone tossing a ball in the air. What good is it to the ball to go up, or harm to come down, or even to have fallen? What good is it to the bubble to hold together, or harm to burst? And the same goes for a lamp.

8.21 Turn it inside out and look at what it's like—what it becomes when it grows old, when it's sick, when it's 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 does everyone agree, nor does anyone agree even with himself. And the whole earth is a point.

8.22 Pay attention to the thing before you, or the principle, or the action, or what is meant. You deserve what you're going through: you would rather become good tomorrow than be good today.

8.23 Am I doing something? I do it with reference to the good of human beings. Does something happen to me? I accept it with

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

8.24 What bathing looks like to you—oil, sweat, dirt, slimy water, everything disgusting—such is every part of life and every object in it.

8.25 Lucilla buried Verus, then Lucilla was buried; Secunda buried Maximus, then Secunda; Epitynchanus buried Diotimus, then Epitynchanus; Antoninus buried Faustina, then Antoninus. That's how it all goes. Celer buried Hadrian, then Celer. And those sharp-witted men, those prophets, those men puffed up with pride—where are they? Sharp wits like Charax, and Demetrius the Platonist, and Eudaemon, and anyone like them. All of it lasted a day, all long dead. Some weren't remembered even for a little while, some turned into legends, and others have already faded even from the legends. Remember this, then: either your little compound will have to be scattered, or your little breath be put out, or else move and be stationed somewhere else.[2]

8.26 A human being's joy is doing what is proper to a human being. And what is proper to a human being is goodwill toward his own kind, disdain for the motions of the senses, discernment among persuasive impressions, and contemplation of the nature of the whole and of what happens in accordance with it.

8.27 Three relations: one to the vessel that surrounds you; one to the divine cause from which all things come about for all; one to those who live alongside you.

8.28 Pain is bad either for the body—in which case let the body declare it—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, impulse, desire, and aversion is within, and nothing climbs up this far.

8.29 Wipe out impressions by constantly saying to yourself: Now it is in my power that there be no wickedness in this soul, no desire, no disturbance at all, but that, seeing all things as

2 Lucilla and Verus were Marcus's mother and father, and Maximus his Stoic teacher Claudius Maximus; Faustina was the wife of Antoninus. Celer was one of Hadrian's secretaries.

they are, I deal with each according to its worth. Remember this power, which you have by nature.

8.30 Speak, whether in the Senate or to anyone at all, with decorum and without showing off. Use sound language.

8.31 The court of Augustus: his wife, daughter, grandchildren, stepsons, sister, Agrippa, relatives, household, friends, Areius, Maecenas, doctors, priests—the death of an entire court. Then go on to the others … not deaths one person at a time, as with the Pompeys. And that inscription on tombs, "Last of his line": consider how hard their forebears strained to leave some heir, and then someone had to be the last. Here again, the death of an entire family.[3]

8.32 You must build your life action by action, and be content if each one achieves its own end as far as it can. And no one can prevent it from achieving its own end. "But something from outside will stand in the way." Nothing will stand in the way of acting justly, with self-control, and with good sense. Perhaps some other activity will be prevented. But by accepting the obstacle itself gladly, and by shifting sensibly to what is granted, another action at once takes its place, one that will fit into the building we're talking about.

8.33 Accept without pride; let go without a struggle.

8.34 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—that is what a person makes of himself, as far as he can, when he refuses to accept what happens and cuts himself off, or does something unsocial. You've cast yourself off somewhere from the natural unity: you were born a part, but now you've cut yourself away. But here's the beauty of it: you can unite yourself again. God has granted this to no other part—to come back together once it has been separated and cut off. Consider the goodness with which he has honored the human being: he put it in his power not to break away from the whole in the first place,

3 Agrippa was Augustus' general and son-in-law, Maecenas his adviser, and Areius his court philosopher. A gap in the text follows "the others."

and, once broken away, to return, grow back, and take up his place as a part again.

8.35 Just as the nature of rational beings has given each rational being its other powers, more or less, so we have received this power from it as well. As that nature turns around whatever obstructs and opposes it, fits it into the order of fate, and makes it part of itself, so the rational creature can make every obstacle material for itself and use it for whatever it was aiming at.

8.36 Don't let the picture of your whole life overwhelm you. Don't brood on all the troubles, of every kind and number, that are likely to befall you. Instead, with each thing as it comes, ask yourself: What about this task is unbearable, too much to endure? You'll be ashamed to say. Then remind yourself that neither the future nor the past weighs on you, only ever the present—and the present shrinks to almost nothing if you mark it off by itself and challenge your mind if it can't hold out against something so bare.

8.37 Are Pantheia or Pergamus still sitting beside Verus' tomb? Or Chabrias or Diotimus beside Hadrian's? Ridiculous. And if they were sitting there, would the dead notice? And if they noticed, would they be pleased? And if they were pleased, would the mourners be immortal? Wasn't it fated that they too would first become old women and old men, and then die? And once they died, what would the others do then? All this is stench and gore in a sack.[4]

8.38 If you can see sharply, then look—and, as the saying goes, judge most wisely.

8.39 In the constitution of a rational creature I see no excellence that rebels against justice. But I do see one that rebels against pleasure: self-mastery.

8.40 If you remove your judgment about whatever seems to be hurting you, you yourself stand in perfect safety. "Who is "yourself"?" Reason. "But I'm not reason." So be it. Then let reason not

4 This Verus is Lucius Verus, Marcus's co-emperor, and Pantheia was his mistress; the others named were members of the imperial households.

hurt itself, and if some other part of you is in a bad way, let that part form its own judgment about itself.

8.41 Obstruction of sensation is bad for a living nature; obstruction of impulse is likewise bad for a living nature. And there is something else that similarly obstructs and is bad for a plant's constitution. So in the same way, obstruction of the mind is bad for an intelligent nature. Now apply all this to yourself. Does pain or pleasure touch you? Sensation will see to it. Did you meet an obstacle when you set out to act? If your impulse was unconditional, that is already bad for you as a rational being; but if you allow for the common condition of things, you have not yet been harmed or obstructed. As for what belongs to the mind, no one else ever obstructs it: fire cannot touch it, nor iron, nor a tyrant, nor slander, nor anything else, once it has become "a sphere, round, in its solitude."[5]

8.42 I don't deserve to cause myself pain, since I have never willingly caused anyone else pain.

8.43 Different things delight different people. What delights me is keeping my ruling mind sound: not turning away from any human being, or from anything that happens to human beings, but looking on everything with kindly eyes, accepting it, and using each thing according to its worth.

8.44 Look—give yourself this present time as a gift. Those who would rather chase fame after death don't reckon that the people of the future will be just like these people now whom they find so tiresome—and they too are mortal. And what is it to you at all if they echo your name with such voices, or hold such a judgment about you?

8.45 Take me up and throw me wherever you like. There too I'll keep the divinity within me gracious—that is, content, so long as it holds itself and acts in keeping with its own constitution. Is this worth it, that on its account my soul should fare badly and be worse than itself—abased, craving, cringing, panicking? And what will you find that's worth that?

5 The quoted words are from the early philosopher Empedocles, describing the cosmos at rest as a perfect sphere.

8.46 Nothing can happen to any human being that isn't a human kind of occurrence; nothing to an ox that isn't proper to oxen, nothing to a vine that isn't proper to vines, nothing to a stone that isn't a stone's own. So if what happens to each thing is what is both usual and natural for it, why would you complain? Common nature has brought you nothing you can't bear.

8.47 If you're distressed by something external, it isn't that thing that troubles you but your own judgment about it—and you can wipe that out right now. If what distresses you is something in your own disposition, who is stopping you from correcting your principle? Likewise, if you're distressed because you aren't doing some particular thing that seems sound to you, why not do it rather than be distressed? "But something stronger stands in the way." Then don't be distressed: the reason it isn't being done doesn't lie with you. "But life isn't worth living if it isn't done." Then leave life graciously, just as the one who does do it also dies, and at peace with what stood in your way.

THE CITADEL OF THE MIND

Marcus calls the mind free of passion an impregnable citadel and warns against adding to first impressions.

8.48 Remember that the ruling mind becomes invincible when it draws in on itself and is content with itself, doing nothing it doesn't want to do, even if its resistance is unreasoned. How much more, then, when it judges something with reason and after careful thought? This is why a mind free of passions is a citadel. A human being has nothing more secure to take refuge in and be impregnable from then on. Whoever hasn't seen this is ignorant; whoever has seen it and doesn't take refuge there is unlucky.

8.49 Tell yourself nothing beyond what your first impressions report. It's been reported that so-and-so speaks badly of you. That has been reported; that you have been harmed has not. I see that the child is ill. I see that; that he is in danger, I don't see. So always stay with first impressions, and add nothing yourself

from within, and nothing happens to you. Or rather, do add something—as one who knows well each of the things that happen in the universe.

8.50 A bitter cucumber? Throw it away. Brambles on the path? Step around them. That's enough. Don't go on to add, "Why did these things even come into the world?" A student of nature would laugh at you, just as a carpenter or a cobbler would laugh if you found fault because you saw shavings and scraps from their work lying about the workshop. And yet they have somewhere to throw these, while the nature of the whole has nothing outside itself. The wonder of its craft is that, having set its own bounds, it transforms into itself everything within that seems to be decaying, growing old and useless, and out of these very things makes other things new again—so that it needs no material from outside and has no need of a place to throw out what is rotting. It is content, then, with its own space, its own matter and its own craft.

8.51 Not to be slipshod in your actions, nor muddled in your conversations, nor to wander in your impressions; not, in short, to let your soul be dragged down or boil over; nor to be so busy in life that you have no time. They kill you, carve you up, hound you with curses. What does that have to do with your mind staying pure, sane, self-controlled, just? It's as if someone stood by a clear, sweet spring and cursed it, and it went on bubbling up water fit to drink; and if he throws in mud or dung, it will quickly scatter it, wash it out, and not be stained at all. How, then, will you have an ever-flowing spring and not a mere well? By keeping yourself, every hour, on the road to freedom—with kindness, simplicity and modesty.

8.52 Whoever doesn't know what the universe is doesn't know where he is. Whoever doesn't know what he is by nature for doesn't know who he is, or what the universe is. And whoever has missed any one of these couldn't even say what he himself is by nature for. What, then, do you make of the man who shuns or pursues the praise of people clapping, who know neither where they are nor who they are?

8.53 You want to be praised by a man who curses himself three times an hour? You want to please a man who doesn't please himself? Does a man please himself who regrets nearly everything he does?

8.54 No longer merely breathe in harmony with the air around you; now think in harmony with the intelligence that surrounds all things. For the power of intelligence is poured out everywhere and pervades everything for whoever can draw it in, no less than air does for whoever can breathe.

8.55 Vice in general does the universe no harm, and a particular vice does no harm to anyone else. It is harmful only to the one who has been allowed to be rid of it the moment he first wants to.

8.56 To my power of choice, my neighbor's power of choice is as indifferent as his bit of breath and bit of flesh. For however much we have been made for one another, still each of our ruling minds has its own sovereignty. Otherwise my neighbor's vice would have been my harm—which God did not see fit to allow, so that my misfortune would not depend on someone else.

8.57 The sun seems to pour down, and it is poured out everywhere, yet it isn't poured away. For this pouring is an extending: its beams are called *aktines* from *ekteinesthai*, "to be extended." What a ray is like you can see if you watch sunlight entering a darkened room through a narrow gap. It extends in a straight line and, as it were, braces itself against whatever solid thing meets it and cuts off the air beyond; there it stops, and doesn't slide off or fall. The pouring and spreading of your mind should be like that: not a pouring away but an extending. Against the obstacles it meets it should strike neither violently nor furiously, nor collapse either, but stand firm and light up whatever receives it. Whatever doesn't pass the light along will deprive itself of the radiance.

8.58 Whoever fears death fears either no sensation or a different kind of sensation. But if there's no longer sensation, you won't sense anything bad either; and if you acquire a different

kind, you'll be a different kind of living being and won't stop living.

8.59 Human beings exist for one another. So either teach them or bear with them.

8.60 An arrow travels one way, the mind another. Yet the mind, even when it is being cautious and when it is circling round in inquiry, is traveling straight ahead no less, and toward its goal.

8.61 Enter into each person's ruling mind—and let everyone else enter into yours.

Book IX

Marcus calls wrongdoing a form of impiety and reflects on death, change, prayer and tolerating others.

9.1 Whoever does wrong is impious. The nature of the whole has made rational beings for one another's sake, to benefit each other as each deserves and never to harm; so whoever transgresses her will is plainly impious toward the most venerable of the gods. 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 are akin to all that exists. She is also called Truth, and she is the first cause of all things that are true. The deliberate liar, then, is impious insofar as he does wrong by deceiving. The involuntary liar is impious insofar as he is out of tune with the nature of the whole, and insofar as he brings disorder into the order of things by fighting the nature of the universe—for whoever is carried, in spite of himself, toward what is contrary to the truth is fighting it. He had received resources from nature, and by neglecting them he is now unable to tell false from true. Again, whoever pursues pleasures as goods and flees pains as evils is impious. Such a person is bound to blame common nature often for allotting things to the bad and the good contrary to what they deserve, since the bad are often in pleasures and acquire what produces them, while the good meet with pain and what produces it. Further, whoever fears pain will at some point fear something that is going to happen in the universe—and that is impious already. And whoever pursues pleasures won't keep from doing wrong—and that is plainly impious. Toward the things to which common nature is

impartial (she wouldn't make both if she weren't impartial toward both), those who want to follow nature, being of one mind with her, must be impartial too. So whoever is not himself impartial toward pain and pleasure, or death and life, or fame and obscurity—which the nature of the whole uses impartially—is clearly impious. When I say common nature uses these impartially, I mean that they happen impartially, in sequence, to the things that come to be and follow upon them, by an original impulse of providence. By that impulse, from some beginning, it set out upon this ordering of the world, gathering together certain principles of what was to be and marking off powers that generate existences, changes and successions of this kind.

9.2 The more graceful course would be to leave humankind without ever having tasted falsehood, or any pretense, luxury or vanity. But to breathe your last having at least had your fill of them is the next-best voyage. Or have you chosen to sit down beside vice, and hasn't even experience yet persuaded you to flee the plague? For corruption of the mind is a plague far more than any such foul mixture and change in the air that surrounds us. That is a plague for living things insofar as they are living things; this one for human beings insofar as they are human.

9.3 Don't despise death; welcome it, since this too is one of the things nature wills. Being young and growing old, growing up and reaching one's prime, getting teeth and a beard and gray hair, begetting, carrying a child and giving birth, and all the other natural processes that the seasons of life bring—being dissolved is like these. This, then, is what befits a reasoning person: not to be casual, or impetuous, or disdainful toward death, but to wait for it as one of nature's processes; and just as you now wait for the baby to come out of your wife's womb, so to await the hour when your little soul will drop out of this sheath. And if you want a plain, heart-touching rule of thumb as well, what will most reconcile you to death is to look closely at the things you are about to leave, and at the characters your soul will no longer be mixed up with. Not that you should take offense at them at all—you should care for them and bear with them gently

—but remember that you will be released from people who don't share your principles. That alone, if anything, might pull you back and hold you in life: if you were allowed to live with people who had made the same principles their own. As it is, you see how wearing the discord of living together is—so that you say, "Come quickly, death, in case I too forget myself."

9.4 Whoever errs errs against himself. Whoever does wrong wrongs himself, by making himself bad.

9.5 Often it is the one who fails to do something who does wrong, not only the one who does something.

9.6 It is enough: a present judgment that firmly grasps its object, a present action done for the community, and a present disposition content with whatever comes about from a cause outside you.

9.7 Wipe out the impression. Check the impulse. Quench the desire. Keep your ruling mind in your own power.

9.8 Among the non-rational animals a single soul is divided up; among the rational, a single intelligent soul is apportioned—just as there is one earth for all earthy things, and we see by one light and breathe one air, all of us that have sight and life.

9.9 Everything that shares in something common hastens toward its own kind. Everything earthy tends toward earth; everything liquid flows together; everything airy likewise, so that it takes barriers and force to keep them apart. Fire moves upward because of the elemental fire, but it is so ready to kindle along with every fire here that any material a little drier than usual is easy to set alight, because less of what prevents burning is mixed into it. Just so, everything that shares in the common intelligent nature hastens toward its kin in the same way, or even more; for the more superior it is to other things, the readier it is to blend and fuse with what is akin to it. So right away, among the non-rational animals, we find swarms and herds, the rearing of young, and something like love; for at this level there were souls already, and the force that draws together was found intensified in the higher being, in a way it wasn't in plants or stones or wood. Among rational beings there are states, friend-

ships, households, assemblies, and, in wars, treaties and truces. Among beings higher still, even though they are far apart, a kind of unity has come to be, as with the stars. So the ascent to what is higher was able to produce fellow-feeling even among things set apart. Now look at what happens. Only intelligent beings have now forgotten their eagerness for one another and their leaning toward each other; here alone the flowing-together isn't seen. Yet even so, though they flee, they are overtaken and caught; nature prevails. You'll see what I mean if you watch closely: you'd sooner find something earthy that touches nothing earthy than a human being cut off from humanity.

9.10 A human being bears fruit, and so do God and the universe; each bears it in its own season. If usage has confined the word strictly to the vine and the like, that's nothing. Reason, too, has fruit, both common and its own, and from it come other things of the same kind as reason itself.

9.11 If you can, teach them better. If not, remember that kindness was given to you for this. The gods too are kind to such people, and even help them toward some things—health, wealth, reputation; that's how good they are. You can be too. Or tell me, who is stopping you?

9.12 Work—not as a wretch, and not wanting to be pitied or admired. Want one thing only: to act or hold back as the reason of a citizen requires.

9.13 Today I escaped from every trouble—or rather I threw every trouble out, for it wasn't outside but within, in my judgments.

9.14 All these things are familiar in experience, fleeting in time, sordid in their matter. Everything now is just as it was in the days of those we have buried.

9.15 Things stand outside the door, by themselves, knowing nothing about themselves and declaring nothing. What, then, makes declarations about them? The ruling mind.

9.16 The bad and the good of a rational and social being lie not in what it undergoes but in what it does—just as its excellence and its vice lie not in being acted upon but in acting.

9.17 For a stone thrown upward, coming down is nothing bad, and going up was nothing good.

9.18 Go in, deep inside, to their ruling minds, and you'll see what judges you're afraid of—and what sort of judges they are of themselves.

9.19 Everything is in change. You yourself are in constant alteration and, in a way, decay—and so is the whole universe.

9.20 Another person's wrongdoing—leave it there.

9.21 The ending of an activity, the halting of an impulse or a judgment—a kind of death: nothing bad. Now move on to the stages of life: childhood, boyhood, youth, old age. Every change among these, too, is a death. Anything terrible? Now move on to your life under your grandfather, then under your mother, then under your father; and as you find many other destructions, changes and endings, ask yourself: anything terrible? Then neither is the ending, halting and changing of your whole life.

9.22 Hurry to your own ruling mind, to the ruling mind of the whole, and to this person's. To your own, to make it a just mind; to that of the whole, to remember what you are a part of; to this person's, to consider whether it is ignorance or intent—and at the same time to reckon that it is akin to you.

9.23 Just as you yourself are a member that completes a social body, so let every action of yours help complete a social life. Any action of yours, then, that doesn't refer, directly or remotely, to the social end tears your life apart, won't let it be one, and is factious—like someone in a community who, for his own part, breaks away from its harmony.

9.24 Children's tantrums and toys, and "little souls carrying corpses"—so that the Summoning of the Dead strikes you as the more vivid.[1]

9.25 Go to the character of the causal element; mark it off from the material and look at it. Then define the time as well—the longest this individual thing can naturally last.

1 The quoted phrase is from Epictetus; the Summoning of the Dead (*Nekyia*) is Odysseus' visit to the ghosts in *Odyssey* 11.

9.26 You have endured countless things because you weren't content with your ruling mind doing what it was made to do. But enough.

9.27 When someone blames you or hates you, or people say anything like that about you, go to their little souls, get inside, and see what sort of people they are. You'll see that you needn't strain yourself to make them think anything in particular about you. Still, you must wish them well, for by nature they are friends; and the gods help them in every way, through dreams and oracles—even toward the things they're so worked up about.

9.28 The cycles of the universe are the same, up and down, from age to age. Either the mind of the whole sets its impulse on each particular thing—and if so, accept what it moves toward—or it moved once, and everything else follows in consequence. And why strain? In a way it comes down to atoms or indivisibles. In sum: if God, all is well; if chance, don't you act by chance too. Soon the earth will cover us all; then the earth itself will change, and what it changes into will change without end, and that again without end. Anyone who thinks about the waves of change and alteration rolling one on another, and their speed, will look down on everything mortal.

9.29 The substance of the whole is a torrent: it sweeps everything along. How cheap they are, these little men busy with politics who think they act as philosophers—full of snot! Man, what then? Do what nature asks of you now. Set to it, if it's granted you, and don't look around to see whether anyone will know. Don't hope for Plato's Republic; be content if the smallest thing moves forward, and think of even its result as a small matter. For who will change their principles? And without a change of principles, what is there but the slavery of people groaning and pretending to obey? Go on, then, and tell me about Alexander and Philip and Demetrius of Phalerum. Whether they saw what common nature wanted and schooled themselves accordingly, that's their affair; but if they strutted like tragic actors, no one has sentenced me to imitate them. The work of philosophy

is simple and modest. Don't lead me off into pompous self-importance.[2]

9.30 Look down from above on the countless herds, the countless rites, every kind of voyage in storm and calm, the variety of things coming into being, living together, passing away. Think too of the life lived by others long ago, the life that will be lived after you, and the life being lived now among foreign peoples: how many don't even know your name, how many will very soon forget it, how many who praise you now will perhaps very soon blame you—and that neither memory nor fame nor anything else whatever is worth reckoning.

9.31 Freedom from disturbance about what comes about from a cause outside you; justice in what is done by a cause that comes from you—that is, impulse and action that end in acting for the community, since that is in accordance with your nature.

9.32 You can strip away many of the superfluous things that trouble you, since they lie wholly in your judgment. And you will at once win yourself plenty of room by taking in the whole universe with your mind, contemplating eternity, and reflecting on how quickly each particular thing changes—how short the time from birth to dissolution, how vast the gulf before birth, and how the time after dissolution is just as infinite.

9.33 Everything you see will very soon perish, and those who watched it perish will very soon perish themselves; and the one who dies in extreme old age will end up the same as the one who died before his time.

9.34 What are their ruling minds like, what do they care about, for what reasons do they love and honor? Picture their little souls naked. When they think they harm you by blaming or help you by praising—what conceit!

9.35 Loss is nothing but change. And change is what delights the nature of the whole, by which everything comes about well, has come about in the same way from eternity, and will be other such things without end. Why then do you say that everything

2 Philip II of Macedon and his son Alexander the Great were kings; Demetrius of Phalerum, a philosopher, governed Athens for the Macedonians (317–307 BC).

has always come about badly and always will be bad, that among so many gods no power was ever found to set these things right, and that the universe has been condemned to be held fast in unending evils?

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

9.37 Enough of this miserable life, this grumbling and aping! Why are you troubled? What's new in any of this? What unsettles you? The cause? Look at it. The matter, then? Look at it. Beyond these there is nothing. But toward the gods, too, become at last simpler and better. Whether you observe these things for a hundred years or for three, it's the same.

9.38 If he did wrong, the bad lies there. But perhaps he didn't.

9.39 Either everything happens from one intelligent source, as to one body, and the part should not find fault with what comes about for the sake of the whole; or there are atoms and nothing but a jumble and scattering. So why are you troubled? Are you saying to your ruling mind, "You're dead, you're decayed, you've turned into a beast, you're playacting, you're running with the herd, you're grazing"?

HOW TO PRAY

Marcus argues one should pray not for events to change but to be free of fear and desire.

9.40 Either the gods have no power or they have power. If they have none, why do you pray? If they have it, why not pray instead that they grant you not to fear any of these things, nor desire any of them, nor grieve over any of them, rather than that any of them be absent or present? For surely, if they can help human beings, they can help with this too. But perhaps you'll say, "The gods put these things in my power." Then isn't it better to use what is in your power with freedom than to fret over what

isn't in your power with slavishness and abjection? And who told you that the gods don't lend a hand even with what is in our power? Start praying about these things, at any rate, and you'll see. This man prays, "How can I sleep with that woman?" You: "How can I not desire to sleep with her?" Another: "How can I be rid of that man?" You: "How can I not need to be rid of him?" Another: "How can I not lose my little child?" You: "How can I not be afraid of losing him?" In short, turn your prayers around this way, and watch what happens.

9.41 Epicurus says: "When I was ill, my conversations weren't about the sufferings of my poor body, nor," he says, "did I chatter about such things to those who came to see me. I went on discussing the chief points of natural philosophy, and focused 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 though they were achieving something; my life went on well and finely." Do as he did, then, in sickness if you are sick, and in any other circumstance. Not to abandon philosophy whatever befalls you, and not to join in the prattle of the layman ignorant of nature—this is common to every school. Attend only to what you are doing now, and to the instrument you are doing it with.

9.42 When someone's shamelessness offends you, ask yourself at once: "Is it possible, then, for there to be no shameless people in the world?" It isn't. So don't demand the impossible: this person is one of those shameless people who must exist in the world. Keep the same thought ready for the scoundrel, the untrustworthy, and anyone who does any kind of wrong. For as soon as you remind yourself that the class of such people cannot fail to exist, you'll be kinder to each one individually. It's also useful to think at once: what excellence has nature given human beings to meet this wrong? As an antidote to the inconsiderate she gave gentleness, and to another sort some other power. And in general you can teach the one who has gone astray; for everyone who does wrong misses the mark he set himself, and has gone astray. And how have you been harmed? You'll find that

none of those you're exasperated with has done anything that could make your mind worse—and that is where your bad and your harm have their whole existence. What's new or strange if an uneducated person acts like an uneducated person? Consider whether you shouldn't rather blame yourself for not expecting him to commit this wrong. Reason gave you the means to reflect that he was likely to commit it, and yet you forgot, and you're surprised he has done it. Above all, when you blame someone as faithless or ungrateful, turn to yourself. The fault is plainly yours, whether you trusted that a person of that disposition would keep faith, or whether in doing a kindness you didn't do it as complete in itself, so that from the act itself you had at once received the whole of its fruit. What more do you want, having done someone good? Isn't it enough that you acted in accordance with your nature—do you look for payment for it too? As if the eye demanded a reward for seeing, or the feet for walking. Just as these were made for a particular purpose, and by acting according to their own constitution they have what is theirs, so a human being, born to do good, whenever he does some good or otherwise helps with things neither good nor bad, has done what he was made for, and has what is his own.

Book X

Marcus asks when his soul will be good and content, and names the qualities he should live up to.

10.1 Will you ever, my soul, be good and simple and single and naked, more visible 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, desiring nothing, living or lifeless, for the enjoyment of pleasures? Not time, in which to enjoy them longer? Not a place or a country or a mild climate? Not people who get on well together? Will you instead be content with your present condition and take pleasure in everything present, and persuade yourself that everything you have 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, contains and embraces them as they dissolve into the birth of others like them? Will you ever be such a soul as to share citizenship with gods and human beings in such a way that you neither find any fault with them nor are condemned by them?

10.2 Watch for what your nature demands, as a being governed by nature alone. Then do it and accept it, as long as your nature as a living creature is not going to be made worse off by it. Next you must watch for what your nature as a living creature demands, and take all of it, as long as your nature as a rational creature is not going to be made worse off. And what is rational

is at once also made for civic life. Use these rules, then, and don't fuss over anything else.

10.3 Everything that happens either happens in such a way that you are naturally able to bear it, or in such a way that you are not. If it happens to you in a way you are naturally able to bear, don't complain; bear it as you are naturally able. If in a way you are not able to bear, don't complain: it will perish once it has used you up. But remember that you are naturally able to bear everything that your own judgment can make bearable and endurable, through the impression that it is to your advantage, or your duty, to do so.

10.4 If he's going wrong, teach him kindly and show him what he's overlooking. If you can't, blame yourself—or not even yourself.

10.5 Whatever happens to you was being prepared for you from all eternity, and the web of causes was spinning together, from everlasting, both your existence and this thing's befalling you.

10.6 Whether atoms or nature, let this be laid down first: I am a part of the whole that is governed by nature. Second: I am in some way closely related to the parts that are of my own kind. For if I remember these things, then insofar as I am a part, I shall not be displeased with anything allotted from the whole; nothing that benefits the whole is harmful to the part. The whole contains nothing that is not to its own benefit. All natures have this in common, but the nature of the universe has this in addition: that it cannot be compelled by any external cause to produce anything harmful to itself. So by remembering that I am a part of such a whole, I shall be content with everything that comes about. And insofar as I am in some way closely related to the parts of my own kind, I shall do nothing unsocial; I shall rather aim at the good of my own kind, direct every impulse of mine toward the common benefit, and turn it away from the opposite. When these things are carried through in this way, life must flow smoothly—just as you would picture a smoothly flowing life for a citizen who goes on through actions

that benefit his fellow citizens and welcomes whatever the city assigns him.

10.7 The parts of the whole—everything naturally contained by the universe—must perish; let "perish" be understood here as meaning "change." Now if this were by nature both bad and necessary for them, the whole would not be well managed, with its parts heading toward change and built to perish in various ways. Did nature herself set out to harm her own parts, and to make them liable to evil and bound by necessity to fall into it? Or did such things happen without her noticing? Both are implausible. And if someone leaves nature aside and explains these things simply as the way things are made, even so it's absurd to say in one breath that the parts of the whole are made to change, and in the next to be surprised or upset at it as if it were something happening contrary to nature—especially since the dissolution is into those very things of which each is composed. For it is either a scattering of the elements from which a thing was compounded, or a turning of the solid into the earthy and of the breath-like into the airy, so that these too are taken back into the reason of the whole—whether the whole is periodically consumed by fire or renewed by everlasting exchanges. And don't imagine that the solid and the breath-like parts are the ones you had from your first birth. All of this came flowing in only yesterday or the day before, from food and the air you breathe. So what changes is what was taken in, not what your mother bore. And suppose that what your mother bore does bind you very closely to your distinctive individual self—that, I think, has nothing to do with what is being said now.[1]

NAMES TO LIVE UP TO

Marcus names the qualities he wants to live up to, such as good, truthful and high-minded.

10.8 Once you have given yourself these names—good, self-respecting, truthful, sensible, cooperative, high-minded—take

care that you are never renamed; and if you do lose these names, go back to them quickly. Remember that "sensible" was meant to signify for you careful attention to each thing and not letting anything slip by; "cooperative," the willing acceptance of what is allotted by the common nature; "high-minded," the raising of the thinking part above the smooth or rough motions of the flesh, above paltry fame, death, and everything of that sort. So if you keep yourself in these names, without craving to be called by them by others, you will be a different person and will enter a different life.[2] For to go on being the sort of person you have been until now, and to be torn and defiled in a life like this, is the mark of someone utterly dull and clinging to life, like those half-eaten fighters in the beast shows who, covered with wounds and gore, still beg to be kept alive until tomorrow, only to be thrown in that same state to the same claws and teeth. So put yourself aboard these few names. If you can stay on them, stay, as if you had moved to some Islands of the Blessed. But if you feel yourself falling off and losing your grip, go off with good courage into some corner where you will prevail, or else leave life altogether—not in anger, but simply, freely, and with self-respect, having done at least this one thing in your life: leaving it that way.[3] In remembering these names, it will help you greatly to remember the gods, and that what they want is not to be flattered but for all rational beings to become like them—for the fig tree to do the work of a fig tree, the dog of a dog, the bee of a bee, and the human being of a human being.

10.9 Farce, war, panic, torpor, slavery: day by day these will wipe out those sacred principles of yours, all the ones you conjure up without studying nature and then let slip. 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

1 The Stoics held that the universe is periodically consumed by fire and then reborn in the same order.

2 The last three names share the Greek root phren, "mind": emphron (with mind in it), symphron (of one mind with), hyperphron (with mind above).

3 In Greek myth, the Islands of the Blessed were a paradise at the edge of the world where favored heroes lived after death.

the confidence that comes from knowing each thing is preserved—unobtrusive, but not concealed. For when will you enjoy simplicity? When dignity? When the knowledge of each thing: what it is in its essence, what place it holds in the universe, how long it is naturally meant to last, what it is compounded of, to whom it can belong, and who can give it and take it away?

10.10 A spider is proud of catching a fly; one man, a hare; another, a sprat in his net; another, wild pigs; another, bears; another, Sarmatians. Aren't they all bandits, if you examine their principles?[4]

10.11 Acquire a method for observing how all things change into one another; attend to it constantly and train yourself in this area. Nothing is so productive of greatness of mind. Such a man has stripped off the body; and realizing that any moment now he will have to leave all these things behind and depart from among men, he has given himself wholly to justice in what he himself does, and to the nature of the whole in everything else that happens. What anyone will say or think about him or do against him doesn't even cross his mind. He is content with these two things: that he is acting justly in what he is doing now, and that he loves what is now allotted to him. He has let go of all his busyness and pursuits, and wants nothing but to go straight by way of the law, and, going straight, to follow God.

10.12 What need is there for guesswork, when you can look into what ought to be done? If you see it clearly, go that way, gladly and without turning back. If you don't see it, hold back and use the best advisers. If other things stand in the way of these, go forward with deliberation according to the resources at hand, holding to what seems just. Hitting that is best, since failing to hit it is the only real failure. The person who follows reason in everything is at once unhurried and quick to move, cheerful and composed.

10.13 Ask yourself as soon as you wake up: Will it make any difference to you if someone else finds fault with what is just and

right? It won't. Have you forgotten what these people who strut about praising and blaming others are like in bed, what they are like at table, what they do, what they avoid, what they chase, what they steal, what they snatch—not with hands and feet, but with the most precious part of themselves, which becomes, when it wants, trustworthiness, self-respect, truth, law, a good guardian spirit?

10.14 To nature, who gives all things and takes them back, the educated and self-respecting person says: "Give what you want; take back what you want." And he says this not defiantly, but simply in obedience and goodwill toward her.

10.15 Little of this remains. Live as if on a mountain. It makes no difference whether there or here, if everywhere you live in the universe as in a city. Let people see, let them observe a real human being living in accordance with nature. If they can't bear it, let them kill him. That is better than living as they do.

10.16 No more talking at all about what a good man should be like. Be one.

10.17 Continually picture the whole of time and the whole of substance, and that every individual thing is, in relation to substance, a fig seed; in relation to time, a turn of a drill.

10.18 Fix your attention on each thing that exists and think of it as already dissolving and in change, and as if rotting or scattering—or think how each thing is naturally made, so to speak, to die.

10.19 What they are like when eating, sleeping, mating, defecating, and the rest. Then what they are like when lording it over others and swaggering, or raging and rebuking from on high. Yet a little while ago they were slaves to how many, and for what; and in a little while they will be in the same state.

10.20 What the nature of the whole brings to each thing is good for it, and good at the moment it brings it.

10.21 "Earth loves the rain, and the holy sky loves too"; and the universe loves to make whatever is going to happen. So I say to

4 The Sarmatians were a nomadic people on the Danube frontier, against whom Marcus himself was campaigning.

the universe: I love along with you. Isn't this also what is meant when we say that something "loves" to happen?[5]

10.22 Either you go on living here, and you're used to it by now; or you go away, and that's what you wanted; or you die, and your service is done. There's nothing besides these. So take heart.

10.23 Always keep it clear that "the country" is just like this, and how everything here is the same as on a mountaintop, or on the seashore, or wherever you like. You'll find Plato's words exactly to the point: "building a pen on the mountain," he says, "and milking the bleating flocks."[6]

10.24 What is my ruling mind to me? What am I making of it now, and for what am I using it now? Is it empty of intelligence? Cut loose and torn away from community? So melted into and mixed with this bit of flesh that it turns along with it?

10.25 Whoever runs away from his master is a runaway slave. The law is master, so the lawbreaker too is a runaway. But also whoever is grieved or angry or afraid does not want something to have happened, or to be happening, or to be about to happen, of the things ordained by what governs all things—which is law, apportioning to each what falls to him. So whoever is afraid or grieved or angry is a runaway.

10.26 A man deposits seed in a womb and goes away, and from then on another cause takes over, works on it, and completes a baby. What from what! Again: he sends food down his throat, and from then on another cause takes over and produces perception and impulse—in short, life and strength and other things, how many and how remarkable! So contemplate these things, done in such concealment, and see the power at work, just as we see the power that weighs things down and the power that carries them upward: not with the eyes, but no less clearly.

10.27 Continually reflect on how everything that happens now also happened before, and reflect that it will happen again. And

5 The quotation is from Euripides. In Greek, "it loves to happen" is the ordinary way of saying "it tends to happen."

6 From Plato's *Theaetetus*, where a king is likened to a herdsman penned inside his city walls as in a mountain sheepfold.

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. All those were just like this, only with different actors.[7]

10.28 Picture everyone who is grieved or discontented at anything as like the piglet being sacrificed, kicking and squealing. Like it, too, is the man who laments alone on his little bed in silence. Think of our bondage, and that only to the rational creature is it given to follow what happens willingly; merely to follow is compulsory for all.

10.29 At each thing you do, one by one, stop and ask yourself whether death is terrible because it deprives you of this.

10.30 Whenever you're offended by someone's wrongdoing, turn at once to consider what similar wrong you commit yourself—judging money to be a good, for instance, or pleasure, or a bit of fame, and so on for each kind. If you attend to this, you'll quickly forget your anger, especially when it also occurs to you that he is under compulsion. What else is he to do? Or, if you can, remove what compels him.

10.31 When you see Satyrion, picture Socraticus or Eutyches or Hymen; when you see Euphrates, picture Eutychion or Silvanus; when you see Alciphron, picture Tropaeophorus; when you see Severus, picture Crito or Xenophon; and when you look at yourself, picture one of the Caesars—and in every case, the counterpart. Then let this strike you too: Where are they now? Nowhere—or who knows where. For in this way you will continually see human affairs as smoke and nothing, especially if you also recall that what has once changed will never exist again in all infinite time. Why strain, then? Why isn't it enough for you to get through this brief span in good order? What material, what opportunity you are running away from! For what are all these things but exercises for a reason that has seen the things of life

7 Hadrian was emperor before Antoninus Pius; Croesus was the fabulously rich king of Lydia.

accurately and in the light of nature?[8] So stay until you have made these things your own too, as a healthy stomach makes everything its own, as a bright fire makes flame and light out of whatever you throw into it.

10.32 Let no one be able to say truthfully of you that you are not simple, or not good; let whoever supposes any such thing about you be a liar. All this is up to you. Who is going to stop you from being good and simple? Just decide to live no longer if you won't be such a person. For reason doesn't insist on your living if you are not.

10.33 What, with the material at hand, is the soundest thing that can be done or said? Whatever it is, you can do it or say it; don't make excuses as if you were prevented. You'll never stop groaning until you feel this: that what luxury is to pleasure-lovers, doing what belongs to a human being's constitution, with whatever material is put before you and comes your way, is to you. For you must regard as enjoyment everything it is possible to do in accordance with your own nature. And that is possible everywhere. A cylinder is not given the power to move everywhere with its own motion, nor is water, nor fire, nor any of the other things governed by nature or by an irrational soul; many things block and obstruct them. But mind and reason can make their way through every obstacle as they are naturally made to and as they wish. Set before your eyes this ease with which reason will be carried through everything—as fire goes upward, a stone downward, a cylinder down a slope—and seek nothing more. The other obstructions either belong to that corpse, your body, or else, without judgment and the surrender of reason itself, they cannot crush you or do any harm at all. Otherwise the one who suffered them would at once become bad himself. In all other constructed things, at any rate, whatever harm befalls any of them makes the thing itself worse for it; but here, if it must be said, a person actually becomes better and more praiseworthy by making right use of what befalls him. In gen-

8 Most of these names are obscure, probably men of Marcus's own circle and of earlier times; Crito and Xenophon were companions of Socrates.

eral, 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. None of these so-called misfortunes harms the law. So what does not harm the law harms neither city nor citizen.

10.34 For someone steeped in the true principles, even the briefest and most commonplace saying is enough to remind him to be free of grief and fear—for instance: "Leaves, some the wind scatters on the ground: so is the generation of men." Your children are little leaves; little leaves too are these people who shout their praise so convincingly and acclaim you, or on the other side curse you, or quietly blame and sneer; little leaves likewise those who will receive your fame after you. For all these "spring up in the season of spring"; then the wind throws them down; then the forest grows others in their place. Brief duration is common to all, but you flee and pursue everything as though it will last forever. A little while and you will close your eyes, and someone else will soon be mourning the one who carried you out to burial.[9]

10.35 A healthy eye should see everything visible and not say, "I want green things"—that's the mark of a diseased eye. Healthy hearing and smell should be ready for everything that can be heard and smelled, and a healthy stomach should be equally disposed toward all foods, as a mill toward everything it was built to grind. So too a 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 looking for green things, or teeth looking for soft ones.

10.36 No one is so fortunate that there won't be some people standing by at his death who welcome the evil that is happening. Say he was earnest and wise: won't there be someone at the very end saying to himself, "We'll breathe easier at last, rid of this schoolmaster. He was never harsh with any of us, but I sensed he was silently condemning us"? So much for the good man. But in our case, how many other reasons there are for

9 The quotations are from Homer's *Iliad*, book 6.

which plenty of people want to be rid of us! Think of this when you are dying, and you'll leave more easily, reasoning: "I am leaving a life in which my very companions, for whom I struggled, prayed, and worried so much—those very people want me gone, hoping perhaps for some other relief from it." Why, then, would anyone cling to a longer stay here? Don't, however, go away less kindly toward them on that account. Keep your own character: friendly, well-disposed, gracious. And don't go as if torn away. Rather, just as in someone who dies an easy death the poor little soul slips easily out of the body, so your departure from these people should be too. For nature bound and joined you to them, but now she is setting you loose. I am being released as from my own people, yet without resisting and without force; for this too is one of the things in accordance with nature.

10.37 Make it a habit, as far as possible, with everything anyone does, to ask yourself: What is he aiming at in this? But begin with yourself, and examine yourself first.

10.38 Remember that what pulls the strings is that thing hidden within. That is speech, that is life, that, if one must say it, is the human being. 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 us. For in fact these parts are of no more use without the cause that moves them and holds them back than the shuttle is to the weaver, the pen to the writer, or the whip to the driver.

Book XI

Marcus describes the rational soul and lists rules for dealing with people who offend him.

11.1 The properties of the rational soul: it sees itself, articulates itself, makes itself whatever it wants to be; it reaps the fruit it bears itself (the fruits of plants, and what corresponds to them in animals, others reap); it reaches its own end wherever the limit of life overtakes it. It is not as with dancing and acting and the like, where the whole performance is left incomplete if something cuts it short; at every point, wherever it is caught, it makes what it set out to do full and complete for itself, so that it can say, "I have what is mine." Further, it travels around the whole universe and the void around it, and its shape; it stretches out into the infinity of time, and embraces and comprehends the periodic rebirth of all things, and observes that those after us will see nothing new, nor did those before us see anything more, but that in a way a man of forty, if he has any sense at all, has seen everything that has been and will be, since it is all of one kind. Proper to the rational soul, too, are love of one's neighbors, truth, self-respect, and valuing nothing above itself—which is proper to law as well. So right reason and the reason of justice turn out to be no different.

11.2 You will think little of delightful song and dance and the pankration if you break the melodious voice up into its individual notes and ask yourself about each one whether it has the better of you—you'll be too ashamed to say yes. Do the same with dancing, for each movement or pose, and the same with the pankration. In general, then, except for excellence and what

comes from excellence, remember to go straight to the individual parts and, by dividing them up, arrive at contempt for them. And carry the same method over to life as a whole.[1]

11.3 What a soul it is that is ready, if it must now be released from the body, to be extinguished, or scattered, or to survive! But this readiness should come from its own judgment, not from mere defiance like the Christians, but thoughtfully and with dignity, and so as to persuade another—without theatrics.[2]

11.4 I have done something for the common good. Then I have been benefited. Keep this always at hand, and never stop.

11.5 What is your craft? Being good. And how is this done well, except from insights—some about the nature of the whole, others about the particular constitution of a human being?

11.6 First, tragedies were brought on stage to remind us of what happens: that these things naturally happen this way, and that what delights you on the stage should not burden you on the larger stage. For you see that these things must turn out this way, and that even those who cry "Alas, Cithaeron!" endure them. And some things are said usefully by the playwrights, such as this above all: "If I and my two children are neglected by the gods, there is a reason for this too"; and again: "We should not rage at things"; and "Life must be reaped like a ripe ear of grain"; and all such lines. After tragedy, Old Comedy was brought in, with a teacher's frankness, usefully reminding people through its very plain speaking to be free of vanity; for some such purpose Diogenes too made use of it.[3] After this, consider for what purpose Middle Comedy was adopted, and then New Comedy, which little by little slid into the art of clever imitation for its own sake. That these writers too say some useful things is well known; but the whole enterprise of that kind of poetry and drama—what aim did it ever look to?

1 The pankration was a brutal combat sport combining boxing and wrestling.
2 Many editors think the words "like the Christians" were added by a later reader.
3 In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus curses Cithaeron, the mountain where he was left to die as a baby.

11.7 How clearly it strikes you that there is no other situation in life so suited to doing philosophy as the one you now happen to be in!

11.8 A branch cut off from the branch next to it cannot help being cut off from the whole tree. In the same way, a human being split off from one other human being has fallen away from the whole community. Now a branch is cut off by someone else; but a person separates himself from his neighbor by hating him and turning away, and doesn't realize that at the same time he has cut himself off from the whole body of citizens. Yet there is this gift from Zeus, who founded the community: we can grow together again with our neighbor and once more become parts that complete the whole. But if it happens often, such a separation makes the part that breaks away hard to unite and restore. And in general, the branch that has grown with the tree from the start and stayed in the same breath with it is not like the one grafted back in after being cut off, whatever the gardeners may say. Grow on the same bush—but don't share the same principles.

11.9 Those who stand in your way as you proceed according to right reason will not be able to turn you from sound action; just so, don't let them knock you out of your goodwill toward them either. Guard yourself on both fronts alike: not only in steady judgment and action, but also in gentleness toward those who try to hinder you or otherwise give you trouble. For being angry with them is weakness too, just as much as abandoning the action and giving in out of panic. Both are deserters alike: the one who has taken fright, and the one who has become estranged from his natural kinsman and friend.

11.10 "No nature is inferior to art"—for the arts imitate natures. If so, the most perfect and all-embracing nature of all could not fall short of the resourcefulness of art. And all the arts make the lesser things for the sake of the better; so, then, does the common nature. And from this justice has its origin, and from justice the other excellences derive their existence. For justice

will not be preserved if we care about indifferent things, or are easily deceived, rash, and changeable.

11.11 If the things whose pursuit and avoidance trouble you do not come to you, but in a sense you go to them yourself, then at least let your judgment about them be still, and they will stay quiet, and you will not be seen either pursuing or fleeing.

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

11.13 Will someone despise me? That's his concern. Mine is to see that I'm not found doing or saying anything that deserves contempt. Will he hate me? That's his concern. But I will be kind and well-disposed toward everyone, and ready to show this very man what he's overlooking—not reproachfully, nor as if showing off my patience, but sincerely and helpfully, like the famous Phocion, if indeed he wasn't pretending. That is how you must be on the inside: the gods should see a human being disposed to be angry at nothing and to take nothing as an outrage. What harm can come to you if you are now doing what is proper to your nature, and accepting what is timely now for the nature of the whole—a human being intent on bringing about, by whatever means, what benefits all in common?[4]

11.14 They despise one another and fawn on one another; they want to rise above one another, and they grovel before one another.

11.15 How rotten and counterfeit is the man who says, "I've decided to deal with you straightforwardly." What are you doing, man? There's no need to announce it. It will show for itself. It ought to be written on your forehead. It rings in the voice at once; it shines out in the eyes at once, just as the beloved knows everything at once from his lovers' glances. The simple, good person should be altogether like that—like someone who smells

4 Phocion: fourth-century BC Athenian general famous for his integrity; condemned to death by the Athenians, he is said to have told his son to bear them no grudge.

of goat, so that whoever stands near him notices the moment he comes close, whether he wants to or not. But affected simplicity is a knife up the sleeve. Nothing is uglier than the friendship of wolves; avoid that above all. The good, simple, kindly person has these qualities in the eyes, and they don't go unnoticed.

11.16 To live life as finely as possible: the power for this lies in the soul, if one is indifferent to things that are indifferent. And one will be indifferent if one looks at each of them both part by part and as a whole, remembering that none of them produces a judgment about itself in us, or comes to us. They stay still; it is we who produce the judgments about them and, as it were, write them in ourselves—when we're free not to write them, and free, if one slips in unnoticed, to wipe it out at once. Remember too that this vigilance will be needed for only a short time, and then life will be over. And what, after all, is so hard about seeing these things differently? If they're in accordance with nature, delight in them and let them be easy for you. If they're against nature, look for what accords with your own nature and hurry toward that, even if it brings no glory. Everyone is forgiven for seeking his own good.

11.17 Where each thing has come from, what each is made up of, what it is changing into, what it will be like once it has changed—and that it will suffer nothing bad.

NINE RULES FOR WHEN OTHERS OFFEND

Marcus lists nine considerations to keep in mind when other people wrong or offend him.

11.18 First: what my relation to them is; that we were born for one another; and, on another reckoning, that I was born to stand at their head, like a ram over the flock or a bull over the herd. Go back to first principles, starting from this: if not atoms, then nature governs the whole; and if so, the lesser things exist for the sake of the better, and the better for one another. Second: what sort of people they are at table, in bed, and so on—above all, what compulsions their principles lay on them, and with

what arrogance they do the very things they do. Third: if they're doing these things rightly, there's no call to be annoyed; if not rightly, then clearly they act unwillingly and in ignorance. For every soul is deprived against its will—of the truth, and equally of the ability to treat each person as he deserves. At any rate, they resent hearing themselves called unjust, ungrateful, grasping—in short, wrongdoers toward their neighbors.[5] Fourth: you yourself do wrong in many ways, and you're just like them. Even if you keep clear of certain wrongs, you still have the disposition that leads to them—even if it's cowardice, or concern for your reputation, or some such vice that keeps you from wrongs like theirs. Fifth: you haven't even grasped for certain that they are doing wrong. Much is done as a matter of policy, and in general one must learn a great deal before pronouncing with certainty on another person's action. Sixth: when you're too indignant, or even upset, remember that human life lasts a moment, and in a little while we've all been laid out. Seventh: it isn't their actions that trouble us—those reside in their own ruling minds—but our judgments. So remove them: be willing to let go of your verdict that this is something terrible, and your anger is gone. How, then, will you remove it? By reasoning that it isn't shameful to you. For unless the shameful is the only bad thing, you too must commit many wrongs—become a robber, and everything else. Eighth: how much harsher are the consequences of our anger and grief over such things than the things themselves that make us angry and grieved. Ninth: kindness is invincible, if it's genuine and not a fake smile or a pose. What can the most insolent man do to you if you remain kind to him and, given the chance, gently advise him and calmly set him straight at the very moment he's trying to hurt you? "No, my child—we were born for something else. I won't be harmed; you are the one being harmed, my child." And show him tactfully and in general terms that this is so: that not even bees behave this way, nor any creatures born to live in herds. But you

5 This is a list of points to keep in mind when others give offense; "them" are the people who offend you.

must do it without irony or reproach, affectionately, with no sting in your soul—not as if lecturing in a classroom, nor so that some bystander will admire you, but as if to him alone, even if others are standing around. Remember these nine headings as gifts received from the Muses, and begin at last to be a human being while you live. Guard equally against being angry with them and flattering them: both are against community and lead to harm. And when anger comes, keep this ready: losing your temper isn't manly. Gentleness and mildness, being more human, are also more masculine; strength, sinew, and courage belong to that person, not to the one who is indignant and discontented. The closer this comes to freedom from passion, the closer it comes to strength. As grief is a mark of weakness, so is anger: both have been wounded, and both have given in. And if you like, take a tenth gift as well, from the leader of the Muses: that to expect bad people not to do wrong is madness, since it asks for the impossible. But to allow that they're like this toward others while demanding that they do you no wrong is unreasonable and tyrannical.[6]

11.19 There are four turnings of the ruling mind you must watch for constantly, and wipe out when you catch them, saying to each: "This impression isn't necessary." "This undermines community." "What you're about to say doesn't come from you"—count saying what doesn't come from yourself among the most absurd things. The fourth is the one for which you will reproach yourself: that this is the more divine part of you being defeated and bowing down to the less honorable, mortal part—the body and its rough or smooth motions.

11.20 Your breath and all the fiery element blended in you, though by nature they rise upward, nonetheless obey the order of the whole and are held down here in the compound. And all the earthy and watery elements in you, though they tend downward, are nonetheless raised up and hold a position not natural to them. So even the elements obey the whole: wherever they're posted, they stay there by force until the signal for dissolution

6 The leader of the Muses is Apollo.

sounds from there again. Isn't it terrible, then, that your thinking part alone should be disobedient and resent its own post? And yet nothing forced is imposed on it—only what is in accordance with its nature. Still it won't put up with this, but is carried in the opposite direction. For its movement toward wrongdoing and self-indulgence, toward anger, grief, and fear, is nothing but the act of one who is deserting nature. And whenever the ruling mind is annoyed at something that happens, it too is deserting its post. It was made for holiness and reverence toward the gods no less than for justice. These too are forms of fellowship—or rather, they are older than just dealings.

11.21 "Whoever doesn't always have one and the same aim in life can't be one and the same person throughout his life." The saying isn't enough unless you add what sort of aim it must be. The judgment about all the things most people consider good in one way or another isn't uniform—only the judgment about certain kinds of them, namely those that are common. In the same way, the aim you set yourself must be social and civic. Whoever directs all his own impulses toward this will make all his actions consistent, and so will always be the same.

11.22 The mountain mouse and the house mouse—and the house mouse's terror and scurrying.[7]

SAYINGS AND ANECDOTES

Marcus records brief sayings and anecdotes about Socrates, the Spartans, the Pythagoreans and others.

11.23 Socrates used to call the beliefs of the many "Lamias"—bogeys to frighten children.

11.24 At their public spectacles the Spartans set seats in the shade for foreigners, while they themselves sat wherever they happened to.

7 An allusion to the fable of the country mouse and the town mouse.

11.25 Socrates to Perdiccas, explaining why he wouldn't come to him: "So that I don't perish by the worst of deaths"—that is, receive favors and be unable to return them.[8]

11.26 In the writings of the Epicureans there was a precept: constantly call to mind one of the people of old who practiced excellence.

11.27 The Pythagoreans: at dawn, look up at the sky, to remind ourselves of beings that always accomplish their work in the same way and the same manner—of their order, their purity, their nakedness. For a star wears no veil.

11.28 What Socrates looked like with the 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.[9]

11.29 In writing and reading you won't lead before you've been led. Much more so in life.

11.30 "You were born a slave; you have no share in reason."

11.31 "And my heart laughed within me."[10]

11.32 "They will find fault with excellence, uttering harsh words."[11]

11.33 Looking for a fig in winter is madness. So is looking for your child when that's no longer granted.

11.34 When you kiss your child, Epictetus used to say, you should say to yourself, "Tomorrow, perhaps, you will die." "Those are ill-omened words." "Nothing is ill-omened," he said, "that signifies a natural process. Otherwise it would be ill-omened to speak of ears of grain being harvested."

11.35 Unripe grape, ripe grape, raisin: all are changes—not into what is not, but into what is not now.

11.36 There's no such thing as a thief of your choice—Epictetus' saying.

11.37 "We must discover an art of assent," he said, "and in the domain of the impulses keep our attention on guard, so that

8 Perdiccas: a king of Macedon; other sources tell the story of his son Archelaus.
9 Xanthippe was Socrates' wife.
10 Homer, *Odyssey* 9.413: Odysseus after tricking the Cyclops.

they operate with reservation, for the good of the community, and in proportion to worth. We must abstain from desire altogether, and feel aversion toward nothing that isn't up to us."

11.38 "So the contest," he said, "isn't over some trivial matter, but over whether to be mad or not."

11.39 Socrates used to say: "What do you want—to have the souls of rational beings or of irrational ones?" "Of rational ones." "Rational beings of what kind—sound or base?" "Sound." "Then why don't you look for them?" "Because we have them." "Then why do you fight and quarrel?"

11 Adapted from Hesiod, *Works and Days* 186.

Book XII

Marcus urges himself to live in the present, value his own judgment, and accept death without fear.

12.1 Everything you pray to reach by a roundabout road you can have now, if you don't begrudge it to yourself. That is: if you leave the whole past behind, entrust the future to providence, and direct the present alone toward holiness and justice. Holiness, so that you love what is allotted to you—for nature brought it to you, and you to it. Justice, so that freely and without evasion you speak the truth and do what accords with law and with worth. And let nothing hinder you—not another's vice, nor opinion, nor talk, nor even the sensations of the bit of flesh that has grown up around you: let the part affected see to that. If, then, whenever you come near your departure, you leave everything else behind and honor only your ruling mind and the divinity within you—if what you fear is not that you will one day stop living, but that you will never have begun to live in accordance with nature—you will be a human being worthy of the universe that begot you. You will stop being a stranger in your own country, stop marveling at each day's events as though they were unexpected, stop hanging on this and that.

12.2 God sees all ruling minds stripped of their material vessels, husks, and dross. With his own intelligence alone he touches only what has flowed and been channeled from himself into them. If you get into the habit of doing this too, you'll rid yourself of much distraction. For someone who doesn't look at the bits of flesh wrapped around him will hardly spend his time

gazing at clothes, house, reputation, and all that outer wrapping and stage scenery.

12.3 There are three things you're made of: body, breath, mind. The first two are yours only insofar as you must take care of them; the third alone is properly yours. So separate from yourself—that is, from your thinking self—everything others do or say, everything you yourself have done or said, everything in the future that troubles you, whatever belongs to the body wrapped around you or the breath grown together with it that clings to you without your choosing, and whatever the vortex swirling around outside sweeps along—so that your intellectual power, freed from what fate brings and pure, may live released, on its own, doing what is just, willing what happens, and speaking the truth. If you separate, I say, from this ruling mind what has attached itself to it through passion, and from time what lies ahead and what has gone by; if you make yourself like Empedocles' "sphere, round, rejoicing in its circling solitude," and practice living only the life you are living—that is, the present—then you'll be able to live out the time left until you die calmly, kindly, and at peace with the divinity within you.

12.4 I've often wondered how it is that each person loves himself more than everyone else, yet sets less store by his own judgment of himself than by other people's. At any rate, if a god or a wise teacher stood over someone and ordered him not to think or plan anything privately that he wouldn't at once speak aloud, he wouldn't endure it for a single day. That's how much more we respect what our neighbors will think of us than what we ourselves think.

12.5 How is it that the gods, who ordered everything well and with love for humankind, overlooked this one thing: that some people—very good ones, who made the most covenants, as it were, with the divine, and through holy works and sacred rites lived on the closest terms with it—once they die, never come into being again but are utterly extinguished? If that really is how it is, rest assured 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 in accordance with nature, nature would have brought it about. So from its not being so—if in fact it isn't so—be convinced that it ought not to have happened that way. You see for yourself that in raising this question you are pleading your case against God. And we wouldn't be arguing with the gods like this unless they were supremely good and just. And if they are, they wouldn't have let anything in the ordering of the universe be neglected unjustly or irrationally.

12.6 Practice even the things you despair of. The left hand, clumsy at other tasks for lack of practice, grips the reins more firmly than the right, because it has been trained to do that.

12.7 What condition you should be in, body and soul, when death overtakes you. The brevity of life. The yawning gulf of time behind and ahead. The frailty of all matter.

12.8 To look at causes stripped of their husks. The purposes of actions. What pain is; what pleasure is; what death is; what fame is. Who is to blame for his own lack of leisure. How no one is hindered by another. That everything is judgment.

12.9 In using your principles you should be like a pancratiast, not a gladiator. The gladiator puts down the sword he uses and picks it up again; the pancratiast always has his hand, and needs only to make a fist.

12.10 See things as they are, dividing them into matter, cause, and purpose.

12.11 What power a human being has: to do nothing but what God will approve, and to welcome everything God allots him, as it follows in nature's sequence.

12.12 Don't blame the gods: they do no wrong, willingly or unwillingly. Nor human beings: they do none except unwillingly. So blame no one.

12.13 How ridiculous, how much a stranger to the world, is anyone who is surprised at anything that happens in life.

12.14 Either there is fated necessity and an order that can't be transgressed, or a providence that can be appeased, or a jumble of randomness with no one in charge. If an inviolable necessity, why resist? If a providence that allows itself to be appeased,

make yourself worthy of help from the divine. If an ungoverned jumble, be glad that amid such a flood you have within yourself a ruling mind. And if the flood sweeps you away, let it sweep away your flesh, your breath, everything else; your mind it will not sweep away.

12.15 Or does a lamp's light shine, and not lose its brightness, until it's put out, while the truth and justice and self-control in you are extinguished before you are?

12.16 When someone gives you the impression that he has done wrong: "How do I know this is a wrong?" And even if he has done wrong, remember that he has condemned himself—which is like tearing at his own face. And that someone who doesn't want a bad person to do wrong is like someone who doesn't want a fig tree to have sap in its figs, or babies to cry, or horses to neigh, or any of the other things that are inevitable. What else can he experience, with the disposition he has? So if you're so keen, cure that disposition.

12.17 If it isn't fitting, don't do it; if it isn't true, don't say it. Let your impulse be in your own hands. Always look at the whole: what exactly is it that produces the impression in you? Unfold it, dividing it into cause, matter, purpose, and the length of time within which it will have to come to an end.

12.19 Realize at last that you have within you 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 that kind?

12.20 First: nothing at random, nothing without a purpose. Second: refer your actions to nothing but the good of the community.

12.21 That before long you will be no one, nowhere—nor will any of the things you now see, nor any of those now living. For everything is born to change, to turn, and to perish, so that other things may come into being in their turn.

12.22 That everything is judgment, and judgment is up to you. So remove the judgment whenever you want, and, as for a sailor

who has rounded the headland, there is calm: everything still, a bay without waves.

12.23 Any single activity that stops at its proper time suffers nothing bad from having stopped; nor has the one who performed it suffered anything bad just because it has stopped. So too with the whole system made up of all our actions—which is life: if it stops at its proper time, it suffers nothing bad just because it has stopped, and whoever ended this chain at the proper time wasn't badly treated. Nature sets the time and the limit—sometimes our own nature, as in old age, but in every case the nature of the whole, whose parts keep changing so that the entire universe stays forever young and in its prime. And whatever benefits the whole is always fine and in season. So the ending of life is not bad for anyone, since it isn't shameful—it lies outside our choice and is not against community. It is actually good, since it is timely for the whole, beneficial to it, and in step with it. For in this way one who moves along the same path as God, and moves in his mind toward the same ends, is carried by God.

12.24 Keep these three at hand. First, in what you do: that it be neither random nor other than Justice herself would have done it. And in what befalls you from outside: that it comes either by chance or by providence—and you shouldn't blame chance or accuse providence. Second: what each thing is like from seed until it receives a soul, and from receiving a soul until it gives the soul back; what it is composed of and into what it dissolves. Third: if you were suddenly lifted up into the air and looked down on human affairs in all their variety, you would despise them, seeing at the same time how vast is the realm of beings of air and ether all around; and however often you were lifted up, you would see the same things: sameness, brevity. That's what our pride is about!

12.25 Throw out the judgment, and you are saved. Who, then, is stopping you from throwing it out?

WHAT YOU FORGET WHEN UPSET

Marcus lists truths forgotten when upset and accepts death as the close of his part in the play.

12.26 When you're upset at something, you've forgotten that everything happens in accordance with the nature of the whole; that the wrong done is someone else's; and besides, that everything that happens always happened this way, will happen this way, and is happening this way everywhere now. You've forgotten how close the kinship is between a human being and the whole human race—a community not of blood or seed but of mind. You've forgotten, too, that each person's mind is a god and has flowed from there; that nothing is anyone's own, but your little child, your little body, your very soul came from there; that everything is judgment; that each person lives only the present, and that is all he loses.

12.27 Constantly recall those who raged at something to excess, those who reached the height of fame, or disaster, or enmity, or any fortune whatever. Then stop and ask: where is all that now? Smoke and ash and a story—or not even a story. And let every example of this kind come to mind as well: Fabius Catullinus in the country, Lusius Lupus in his gardens, Stertinius at Baiae, Tiberius on Capri, Velius Rufus—in short, any passionate contention over anything, joined with conceit. How cheap is all that straining, and how much more philosophical it is, with the material you've been given, to show yourself just, self-controlled, and simply following the gods. For pride that preens itself on having no pride is the most insufferable of all.[1]

12.28 To those who ask, "Where have you seen the gods, or how have you ascertained that they exist, that you worship them like this?" First, they are in fact visible to the eye. Second, I haven't seen my own soul either, yet I honor it. So too with the gods:

1 Tiberius was the emperor who withdrew to Capri; the others are Romans about whom little is known.

from what I experience of their power on each occasion, from that I grasp that they exist, and I revere them.[2]

12.29 Salvation in life: to see each thing through and through, 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 living, linking one good thing to the next so as to leave not even the smallest gap?

12.30 The sun's light is one, even if it is divided by walls, mountains, countless other things. The common substance is one, even if divided among countless bodies, each with its own qualities. Soul is one, even if divided among countless natures and individual boundaries. Intelligent soul is one, even if it seems split up. Now the other parts of the things mentioned—breaths, for instance, and material substrates—are without sensation and have no affinity for one another; and yet even these are held together by the unifying principle and by the weight that draws them to the same place. But thought, by its own nature, reaches out to what is akin to it and joins with it, and the feeling of community is not cut off.

12.31 What are you after? To go on breathing? Or to have sensation? Impulse? Growth? To stop growing, in turn? To use your voice? To think? Which of these seems to you worth longing for? And if each of them is easy to disdain, go on to the last: to follow reason and God. But prizing those other things—being distressed that death will deprive you of them—is at odds with this.

12.32 What a tiny part of boundless, gaping time has been allotted to each of us—for it vanishes almost at once into eternity; what a tiny part of all substance; what a tiny part of all soul; on what a tiny clod of the whole earth you crawl. Considering all this, imagine nothing to be great except this: to act as your own nature leads, and to undergo what the common nature brings.

12.33 How does your ruling mind make use of itself? Everything lies in that. The rest, whether within your choice or outside it, is corpses and smoke.

2 The Stoics held the heavenly bodies to be gods.

12.34 The strongest spur to despising death: that even those who judged pleasure a good and pain an evil nonetheless despised it.[3]

12.35 For whom only the timely is good; for whom performing more actions in accordance with right reason is the same as performing fewer; for whom it makes no difference whether he contemplates the universe for a longer time or a shorter—to him not even death is frightening.

12.36 Man, you've been a citizen in this great city. What difference does it make to you whether it was for five years or three? What accords with its laws is equal for everyone. What's so terrible, then, if you are sent out of the city not by a tyrant or an unjust judge but by the nature that brought you in—as when the magistrate who engaged a comic actor dismisses him from the stage? "But I haven't played the five acts, only three." Well said; but in life three acts are the whole play. For the one who decides when it is complete is the one who was once the cause of your composition and is now the cause of your dissolution; you are the cause of neither. So go in peace—for the one releasing you is at peace with you.

3 Those who judged pleasure a good: the Epicureans.