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The Selfless Mind of Marcus Aurelius

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Contents

Abreviations 2

Introduction 3

Chapter 1: History and Structure of the *Meditations* 8

1. **Introduction** 8
2. **History of the Text** 8
3. **The Reign of Marcus Aurelius and the Writing of the *Meditations*** 10
4. **The first book of the *Meditations* and Marcus' Philosophical Education** 12

Chapter 2: The Soul 16

1. **Introduction** 16
2. **The Soul as Breath** 18
3. **The Demon Within** 32
4. **A Material World** 49

Chapter 3: The Mind 55

1. **Introduction** 55
2. **Sensation and Impressions** 55
3. **Judgement and Belief** 61
4. **Impulse and Emotion** 64

Chapter 4: The Self 72

1. **Introduction** 72
2. ***Prohairesis* and *sunkatathesis*** 74
3. **Mind and Self in the *Meditations*** 89

Conclusion 100

Bibliography 102

1. **Primary Sources** 102
2. **Secondary Sources** 103

Abreviations

Diss. Epictetus, *The Discourses as Reported by Arrian*, generally known by the Latin title *Dissertationes.* The translation used is that of W.A. Oldfather from the Loeb Classical Library.

DL Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers.* The translation used is that of R.D. Hicks from the Loeb Classical Library.

LS A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley (eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. Volume 1 contains English translations of the fragments, volume 2 contains the original Greek or Latin texts.

Med. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations.* The translations used is that by R. Hard with slight deviations for consistent English translation of some important Greek terms or to minimize confusion.

SVF *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, edited by H. von Arnim. References to this standard collection are also given in LS where applicable.

Introduction

Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* is one amongst the rather limited number of ancient Stoic writings that have survived completely, or almost completely, intact. His writings are especially interesting in the area of moral psychology because of their undoubtedly practical and strikingly intimate nature. This personal and practical character, combined with the rare position of its author as Roman emperor (A.D. 161-180) sets this text apart from other Roman Stoic texts such as the writings of Seneca and the discourses of Epictetus as reported by Arrian and it thus gives us a perspective on the theory and practice of (Stoic) philosophy in ancient Rome that cannot be found anywhere else. Moreover, it could provide important information on the development and continuity of the Stoic school up to the second century A.D. The survival of such an intimate text is close to miraculous and this is shown in the fact that we have only a single surviving manuscript (Vat. Gr. 1950) of the text dating from the fourteenth century, in addition to the first printed edition with Latin translation by Xylander from 1559, which was based on a manuscript now lost. Whereas the surviving manuscript lacks a title, the printed edition was entitled "*Marcou Antoninou Autokratopos Tôn eis heauton bibliôn"*. This title was very probably given to the work later but - although there have been suggestions that the text was either a preparation for, or extract from, a moral treatise and even that it was intended for the instruction of Marcus' son and successor Commodus - the title is probably correct in its implication that the emperor wrote the text exclusively for, and specifically directed at himself.[1] Greek editions of the text usually maintain as title the elliptical version "*ta eis heauton"* while the English translations generally go by the title "*Meditations*" which carries possibly misleading connotations, especially in the form of a supposed resemblance to Descartes' *Meditationes*. As opposed to the latter, the *Meditations* do not show a series of extended and thoroughgoing contemplations that focus on a small number of interrelated problems or subjects. On

[1] The idea that the meditations might have been designed as a moral treatise or as a preparation for one has in my opinion been sufficiently refuted by Brunt (1974), p. 1-7.

the contrary, the story behind the title reflects that of the entire work: its philosophical background and its purpose are not immediately clear and it lacks a definitive focus. The title "*Meditations*" should thus be taken to refer to relatively brief personal moments of contemplation, the subjects of which are usually directly relevant to the author's daily life,[2] something that is less ambiguously communicated in the German title "*Selbstbetrachtungen*". But however we characterize the work, and whatever title we give it, what is common in the titles used throughout the years is clearly also a recurring theme in both the character and the contents of the work itself: Marcus' relation to himself. Furthermore, as difficult as it is to determine which title would be most appropriate to the work, it is equally, or perhaps even more difficult to determine to which philosophical conception of himself, both as a person and as a human being, Marcus subscribed. Stoicism, and therefore perhaps also the Stoic conception of a person as a psychological and psychophysical unity, was clearly the biggest influence on Marcus. In addition to this the text reveals implicit and explicit references to, as well as quotations and paraphrases of a number of other traditions ranging from Heraclitus and Plato to Democritus and Epicurus. This, along with Marcus' notoriously inconsistent and fluctuating terminology and focus, are the main reasons why there is as of yet no agreement about what Marcus considered himself to be. Combinations of passages taken from any and all parts of the work could be used to argue for a traditional Stoic physicalist position while others could be used to support a Platonic dualist conception of the relationship between mind and body. Also, recent scholarship has increasingly favoured research formulated in terms of "the self", rather than the soul or the mind, importing the ambiguity of this theme in contemporary philosophy into discussions of ancient philosophy. A possible justification for this approach can be found in the argument of Charles Kahn that with the use of the term *prohairesis*, which Marcus quotes from Epictetus, the latter had introduced a kind of subjectivity into the Stoic conception of a person that we do not find in Greek

[2] An excellent characterization of the text as „a trace of a process of philosophical exercise" that forms part of the practice of philosophy understood as a *technê* can be found in Sellars (2012), p. 461.

and Roman philosophy up to the second century AD.[3] However, others have argued against this idea or focused on other questions regarding the self. More recent work on Stoicism has improved our understanding of the development and continuity of the Stoic school as well as the attitude of its members towards other philosophical traditions and, contrary to earlier work which divided the school into three distinctive periods, it has shown this continuity to have remained sufficiently intact throughout the history of the school and the attitude towards other philosophical traditions in its later parts either having been common to its entire history or causing no more than slight shifts in emphasis and a streamlining of the Stoic doctrine.[4] Despite this development, Marcus' position as a Stoic philosopher, or at least a writer of a Stoic philosophical text, has only been vindicated through the explanation of his Platonic-style language "as a resource or instrument used to formulate distinctively Stoic ideas"[5] and his attitude towards, and influences from, other philosophical traditions have yet to be put into their proper context. Furthermore, I believe that the failure to place Marcus' psychological and metaphysical language within the Stoic tradition, and thus resigning ourselves to confining the importance of the *Meditations* to ethical contexts, is not just related to the historical characterization of the Stoic tradition and Marcus' place in it but just as much to the philosophical problems surrounding the understanding of the account of the *psychê*-body relationship in the Stoic tradition in general and its relation to what we now understand as a conception of the self. My aim in this project is to investigate whether Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* provides us with some conception of a separate, irreducible self. The first part of this investigation confronts the question whether Marcus, inspired by Plato's identification of the true self with a divine and immaterial intellect, understood the mind or intellect as a separate and irreducible part of a human being. The discussion will then continue onto two related, and often confused, senses in which Marcus could be said to provide us with a conception of a separate and

[3] Kahn (1988)
[4] See Reydams-Schils (1999), Betegh (2002), Tieleman (2003) and (2007)
[5] Gill (2007a), p. 192

irreducible self. The first is that of the self as involving a unique and private sphere of experience that is separated from the experience of others and irreducible to perception of the physical processes that underlie this experience. The second one is that of the self as the subject and owner of our psychological experiences which is separate from and irreducible to these experiences. Many discussions of the self involve, and often confuse, a number of other questions.[6] Modern discussions often involve, or focus on, the question of identity over time, while application of the concept of the self to ancient philosophy is often restricted to ideas about psychological structure or self-reflection.[7] Applying these other questions to ancient philosophy is usually much less problematic, because it is clear that many of them were present even in early Greek philosophy. Of course an investigation into psychological structure is necessary as a basis for a discussion of psychological experience. Chapter 3 will serve this purpose, while chapter 4 will confront the idea that Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus before him, introduce a more subjective conception of the self, closer to the concept of will or a Cartesian "ego". In chapter 2 I will confront the questions of the soul-body and mind-body relationship and the coinciding question of Marcus' orthodoxy with regard to the Stoic doctrine on this. When dealing with Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, it is especially important to be aware of the relationship between the author and the work. Many scholars, although aware of the character of the work, have approached it as if it were a philosophical treatise by using passages to support their arguments independently of where exactly these passages come from. I have to admit that it is not an easy task to take the creation of the work and the background of its author into account when considering philosophical issues – particularly since we

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[6] Apart from questions about consciousness and psychological experience, discussions of the self often involve questions of identity over time, personhood, ethical identity or personality, self-reflection and mortality. Many of these are of course somehow related to others; when one attempts, as for example Derek Parfit does, to use psychological experience as a criterion for identity over time, the questions of consciousness or the existence of a separate subject necessarily become entangled with those of identity over time. Nevertheless, apart from these possible relations, these question are independent and should be treated as such.

[7] Long's recent article „The Self in the Meditations" provides an excellent discussion of the ideas of psychological structure, identity and certain therapeutic ideas from the *Meditations*, but does not tackle the questions of the existence of a separate subject or the status of psychological experience. Gill (2006) does tackle these questions, but unfortunately takes them as a single question thereby limiting the answers available to him.

have little information about the circumstances in which the text came into existence - but I will try at least to show awareness of this when judging the value and relevance of certain passages or terms to the understanding of the work as a whole. Therefore, I think it will be helpful to set the stage by briefly explaining the state in which the text survived, the biographical background of its creation and the most obvious structural features of the work in the first chapter.

Chapter 1: History and Structure of the *Meditations*

1. Introduction

In this Chapter I will briefly give some background information about the history of the *Meditations*, both about how it supposedly came into existence and how it survived until the present day, as well as some information about the structure of the work and the philosophical education of its author. Some of this information will prove important to putting various themes and features of the work into proper perspective. I will start with a short history of the text as it survived and what early references to it have been uncovered, after that I will give a short summary of Marcus Aurelius' life and reign, and situate the approximate time when, at least certain parts of, the *Meditations* would have been written. Finally I will make some suggestions about the deviant nature of the first book and what it tells us about Marcus' philosophical education and possible affiliations. This last part will also serve as a first step towards answering questions about Marcus' relation to the Platonic idea of a separated intellect as the true self.

2. History of the Text

There is only one complete manuscript of the *Meditations*, the Vaticanus Graecus 1950, which dates from the fourteenth century. The only other complete independent witness is the first printed edition from 1559. The printed edition itself is a witness, because it is based on another manuscript that is now lost. This manuscript came from the Bibliotheca Palatina at Heidelberg, which was ransacked in 1622 and subsequently incorporated into the Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana at Rome. It is now not to be found in the Vatican Library, however. The only known complete surviving manuscript, the Vaticanus Graecus

1950, passed to the Vatican in 1683 and is remarkably similar to the first printed edition. Other evidence comes from a number of collections of excerpts from the 14th to 16th centuries. Recently, D.A. Rees has discovered additional quotations of the *Meditations* in the writings of the 14th century Byzantine theologian Joseph Bryennius.[8] Mention of the text in medieval times is scarce, however: at the end of the 9th or possibly the start of the 10th century, Arethas, deacon of Patras, sent a letter to Demetrius, archbishop of Heracleia, accompanied by a copy of what he describes as "the Emperor Marcus' most profitable book". In the lexicon known as the *Suda*, which very probably dates to the late 10th century, the work is referred to as "Conduct of his own Life", and here the division into twelve books is first mentioned. How exactly the work survived so long after Marcus' death remains a mystery. There seems to be no explicit indication that Marcus intended it to be published, so it is plausible that its preservation was ensured only after Marcus' death, perhaps by a close friend or relative. Herodian, who wrote a history in the third century which begins with the death of Marcus and the rule of his son Commodus, does mention the sayings and writings of Marcus that have come down as evidence of his concern for virtue and love of literature,[9] but not until Themistius in his *Oration On Brotherly Love* in A.D. 364 refers to the *paraggelmata* ("instructions" or "exhortations") of Marcus is there any mention of a single text. Between this mention by Themistius in A.D. 364 and the letter of Arethas of around A.D. 900 we have no reference to any text by Marcus, and even very little in the four centuries after that, so it remains unclear how and in what form the text survived until the Renaissance. A look at the circumstances in which the text was written might gives us at least a glimpse of the author's intentions.

[8] Rees (2000)

[9] Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire from the Death of Marcus Aurelius*, 1.2

3. The Reign of Marcus Aurelius and the Writing of the *Meditations*

Marcus was born to a wealthy family in Rome in A.D. 121 as Marcus Annius Verus. He was noticed by the emperor Hadrian, who had first chosen and adopted the former senator Lucius Aelius as his successor, but because Aelius died just before Hadrian himself, the latter adopted the successful politician Titus Aurelius Antoninus as his new successor and asked him to in turn adopt both Marcus and Lucius Verus, the son of Aelius. In A.D. 161 Marcus succeeds Antoninus and insists on ruling together with his adoptive brother Lucius Verus, even though Marcus was considered the senior and more suitable of the two. Immediately after their accession to the throne, Marcus and Lucius are faced with a Parthian invasion into the allied land of Armenia. Marcus sends Lucius to the eastern front where the latter commands from the safety of Antioch while general Avidius Cassius leads the army at the front. The campaign is highly successful and the Roman army invades Parthia and raids and plunders the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon. The soldiers also bring back the plague, however, and in the time following the victory a significant part of the Roman population dies from the disease. Furthermore, the war leaves Rome's troops severely diminished, exposing the now undermanned northern front along the Danube River to attacks from Germanic tribes. Apart from foreign threats, the empire also suffers natural disaster in the form of a flood and an earthquake in the year 161. The toll of the Parthian victory becomes clear when Germanic tribes attack the undermanned northern front of the empire in the province of Pannonia along the Danube River. Around A.D. 167 an attack of a combined army of Germanic tribes ravages the province of Pannonia but is eventually fended off when Roman reinforcements arrive. Marcus and Lucius lead a punitive expedition to the northern front in 168. In 169, however, Lucius dies and Marcus is forced to return to Rome with his body. Marcus reportedly sells private possessions when back in Rome because the empire's treasury is not sufficient to pay the Roman troops. In the autumn of 169 Marcus sets out to fight the Germans along the Danube. At the same time, however, German tribes cross the border into the empire to the north-west of Carnuntum and press forward all the way to the town of

Aquileia in Italy itself. In the following years (171-175), Marcus leads his army to invade the lands of the Marcomanni, Quadi and Sarmatians on the other side of the Danube River. It is usually assumed that it was during this campaign that Marcus started writing the *Meditations* as the second book is preceded by the remark that it was "written among the Quadi on the river Gran", which flows from the Danube into Quadi-territory and the third book is preceded by the remark that it was written in Carnuntum, which was the Roman headquarters near the border with Marcomanni territory. Later, in the eastern part of the empire, the earlier mentioned general Avidius Cassius revolts and proclaims himself emperor. Even though Cassius is assassinated shortly after, Marcus decides to travel east anyway. It is during this trip that his wife Faustina dies. In summary, the reign of Marcus Aurelius was characterized by war, disease, natural disaster, economic crisis and revolt as well as personal loss. Despite this turbulent time, or perhaps thanks to it as a series of opportunities for an emperor to show his worth, Marcus remains an inspiration as the closest thing in history to Plato's philosopher-king. Marcus' extremely critical attitude towards himself, his overly serious character and the fact that he started writing the *Meditations* in old age while he was far away from home among Germanic tribes bent on invading not only the empire but even Italy itself, make it no surprise that the *Meditations*, and especially the earlier books, sometimes exhibit a panicky atmosphere that occasionally turns into Weltschmerz. This is offset, however, by Marcus' unyielding dedication to attaining a selfless perspective, his refusal to pursue pleasure and fame, and his constant efforts not to judge or punish but to accept and instruct.

4. The first book of the *Meditations* and Marcus' Philosophical Education

Books 2 and 3 were clearly written by Marcus while he was on campaign, about books 4-12 we can only speculate because they contain no clear references to particular events or phases in Marcus' life. The intimately personal nature of all of these books strongly suggests that Marcus did not intend any of them to be published. However, the absence of references to events in his life and to persons he knew seems hard to explain if he didn't at least expect the text to survive. If the work was not only written as an intimately personal journal but also meant to stay personal, we would expect far more of these kinds of references. If Marcus intended the work to survive however, it would explain why he has omitted these, namely in order to protect the memory of others or perhaps even to protect his own memory because he might appear ungrateful or judgmental towards those around him by the less positive remarks that the work surely would have contained. I think it is even plausible that Marcus eventually removed all of these kinds of references from the work. Perhaps the work started out as an intimately personal journal, but he decided at a relatively late stage that he wanted to add his philosophical side to his own memory, either failing to resist the temptation of after-fame for which he so frequently warns himself or because he believed the text could be valuable to others. Surely the frequency of the theme of praise and fame in the *Meditations* can be taken to indicate that it was one of Marcus' weaknesses or more potent temptations. On the other hand it can be taken to indicate that this could not have been his motivation and, as a true Stoic, he merely intended to provide others with a guide to achieving virtue. The first book seems to provide additional evidence for such a later change of plans, because it seems to be written at a completely different phase of his life, perhaps after all the other books. In it Marcus praises and thanks the people who were close to him, starting with his family, followed by his teachers and friends and ending with two long sections: the first dedicated to his adoptive father and imperial predecessor Antoninus, the second to the gods. In contrast to the others, the first book is not that intimately personal but rather points to a potential audience. The text is somewhat reminiscent of the practice reported by

Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, as a reply to Phaedrus' remark that statesmen are afraid to write for fear of being called sophists by posterity:

> "You seem to be unacquainted with the 'sweet elbow',[10] Phaedrus, and besides the elbow, you seem not to know that the proudest of the statesmen are most fond of writing and of leaving writings behind them, since they care so much for praise that when they write a speech they add at the beginning the names of those who praise them in each instance."[11]

Marcus, however, added the names of those *he* admires and thanks at the beginning of his text rather than of those who praise *him*. The question of whether and why statesmen would like to leave behind writings is, however, exactly what is at issue here. Perhaps Marcus did give us the "sweet elbow" by leaving writings that seem to be very intimate and personal but are actually intended to enhance his memory after his death, but more likely Marcus wrote books 2-12 as a journal to help him develop his character and achieve *eudaimonia* - much like a chef's recipe book, an artist's sketchbook or a whiskey blender's tasting notes – and decided later that it could serve as a guide and an example for anyone wanting to walk the same path, if not by its contents than in any case by its example. I therefore agree with Sellars who characterizes the text as an aid for the practical stage of a philosopher's development,[12] although I cannot say to what extent this was a standard formula in Stoicism. The first book does, however, not fit in with this and was perhaps genuinely meant to thank those who helped him on this path. In any case it shows a kind of selflessness that results from taking a broader perspective on oneself and one's own accomplishments that is central to the ethics presented in the *Meditations*.

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[10] Probably meaning that the statesmen merely pretended not to care about leaving writings, similar to the English expression "sour grapes", see Fowler's note to the passage (p. 507).

[11] *Phaedrus* 257d-e

[12] Sellars (2012)

Of the people mentioned in the first book, the most important ones in regard to the philosophical content of the *Meditations* are Marcus' teachers and friends. In particular the teachers Junius Rusticus, Apollonius of Chalcedon and Sextus of Chaeronea seem to have been of great importance to Marcus' philosophical development. Of these Rusticus was clearly the biggest influence on Marcus. He was a Stoic teacher and had introduced Marcus to the philosophy of Epictetus, for which the emperor shows himself explicitly grateful in the *Meditations*. Marcus was clearly very fond of him and vice versa; he awarded him two consulships and used to greet him with a kiss even before the Praetorian prefect. Similarly, Marcus' rhetorical teacher Fronto writes in a letter that Rusticus would give his life to save Marcus' little finger. Although this is clearly exaggerated, it shows how close the two were. Furthermore, the *Historia Augusta* reports that Rusticus was Marcus' favourite teacher[13] and Dio Cassius only mentions Apollonius next to Rusticus as one of Marcus' teachers.[14] This Apollonius and also Sextus of Chaeronea, both of whom receive more praise from Marcus than his rhetoric teacher Fronto or Alexander the Grammarian, were Stoic teachers just like Rusticus. Even though Marcus was also befriended to one Alexander the Platonist and the Peripatetic Severus, he was surrounded by far more Stoics and it is clear that his philosophical education and the influences he underwent were predominantly Stoic. Fronto was not at all pleased with Marcus' preference for philosophy over rhetoric and at times refers to it slightly disapprovingly or in jest.[15] When he does, he talks about "his" Zeno, Cleanthes or Chrysippus to refer to the philosophy Marcus committed himself to; Fronto clearly has no doubts that Marcus was a Stoic. It has, however, proven to be less straightforward for modern scholars, and the hesitations about regarding Marcus as a Stoic are especially strong with regard to what Marcus

[13] Herodian, *History of the Empire*, I
[14] Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 69
[15] For more about Marcus' turning away from Fronto in favour of his Stoic teacher Rusticus see McLynn (2009), p-64-68. I agree with McLynn that Marcus' conversion to philosophy should not be sought for in a single moment or event but was probably a long process that already started at an early age. The role of Rusticus near the end of this process was however likely a significant one.

conceived himself to be. I believe that it is mostly the nature of the work itself and our still expanding and improving understanding of Stoic doctrine in general as well as of the history of the school that have caused these hesitations. In the next two chapters I will discuss the most important reasons for these hesitations, first with regard to Marcus' conception of the soul and its relation to the intellect and the body and secondly, with regard to the operations of the mind itself. By doing so I will try to remove most of these hesitations and bring to light some philosophically interesting aspects of Marcus' thoughts and those of Stoicism in general.

Chapter 2: The Soul

1. Introduction

Because it was generally taken for granted in antiquity – in any case by most philosophers - that human beings are made up of a body and a soul and that death could be described as the separation of the two, it is neither surprising nor very informative that these elements are abundantly present in the *Meditations*. Plato's immortal and incorporeal soul is however far removed from that of the Stoics, which is made up of breath (*pneuma*), which is corporeal and will, in any case at the conflagration, be destroyed. Marcus takes over Stoic terminology but sometimes uses Platonic-style language that seems to point to a more strict separation between body and soul than we find in early Stoic doctrine. Thus the question whether Marcus allows for a separate and irreducible part of human beings, which could be identified with the true self, coincides with the question whether Marcus' conception of the soul and intellect is either Platonic or Stoic. In his monograph on Marcus Aurelius, Van Ackeren has identified two questions relating to a possible Platonic dualism in the *Meditations*. The first is related to the dualism of body and soul, the second one to the separation of the intellect from the soul.[16] Older scholarly discussions generally favoured considering Marcus either an eclectic or a Platonic Stoic, especially with regard to his three-part divisions,[17] while more recent discussions have once again favoured keeping Marcus on the Stoic side.[18] The latter are, in my opinion, not as convincing as they could be, and Van

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[16] Van Ackeren (2011), p. 476

[17] Bonhöffer (1890) thinks Marcus regarded the intellect as immaterial and remarks: „Dass diese beiden trichotomieen mit der stoischen Anthropologie unvereinbar sind, leuchtet ein." (p. 31-32). Rist (1982) does not, but still suggests influence from Posidonius' introduction of the Platonic tripartition into Stoicism on Marcus (p. 31). Asmis (1988) says: „Influenced by Plato and middle Platonism, he [Marcus] opposes both the body and the pneumatic soul as changing, worthless entities to the unchanging, divine intellect." (p. 2240)

[18] Annas (2004) mostly discusses Marcus' ethics, but remarks with regard to the intellect and the self that Marcus sometimes reminds himself that he is a psychophysical unity and never shows himself tempted to think of the mind as immaterial or as a separate self. Gill (2007a) also designates him as a Stoic, but in my opinion he does not vindicate his psychology thoroughly enough.

Ackeren has also noted that this still tempts some scholars to invoke (Neo-)Platonist or religious elements in order to explain Marcus' psychology.[19] I think both questions come down to asking whether Marcus considered the soul and especially the mind to be made up of corporeal *pneuma*. This will thus be the first focus of this chapter. Secondly, I will discuss Marcus' references to the mind as a "demon within", a choice of terminology which immediately reminds us of the divine status accorded to the mind by Plato and, perhaps, by Aristotle and which has sometimes been taken as an additional indication of Marcus' Platonism or religiosity. I will explore its use by philosophers of the time as well as its history within the Stoic tradition and uncover what was most likely Marcus' motivation to employ it, in order to improve our understanding of its place in the historical and philosophical context. Finally I will discuss the surprisingly extreme contempt Marcus frequently expresses both for the body and the material world and his subsequent advice of detachment from these. These features of the *Meditations* can easily be taken as being in line with a Platonic ethical ideal of separating the soul from the body, as presented from a pessimistic and fatalistic perspective. It will however become clear that the *Meditations* is a truly Stoic text that is in line with early Stoic doctrine while reflecting the contemporary philosophical discussions and the methodology of contemporary Stoic philosophers even though its purpose was not to expound or argument for Stoic doctrine but rather to apply it, and its focus and atmosphere are colored throughout by the character of its author.

[19] Van Ackeren (2011), p. 476-480

2. The Soul as Breath

> "Whatever it is that I am is flesh and a bit of breath and the ruling centre. Put away your books, distract yourself with them no longer, that is not permissible; but rather, as though you were now on the verge of death, despise the flesh - just blood and bones and a mesh of interwoven nerves, veins and arteries. Consider too what kind of a thing breath is: a stream of air, and not always the same, but at each moment expelled and drawn back in again. The third part of you, then, is the ruling centre. Look at the matter in this way: you are an old man, no longer allow this part of you to act as a slave, no longer allow it to be tugged this way and that, like a puppet, by each unsociable impulse, no longer allow it to be discontented with its present lot or flinch from what will fall to it in the future." (Med. 2.2)[20]

This chapter, which is the second actual "meditation" after the passages in which Marcus pays homage to his family, friends, teachers and the gods that make up the first book, contains explicit discussion of the human mind and soul in the areas of (meta-)physics as well as psychology and ethics. It shows some of the restlessly exhortative atmosphere that is often taken as characteristic of much of the work as a whole and it immediately reveals some of the difficulties that arise when one tries to locate Marcus' conception of what we essentially are among the ancient philosophical traditions. The terminology is Stoic, the advice to put away books sounds specifically Epictetian but the following exhortation to despise everything except the *hêgemonikon* (ruling centre) is more reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedo* than of the more moderate Stoic position. The "tugging of impulses" seems to point to a Platonic or Aristotelian irrational part of the soul with which the rational part struggles for control, while the ideal of a state in

[20] I will give references to longer passages from the *Meditations* (Med.) and Epictetus' *Dissertationes* (Diss.) between brackets in the text for easy consultation. For the translation I mostly rely on R. Hard's translation of the *Meditations* and Oldfather's translation of the *Dissertationes*, with an occasional slight deviation to keep the terminology consistent.

which one accepts one’s present and future lot is once again clearly Stoic. According to Marcus’ exposition in this chapter, we are made up of a body, of breath (*pneumation*) - which is more rarefied matter namely hot air - and we have a ruling centre (*hêgemonikon*). Again, the use of the diminutive “*pneumation*” here instead of the more common “*pneuma*” strongly suggests the influence of Epictetus.[21] We know from Galen that Chrysippus held that the *hêgemonikon* is the psychic *pneuma* which fills up the left ventricle of the heart,[22] but whether Marcus accepts this relation between the *hêgemonikon* and the corporeal *pneuma* is left completely open in this chapter, as it seems to be in the rest of the work. On the one hand the enumeration may suggest three separately identifiable parts none of which is reducible to, or explainable in terms of, one of the others; on the other hand, the initial conditional clause “Whatever it is that I am” indicates that in what follows Marcus is not pretending to make precise metaphysical claims about the separate parts that constitute a human being but in all likelihood is merely indicating that these elements can at least be separately identified. In the rest of the work, however, thinking (*dianoia*), mind (*nous*) and the *hêgemonikon* are usually explicitly treated separately from *pneuma*[23] and the latter is frequently put on a par with the flesh.[24] That Marcus takes *pneuma* to be the hot air of our breath which forms our soul is beyond doubt: in the passage quoted above he explicitly calls it air and on another occasion he says that it is taken in from the atmosphere which is respired.[25] In Med. 4.21, a chapter which is rare in that it focuses on metaphysical issues and deals with the discussion of what happens to souls after death, Marcus designates the atmosphere as the proper place for souls after death, provided they survive, and he says that the souls of animals eaten

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[21] See for example Diss. 2.1.17: “τὸ σωμάτιον δεῖ χωρισθῆναι τοῦ πνευματίου, ὡς πρότερον ἐκεχώριστο, ἢνῦν ἢ ὕστερον”.
[22] Galen, PHP 1.6, p. 141 Müller = SVF II.897, p. 246.12-14
[23] Med. 4.3: *dianoia* does not mix with *pneuma*; 12.3: the *pneumation*, by contrast with the *nous*, is only your own in so far as you must take care of it; 12.14: the flood may carry away *pneumation* but not *nous*.
[24] Med. 5.33: „all that lies within the limits of mere flesh and *pneumation*“; in 9.36 Marcus says that the nature of *pneumation* is similar to that of matter; 12.3: „all that as part of the enveloping *somation* or natural *pneumation* attaches to you without your will“ and in the same passage he says that both *sarkidion* and *pneumation* may get carried away by the flood.
[25] Med. 10.7

are changed into forms of air and heat and taken up into the blood. He concludes by saying that the problem of how there is room for these souls can only be solved by the distinction between the material and the causal. Presumably Marcus, like Galen says the Stoics do,[26] holds that the material principle refers to the passive elements of earth and water and the causal refers to the active elements fire and air. The distinction thus serves to explain how the lifeless bodies need actual space after death until they have decomposed but how souls, being made up of *pneuma* which is capable of *krasis di'holôn*, i.e. complete blending with more dense matter, are not hindered by the space taken up by the latter. In a later chapter Marcus again calls the soul an exhalation from blood.[27] There is thus no doubt that Marcus identifies the soul with *pneuma* and considers it corporeal. Even though he sometimes refers to "soul" (*psychê* or *psycharion*) in cases where he could have been more specific by using "mind" or "ruling centre",[28] whether Marcus accepts that the mind too is made up of *pneuma* and thus corporeal is never made explicitly clear. On the contrary, some chapters seem to provide evidence for the opposite position:

> "Reflect that thinking (*dianoia*), as soon as it abstracts itself and knows its own power, no longer associates itself with the motions, be they rough or smooth, of the breath" (Med. 4.3.2)

In this passage, Marcus seems to be saying that thinking can be separated from *pneuma* when it "abstracts itself". This at least suggests that the conception of the mind as a specific portion of the breath that pervades the human body, i.e. the early Stoic position, is not accepted by Marcus. If the mind would be identified with *pneuma*, it would unconditionally follow that it is impossible for it to be in any

[26] Galen, *On Sustaining Causes* 1-1-2.4 (= LS 55F)
[27] Med. 5.33
[28] See Med. 5.11, 9.27 and 9.34

way separated from it. The chapter that follows immediately after has also been taken to indicate explicitly that the mind for Marcus can be completely separated from the body and breath, both of which are made up of the four elements. As will become clear shortly, it will be useful to quote the whole chapter:

> "If intelligence (*to noeron*) is common to us all, then so is the reason (*logos*) that makes us rational beings; and if that be so, then so is the reason that prescribes what we should or should not do. If that be so, there is a common law also; if that be so, we are fellow citizens; and if that be so, the world is a kind of state. For in what other common constitution can we claim that the whole human race participates? And it is from there, from this constitution, that our intelligence and sense of law derive; or else, where could they come from? For as what is earthy in me has been apportioned to me from some earthy element, and what is watery from another element, and the airy (*pneumatikon*) from some source, and what is hot and fiery from yet another specific source – for nothing proceeds from nothing, just as nothing returns to nothing – so our intelligence also has come from some particular source." (Med. 4.4)

I think Elizabeth Asmis was right to note that the last part of this passage, in which Marcus mentions the intellectual part of us as something separate from, but analogous to, the four elements, is indebted to a very similar argument in Plato's *Philebus*.[29] However, I do not agree with her conclusion that "his view of the intellect as a special kind of substance, distinct from the four elements that constitute the rest of ourselves, is a major departure from Stoic doctrine".[30] As Asmis already notes herself, this passage does not show that Marcus regarded the intellect as immaterial, and I believe it does not even commit him to the idea of the intellect as a special kind of substance that is irreducible to the four elements. In the passage from the *Philebus* referred to, Socrates wants to accept the assumption – that he says was

[29] *Philebus* 28d-30e
[30] Asmis (1989), p. 2240

already made by his predecessors – that the universe is ordered and directed by mind (*nous*) but nevertheless he proceeds to first give an argument for it. The argument states that every element in us comes from and is ruled and nourished by the same element in the universe as a whole. The elements in us combine to form our body and so also the elements in the universe as a whole combine to form the body of the universe. Since our body has a soul, the same must be true of it that is true of the elements, i.e. that it comes from the soul of the universe as a whole. Soul is given to us, says Socrates, by the element of cause which he identifies with wisdom (*sofia*) and mind (*nous*). The similarity of the argument to the latter part of chapter 4.4 is unmistakable but there are also some significant differences. First of all, Socrates' argument clearly includes the assumption that the four elements constitute only our body and that soul is exclusively linked to cause and mind. Soul is thus treated separately from the four elements which constitute the body. Marcus, however, makes no reference to soul as a separate substance linked exclusively to intelligence or reason but he does treat all four elements explicitly - as opposed to the *Philebus* passage in which only earth and fire are explicitly named – and starts out with what the Stoics considered the passive elements, earth and water, then proceeding to the elements that form *pneuma*, i.e. air and fire. Moreover, the word he uses for the airy, i.e. "*pneumatikon*", makes it very likely that, in contrast to the *Philebus* passage, he has the link between the soul and air in mind rather than a link between soul and a metaphysically irreducible intelligence. Furthermore, the fact that he chooses to use intelligence (*to noeron*) and reason (*logos*) instead of the terms wisdom (*sofia*) and mind (*nous*) that Plato used in the *Philebus*, indicates that he does not want to refer to an individual mind or its state but rather to universal reason, such as can be identified with the Stoic active principle. The significance of the conclusion of the argument – that our intelligence has also come from some source – is thus for Marcus related to the omnipresence of reason which is the active principle. It does not commit Marcus to the idea of the intellect as a separate kind of substance any more than the early Stoics

were. In fact, a shorter version of the argument is attributed to Socrates in Xenophon's Memorabilia[31] and discussed by Sextus Empiricus,[32] who reports that Zeno took this argument as the starting point for his own. As Tieleman has noted, in Zeno's version "the cosmic soul is described as a *whole* comprising parts, viz. the individual human intellects".[33] Marcus has indeed probably taken the core of the *Philebus* argument, but he also formulates it with significant differences that make it specifically support the Stoic doctrine of the presence of reason *in* all matter and the individual human mind as part of that reason, rather than the Platonic one of a separate substance that rules over matter.

The fact that the argument as Marcus presents it is preceded by the comparison of the communion of human beings with a city and its laws further indicates that he uses it in a Stoic context. This comparison is reported by Diogenes Laertius to have been used by Chrysippus[34] and we already find it in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* where he says that Zeus steers all things with his law, that the cosmos obeys him and that Zeus directs the common reason, which runs through all things.[35] Leading a good life he describes as obeying the universal law of Zeus. Moreover, in this both Cleanthes and Marcus Aurelius seem to be directly indebted to Heraclitus, who made the same comparison as we can tell from our fragments:

> "Those who speak with understanding must hold fast to what is common to all as a city holds to its laws, and even more strongly. For all human laws are fed by the one divine law. It prevails as much as it will, and suffices for all things with something to spare."[36]

[31] *Memorabilia* 1.4.8
[32] *Against the Physicists* I (= *Adversus Mathematikos* IX) 92-104
[33] Tieleman (2002), p. 191
[34] DL 7.87
[35] SVF 1.537
[36] Heraclitus fr. 114

A.A. Long has shown the indebtedness of Cleanthes to Heraclitus in this and other aspects of his *Hymn to Zeus*[37] and it is clear that Marcus was aware of these ideas of Heraclitus when he explicitly attributes the idea of the communion and cooperation of all human beings to him:

> "We are all working together to a single end, some of us knowingly and with understanding, and others without knowing what they do, in just the same way as those who are asleep, for even they, as Heraclitus, I think, remarks, are workers and fellow workers in what comes to pass in the universe." (Med. 6.42)

Just as Heraclitus and the early Stoics, Marcus holds that the whole human race participates in a common constitution because the whole cosmos is made up of one substance of which everyone is a part. The strategy that I attribute to Marcus, i.e. of using a Platonic argument for the presence of reason throughout the universe but reinterpreting it in a Stoic context in which reason is inherent - even though Plato sets reason and the soul apart from the four elements - is furthermore also found in Dio Chrysostom, who gives a Stoic version of the myth of the chariots from the *Phaedrus*. Interestingly, just as Marcus does in 4.4, Dio starts out by giving the doctrine of the Universe as a city, then tells the story of Zeus' chariot from the *Phaedrus* but with four horses instead of the original two, each of which represents one of the four elements, rather than the powers of the soul. Within the myth, Zeus, who is equated by the Stoics with Universal Reason, is thus also set apart from the four elements that are represented by the horses.[38] Even though Dio is not exclusively committed to Stoicism it is clear that he is giving a Stoicizing interpretation of a Platonic passage. It is clearer even than it is in the case of Marcus, but in any case it shows that this attitude towards Plato's dialogues was not uncommon in the first and second century AD. Stoicism was indebted to Socrates from the start, and it is not unlikely that Plato's

[37] Long (1976), pp. 143-153; for the connection with fr. 114 see p. 144.
[38] *Oration* 36.39-60

dialogues were taken as interpretations of Socratic doctrine that Stoics could and perhaps should reinterpret. The Stoics would not be interested specifically in Plato himself but in the Socratic wisdom that formed the core of some of Plato's dialogues. Both Marcus and Dio are referring to Zeus or reason as the active principle that is – in different degrees – present in all four elements and both see their respective Platonic passage as communicating what in Stoic fashion may be called a preconception of this idea.

The relation between the elements on a small scale, i.e. in the human body, and in the universe as a whole as we find it in the *Philebus* is moreover also found in Epictetus. Although there is no clear link to the *Philebus*, we find in this passage also a distinction between a person and his body which could suggest Platonic influence:

> "What there was of fire in you shall pass into fire, what there was of earth into earth, what there was of air into air, what there was of water into water (…) 'What if someone should attack me when I am alone and murder me?' Fool, not murder *you*, but your trivial body" (Diss. 3.13.15)

According to Epictetus, "you" are only affected by externals when you *let* yourself be affected, but that does not mean that there exists a mind or self separate from your body that does not die when your body does. Rather, "you" refers to what you regard as your personal interest. The distinction between being externally affected and being personally injured is indeed influenced by Plato. It has its origins in Socrates' remark in Plato's *Apology*: "For know that if you kill me, I being such a man as I say I am, you will not injure me so much as yourselves; for neither Meletus nor Anytus could injure me (…) He might, however, perhaps kill me or banish me or disfranchise me",[39] which Epictetus paraphrases in Diss. 2.2.15. The solution to the paradox in the statement, i.e. that I can be killed but still remain uninjured, rests on

[39] *Apology* 30c-d

the idea that talking about yourself in the latter way does not have any metaphysical implications. Epictetus' ethics can often be seen as an interpretation of the life of Socrates, who was the main example for Stoics in their conception of the sage from early on and clearly also for Epictetus. Plato's dialogues were probably an important source for information about Socrates in the later history of the school.

This apparently popular microcosm – macrocosm analogy is furthermore also formulated by Marcus with reference to causality and destiny, rather than intelligence and reason, further indicating that by intelligence he means the Stoic active principle of causality and destiny rather than a "substance of mind":

> "Now there is a single harmony that embraces all things, and just as all bodies combine together to make up this single great body, the universe, so likewise, all individual causes combine together to make up the single great cause known as destiny." (Med. 5.8)

Marcus is thus not committed to accepting the complete separation of the mind or soul from the four elements when he uses the argument from the *Philebus*, but we have seen that in the preceding chapter he *does* state that thinking (*dianoia*) is capable of dissociating itself from the movements of the breath. From this we cannot conclude, however, that Marcus thought the mind to be irreducible to the *pneuma* that is the soul. The formulation of the "smooth or broken movement of breath" (λείως ἢ τραχέως κινουμένῳ πνεύματι) comes from Epictetus' statement that "the mere flesh is subjected to rough movement, and then again to smooth (τραχέως κινεῖται τὸ σαρκίδιον, εἶτα πάλιν λείως)" (Diss. 2.1.19) and in the *Meditations* we find a second passage that is even closer to it:

> "Make sure that the ruling and sovereign part of your soul remains unaffected by every movement, smooth or violent, in your flesh (τῆς ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ λείας ἢ τραχείας κινήσεως) and that it does not combine with them, but circumscribes itself, and restricts these experiences to the bodily parts." (Med. 5.26)

Here Marcus speaks of the smooth or broken movement in the *flesh*, rather than the *pneuma*, just as Epictetus does, and looking back at chapter 4.3 he is there also concerning himself with the question: "Shall then the things of the *flesh* still have hold upon you?" Marcus seems sometimes to use *pneuma* and "flesh" practically interchangeably.[40] Of course it is completely in line with early Stoic doctrine that the movements of the body are communicated to the *pneuma*, both being corporeal and completely blended with each other. This however does not explain, at least not in a way consistent with Stoic doctrine, the remark that thinking could completely dissociate itself from the compound of body and the *pneuma* that makes up the soul. Epictetus makes clear in Diss. 3.3.22 that he understands and accepts the Stoic relation between the intellect and breath. He compares the soul to a bowl of water and the impressions to rays of light that fall upon the water. A wrong judgement is then like rays of light falling upon disturbed water: the rays of light may appear disturbed but it is actually the *pneuma* that makes up the soul that is disturbed. Marcus, however, never shows this level of metaphysical understanding explicitly and it seems he uses "*pneuma*" in a more specific sense.

Marcus accepts that the soul is made up of *pneuma*, but only on a small number of occasions does he use the term "soul" for the whole of the *pneuma* that pervades the body.[41] The term usually refers

[40] See also Med. 5.33

[41] At 6.14 it is clear that he uses *psychê* as synonymous with *pneuma*: "Most things, that the masses wonder at, one can most typically refer to as things held together by stress and nature: stones, wood, figs, vines, olives; those of the moderate few as by *psychê*, such as flocks and herds; those of the still more refined as by reasonable *psychê*." At 6.32, 11.3 and 12.7 he contrasts body with *psychê*, thus probably using the latter to refer to all *pneuma* blended

specifically to the ruling centre itself, usually in ethical contexts.[42] Marcus explicitly subscribes to the Stoic *scala naturae*, most importantly in chapters 9.8 and 9.9 which I think clearly belong together:

> "One soul is distributed among irrational creatures, and one rational soul (*noera psychê*) has been divided among rational creatures; just as there is one earth for all things formed from earth, and there is one light by which we all see and one air from which we all breathe, we who have sight and life. (Med. 9.8)
>
> All things that share in a common element strive to rejoin their kind. All that is earthy inclines towards earth, and all that is watery flows together, as does all of an airy nature, so that barriers and the use of force are needed to hold them apart. (…) So likewise, all that shares in the common nature of mind strives with as great an eagerness, or indeed greater, towards what is akin to itself, for in proportion to its superiority to all other things it is the more eager to mix and coalesce with its own kind. Accordingly, there could be found from the beginning among irrational creatures, swarms, flocks, birds caring for their young, and something resembling love; for already, at this level, there are souls, and in higher forms of life the power of mutual attraction was found to be more intense that it was in plants or minerals or timber." (Med. 9.9)

There is an unmistakable resemblance of 9.8 to chapter 4.4 discussed above, but here it is far more clear that Marcus is not making an enumeration of substances, because he adds light to the analogy and makes a division between what he plainly calls "soul" and "rational soul". So why does Marcus explicitly identify the soul with *pneuma* but discusses the mind or *hêgemonikon* almost always separately from that *pneuma*?

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with that body. At 4.40, 9.8 and 12.30 he stresses the idea of the universe having a single *psychê*, thus probably also referring to the presence of all *pneuma* everywhere.

[42] See Med. 2.6, 2.8, 2.13, 2.16, 4.3, 5.5, 5.16, 5.19, 5.27, 5.32, 6.52, 8.28-9, 8.45, 10.1, 11.3, 11.16, 11.18, 11.39

We know from various sources that the Stoics posited different kinds of *pneuma*,[43] or at least different kinds of behavior for *pneuma*. Even lifeless objects are blended with *pneuma*, in which it works as *hexis*, a force holding bodies together and providing them with their qualities, which exist in virtue of the *pneuma* which extends from the centre of the object outwards up to its surface where it turns back again toward the centre.[44] In plants it exists as *physis*, which is *hexis* in motion and which realizes growth and nutrition. When *physis* also acquires impression and impulse it is called soul and this is shared by animals and humans.[45] Humans, however, have a rational soul, animals have an irrational one. There is no doubt in the sources that the higher level creatures also exhibit the functions of the lower levels. Thus Bonhöfer already noted that "nach D.L. 86 und Clem. Strom II, 487, wonach die ἄλογα ζῷα auch an der ἕξις und φύσις teilnehmen, ist diese Frage unbedingt zu bejahen",[46] and I cannot imagine anyone disagreeing. The next question Bonhöffer poses has, however, proven to be more complicated and this is the question whether the *pneuma* that makes up the soul in the strict sense, i.e. the *hêgemonikon* and the seven parts stretching out from it,[47] is also responsible for the functions of *physis* and *hexis* that we share with plants. That we share these functions is clear: *hexis* is also found in our bones, where it provides them with the necessary strength and *physis* is found in our nails and hair which always grow. Bonhöffer bases his answer on D.L. 138, where the Stoics are said to hold that the whole cosmos is pervaded by reason, just as soul pervades every part of us. In some parts there is less soul and there it functions as *hexis* and in others there is much more an there it passes as intelligence, such as in the

[43] See LS 47I-S, p. 282-286
[44] Philo, *God's immutability* 25-6 = LS 47Q = SVF 2.458: "In stones, and logs which have been severed from their physical connexion, he [God] created tenor which is the strongest bond. This is breath which turns back towards itself. It begins to extend itself from the centre to the extremities, and having made contact with the outer surfaces it bends back again until it returns to the same place from which it first set out"; see also Nemesius 70,6–71,4 = LS 47J: "[...] the outward movement producing quantities and qualities and the inward one unity and substance [...]" and Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1053F-1054B = LS 47M = SVF 2.449, reporting what Crhysippus said in his *On tenors*: "The sustaining air is responsible for the quality of each of the bodies which are sustained by tenor; in iron this quality is called hardness, in stone density, and in silver whiteness".
[45] Philo, *Allegories of the Laws* 2.22-3 = LS 47P = SVF 2.458
[46] Bonhöffer (1890), p. 69
[47] Aetius 4.21.1-4 = LS 53H = SVF 2.836

hêgemonikon. Bonhöffer's conclusion, however justified, remains as ambiguous as the source: "Damit soll doch wohl gesagt sein, dass ein und dasselbe seelische Pneuma im Menschen sowohl in der Form der ἕξις, als auch der φύσις und der Vernunft wirksam sei". His conclusion is justified because *pneuma* is a continuum and thus there is always only one, but it still leaves open the question what exactly is meant by "seelische Pneuma", the *pneuma* of the soul. We know from Sextus Empiricus[48] that the Stoics used the word *psychê* either for that which sustains the whole compound (as Marcus uses it in Med. 6.14) or particularly for the *hêgemonikon* (as Marcus usually uses it). How Diogenes Laertius uses it here is unclear. It is however clear that Marcus uses it primarily in the second sense but was also aware of the first sense, and that when he uses the term *pneuma* he usually excludes the second sense from the first, i.e. he refers to that *pneuma* none of which makes up the *hêgemonikon*. The question Bonhöffer actually wanted an answer to is whether there is some part of the *pneuma* in a rational creature that *only* functions as *physis* or *hexis*, without also being part of the soul in the strict sense. Based primarily on the evidence of Galen, Philo and Clement of Alexandria, Long argues that "the dominant Stoic doctrine distinguished the *pneuma* which changes from *physis* to soul from the *pneuma* responsible for bodily coherence and growth after an animal is born"[49] and that these functions become functions of the body when an animal is born, rather than of the soul in the strict sense. The evidence from Philo can be used to support both views because he treats the different "kinds" of *pneuma* separately but also says that the psychic functions are *added to physis*. Furthermore, as has been shown by Tieleman,[50] if we expand our sources even further we have to conclude that they are divided on this point. Whatever the reason for this inconsistency in the sources, I believe that Marcus' apparent separation of the mind from *pneuma* is due to the fact that he at least does recognize *pneuma* that is exclusively present as *physis* or *hexis* and thus connects this *pneuma* to the body rather than the mind. Moreover, this idea trickles down

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[48] Sextus Empiricus , *Against Logicians* I (= *Adversus Mathematicos* VII) 234 (= LS 53F).
[49] Long (1982a), p.44
[50] Tieleman (1996), p. 95-99; especially the evidence of Calcidius 220 = LS 53G = SVF 2.879 without a doubt supports the view of Bonhöffer and Tieleman.

into his ethics when he tells himself to not be influenced by the movements of flesh and *pneuma*. Marcus assigned certain basic natural lusts and bodily experiences to the purely physical *pneuma*. Although Sextus presents the different meanings of the word "*psychê*" as already applicable to Zeno, the connection with basic bodily experiences could have been a later development in Stoic doctrine, as Panaetius is said to have demoted the reproductive faculty from *psychê* to *physis*. The difficulty in making sexual lust a rational phenomenon was very likely one of the determining factors in this development. In any case, it leaves the core doctrine intact and is therefore not a major departure from the tradition, and given that the rational *hêgemonikon* was located in the left ventricle of the heart, and the other seven parts only cover the senses, the vocal apparatus and the reproductive organs, but that the whole body was said to be blended with *pneuma*, it is, I believe, very likely that Long is right in asserting that the dominant Stoic doctrine would actually have allowed for *pneuma* that operates exclusively as *physis* or *hexis*. Hunger and thirst, for example, may always have been explained as phenomena related to this type of *pneuma*, even though they would be communicated to the *hêgemonikon*. This is not a "second" *pneuma*, as the different functions of *pneuma* are explained either as the degree to which *pneuma* is present, or as the behavior – extending, moving or interacting with the body – of *pneuma*. Philo's remark that *psychê* is *added to physis* therefore does not mean that *all pneuma* that operated as *physis* is turned into *psychê* upon birth, but that certain parts of the *pneuma* that is present start exhibiting the behavior that is experienced as rationality while other parts remain as they are. Marcus' distinction between the mind and *pneuma* should therefore not be taken as a separation of the mind from the body or the soul as a whole. He does, however, appear to confer divine status on the mind by referring to it as a "demon within" which will remind us of a separate Platonic-type intellect or of the problematic discussion of the mind by Aristotle in *De Anima* 3.5. I will show that there is actually no need to explain this with reference to Platonic dualism and to further support this conclusion I will suggest a different explanation for why we find the term in the *Meditations*.

3. The Demon Within

> "What then is it that can help us on our way? One thing and one alone – Philosophy; and this consists in keeping the *daimôn* within pure and unwronged." (Med. 2.17)

In some chapters of the *Meditations,* the term *daimôn* is used by Marcus in a surprisingly important role. The term generally refers to a deity, divine power or spirit. In early Greek thought it seems to have been reserved for divine beings or for surviving human souls, mostly those of particularly important persons. The former were sometimes invoked to explain certain phenomena and either of the two could also be said to accompany humans, either to guard them or to watch and judge them. In any case, they were conceived of as beings separate from, and external to, living humans. The passage above shows the central position that is assigned to a *daimôn* by Marcus: the one and only thing that can lead us in life and is therefore the most meaningful thing to pursue, is philosophy, and philosophy is aimed at cultivating the *daimôn* within. In contrast to those of early Greek thought, the demon that Marcus refers to in the *Meditations* is an internal one. In other chapters that focus on identifying the one thing that is far more important than everything else in life, and that makes a man good, this thing is also formulated in relation to the *daimôn* within him.[51] Although we find discussions of demons, even internal ones, in some earlier philosophers, including Stoics, the importance and the central position that Marcus attributes in these passages to the *daimôn* within him seems to have no real antecedent in any philosophical tradition. This makes it likely that it was a matter of personally motivated emphasis for Marcus to use it on a number of different occasions in formulating central ethical propositions. His use of

[51] Med. 2.13: "It is enough to abide with the *daimôn* that is within himself"; 3.6: "If nothing higher is revealed than the very *daimôn* seated within you"; 3.16: "The mark of the good man is (…) not to soil the *daimôn* seated within his breast".

it has, however, often been linked to Posidonius and to the conception of the mind as divine and transcendent, both of which also further the idea that Marcus was an eclectic or Platonizing Stoic philosopher and that he conceived of the mind as a separate and irreducible part. Rist, for example, followed up his conjecture on the possible influence of Posidonius' introduction of the Platonic tripartition of the soul on Marcus' own threefold division, with the supposedly surer ground of Marcus' adoption of the "Posidonian line" of identifying reason with the individual's true self or *daimôn*.[52] Similarly, Asmis traced the use of *daimôn* back to Posidonius and takes Marcus' more frequent - compared to Posidonius - use of it to indicate that "it forms the basis of his ethics" and also that it refers to "one's true self".[53] After Marcus' demon within is connected with Posidonius, both of them could then be connected to a passage in Plato's *Timaeus* where it is said that one must care for the demon within himself.[54]

There is some evidence for the use of the term *daimôn* by the early Stoics, very probably by Chrysippus,[55] which has been taken as an argument among others to show the influence of Plato's *Timaeus* on the early Stoics.[56] Later use of the term by Posidonius is reported by Galen.[57] Although Reydams-Schils argues that the later reintroduction of the irrational part of the soul by Posidonius brings his use of *daimôn* again closer to Plato than the Stoicizing use of it by Chrysippus does, this deviation from early Stoic psychology has been contested by Tieleman[58] and there is no reason to assume that Posidonius actually deviates from early Stoic (Chrysippean) doctrine with regard to his use of *daimôn*. I believe, however, that the influence of Plato's *Timaeus* on the history of the term is only part of the story for the

[52] Rist (1982), p. 31-2
[53] Asmis (1989), p. 2243-4.
[54] *Timaeus* 90b1-d7
[55] DL 7.88; see also Algra (2009)
[56] See Betegh (2002), p. 278 and Reydams-Schils (1999), p. 69-70 for the influence of the relevant passage from the *Timaeus* (90b1-d7)
[57] PHP V, 6.4 = p. 449 Müller = p. 326-327 De Lacy
[58] Tieleman (2003), Ch. 5

early Stoics but especially for the use of it by Roman Stoics of the first and second century A.D., which seems to have had its apex in the central position accorded to it by Marcus Aurelius. Even though it is now far more common to accept that the influence of Plato, particularly of the *Timaeus*, on Stoicism goes back to the early Stoics rather than having started with Posidonius or Panaetius, and that these do not deviate from the doctrine of early Stoics in favor of certain Platonic elements, Marcus' use of the demon within has not yet been placed in its proper context. Although a role could have been played by Posidonius in the history of the Stoic inner demon up to Marcus Aurelius, there is far more evidence in other sources to which we know Marcus to be indebted. An exploration of these sources and their relations to one another will shed more light on the history of this aspect of Stoic doctrine, especially in the first and second centuries A.D. and on Marcus' conception of what a human being essentially is, as well as provide a more thorough vindication of Marcus' use of it as a practice fitting for a Stoic philosopher. Furthermore, other circumstances than just philosophical traditions almost certainly played a role in Marcus' decision to operate with this particular term.

Even though Marcus gives it a central position in formulating his ethical goal, it is easy to overstate the importance both of Marcus' use of the term *daimôn* as well as of the idea of this as a terminological shift. Rist notes that: "At any rate, in considering this question we should particularly notice how common the theme of the *daimôn* is; it is clearly fundamental in Marcus' mind"[59] and he proceeds to quote a list of chapters in which Marcus uses the term *daimôn*. What he either fails to notice or does not deem important - apart from the fact that featuring in 13 out of the total of approximately 490 chapters of the *Meditations*[60] is hardly unarguably "common" - is that of the twelve chapters he quotes as containing references to the demon within, eight are taken from books 2 and 3. Even if we correct his list

[59] Rist (1982), p. 31

[60] The subdivision of the *Meditations* in chapters varies and thus so does the number of chapters, the number is in most versions very close to 490.

slightly by removing 3.4, which does not include the term *daimôn* or any synonymous term, and include 7.17, 8.45 and 10.13 where he *does* use it, and even include the passages where Marcus does not use the term *daimôn* itself but refers to "the divine part" or "divinity", we will see that books 2 and 3 together contain more than half of the total uses or references to *daimôn*. This observation becomes even more significant if we add to that the fact that books 2 and 3 are considerably (about 50%) shorter than books 4-11 (book 12 is again about the same length as 2 and 3), which means that they cover little more than 10% of the entire work. Furthermore, we have already seen that books 2 and 3 stand out by being preceded by the indication of where they were written, which is in both cases when Marcus was on campaign against the Marcomanni and Quadi, which is consistent with the character of these books being more strongly and hastily exhortative and focusing on the present.[61] Both the titles and the content are consistent with the idea that Marcus was not in a position where he could easily consult philosophical texts – which is shown by the absence of quotes and paraphrases and the relatively infrequent use of technical vocabulary – and the focus on the present and his own mortality could have been affected by the unusual situation in which the books were written. That the term *daimôn* is common in these books but not in the later ones indicates that its supposed importance to Marcus should be confined to a particular phase of Marcus' life. As I will show, there is good reason to assume that the use of this term in books 2 and 3 was, at least partly, motivated by circumstances. However that may be, the important role Marcus assigns to it is clearly based on philosophical influences and even though its use is largely confined to these earlier books, it is still legitimate to ask whether it was a conceptual innovation or deviation from the Stoic doctrine of the time, rather than merely a terminological shift brought about by personal circumstances. Marcus is himself actually very clear about the fact that the term *daimôn* is merely a different word for some more common Stoic philosophical

[61] The passages in which Marcus reminds himself of his old age, or the little time he has left or that he should not concentrate on anything else but becoming good are relatively more numerous in books 2 and 3 than in the rest of the work. See for example 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.11, 2.13, 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 3.10, 3.12 and 3.14.

terms when he says that the wrongdoer partakes with him in "*nous* and divinity", that what does service to our earthly vessel is "*nous* and *daimôn*", that a man should put first his "*nous* and *daimôn*" and that the *daimôn* "is each man's *nous* and *logos*".[62] There is thus no doubt that, at least extensionally, *Daimôn* is for Marcus equivalent to the mind or intelligence (*nous*) which he also identifies with reason (*logos*) and in itself it is therefore not an indication that he subscribes to one theory of the mind or another. For now that leaves us still with two problems. We have to inquire what the philosophical background is for Marcus' use of this term, specifically whether there is some reason to assume that Marcus subscribes to a Platonic, dualistic conception of the mind-body relationship and whether we should accordingly interpret the demon within in that context. In some ways related to this is the second question, viz. why he adopted this term in the first place. As mentioned earlier, these two questions were formerly often taken together and given a single answer: Posidonius.

That this single answer could be given to these two different problems rests mainly on three factors: firstly, Marcus' references to Plato, which outnumber those to any other philosopher, provided a link between him and the supposed Platonic Posidonius; secondly, Marcus was sometimes taken to have conceived of the mind as a distinct part of the human being, in a more Platonic than Stoic fashion by his insistence on the safety of the mind from external impressions, his frequent advice to withdraw into yourself and his apparent pessimism about, and disgust with everything bodily and external; finally Marcus' use of the term *daimôn* was usually traced back directly to Posidonius. The application of the label of "Platonizing Stoic" to Posidonius, which had been accepted for a long time by most scholars has been convincingly dismissed by Tieleman.[63] It rests almost exclusively on the extremely polemical testimony of Galen who argued that Posidonius deviated from traditional Stoic psychological monism in

[62] Resp. Med. 2.1, 3.3, 3.7 and 5.27
[63] Tieleman (2003)

favor of the Platonic tripartition, even though this has apparently gone completely unnoticed by sources such as Cicero and Plutarch. Furthermore, Diogenes Laertius does not exclude Posidonius from the sources for traditional Stoic doctrine but even lists him next to Antipater and Zeno himself as one who defines the soul as *pneuma.*[64] I think that rather than considering Marcus as an accomplice to the Platonic treason of Posidonius, Tieleman's conclusion that Posidonius interpreted Plato as anticipating Stoicism, thereby strengthening the Stoic position as one which articulates existing notions and corresponds with common conceptions, could also be applied to Marcus, though perhaps in a more casual fashion and with reference not only to Plato but also to Heraclitus. Furthermore, Marcus' quotes of and references to Plato, in most cases, only show the admiration of and indebtedness to Socrates that can be found in Stoicism from the start and that Marcus was surely very familiar with from his reading of Epictetus. Although Stoicism was surely an original system, especially in the areas of metaphysics and logic, its ethical doctrine seems to have resulted for a large part from the desire to systematize and justify the exemplary behavior of Socrates. As Long already noted in his treatment of the importance of Socrates in Hellenistic philosophy, Philodemus reported that the Stoics actually wanted to be called "Socratics".[65] It would therefore not be surprising if Marcus saw the explaining of Plato's Socratic dialogues as a way of discovering Stoic, i.e. systematized Socratic, ethics.

Apart from whether we can consider Posidonius a Platonizing Stoic or not, it is highly unlikely that Marcus derived his use of the term *daimôn* directly from him at all. It seems that tracing back Marcus' use of the term, which is taken as contributing to the evidence for his Platonic tendencies, possibly via Epictetus and Seneca, to Posidonius is given additional importance exactly on the basis of these shared Platonic tendencies themselves. Granted that Posidonius used this term – something on which we

[64] DL 7.157
[65] Long (1996b), p. 3

should probably trust Galen this time - it is far more likely that Marcus' immediate philosophical source for it should be looked for in his acknowledged heroes: Socrates, Epictetus and Heraclitus. In addition there is good reason to assume that its use has been directly motivated by the Roman tradition of the worship of the *Genius* which was probably based on the Greek *agathodaimôn*. Some emperors allowed worship of, and sacrifices to, their own *Genius* in addition to the traditional pantheon. It is not exactly clear when this practice started, but it was probably Claudius or perhaps his predecessor Caligula who first let his *Genius* be added to the pantheon.[66] There is at least evidence of it during the reign of Nero but after him it seems that this practice became less common until Domitian revives it. Even though Domitian should perhaps not be considered a "bad" emperor, the senate at the time certainly thought he was and Pliny the younger praises the later emperor Trajan for refusing this practice, in contrast to Domitian. Thus the practice, which by now has obtained a connection to "bad" emperors, disappears again during the reign of the "good" emperors Trajan, Hadrian and Marcus' adoptive father Antoninus. Interestingly, the practice reappears during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. We would not expect Marcus to reinstate practices of worship to his own *Genius* and the fact that the sacrifice is recorded in the *Arval Acta* from AD 176 as to *Genio Imperatoris* suggests that it was actually reintroduced by the senate while Marcus was away on his campaigns against the Marcomanni and the Quadi.[67] This particular campaign was a response to the invasion of Italy itself by Germanic tribes, which was a rare and threatening occurrence for the Romans. It is thus not unlikely that the senate reinstated the practice to pray for Marcus' victory out of fear that the invaders would reach further into Italy, perhaps even to Rome itself. As stated before, it was during these campaigns that Marcus started writing the Meditations, in any case books 2 and 3 which contain most of the occurrences of, or references to, the *daimôn*. Given Marcus' love of modesty and serious character it is probable that the frequency of the term in these books relates to Marcus' experience of the reintroduction of practices of worship to the emperor's, i.e. his,

[66] Gradel (2002), p. 162-186
[67] Gradel (2002), p. 190-193

Genius as emphasizing his responsibilities as an emperor rather than merely as praise. The connection between these practices of worship and certain "bad" emperors such as Nero and Domitian may even have increased this sense of responsibility and the challenge for Marcus to be a good emperor. As we shall see, the philosophical influences that were important to Marcus' conception of the *daimôn* also focus on it as a way to instill a sense of responsibility to lead a good life.

Even though the senate's decision could be responsible for Marcus' emphasis on his *daimôn*, it is clear that for him the term is philosophically charged and that the respective passages are not just articulating the extra weight it may have put on his shoulders. Marcus would of course already have found this term in Plato's *Timaeus* or *Phaedo* during his upbringing or even in Posidonius, but I believe he used it in a more Epictetian-Heraclitean sense which is far closer to traditional, i.e. Chrysippean, Stoicism and to a Stoic reading of the *Timaeus* than to a Platonic conception of the mind or to the *daimôn* as a guardian spirit guiding our souls after death, as we find it in the *Phaedo*. It is exactly in the context of showing how Stoicism does not do away, but is consistent with, common opinion that Epictetus invokes the term *daimôn*. In Diss. 1.14 he deals with the question of how one can be convinced that everything is under the eye of God, something which could be generally accepted in common religion but may pose a challenge for those wishing to advance a philosophy that seeks to stay consistent with practices of worship and common religious vocabulary. The task is easy for Stoics, however, because they assume that everything is united and that therefore our souls are bound with God and because God is identified with the Universe itself, our souls are not only parts of the Universe but also parts or portions of god. Epictetus explains this, not only by referring to human beings as a whole, but also by applying it specifically to the mind, which is a part of God seen as Universal Reason. We therefore possess a faculty equal in type to that of Zeus himself and hence, if Universal Reason is the same as God, the mind is not

only a smaller instance of Reason but can also be described as a smaller version of God, a *daimôn*, i.e. a spirit or semi-divine entity. And if it is in its most fundamental description a part of Zeus and in a more narrow sense a part of us, it is appropriate to say that it is something that Zeus has given to us. It is perhaps not likely that only this passage inspired Marcus' conception of the *daimôn* but that his use of it is in line with that of Epictetus is shown by the fact that the latter makes a comparison in this chapter – one which further illustrates the relation of the *daimôn* to Universal Reason - which Marcus also adopts, namely that of God, or Universal Reason, with the sun and its light:

> "Yet the sun is capable of illuminating so large a portion of the universe, and of leaving unilluminated only the small space which is no larger than can be covered by the shadow that the earth casts; and is He who has created the sun, which is but a small portion of Himself in comparison with the whole, and causes it to resolve, is *He* not able to perceive all things?" (Diss. 1.14.10)

The argument is that if we accept that the light of the sun reaches almost everywhere, how then can we not accept that God, who is everything including the sun, is able to reach everywhere. Marcus uses this comparison twice, but he substitutes intelligent soul for God: "There is one Light of the Sun, even though it is interrupted by walls, and mountains, and countless obstacles besides (…) There is one Intelligent soul, though it may appear to be divided" and secondly: "(…) one rational soul has been divided among rational creatures. Just as (…) one light by which we all see".[68]

[68] Med. 12.30 and 9.8 resp.

Just as Posidonius, both Epictetus and Marcus stick to an understanding of the *daimôn* that is close to a traditional Stoic reading of that given by Plato in the *Timaeus*. Epictetus' use of *daimôn* may indicate direct influence from Posidonius, or may have been mediated by the use of *spiritus* as we find it in Seneca, Epist. 41.2: "*sacer intra nos spiritus sedet, malorum bonorumque nostrorum observator et sutos*". Seneca, however, seems to make a more clear distinction between himself and the *spiritus* that lives inside him and watches over him. The context in which he uses it is similar to that of Epictetus: he tells Lucilius that it is not necessary to pray and beg to statues of the Gods because the God is close by and within us. When we behold someone who lives according to nature and reason, we cannot but tell ourselves that this is something that is too great for a mortal body and thus has to be something divine. A divine power has descended into this kind of person. Seneca thus operates with a more strict separation between the person himself and the *daimôn* here. The argument that we must recognize something divine in a wise person may be inspired by Socrates' saying in the *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and *Phaedrus* that a *daimonion* always withholds him from doing something unwise or impious.[69] Socrates always served as the prime example of the wise man for the Stoics and the presence of a *daimonion* might therefore be taken by them as something exclusively accompanying wise men. In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, however, we find Socrates' *daimonion* more closely connected to the *daimôn* of Epictetus and Marcus. In discussing the charges of impiety brought against Socrates, Xenophon notes that it was probably out of Socrates' claim of having a *daimonion* to guide him that the charges of bringing in strange deities arose.[70] Further on in the discussion, Xenophon attributes to Socrates the ideas of the omnipresence and omniscience of the gods.[71] This Statement is more elaborately given in 1.4, where Xenophon reports Socrates' words in order to refute the idea that he was incompetent in exhorting men to virtue:

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[69] *Euthyphro* 3b; *Apology* 31d, 40a; *Phaedrus* 242b
[70] *Memorabilia* 1.1.2-3
[71] *Memorabilia* 1.1.19

> "For think not that your eye can travel over many furlongs and yet god's eye cannot see the whole world at once; that your soul can ponder on things in Egypt and in Sicily, and god's thought is not sufficient to pay heed to the whole world at once. Nay, but just as by serving men you find out who is willing to serve you in return, and by taking counsel, discover the masters of thought, so try the gods by serving them, and see whether they will vouchsafe to counsel you in matters hidden from man. Then you will know that such is the greatness and such the nature of the deity that he sees all things and hears all things alike, and is present in all places and heedful of all things."[72]

The context here is not that of the *daimonion*, but the responsibility one has to sacrifice to the gods. It is clear, however, that Xenophon presents Socrates' *daimonion* as related to the omnipresence and omnipotence of the gods. Moreover, this theme of responsibility is shared by Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, although it is not a responsibility for sacrifice to the gods, but the philosophical responsibility to the gods of leading a good life. Socrates apparently also used a visual analogy, just as Epictetus and Marcus. Seneca also uses the comparison with the light of the sun in his letter, but where Epictetus and Marcus use it to indicate the omnipresence of the divine, Seneca uses it to illustrate that our minds are touched by the divine while the divine itself is somewhere else, just as the sun touches us with rays of light but itself stays far above us. In this again, Seneca's use of *spiritus* is closer to that made of *daimôn* in the *Phaedo*: "And so it is said that after death, the *daimôn* of each person, to whom he had been allotted in life, leads him to a place where the dead are gathered together; then they are judged and depart to the other world". According to this notion of the *daimôn*, it is a semi-divine being sent by the Gods to accompany us. This idea is, however, also dismissed by Seneca in EM 110, even though he explains that his Stoic predecessors held this belief. I think Seneca's dismissal of this idea is a dismissal of

[72] *Memorabilia* 1.4.17-19

the existence of a *daimôn* as it is explained in Plato's *Phaedo*, but that he accepts something similar to the *daimonion* in the *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and *Phaedrus*, which comes a little bit closer to the Stoic sense in which Epictetus and Marcus understand it. Even though Seneca accepts the Stoic part-whole relation between the mind and the divine,[73] he has not completely reinterpreted the *daimôn* in this sense.

That the philosophical understanding of what it means to have a *daimôn* was an issue in the first century AD is shown by Dio Chrysostom's discussions of it. Dio, a former sophist, was converted to Stoicism by Musonius Rufus, the teacher of Epictetus. Especially his *Orations* 23 and 25 discuss the concept of the *daimôn*. The former is a dialogue in which Dio discusses the nature of the *daimôn* with an imagined interlocutor. They agree that a man lives justly, prudently and temperately when he has a good *daimôn* but the opposite when he has a bad one. Dio then argues that because the *daimôn* itself cannot be evil, but is divine and good, wickedness results from a person not heeding the *daimôn*, like a patient who does not follow the advice of his doctor, rather than from the *daimôn* itself being bad. Here it seems Dio is conforming to the more religious view that the *daimôn* is a guardian spirit that is closely linked to one's fate or fortune. In Oration 25, however, Dio's interlocutor agrees with the statement that the *daimôn* is outside the person but Dio himself argues that in this case it would have to be some other person and finally challenges his interlocutor to explain how this would work. These dialogues give the impression that the more common understanding of the *daimôn* was one in which it was taken to be a divine entity or spirit which was sent by the gods to accompany a person and which was responsible for his fate. Philosophers bent on convincing laymen of the relation between virtue and happiness were challenged to improve upon this understanding instead of completely rejecting it. Even though Dio speaks of different kinds of *daimôn* and of listening to or heeding your *daimôn*, it is clear from *Oration* 4, where he

[73] Ep. 66.12, 92.30 and 120.14

reports about a meeting between Diogenes the Cynic and Alexander, that he did not take this to be inconsistent with identifying *daimôn* with one's *nous* as Marcus does:

> "[…] he [Diogenes] spoke to him [Alexander] as follows about attendant spirits [*daimonia*], showing that the good and the bad spirits that bring happiness and misery are not outside the man, and that each one's intelligence [*nous*] — this and nothing more — is the guiding spirit of its owner, that the wise and good man's spirit is good, the evil man's evil, and likewise the free man's is free, the slave's slavish, the kingly and high-minded man's kingly, the abject and base man's abject. 'However, not to provoke a tedious discussion,' he continued, 'by taking up each separate point, I shall mention the commonest and most noticeable spirits by which everybody, generally speaking, is actuated — tyrants and private citizens, rich and poor, whole nations and cities.' Thereupon he let out all his sails and delivered the following discourse with great loftiness and courage."[74]

The discourse which follows explains three types of bad *daimonia*, and Diogenes also says that one can be affected by more than one of them at the same time. So we see that on the one hand, Diogenes is said to hold that the *daimôn* is one's intelligence which one can improve, but on the other hand he, as Dio himself does in Oration 23 and 25, speaks of it as if it were a separate entity that affects a person and that a person has a choice of either listening to or ignoring. The same holds for Marcus:

> "He is living with the gods who continuously exhibits his soul to them, as satisfied with its dispensation and doing what the *daimôn*, the portion of himself which Zeus has given to each man to guard and guide him, wills. And this is each man's *nous* and *logos*." (Med. 5.27)

[74] *Orations* 4.79-81 (*On Kingship*)

A.A. Long has taken this passage as a warning against treating the *daimôn* "as simply a highly charged reference to his mind or reason".[75] Of course the mind or reason have a divine status, but in Stoic philosophy that was already present in the words *nous* and *logos* because they assume that we are all portions of God, this does not explain Marcus' use of the term *daimôn*. Neither does speaking of the *daimôn* as a guardian that has to be cultivated and kept pure and unharmed indicate that it is not completely synonymous with *nous* and *logos*. The mind, for a Stoic, is by nature rational and that is its pure and unharmed state, and perfect rationality is the property that it shares with Zeus. Cultivating the mind for a Stoic is thus more like keeping something that has been given to you safe from harm than it is a process of ascension. The description of the mind itself as a guardian that should be kept pure and unharmed is thus perfectly in line with Stoic doctrine because it has been sent by Zeus and it will protect us from everything external as long as we don't contaminate it with false values. Epictetus does not identify *daimôn* explicitly with the mind or the governing part, but it is clear that he is referring to the governing part of the soul, which is the mind. He does not use the term *daimôn* in this particular meaning anywhere else in the *Discourses*, however, but like Marcus, he sometimes refers to the mind as a divine element within us. Both Seneca and Epictetus use resp. *spiritus* and *daimôn* in a context in which they deal with the question of God being somehow inside us and perceiving everything we do, thereby uniting this morally motivational aspect of common religious practice with philosophical doctrine. Unlike Seneca and Dio, however, Epictetus assumes the identification of the *daimôn* and the mind, while Dio feels the need to argue for this and Seneca seems to alternate between the more religious notion and one that is somewhere in between this and the philosophical one. Moreover, Seneca's association of the *daimôn* with the wise man brings it closer to Socrates' *daimonion*. Marcus' use of the term as directly equivalent to *nous* was therefore more likely inspired by Epictetus' use of it than by Seneca or directly by

[75] Long (2012), p. 475

Plato's *Phaedo*. Plato's, but especially Xenophon's Socrates has also very likely played a significant role, not only in Marcus' use of the term but in its presence in the Stoic tradition in general. However, by giving it such a central position in ethical contexts he goes even further than Epictetus does. This could be due to influence by other philosophers of the time, for example Dio, but I think it is not unlikely that some role was played by his acquaintance with the work of Heraclitus, who equates *daimôn* with *ethos anthrôpôi*, or man's character[76] and who, according to Diogenes Laertius, also held that "all things are filled with souls and *daimones*".[77]

Epictetus may have been a strong influence on Marcus in such a way that we may regard him as an indirect teacher for Marcus, but Heraclitus is listed among Marcus' heroic examples next to Socrates and Diogenes, the latter two being also Epictetus' prime examples of true philosophers in the sense of having lived the philosophical life.[78] But Marcus not only regarded Heraclitus as an example, he was also strongly influenced by his philosophy:

> "Always bear in mind what Heraclitus said: *The death of earth is to pass into water, and the death of water to pass into air, and of air to pass into fire,* and so back again. Bear in mind too *the wayfarer who forgets the trend of his way,* and that *men are at variance with the one thing with which they are in the most unbroken communion*, the Reason that administers the whole Universe; and that *what they encounter every day, this they deem strange*; and that we must not *act and speak like men asleep*, - for in fact even in sleep we seem

[76] Plutarch, Platonic Questions 1.1 (= Heraclitus fr. 119); There are several ways to read Plutarch's quote of Heraclitus saying "ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων" but that Plutarch at least takes him to be equating the mind or character of men with a divine or semi-divine being I think is shown by the fact that Plutarch gives it next to a quote of Menander saying: "ὁ νοῦς γὰρ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός", equating the mind with god. The evidence in Diogenes Laertius 9.7 makes Plutarch's reading even more plausible.
[77] DL 9.7
[78] Med. 8.3

> to act and speak; - and that there should be nothing of the *children from parents* style, that is, no mere perfunctory *what our fathers have told us*." (Med. 4.46)

Many of these themes can be found abundantly in the *Meditations*: the ever-changing nature of the elements which constitute the universe, the ignorance of the wrong-doer, the disconnection of bad men from universal reason, the surprise of people at events that are natural and that always have and always will happen. Apart from the influence of Heraclitus on early Stoics, the agreement between him and the Stoics on the idea that everything is united and that the universe is governed by divine law would make the philosophy of Heraclitus extremely interesting to someone who follows Stoic doctrine, especially when it comes to internalizing the precepts, rather than composing a theoretical treatise. Marcus is such a person and he shows his agreement with Heraclitus as well as his admiration of him. Moreover the context in which Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius mention the *daimôn*, the omnipresence of god and its comparison with the light of the sun, seems to be summarized in Heraclitus' remark "How can one hide from that which never sets?"[79] It is therefore likely that Marcus' use of *daimôn,* especially as equivalent to *nous,* indicates not only influence from Socrates and Epictetus, rather than from Seneca, Posidonius, or Plato, but also a combining of Heraclitean with Stoic material. That is not to say that Marcus was unfamiliar with Plato, Posidonius, or Seneca, but rather that if he was, he preferred the Epictetian-Heraclitean understanding of the notion of *daimôn* as the mind which is a part of god rather than as a separate entity, either mind or guardian, in the Platonic sense. Although I would not go as far as Hadot does by saying the Stoics considered Heraclitus "their great ancestor"[80] we should note, as Long has shown,[81] that Cleanthes already adopted Heraclitean material in his *Hymn to Zeus*, especially with regard to universal reason and universal law and the role of man in it. It is clear that Marcus takes up

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[79] Heraclitus fr. 16

[80] Hadot (1992), p. 54

[81] Long (1976), pp. 35-57

more of Heraclitus than just this, as was almost certainly also the case with Cleanthes and perhaps even Zeno. Furthermore, both Cleanthes and Marcus do not simply accept Heraclitean material purely and unconditionally, but they place it in a Stoic context.

As said before, the role of the term *daimôn* is mostly confined to books 2 and 3 and it plays a limited role in the rest of the *Meditations*. Perhaps it was the ambiguity of the term itself that discouraged Marcus from using it often after book 3 but more likely its use was motivated by circumstances and the later books were written after his return to Rome where he had better, and perhaps more frequent, access to philosophical works which means the technical vocabulary from these books would have had a greater influence on his own writings. In any case, in the later books he uses the more technical Stoic vocabulary of *hêgemonikon*, *nous* and *logos* more frequently. His understanding of *daimôn* in a traditional Stoic fashion meant that he could seamlessly transition between these terms. The role of Posidonius in Marcus' use of *daimôn*, I believe, cannot be proved and should therefore not be given too much weight in the consideration of the question of Platonic elements in Marcus' conception of the mind. There are other considerations however, that seem to indicate a more Platonic conception of the mind in the *Meditations* and therefore require further investigation. One of these is Marcus' advice, in several chapters, to withdraw into yourself, which I will include in the discussion of the self in chapter 4. Another one is the independence of the mind from sensory impressions and will be discussed in chapter 3, which will deal more closely with the activities of the mind and the moral precepts that follow from it. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to a third one, which is Marcus' pessimism about the material world and his expressions of disgust with everything that is bodily and material, which I believe is also strongly related to Epictetus and Heraclitus. It is, however, often taken as a view of the material world as an unstable and burdensome realm from which one should abstract oneself as much as possible or as

doubting the importance of moral human behavior. Marcus' strong exhortation to spend what is left of his life trying to exhibit the best possible moral human behavior and his belief that nature cannot do evil but that everything that exists is beautiful because it shows its workings show that this cannot be right.

4. A Material World

> "Just as it seems to you when you take your bath – oil, sweat, filth, greasy water, all quite vile – such is every part of life and every given thing." (Med. 8.24)

Marcus' remarks about the body and the material world often seem to show utter contempt, disgust and pessimism. The passage quoted above is probably the most pessimistic of all because it remains very general: every part of life is filthy and vile. It is these kinds of remarks that have fueled the idea that Marcus takes over the sharp contrast between mind and matter that we find in Plato, especially when the contrast between the mind and the sensible world is explicitly brought into play: "Now pass on to the sensible objects (*ta hupokeimena*) themselves: how ephemeral they are, how cheap, how liable to become the property of a catamite, a prostitute, or a robber!"[82] These kinds of remarks cannot be simply taken together as evidence for a general attitude of pessimism. They range from rather neutral comparisons: "you will no longer (…) be the servant of an earthen vessel as inferior in value as that serving it is superior, the servant being nous and guardian-spirit and the master mud and gore",[83] to the more contemptuous quotation of Epictetus' saying that "you are a spirit bearing the weight of a dead

[82] Med. 5.10
[83] Med. 3.3

body",[84] and finally to elaborately expounding the insignificance of human life: "In human life, the time of our existence is a point, our substance a flux, our senses dull, the fabric of our entire body subject to corruption, our soul ever restless, our destiny beyond divining, and our fame precarious. In a word, all that belongs to the body is a stream in flow, all that belongs to the soul, mere dreams and delusion, and our life a war, a brief stay in a foreign land, and our fame thereafter, oblivion".[85] Moreover, although the attitude in these passages can be said in general to be negative to some degree, there are several different subjects involved in them. I have already explained that Marcus' negative attitude towards the flesh and *pneuma* relates to the *pneuma physikê* which is the *pneuma* that is blended with other parts of the body than those in which *psychê* in the strict sense exists and which Marcus connects with basic bodily functions and experiences such as nutrition and hunger, pain and sexual lust. When Marcus talks about things being foul (*rupara*) or cheap (*eutelos*) he is in many cases talking about the mistake of acting only in line with these bodily functions or experiences rather than leaving those influences outside of the rational soul and about giving up the freedom that you have by nature in virtue of that rational soul. In both cases he is following Epictetus and these remarks come down to warnings about ascribing value to external things.

In this chapter I want to focus on the apparent instability, insignificance and ephemeral nature ascribed by Marcus to matter.

> "How cheap it all is, how despicable, sordid, corruptible, dead" (2.12)
>
> "How putrid is the matter which underlies everything. Water, dust, bones, stench!" (9.36)

[84] Med. 4.41; in different words also in Med. 9.24
[85] Med. 2.17

> “All things are ever the same, familiar in experience, ephemeral in time, foul in their material” (9.14)

> “How swiftly all things vanish away, both the bodies themselves in the universe, and the memories of them in time; and of what a nature are all those things that we perceive, especially the things that entice us with the promise of pleasure, or frighten us with the thought of pain, or are proclaimed with an empty mind. How cheap it all is, how despicable, sordid, corruptible, dead – this must be left to our faculty of reasoning to determine” (Med. 2.12)

Marcus is forcing the idea of the familiarity, worthlessness and ephemeral nature of everything in the world upon himself for two main reasons: to accept whatever befalls him and to refrain from being proud, vain and fond of fame and praise. It is an important part of Stoic doctrine to not be dissatisfied with whatever happens, but accept what destiny, the whole of causality, brings. The whole of causality is identical with nature, not merely as the whole of natural things which exist but also to the specific way in which it “behaves”, i.e. the direction it takes in its being active over time. The Stoics did not yet make the distinction that Spinoza made, between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, but both are clearly present in their concept of nature. Human beings are also explicitly not excluded from the whole of causality. Marcus frequently stresses that people do wrong through ignorance and against their will, and that by their opinions and the state of their *hêgemonikon* one can understand that they act in the way they do. Because the whole of causality proceeds in a very specific way, there is a relatively limited range of ways in which events follow upon one another. It is therefore characteristic of a wise man, who understands this aspect of nature and combines it with a certain epistemic caution with regard to his experiences,[86] that he will not be surprised at anything that happens. Here Marcus would also have found common ground with Heraclitus, who says that “the learning of many things does not teach understanding” but that wisdom is “to know the thought by which all things are steered through all

[86] The wisdom of the wise man is not based on the content of his knowledge, see Kerferd (1978).

things".[87] As a result of our advancements in science, it is not difficult to imagine that one should never be surprised at physical events, such as the interaction between billiard balls or a chemical reaction. For Marcus as for the Stoics, however, it is far more important that one doesn't need to be surprised at human behavior either and this shows again that human behavior is not given a special place outside of the whole of causality. Rather than giving rise to pessimistic fatalism, Marcus takes it as the basis for certain moral obligations: "It is a special characteristic of human beings to love even those who stumble. And that sentiment arises as soon as the thought strikes you that these are your relations and do wrong through ignorance and against their will".[88] Another motivation Marcus frequently invokes for his acceptance of wrongdoers, is "that in no time at all both you and the wrongdoer will be dead", i.e. the significance of someone's wrongdoings should be placed in a cosmic perspective in which it becomes negligible. Although this focus on the ephemeral nature of even human life can sound pessimistic and depressing, it does not come from a lack of self-respect. Marcus is bent on putting the interest of the universe before what he could see as his own interest. He has a very strong belief that what people generally hold to be their own interest is only part of the story, and only a result of the fact that they do not look far, or deep enough. Our interests should be directed at being a single human being among others because the way we have come into being is consistent with everything else that happens in the universe and is based on the whole of causality. Thus my goal should be to act according to my constitution, and by doing so my acting will also be consistent with everything else which happens in the universe, and thus with the universe itself. My self-interest thus should be aligned along the interest of the universe because my constitution is aligned along the constitution of the universe. And happiness is, as it was for Aristotle, a function of our constitution, it is a measure of our success in fulfilling our goal in life. Thus the interest of the universe is identical to my own interest and happiness. Moreover, from the cosmic perspective, death is not an evil but merely an event, a change that like everything else is based

[87] Heraclitus fr. 40 and 41
[88] Med. 7.22

on the whole of causality and "if somebody is frightened of a process of nature, he is no more than a child".[89] Moreover, by convincing himself of the rottenness, sordid and corruptible nature of everything material, Marcus is only trying to detach himself by overemphasizing the relative unimportance that follows from the nature of external things. Thus he says: "fine marbles are calluses of the earth, and gold and silver its sediments, and our garments matted hairs, and the purple, blood from a shellfish",[90] obviously referring to the clothes worn by an emperor: marbles, gold and silver and the purple cloak. In 6.13 the same practice is described and Marcus adds that it will keep him from lapsing into false pride. By making an effort to realize what these things are in reality, we will refrain from attaching value to them because we will see how indifferent they are from a cosmic perspective. We have to "divide and analyze every given object into the material and the causal"[91] and ask ourselves "what is it in itself, in its own constitution? What is its substance and material, and its formal cause? What part does it play in the world? And how long does it subsist?".[92] The process does not end in pessimism about the things in the world and in depression with regard to their ephemeral nature however. By realizing the true nature of things, we will see them as showing the workings of nature, of the whole of causality, and this will once again make them beautiful to us. But it will make them beautiful, not because they appear to further our confused sense of self-interest, but because they show themselves as the result of natural processes:

> "Truths such as this should also be carefully noted, that even the by-products of natural processes have a certain charm and attractiveness. Bread, for instance, in the course of its baking, tends to crack open here and there, and yet these very cracks, which are, in a sense, offences against the baker's art, somehow appeal to us and, in a curious way, promote our appetite for the food." (Med. 3.2)

[89] Med. 2.12
[90] Med. 9.36
[91] Med. 7.29
[92] Med. 8.11

Marcus here illustrates the contrast between our confused sense of self-interest and the cosmic interest. Some events may seem to be evil because they are imperfect to some part of nature, as the cracks in the bread are an imperfection to the baker's art, but from a broader perspective they have a charm and attractiveness that can be recognized by everyone. But even "the gaping jaws of a lion, and poison, and every noxious thing, from a thistle to a quagmire, are by-products of what is sublime and noble. Do not suppose, then, that these are alien to what you revere, but direct your thoughts to the common source of all things".[93] Marcus' apparent pessimism is thus only the first step, one of detachment from externals, towards the cosmic perspective from which everything shows its beauty as being a result of nature and destiny. The road to the achievement of this perspective is provided by the same epistemic attitude that realizes a reasonable and selfless behavior towards others. This epistemic attitude is an unyielding dedication to the avoidance of accepting anything false, even though the whole truth may not always be gained, which is a shared feature of Stoic and Skeptic epistemology and psychology but in which the Stoics takes up a position that is clearly more positive.

[93] Med. 6.36

Chapter 3: The Mind

1. Introduction

Marcus' seemingly extreme position with regard to externals is part of the way he tries to internalize the Stoic epistemic ideal of only allowing your judgements to involve objective facts about the world and not mistakenly ascribing value to things to which value cannot and should not be ascribed. In this Marcus and the Stoics allow for a conceptual distinction between the internal and external world: the concept of value is not applicable to anything external. Although Marcus does not subscribe to a metaphysical dualism as Plato does, he does need a conceptual dualism which separates our psychological experience from others and from the outside world. The extreme separation and more negative attitude towards impressions occasionally shown by Marcus does not imply a metaphysical separation but can be explained in line with early Stoic psychology and epistemology.

2. Sensation and Impressions

At 7.66, Marcus says that what we ought to examine about Socrates in order to judge him, is what kind of soul he had. Part of this consists in asking whether Socrates was "submitting his mind to the seductive influence of the passions of the flesh".[94] In Chapter 2 I have shown how Marcus connects these passions of the flesh with the "physical" *pneuma* which is not part of the soul in the strict sense, i.e. the *hêgemonikon*. These influences are thus not explained with reference to a Platonic or Aristotelian irrational part of the soul. In a way Marcus follows what Socrates says in the *Phaedo*, namely that

[94] The term translated as "seductive influence" by Hard here is *sumpathê*, meaning the reciprocal affection between the parts of a system, usually either the universe or a human being. Both Marcus (Med. 4.27) and Epictetus (Disc. 1.14.1) use it explicitly in this sense.

philosophy is the key to preventing the mind to subject itself to the body.[95] However, Socrates calls the body the prison of the soul, and it is the passions of the flesh that come as a result of sensory perception that attach the soul more and more to the body, making it more corporeal and preventing it from departing in purity to the other world. The intellect, then, has to separate itself from the deception of the senses because only *it* can see things as they really are. Marcus does not accept this strong distinction between the intellect and the body, where it is not the attribution of value to externals that causes passions, as it is for the Stoics, but the other way around: "The evil is that the soul of every man, when it is greatly pleased or pained by anything, is compelled to believe that the object which caused the emotion is very distinct and very true; but it is not".[96] Marcus does link sensory perceptions to the body,[97] but this is because perception is a process in which the body and *pneuma* are affected together, after which the effect is transmitted by and through the *pneuma* to the *hêgemonikon*. In 2.17 he calls perceptions "dim" (*amudros*) and in 5.33 both dim and easily mis-impressed (*euparatupôtos*). Marcus also exhorts himself on more than one occasion to "wipe out" impressions and at times shows a hostile attitude towards them:

> "What is this that you are doing, impression?[98] Go away, in the name of the gods, just as you came; for I have no need of you. But you have come according to your age-old habit. I am not angry with you: only, go away!" (Med. 7.17)

[95] *Phaedo* 82d-83c
[96] *Phaedo* 83c
[97] Med. 3.16; 12.1
[98] I have translated *ô phantasia* as "impression" because it keeps the terminology constant and because I think Hard's translation as "my imagination" is misleading because it can suggest that the term refers only to self-created impressions rather than to all thoughts as it does for the Stoics.

Taken on its own, this passage seems indeed to indicate that Marcus wants to refuse any and every impression that imposes itself on him from the outside world and on most other occasions when he is advising himself on what to do with impressions, he is also telling himself literally to wipe them out (*exaleipsai*).[99] If we take "impression" here only to mean "sensory perception", Marcus' advice would amount to a complete isolation from the outside world, and could be seen as a way to separate the intellect from the material world. This is not the case, however, Marcus uses "impression" in the Stoic sense which covers all thought contents.[100] Furthermore, we should interpret "wiping out" in a different way than as a complete rejection of an impression. In another passage that deals with impressions, we find a slightly more nuanced formulation, and one that is strongly connected to the Stoic theory of perception, belief and knowledge: "[…] in all your impressions preserve the *katalêptikon* (that which is grasped)."[101] The concept of the *katalêptikon* is characteristic of Stoic epistemology and goes back to its founder Zeno who distinguished a particular type of impression that is related to "grasping" in two ways: firstly, it is a "grasper" (*katalêpton*) of its object - which makes it an adequate impression of whatever it represents - and secondly, when this impression is received and accepted by the agent, i.e. the agent recognizes it as an adequate impression, the act of accepting is itself called a "grasping" (*katalêpsis*) by the agent.[102] These two ways of grasping signify two ways in which one impression is related to either its object or the agent. For the Stoics it is not enough that an impression is adequate, the agent also has to recognize and accept it as such. A *katalêptikon* is different from a *katalêpton* because it signifies the object of an act of *katalêpsis* by the agent rather than a "grasper" of an object. Marcus thus correctly refers to the second kind of grasping as the moment which is important to the agent. He tells himself to preserve all adequate impressions in the way they are first received; and in another passage he reveals in

[99] Med. 5.2; 7.29; 8.29; 9.7. (In 5.2 *apaleipsai*: to wipe off, rather than *exaleipsai*: to wipe out / cover up)
[100] DL 7.51: „According to them some impressions are data of the senses and others are not […] Those which are rational are processes of thought."
[101] Med. 4.22
[102] Cicero, *Academica* 1.40-1 = LS 40B

what way we could fail to do this: “Say nothing more to yourself than what the first impressions report. You have been told that some person is speaking ill of you? That is what you have been told: as to the further point, that he has harmed you, that you have not been told.”[103] The “first impressions” refers to adequate impressions, thus to what Zeno called *katalêpta*. If a perception is unclear - e.g. you are seeing someone from a distance and cannot entirely make out who it is - in that case still the impression itself is not telling you anything that is not there, it is just unclear. It is always something you yourself add that will cause you to be mistaken about what you are seeing. Unclear impressions are therefore dangerous because it is tempting to tell yourself more than what this impression itself reports when you accept it; you are therefore “easily mis-impressed” when you do not preserve, or protect, the *katalêptika* that you received, but add to them, thereby altering them and allowing them to become inadequate. Marcus speaks correctly of adding to the *katalêptikon* rather than to the *katalêpton*, i.e. to the object of the act of grasping by the agent. The difference is small of course, because we are talking about the same impression in its different relations, but the important difference is that the *katalêptikon* refers to the impression as it is being received and therefore the moment of adding is not placed at the arrival of the impression itself but at the reception and acceptance of it. Moreover, the fact that Marcus says “do not *tell* yourself more” also indicates that he is talking about the way the perception is accepted by the agent. Therefore, even though he does not make the distinction between *katalêpton* and *katalêptikon* himself, it is clear that Marcus follows Stoic theory of perception correctly when he talks about adding to the *katalêptikon*.

In both 2.17 and 5.33, where Marcus says perception is dim, he goes on to give advice on what to do in life. On neither occasions does he give any “Platonic” advice of separating the mind from the flesh, but rather gives thoroughly Stoic prescriptions such as accepting fate, putting up with others, awaiting death

[103] Med. 8.49

“with a cheerful smile as being nothing other than the releasing of the elements from which every living creature is compounded” and remembering that the things of the flesh are not your own nor in your power. This last advice is thoroughly Epictetian and should not be taken as a separation from the senses, but as a correct attitude towards them, as is clear from a chapter where Marcus recognizes the common ground between the Stoics and Epicurus:

> “In the case of every pain have this thought at hand, that there is nothing wrong in this nor does it make our governing intellect worse than it was; for neither in so far as it is rational nor in so far as it is concerned for the common good does pain cause it any harm. With regard to most pains, furthermore, let this saying of Epicurus come to your aid, that ‘pain is neither unendurable nor everlasting, if you keep its limits in mind and do not add to it through your own imagination (προσδοξάζῃς)’.”[104]

The precepts of the *Phaedo*, of resisting sensory perceptions as deceptive and of using the mind to apprehend the invisible truth, are explicitly rejected by Marcus in favour of the Stoic theory of keeping perceptions “pure”, i.e. of not adding any unjustified value-judgements to them:

> “[…] you must not try to resist the sensation, which is natural, yet the governing part must not of itself add the judgement that it is either good or bad”[105].

[104] Med. 7.64; The formulation “add to it through your own imagination” suggests something different than I have explained, but we have to keep in mind first of all that the word used here is προσδοξάζῃς and is Epicurean rather than Stoic. This is however not directly inconsistent with Stoic doctrine.
[105] Med. 5.26; after “add” I left out “to the affection” as it says in Hard’s translation because this is not present in the Greek and makes it seem that Marcus specifies what is exactly being added to.

What Marcus is trying to get rid of or "wipe out" is thus not so much any impression in general, but one to which some addition has been made. The *Meditations* is not a theoretical Stoic work, but one that is meant as an instrument to internalize the Stoic doctrine, therefore stronger formulations such as the "wiping out of impressions", although technically not the best, are to be expected and required in order to achieve the best results. The similarities and references to Stoic doctrine, however, leave no doubt that Marcus did understand and apply the Stoic theory. The reason why we should wipe out the impressions that have been incorrectly augmented, is because they leave traces in the mind that make us more prone to make the same wrong judgement the next time. As Marcus puts it: "As are your habitual impressions, so will your mind be also; for the soul takes its colouring from its impressions".[106] The terminology of "wiping out" (*exaleipsai*) probably comes from Epictetus, who uses it to describe the same idea:

> "For when once you conceive a desire for money, if reason be applied to bring you to a realization of the evil, both the passion is stilled and our governing principle is restored to its original authority; but if you do not apply a remedy, your governing principle does not revert to its previous condition, but, on being aroused again by the corresponding external impressions, it bursts into the flame of desire more quickly than it did before. (…) Certain imprints and weals are left behind on the mind, and unless a man erases (*exaleipsêi*) them perfectly, the next time he is scourged upon the old scars, he has weals no longer but wounds." (Diss. 2.18-8.14)

Marcus has apparently taken this lesson from Epictetus to heart, a lesson which we already find attributed to Socrates. It is thus not a Platonic separation of the intellect from the material world

[106] Med. 5.16

that these Stoics have in mind, but a Socratic ethical training of the mind to accept only adequate impressions.

3. Judgement and Belief

In the passage from Med. 5.26 quoted above, Marcus says that what is added when a sensation is misinterpreted is a judgement. In traditional Stoic doctrine, an impression can be either assented to or rejected. For example: to perceive a house and judge it as desirable is to receive an impression of it, either from perception or memory, and adding to it the predicate "desirable" and assenting to the resulting proposition "this is such-and-such a house which is desirable". Because the visual impression and the proposition are just different forms of the same content, the one an image and the other a verbalization, assenting to an impression also includes assenting to the accompanying proposition. Assenting to such a mental verbalization means accepting an impression as well as your interpretation of it and internalizing its content. The act of assenting can therefore also be called a judgement, i.e. the action of accepting a certain proposition or adopting a certain belief. It is clear that Marcus also accepts the Stoic doctrine of assent and the conditions on which one is to give or withhold it: "[…] things go well for a rational creature when it never gives its assent to a false or doubtful impression […]".[107] In 5.26, where Marcus says a judgement should not be added, he is actually combining two things: adding something to an impression, and assenting to such an impression. When we compare judging an impression purely as it appears to a case in which one adds something to the impression and thus includes something in the judgement that is not justified by the original impression and thus would not be there if one only assented to the original impression, we can see how Marcus saw no problem in

[107] Med. 8.7

formulating the latter as "adding a particular judgement". Technically, one should not say that a judgement is being added to the impression but that a judgement is made in which something added is contained. Marcus' formulation in this particular passage seems to bring him closer to the Epicurean position, but other passages confirm that Marcus is adopting the Stoic position and that this flexibility in his formulations actually allows him to draw the Epicurean position closer to the Stoic one than the other way around.

Of course, one also has the option to refuse assent and thus reject the impression to which assent is refused, presumably because one does not agree with its contents. According to Stoic doctrine, one should not agree with its contents as soon as something has been added that does not belong in the original impression and we have seen above that Marcus adopts these criteria. In other words, one should not assent in the case where the received impression does not "grasp" its object any more. Even though Marcus is again not technically correct in his formulation of this, the consistency of his incorrectness actually shows that he understands and accepts the Stoic position rather than the Epicurean one: "It is sufficient that your present judgement should grasp its object (…)".[108] Technically a Stoic would have to say that it is sufficient to judge something *as it* grasps its object, in other words to assent only to a *katalêpton*. Marcus formulates it as the *judgement* grasping its object instead of the *impression* grasping it. He cannot hold at the same time that the judgement grasps the object and that a judgement is something that can be added to sensation, so it must be that in both cases he is taking the same shortcut from impression to judgement and thus by "adding the judgement" he must be taken to mean "to make a judgement in which something added is present" - the actual adding having been done to the impression. By "your present judgement should grasp its object" we should take him to mean

[108] Med. 9.6.

"you must presently judge something as it grasps its object" – the actual grasping being done by the impression.

Just as when Marcus tells himself to "wipe out" impressions, he actually means to refuse assent specifically to those impressions to which one has made additions, he also makes shortcuts when talking about judgements. Pierre Hadot was not far off when he wrote that "Marcus has a frequent tendency to confuse judgement and representation [*phantasia*]; in other words, he identifies representations with inner discourse which enunciates their content and their value".[109] But I think the explanation I have given shows that he does not so much confuse the impression with the judgement, but that by lacking the technical Stoic distinction between impressions and propositions - which is not that big a confusion because the proposition belongs to the impression as it is grasped by the soul and it is not completely unjustified to take the two together under a broad definition of impression – he makes a shortcut to the judgement. Because of this shortcut Marcus cannot elucidate the difference between the formulation "wiping out impressions" and "suppressing judgement", because the former refers primarily to getting rid of a particular mental verbalization of the representation which goes together with not assenting to it.

Value-judgements about external things are always unjustified according to Marcus, they are not contained in the objects themselves and one should not add them to these. Even if they are generally conceived to have a certain value and one is involuntarily impressed by them, one always has the option not to judge them in this way, but to see them as they truly are:

[109] Hadot (1996), P. 103

> “Let anything from outside that so wishes happen to the parts of me which can be affected by this event, for it is up to them, if that is their will, to make their complaint. But I myself, if I do not suppose that anything bad has happened to me, have yet to suffer any harm; and it is open to me not to make that supposition.” (Med. 7.14)

Again, we find the same elements. Perception, i.e. sensory impression, is a process which happens to a person involuntarily but the added attribution of value is made by the person himself, not contained in the image itself, i.e. in *to katalêpton*, but added to the mental verbalization. Furthermore the choice to give or withhold assent is completely “up to us”, things themselves cannot force us to consider them good or evil, because their influence ends with sending a *katalêpton* our way, which is why Marcus repeatedly says that things themselves stand outside the soul, they do not know anything, do not report anything and they cannot “touch the soul”, i.e. the soul in the strict sense. What reports is the *hêgemonikon* and it does so by its judgement.[110] Our job, then, in order to live the best possible life, is to refrain from giving things outside us value: “Live constantly the highest life. This power is in a man’s soul, if he is indifferent to what is indifferent”.[111]

4. Impulse and Emotion

> “Here, then, is what is of true value, and if this be well, you will not endeavour to obtain for yourself any one of the rest. Will you not cease to value many other things besides? Then you will not be free (*eleutheros*) or

[110] Med. 4.3; 5.19; 6.52; 9.15
[111] Med. 11.16

> self-contained (*autarkês*) or passionless (*apathês*); for you will be obliged to entertain envy and rivalry, to regard with suspicion those who are able to take away those things, to plot against those who have what is valued by you. To sum up, he who feels the want of any one of those things must be sullied thereby and besides must often blame the gods. But to reverence and value your own understanding will make you acceptable to yourself, harmonious with your fellows, and in concord with the gods; that is, praising whatsoever they assign and have ordained." (Med 6.16)[112]

If you are not indifferent towards indifferent things, but value anything besides your own understanding, you will not be free, self-contained and passionless according to Marcus. Instead, you will be a slave exactly because of the passions (*pathê*) that result from this mistaken attitude; you will be obliged to busy yourself with envy, rivalry, suspicion and blame, which enslave you not only because they keep you from doing anything you yourself would choose to do, if you were not so busy acting according to them, but also because they prevent you from having peace of mind and tranquillity. This is why Marcus says in 5.2: "How simple to reject and to wipe away every disturbing or alien imagination, and straightway to be in perfect calm". "To be in perfect calm" here means the same as to "be free or self-contained or passionless" and this results from not accepting impressions of, i.e. judging, indifferent things as having either positive or negative value. Moreover, Marcus here explicitly connects the "wiping-out" of impressions with rejecting them. Marcus is referring to the traditional Stoic doctrine of *apatheia*: a *pathos* results from assent to a particular kind of impression, namely one which, first of all, is of such a nature that it will lead to action and secondly, contains the attribution of value to something that is in reality indifferent. Action occurs in virtue of an impulse (*hormê*), which is a command of the *hêgemonikon* to perform some action. This command is not different from the assent to the impression that suggests the action; as "judgement" refers to assent as that which forms belief, "*hormê*" refers to

[112] Cf. Med. 6.41

assent as that which initiates action, but ultimately both are aspects of assent.[113] A *hormê* therefore only, and always, occurs when assent occurs to a so-called *phantasia hormêtikê*, an impulsive, i.e. action-directed, impression. When the *hormê* results from a *phantasia hormêtikê* that involves the attribution of value to something that is indifferent, it is called unreserved and excessive and goes by the name *pathos*, usually translated "passion" or "emotion".[114]

The connection between mistaken value-attribution and *hormai* and that between *hormai* and *pathê* is never made as explicit by Marcus as it is in earlier Stoic texts. The passage above nonetheless shows the relation between value and *pathê*, although it leaves out the role of *hormê*, and in another place Marcus reveals the role of judgement in the process: "Get rid of the judgement; you are rid of the 'I am hurt', get rid of the 'I am hurt', you are rid of the hurt itself".[115] The 'I am hurt' clearly refers to the formation of a belief, i.e. to a proposition to which one has assented. The first advice clearly makes sense then, and is even almost tautological: not making this judgement will prevent you having this belief. The other consequence is that you will be rid of the hurt itself when the belief is gone. In other words, the affection of being hurt depends on the belief that some bad thing is happening or, in more general and technical Stoic vocabulary: the *pathos* depends on assent to an impression to which one has mistakenly added value. Marcus never makes the technical details and distinctions explicit even though it is clear from his quoting of Epictetus that he is well aware of the relation of *hormai* to assent and value:

[113] LS 33I = Stobaeus 2.97,15 – 98,6 (=SVF 3.91): „They say that all impulses are acts of assent, and the practical impulses also contain motive power. But acts of assent and impulses actually differ in their objects: propositions are the objects of acts of assent, but impulses are directed towards predicates, which are contained in a sense in the propositions."

[114] For accounts of Stoic action-theory see Inwood (1985), Ch. 3, Brennan (2005), Ch. 5-7 and Graver (2007)p. 24-28

[115] Med. 4.7

> "He [Epictetus] said too: 'you must find out an art of assent, and keep your attention fixed in the sphere of the impulses, that they may be controlled by reservation, be social, and in proportion to value; […]" (Med. 11.37)

Marcus does refer to the term *hormê* in some form on a number of occasions, but he always does so either in very general terms or in its relation to action, never explicitly in its relation to assent. For example he says that death is repose from the "string-pulling" of impulse (*hormêtikês neurospastias*), that just as the body is characterized by perception, the soul is characterized by *hormai* and that "good fortune means good disposition of the soul, good *hormai*, good actions".[116] Marcus nevertheless clearly follows what Epictetus says in the passage above, that the right assent results in a "good" *hormê* which is *a hormê* controlled by reservation (*meth' hupexairesis*).[117] Even though Brad Inwood has made an impressive start with it, determining the exact role of reservation in Stoic moral psychology in relation to value and *pathê* is still difficult. For Marcus, reservation is always explained in relation to the proper way of dealing with unintended events, when something or someone prevents your intended action: "[…] to my *hormê* and disposition they form no obstacle because of my reservation and adaptation"[118] and he usually takes this together with the proper attitude towards anything that happens, because in neither case should one feel hindered:

> "The ruling power within, when it is according to nature, makes itself stand against events by always placing itself ready for what is possible and what is assigned to it. For not one particular thing it desires as its material, but it strives after the first event under reservation (*hupexairesis*), and anything that is

[116] Med. 6.28 and Med. 3.16 and further Med. 5.37 (good *hormai*)
[117] Med. 4.1; 5.20; 6.50; 8.41; 9.37
[118] Med. 5.20

presented it makes into material for itself, like fire, because it overcomes whatever comes upon it that would extinguish a small flame. A bright fire swiftly makes into its own what is piled upon it, using it up and by the things there, being upon them, it is raised up bigger." (Med. 4.1)

Reservation is important for preventing *pathê*, but it is separated from whether or not one attributes value to an indifferent. Marcus explains that reservation is about putting your aim in a broader perspective: "[..] and remember that you initiated under reservation and that you did not reach for the impossible. For what then? For such a *hormê*; and that we came upon. What we started out on, that has come into being".[119] Acting with reservation means that we aim only for the *hormê* itself, the initiation of action that is completely in our power, instead of aiming at an imagined outcome of it which is not in our power, and might even prove to be impossible. In the latter case there will still be a *hormê*, but because we are aiming at some imagined outcome of it rather than at the *hormê* itself, any frustration of the imagined outcome will be a frustration of our aim and therefore a frustration, in the emotional sense, to us. Because assent is up to us, *hormê*, being a certain kind of assent looked at from a certain perspective, is also up to us. The decision not to act without reservation is therefore up to us, because we can decide not to assent to any *phantasia hormêtikê* that aims at something that is not in our power but instead only assent to those that aim purely at *having* a certain *hormê*, i.e. at initiating some action regardless of whether we succeed or fail. Although we can decide never to act without reservation, this does not guarantee our ever acting *with* reservation. In order to act with reservation, we need a *phantasia hormetikê* which focuses on our intention, i.e. on having a certain *hormê*, but this depends on how we interpret our impressions. In other words, we might be able to decide not to act without reservation, but that could mean we simply cannot act at all if we don't interpret our impressions in the right way so as to allow us to act with reservation.

[119] Med. 6.50

Besides using *hormê* in the traditional Stoic way of a command of reason to act, Marcus also uses it to include the activities of the *pneuma* outside of the *hêgemonikon*. Marcus usually uses the word *pneuma* specifically to refer to the *pneuma* that pervades the body outside of the soul in the strict sense and he sometimes uses "soul" and sometimes "flesh" to refer specifically to *pneuma* that functions only as *physis*. Similarly, *hormê* refers not only to a command from the *hêgemonikon* that initiates some action, but it also refers to impulses for which *pneuma* as *physis* is responsible. This is why Marcus uses the term "impulse" sometimes in a way that may resemble an irrational force in human beings and tells himself not to be pulled in every direction by them like a puppet.[120] Impulse, just as sense perception, extends outside the *hêgemonikon* in virtue of the fact that breath pervades our whole body and does not just make up our minds. This is why Marcus says that "Any hindrance to sense perception is detrimental to animal nature, as likewise is any hindrance to impulse"[121] and why he assigns sense perception to the body and impulse to breath, because perception is primarily a process in which the body is being acted upon, but impulse refers to the movement of our *pneuma*. The body is made up of the passive elements, *pneuma* of the active ones. It is somewhat curious that Marcus uses *hormê* in this broad sense and it certainly helps him to integrate Platonic elements into his philosophy more easily. It does not, however, commit him to a dualistic position. Marcus still maintains that the soul is *pneuma* and that the mind is part of this *pneuma*. To attribute physiological functions to the *pneuma* that pervades the other parts of the body is not the same as to posit an irrational part of the soul. It is these physiological functions that Marcus sometimes exhibits a negative attitude towards, but in this he is following Epictetus:

[120] Med. 2.2, 6.16, 6.28, 7.3, 7.29, 12.19
[121] Med. 8.41

> "Well, when do we act like sheep: When we act for the sake of the belly, or of our sex-organs, or at random, or in a filthy fashion, or without due consideration, to what level have we degenerated? To the level of a sheep." (Diss. 2.18.25)

Even though both Marcus and Epictetus express themselves very negatively towards bodily functions, they do not assume the existence of an irrational part of the soul, but even when they speak of the filthy habits of men, they explain it in Stoic epistemological terms:

> "What, then, can that be which makes the soul dirty and unclean in these functions [choice, refusal, desire, aversion, preparation, purpose and assent]? Nothing but its erroneous decisions. It follows, therefore, that impurity of a soul consists of bad judgements, and purification consists in creating with it the proper kind of judgements" (Diss. 4.11.8)

> "Set before your eyes this ease with which reason can make its way through every obstacle (…) and look for nothing beyond; for all other obstacles either relate to that corpse, our body, or else cannot break us or do us any harm whatever without the decision and assent of reason itself." (Med. 10.33)

For both Marcus and Epictetus the ethical ideal remains a matter of making the right judgements, which requires the correct epistemic attitude. They do not assume any irrational part of the soul, nor an intellect that is completely separated from the material world. Both Marcus and Epictetus maintain that the *hêgemonikon* is by nature free and unhindered when it aims at what is in its power and that the cultivation of the *hêgemonikon* is directed at a state in which it accepts only adequate impressions and

aims only at its own intentions, rather than their outcomes. How the body and the *hêgemonikon* are related is a difficult question in Stoicism in general. The *hêgemonikon* has often been described as the Stoic equivalent of, or that which comes closest to, the self,[122] but it is unclear in what sense one could accept this claim. It is not very problematic to talk about the self as equivalent to psychological structure, character or identity, but the term is also used for more problematic concepts such as consciousness, the will, subject or ego. It is in these senses that the self is taken to be something separate from, and irreducible to, the psychological and physiological processes of the mind and it is unclear to what extent these concepts existed in ancient philosophy. Related to this is the idea of the freedom emphasized by Epictetus but also by Marcus Aurelius as close to what we would call freedom of the will. These problems I will explore in the next chapter.

[122] Hadot (1998) p. 112, Long (2012) p. 468

Chapter 4: The Self

1. Introduction

In his *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought*, Christopher Gill remarks that "there are some recent scholarly discussions which suggest that what is new or distinctive about Hellenistic or Graeco-Roman thought in the first and second centuries AD is the emergence of an idea of selfhood centred on self-consciousness, unique individuality, or the first-personal perspective".[123] Gill associates these ideas with conceptions of the self as a unified locus of psychological experience or as the centre of a uniquely first-personal viewpoint, that underlies and is the subject of that experience, and he therefore labels these kinds of conceptions "subjective". The contrasting objective approach is characterized by a rejection of the idea of a peculiarly private, first-personal sphere of experience to which the person as subject has privileged access. The scholarly discussions to which Gill refers focus primarily on the *Discourses* of Epictetus, which we know to have been a strong influence on Marcus.[124] An especially important role in discussions on the emergence of conceptions of self and personhood is given to Epictetus' innovative use of the term *prohairesis* – often translated as moral choice or moral purpose – which Epictetus explicitly identifies with that which is most properly himself. Charles Kahn for example, takes this innovation to be both an important step in the emergence of the concept of "will" and a momentous shift for the evolution of the idea of person- and selfhood.[125] Epictetus supposedly identifies the self with the capacity for choice that is involved in his notion of *prohairesis*. Marcus Aurelius could be taken to have continued this innovation, which would be shown in his strong focus on self-consciousness and the first-personal perspective and his quoting Epictetus' saying that "there cannot be

[123] Gill (2006), p. 325
[124] See Hadot (1998), ch. 4, particularly p. 59-70
[125] Kahn (1988)

a robber of *prohairesis*".[126] However, Marcus does not use the term *prohairesis* itself anywhere else in the *Meditations*; and contrary to the suggestion that choice is given a central role in selfhood, Marcus frequently states that "the wrongdoer acts involuntarily", suggesting not only that completely undetermined choice is impossible but even that every choice is highly, or even completely, determined.

Thus Epictetus had introduced a term that played no significant role in Early Stoicism and which seems to be connected to a more subjective conception of the self and which is seen as a step in the development of a notion of the will. Marcus Aurelius, although being clearly aware of this development and agreeing that *prohairesis* is exclusively under our own control, again gives no important role to the term in his philosophy but returns to the more traditional Stoic terminology. I believe that neither Epictetus nor Marcus Aurelius, despite the introduction of *prohairesis* and the strong focus on the first-personal perspective, deviates from traditional Stoic doctrine by introducing a more subjective conception of the self. To show how Marcus can use *prohairesis* once casually, without being committed to a significantly new conception of the mind or self for which no other indication can be found in the *Meditations*, I want to show that Epictetus' use of *prohairesis* constitutes a shift in emphasis within Stoic doctrine that more clearly avoids the problem of the compatibility of choice and determination, rather than being a deviation from standard doctrine; and that Marcus Aurelius again reformulates the same doctrine, but in more traditional terminology. The traditional Stoic concept of *sunkatathesis was* a clear development and innovation in action-theory compared to the concept of *prohairesis* as used by Aristotle. However, there are first of all significant differences between *sunkatathesis* and what we would call "will" and secondly, the notion of *prohairesis* in Epictetus and subsequently in Marcus Aurelius differs significantly from both *sunkatathesis* and the Aristotelian *prohairesis*.

[126] Med. 11.36: Ληστὴς προαιρέσεως οὐ γίνεται, Haines even translates: „no one can rob us of our free choice".

2. *Prohairesis* and *sunkatathesis*

In tracing what he calls the “discovery of the will”, Kahn identifies four important stages between the philosophy of Aristotle and that of Thomas Aquinas. Two of these four stages are directly related to Stoic philosophy. The first stage is the Stoic innovation of giving a decisive role in theory of action to the notion of *sunkatathesis*, usually translated as “assent” or sometimes as “consent”. The innovation of this notion in relation to Aristotle’s theory of action is that the Stoics singled out and isolated the event that constitutes what we can generically describe as an agreement with something, as separated from both what is being agreed to, the deliberation that may have preceded it and the initiation of action that follows upon it. A concept that is in this way related to *sunkatathesis* and that we find in Aristotle is that of *prohairesis*, which is almost always translated with “choice”. This is however a much broader and coarser notion, but nevertheless one which includes that which the Stoics later singled out as *sunkatathesis*. Aristotle’s *prohairesis* is presented as one of the things that are voluntary and always refers to something that is in our power. He contrasts it with proper desire, because desire is something that can even oppose *prohairesis*; and he also contrasts it with *boulêsis* or wish, because wish does not refer to things that are directly within our power but rather relates to an eventual end, whether that end is in our power or not, and even independent of whether it is possible or not. *Prohairesis* is based on deliberation, which refers to the means to achieve an end rather than to the end itself. More specifically, it is directed at an immediately possible action, which is usually the first in a series of means that is directed at the end one wishes. As an oversimplified example: if my wish is to be a doctor, I can deliberate that I will have to attend medical school and that to do this I will have to fill in a form to apply for medical school. My wish is directed at being a doctor, while my *prohairesis* at this moment is directed at filling in the form. The common translation of *prohairesis* with “choice” raises the question how

Aristotle can maintain, as he does, that *prohairesis* cannot be directed at becoming a doctor, but only at filling in the application form. For it is not uncommon for us to say that one can make the *choice* to become a doctor. Two mistakes are being made with the formulation of this problem, however. First of all, the term *prohairesis* as Aristotle uses it implies a greater degree of commitment than our term "choice". In common language we might say that someone makes a choice without there being any intention at, or commitment to, action involved, in that case "choice" refers only to the *thought* of executing some action or of maintaining some preference. *Prohairesis* for Aristotle, however, refers not only to a thought of this kind but always includes an intention or impulse directed at an action. This is the property Aristotle says that *prohairesis* has in common with desire, and which is why he defines *prohairesis* as "deliberative desire". The second mistake is that of confusing the series of means that lead up to the end with the end itself; in other words, that of confusing "becoming a doctor" with "being a doctor". Wish, for Aristotle, is directed at "being a doctor", because it is normally not the process leading up to being a doctor that one wishes for, it is the eventual end, i.e. the state of being a doctor, at which wish is directed. Aristotle would therefore not deny that one can have a *prohairesis* directed at becoming a doctor, but he would insist that this is just another way of saying that one has a *prohairesis* directed at filling in the application form, because that is the first step in the process that we are calling "becoming a doctor". *Prohairesis* can, however, not be directed at "being a doctor" because it is not directly in our power to be a doctor, i.e. it is not an action we can immediately perform, or a state we can just shift into. To emphasize this aspect of Aristotle's notion of *prohairesis*, I believe it is better translated as "decision" rather than "choice", because this places more emphasis on the commitment that is involved in *prohairesis* as including an intention. It then also immediately becomes clear that Aristotle is perfectly justified in maintaining that one cannot suddenly decide that one is a doctor - at least not without a serious risk of institutionalization - but that one can only *wish* to *be* one and *decide* to take the first step in *becoming* one. This distinction allows us to see more clearly the innovation of *sunkatathesis* in relation

to *prohairesis*. The notion of *prohairesis* includes the impulse or intention directed at an action, namely at the first step towards some specific end. Aristotle does not isolate the agreement from the impulse or initiation of the action. *Prohairesis* is impulsive or initiating in the way desire is, but it is at the same time strongly connected to the preceding deliberation that has led to the formulation of a series of actions that are imagined by the agent to eventually bring about the end one wishes for, and to the agreement to initiate this particular series of actions.

The Stoic notion of *sunkatathesis* refers to a much more specific event that, however much related to a certain proposition and impulse, does not itself include that proposition or impulse in the way *prohairesis* for Aristotle does. Furthermore, *sunkatathesis* is not restricted to the result of prior deliberation, but can occur at any moment at which an impression or proposition has presented itself. Orthodox Stoic theory of action includes *three* factors: *phantasia*, *sunkatathesis*, and *hormê*. A *phantasia* can be any, and any kind of, impression, i.e. either a direct sensory impression, an indirect sensory impression from memory, or even a thought that is not related to one single instance of perception. Some of these *phantasiai* include suggested actions, which means they have the potential of giving rise to a *hormê*, i.e. the initiation of an action in the sense of being a command given by reason that arises in the soul upon assent. In virtue of this, such *phantasiai* are called *phantasiai hormêtikai*. In animals a *phantasia hormêtikê* automatically gives rise to the corresponding *hormê*, in other words: animals act automatically based on what they are presented with, we would perhaps say they act on instinct. Man is different in two regards: first of all, *phantasiai* present themselves to us also as propositions which are our interpretations of them; and secondly, we have the possibility of either “agreeing” with such a proposition or rejecting it. This possibility of “agreeing with” is what the Stoics called *sunkatathesis*. The term was also used for “voting for something” because it literally means “to join in on putting something

down, i.e. a proposition", which perfectly describes the moment someone raises his hand or joins a group of people to indicate he is backing a proposed law or measure. In this meaning the act of agreement is also separated from any discussion of deliberation that has preceded it and any action or event that will result from it. Similarly, in the Stoic psychological sense, even though it is directed exclusively at a specific proposition and it will result in a specific *hormê*, the major difference with Aristotle's *prohairesis* is that *sunkatathesis* refers exclusively to this event of agreement, independently of the content of the proposition and without including the intention or impulse which is separately contained in the notion of *hormê*. This separation of the event of agreement with a proposition, from the rational command that initiates the corresponding action is, I think, rightly described by Kahn as a step in the direction of the development of the notion of the will, understood as our capacity for choice which is closely connected to the self because it guides our consciousness and guarantees our freedom. The Stoics were the first to isolate an event of assent or agreement from whatever is being assented to and, more importantly, from the initiation of the action itself. This is a moment in the explanation of action that is completely defined by our decision alone and the formulation of such a notion is therefore essential to the development of such a notion of the will. This does not mean, however, that the notion of *sunkatathesis* is equal, or even very close to that of the will. First of all, the Stoics' complete materialism means that *sunkatathesis* is not an act of the mind acting independently from the body, but it also occurs as a physical change in the *pneuma* that constitutes the soul. It is therefore not a feature that is unique to the first-personal perspective. Secondly, even though it is characterized by the Stoics as free and as that which provides us with our freedom, this freedom is not equivalent to the freedom of undetermined choice that is usually involved in the notion of "free will". Gilbert Ryle also traces back "volitions" or "acts of the will" to the Stoics,[127] but based on his description of them as "mental thrusts" that play a causal part in the mind-body relationship it is unclear whether he is referring to *sunkatathesis*

[127] Ryle (1949), p. 63

or to *hormai*, the latter of which seems a much better candidate for "mental thrusts". Whichever one he means, the Stoics are not vulnerable to his criticism of the concept of "volition" because neither aspect of the *hêgemonikon* plays this role of translating mental phenomena into physical ones; both of them can be described either as mental or as physical. Nonetheless, the separation of *sunkatathesis* from the *phantasia* and the *hormê* is an essential step towards the concept of the will in which it is given this causal and transitional role. Epictetus' use of *prohairesis* may have been partly based on *sunkatathesis*, but it does not continue this development towards the concept of the will.

For the early Stoics, *prohairesis* was not an important term at all. *Phantasia*, *sunkatathesis* and *hormê* make up the repertoire of the *hêgemonikon* or ruling-centre of the soul. In the *Discourses* of Epictetus, the term *prohairesis* is given a central role again and from some passages we can see a close relationship to *sunkatathesis* because it is there characterized as free and unhindered and as that which is unique to man. For example, Epictetus says: "Man, you have a *prohairesis* free by nature from hindrances and constraint"[128] and "Consider who you are. To begin with, a Man; that is, one who has no quality more sovereign than *prohairesis*"[129] and also "There cannot arise a robber of *prohairesis*, nor any tyrant over it".[130] On numerous other occasions, Epictetus characterizes *prohairesis* as the only thing that is "up to us", i.e. that is under our control and that cannot be hindered or constrained by anyone or anything else. Furthermore, only in reference to *prohairesis* can anything ever be said to be good or evil and *it*, like *sunkatathesis*, plays a pivotal role in the correct use of *phantasiai*, which is Epictetus' formulation of the essence of the Stoic ethical ideal. But unlike *sunkatathesis*, *prohairesis* for Epictetus is, time and time again, explicitly identified with that which is most properly himself, most famously in a passage where he imagines being threatened, probably by a tyrant, for information:

[128] Diss. 1.17.21
[129] Diss. 2.10.1
[130] Diss. 3.22.105

> "Tell your secrets." I say not a word; for this is under my control. "But I will fetter you." What is that you say, man? Fetter me? My leg you will fetter, but my *prohairesis* not even Zeus himself has power to overcome. "I will throw you into prison." My paltry body, rather! "I will behead you." Well, when did I ever tell you that mine was the only neck that could not be severed?" (Diss. 1.1.23)

If we assume that *prohairesis* is Epictetus' development of *sunkatathesis*, his identification of it with that which is most properly himself in these passages seems to suggest, not only that he gives an additional role to the Stoic concept of *sunkatathesis* as expounded by Chrysippus and the other early Stoics, but also that he makes an innovative move in identifying himself with his capacity to choose. Thus, Charles Kahn says: "Epictetus is faithful to the orthodox Stoic view of assent as the decisive moment of rational control over action, but instead of expounding the classical theory of *sunkatathesis*, he prefers to develop two equivalent or closely allied notions which he can formulate in a personal way. The first is what he calls the rational "use of impressions," […] The other concept is *prohairesis"*.[131] Furthermore, Epictetus' identification of *prohairesis* with that which is most properly himself can lead us to the conclusion that he develops a conception of the self that consists essentially of a separate subject that is free to give or withhold assent to impressions and thereby make the choice of either initiating or refusing a certain suggested action. Kahn interprets this move not only as an important step in the discovery of the will, but also as the formulation of "the true self, the inner man, the 'I' of personal identity" which he calls the late Stoic parallel to a Cartesian *cogito* or focus on consciousness. Anthony Long also identifies *prohairesis both* with the faculty of assent *and* with the essential self and the bearer of personal identity. *Prohairesis*, according to Long, is a state of the *hêgemonikon* or "commanding part" which he describes as the subject to which things appear and which responds to representations. He

[131] Kahn (1988), p. 251-252

agrees with Kahn that Epictetus identifies himself not with reason as such but with “the practical application of reason in selecting his commitments, in keeping his emotional balance, his serenity, by not extending himself to goals and values that lie beyond his control”.[132]

The identification of *prohairesis* with a type of rational choice or decision that is identified with the self raises questions about a number of passages where this faculty, or the self, seems to be either multiplied or in some way made to disappear. In a couple of passages, Epictetus recognizes two kinds of *prohairesis*. In 1.17.25-26 he returns to a discussion of the situation of being compelled by someone through fear of death. He says that in this case, it is not the person who would kill you that compels you, but it is your opinion that it is better to do what he says than to die, that compels you, i.e. *prohairesis* compels *prohairesis*; in another passage he says that nothing else can overcome prohairesis but itself and similarly he says that nothing can hamper or injure *prohairesis* but *prohairesis* itself.[133] Secondly, Epictetus sometimes refers to destroying, losing or selling your *prohairesis*; and in the last case he also talks about *you* selling *yourself*, seemingly recognizing two selves, just as when he says that God has entrusted me to myself and subjected my *prohairesis* to me alone.[134] In another passage, Epictetus says that one can locate “I” either in the flesh or in externals or in *prohairesis*, thus apparently maintaining an “I” that exists separately from *prohairesis*:

> “For where one can say “I” and “mine,” to that side must the creature perforce incline; if they are in the flesh, there must the ruling power (*to kurieuon*) be; if they are in externals, there must it be. If,

[132] Long (1991), p.112
[133] Resp. Diss. 1.29.12 and 3.19
[134] Diss. 4.12.12

therefore, I am where my *prohairesis* is, then, and then only, will I be the friend and son and the father that I should be."[135]

Epictetus is, however, not trying to locate the self in a particular place or part of himself and neither is he identifying the self with *prohairesis*. Richard Sorabji has addressed the problem of Epictetus' use of more than one *prohairesis* and has attempted to find a solution by reference to passages in which Epictetus mentions bad *prohairesis*.[136] Most of these passages are ones in which Epictetus explains that evil or the essence of evil consists in a kind of *prohairesis*[137] but in one passage he says that nothing can hinder *prohairesis* except *prohairesis* itself when it becomes perverted. Sorabji suggest that in cases where there are two *prohaireseis*, Epictetus refers to perverted and unperverted *prohairesis*. By locating "I" outside of *prohairesis* in externals, he therefore means locating it in perverted *prohairesis* because even the choice of flesh or externals represents some kind of rational choice, albeit a perverted one. The cases of selling or destroying *prohairesis* are cases of bad choices that are not *described* as *prohairesis* because they can only be perverted *prohairesis*.

This solution seems to me unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. First of all, in the passage just quoted it seems incredibly roundabout to talk about "saying 'I' and 'mine' in the flesh or in externals and thereby placing the ruling power there" if Epictetus means nothing more than *choosing* flesh or externals. Furthermore, if locating "I" in externals is also some kind of *prohairesis*, it does not make sense to contrast it with *prohairesis* generally. For the same reason perverted *prohairesis* does not explain how valuing externals destroys *prohairesis* if this valuing is just another kind of *prohairesis*. The case of selling

[135] Diss. 2.22.19-20
[136] Sorabji (2007)
[137] Diss. 1.29.1, 2.1.6, 4.5.32

prohairesis is different altogether because Epictetus uses this to refer to the great and pre-eminent deeds of Socrates and the like for which they paid with their life and thus with their *prohairesis.* We can thus be sure he does not regard these as cases of perverted *prohairesis*. This does not mean that there is no such thing as bad or perverted *prohairesis*, Epictetus clearly holds that there is, but where he does it is clear that there is a transition from the one to the other, not the two existing together. For example in 1.18.8 he says that the wrongdoer has been deprived of such a *prohairesis* that is the greatest thing a man can have. Here Epictetus specifically refers to a kind of *prohairesis* and the loss thereof and it is this kind of situation that will result in bad or perverted *prohairesis*. I believe that the passages in which more than one *prohairesis* figure, or where *prohairesis* is combined with a separate "I" cannot be explained by reference to perverted and unperverted rational choice. When Epictetus says that *prohairesis* compels *prohairesis* he is not necessarily talking about a wrong act. Giving in to the tyrant in order to avoid certain death is not necessarily a wrong act for Epictetus, but depending on your social role and the responsibilities and expectations that result from it, it can even be good to do so. For example, imagine a single mother of 6 children being forced to wash the clothes of a tyrant or be killed. Epictetus would say that her role as a mother makes it much more important for her to stay alive, because in virtue of that she has taken on a number of responsibilities and furthermore, the thing she has to do to stay alive is not really bad or unworthy enough to avoid by choosing death. It is therefore clear that giving in to the tyrant is not necessarily a case of *perverted prohairesis* compelling unperverted *prohairesis*, but it *is* a case of *prohairesis* compelling *prohairesis* because also in this case the woman's thinking that it would be better to wash the clothes than to die is what compels her to do so.

What I would like to suggest is that Epictetus is not elevating *prohairesis* to the true self, but rather that he is calling the mind *prohairesis*, i.e. that he uses *prohairesis* as synonymous with *hêgemonikon*. He uses

it to refer to the mind in general, as that which assents, has intentions and puts its interest in certain things, but also to refer to the qualities of a particular *hêgemonikon* in terms of its preferences and tendencies, what we would refer to as one's character. The reason that Epictetus uses *prohairesis* in these two ways is that the term is very well suited to capture *both* the meaning of general preferences or tendencies that make up our character *and* that of an act of preferring some specific thing before others or placing some specific thing before yourself as that towards which you direct your intention and in which you place your interest. *Prohairesis* can mean choice or intention but also plan, purpose or policy and even a political party, sect, or school of music or philosophy.[138] By using one term to refer to the two most important aspects of the *hêgemonikon* that figure in practical ethics, Epictetus can emphasize the intimate reciprocal relationship between these two aspects, as well resolving the tension between them by emphasizing the fact that they are aspects of the same thing, i.e. the *hêgemonikon*. The problem of *prohairesis* being the only thing compelling, impeding or harming *prohairesis* itself, makes perfect sense when *prohairesis* refers to thinking or the mind in these two aspects. Your mind as having a certain intention cannot be compelled or hindered by anything external, but only by the mind itself. It can, and actually always is, compelled by itself because whatever we intend is determined by the preferences and tendencies that make up our mind. In this sense *prohairesis* can never hinder itself directly, because it actually always compels itself, it can, however, hinder itself indirectly in its future operations when it endangers its natural freedom.

Prohairesis is by nature free, but we can only keep it free by only setting value on that which is up to us, and the only thing up to us is *prohairesis* itself. Externals are all *aproaireta* and therefore not under our control. Just as Aristotle, Epictetus holds that everyone assumes that the good is something profitable and something to be chosen. Unlike Aristotle, however, he defines the differences between people's

[138] See Liddel-Scott-Jones entry for *prohairesis*

desires and actions, not as different definitions of the good but as different applications of the preconception of the good.[139] Epictetus also takes over the orthodox Stoic doctrine that every living thing is to nothing so devoted as to its own interest and that what a man is interested in he correspondingly loves.[140] Men therefore take an interest in good things only, and love them, and whatever stands in the way of them acquiring their interest, they hate, accuse and curse. This is the context in which Epictetus says that one can place "I" and "mine" in flesh, externals or *prohairesis*. By placing "I" and "mine" somewhere he means placing one's interest or that which one considers profitable (*to sumpheron*) there. By placing our interest in flesh or externals we are destroying the natural freedom of *prohairesis* by making it a slave to things that are not under our control. Bad *prohairesis* therefore, is not merely a bad decision, it is a mind which puts its interest in things which are not under its control. By doing this it hinders itself because it compels itself to direct its interest in a way that destroys its natural freedom. But, as Epictetus says in another passage, if we define the good as consisting in a right *prohairesis*, then the mere *preservation* of the relationships of life becomes a good.[141] It is not the relationships themselves that are good but the intention to preserve them in which we have put our interest that is good. Relationships themselves are clearly ranked among indifferents by Epictetus.[142]

Epictetus is thus true to the traditional Stoic doctrine that good and evil consist only in a state of the *hêgemonikon* and that the *hêgemonikon* does not have separate parts or faculties but that all psychological phenomena are certain qualities of the *hêgemonikon* as a whole. The difference with traditional Stoic doctrine is that Epictetus uses the notion of *prohairesis* to focus on the practical

[139] Diss. 1.22
[140] Diss. 2.22
[141] Diss 3.3.8
[142] Diss 1.1.14, 1.22.10 and 4.1.67

application of ethics in which the intimate relationship between our choices and our character is particularly important. Another difference with traditional Stoic doctrine is that Epictetus places more emphasis on the connection between freedom and what is up to us. To be free is a moral quality that consists in knowing what is up to us, namely *prohairesis* and all the deeds of *prohairesis*, and never directing your interest at anything but what is up to us. This is why Epictetus says that *he* is free for whom all things happen according to his *prohairesis*, which can only be achieved by not desiring haphazardly but by directing your interest only at things that cannot fail, i.e. at your intentions. The same doctrine can be found in the writings of Marcus Aurelius, but where Epictetus uses *prohairesis*, Marcus returns to the traditional term *hêgemonikon* or one of a number of practically synonymous terms and he focuses more on the relationship with fate, which provides an interesting perspective for relating the Stoic conception of the self to subjectivity and the notion of free will.

Like Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations* rarely mentions the traditional Stoic notion of *sunkatathesis* but unlike Epictetus, he does not give an important role to *prohairesis* either. Apart from quoting Epictetus verbatim that “there cannot arise a robber of *prohairesis*”, Marcus does not use the term *prohairesis* itself anywhere. He does use the derivative *aproairetos*, when referring to things that are external, and the contrasting term *proairetika*, which refers to things that involve *prohairesis*; but taken together these terms only occur in a total of six chapters in the *Meditations*, and they occur mostly in the later books where quotes of, and references to Epictetus are far more numerous than in the earlier ones. These quotes and references and the fact that he does use these terms a couple of times shows, however, that Marcus was very familiar with the philosophy of Epictetus and his use of *prohairesis*, probably at least in the form in which we now know it, i.e. the first four books of the *Discourses* reported by Arrian, but very likely also from the texts that have since been lost. Some

chapters of the *Meditations* also echo parts of Epictetus' *Discourses* as we know them.[143] In this way we also find passages which echo those in which Epictetus applies the notion of *prohairesis* but without use of this term:

> "These two properties are shared by the souls of God and man alike, and of every rational creature: not to be subject to hindrance from another, and to find one's good in a just disposition and righteous action and to make that the limit of one's desire." (Med. 5.34)

> "As to the operations of your intellect (*nous*), no other person is in a position to hinder them; for neither fire, nor steel, nor a tyrant, nor abuse, can affect the mind in any way. When it has become a 'well-rounded sphere', it always remains so." (Med. 8.41)

> "'They kill you, cut you up, pursue you with curses'" And how does that prevent your mind (*dianoia*) from remaining pure, balanced, temperate, and just? It is as if someone were standing by a sweet, clear-flowing spring and hurling curses at it: but for all that, it never stops brimming over with water good to drink, and if he throws mud into it, or dung, the spring will swiftly disperse it and wash it away, and suffer no defilement." (Med. 8.51)

[143] For example, Epictetus says that it becomes clear that we should not injure the man who has injured us when we reformulate this as: "Since so-and-so has injured himself by doing me some wrong, shall I not injure myself by doing him some wrong?" which is echoed in Med. 6.6 and 9.4.

Instead of using *prohairesis*, Marcus uses *nous*, *logos*, *daimôn* and *dianoia* practically interchangeably. Thus he says that all people partake in *nous* and divinity; that our superior part is *nous* and *daimôn*; That Zeus has given to all men a part of himself which is *nous* or *logos*; that you should make haste to make your *hêgemonikon* a just *nous*; and that if you separate all things external from your *dianoia*, that is from your *hêgemonikon*, that you will have the power to live until you die reconciled with your *daimôn*. Another difference with Epictetus is that Marcus does not focus on the idea of keeping the *hêgemonikon* free and unaffected by external circumstances, but rather formulates this as the *hêgemonikon* being able to adapt itself to whatever it encounters. He compares the *hêgemonikon* with a fire that, when cultivated, burns brightly and appropriates and devours whatever is thrown upon it that would extinguish a smaller flame, and that leaps up higher out of the very obstacles it encounters.[144] This formulation can also be found in Epictetus however, who says that external things are materials for the *prohairesis* and if the *prohairesis* does not admire the materials but makes correct judgements about them, the materials will make the *prohairesis* good.[145] That this formulation of the attitude of the cultivated *hêgemonikon* is not different from that of Epictetus, which focuses on freedom, is shown by the fact that both of them explain this in terms of focusing the *hêgemonikon* on its intentions rather than on externals. We have already seen how this works in Epictetus, by focusing on intentions our interests can never be frustrated and thus we remain free. In the chapter where Marcus compares the *hêgemonikon* to a fire, he explains this by reference to the traditional stoic notion of acting with reservation:

> "The inner sovereignty, when it is according to nature, has so set itself against what happens as to always be able to adapt easily to what is presented to it. For it *loves* nothing that has been set apart

[144] Med. 4.1
[145] Diss. 1.29.1-4

> but sets itself in motion (*hormaô*) towards its object with reservation (*hupexairesis*), and then makes the opposition which encounters it into material for itself." (Med. 4.1)

Like Epictetus, Marcus here uses love (*phileô*) to refer to where one has set his interest and towards what one directs his intention. To remain at peace and be able to adapt oneself to anything that comes to pass, one should not set his interest upon the material itself, but proceed towards it with reservation. To proceed with reservation is explained by Marcus elsewhere as to set one's interest only in one's own intention because this can never be frustrated. He says that to proceed with reservation is never to aim at the impossible but to always achieve what we set out to do,[146] that what is important is the aim of an action[147] and that it is madness to pursue the impossible but it is impossible for evil men not to do so.[148] The difference from Epictetus is that Marcus explicitly says that if you set out to do something and you do not achieve it, that you have set out to do something impossible because it was never fated to happen. More importantly he says that it is impossible for evil men not to do this; because their *hêgemonikon* is in a bad state they are determined to act without reservation. This difference from Epictetus is only due to Marcus' preoccupation with fate, however, it is not a difference in doctrine. Marcus also holds that one should direct one's interest at *prohairesis*, i.e. at one's thoughts and intentions, and that one is free when everything happens according to one's *prohairesis* but that *prohairesis* turns bad when it is directed at externals. He just refrains from taking over this term from Epictetus but instead formulates it in the more traditional Stoic terminology of *hêgemonikon, hormê and hupexairesis*. The characterization of Epictetus' use of *prohairesis* as a step in the development of the notion of the will rests on the interpretation of it as referring to our rational choice, as identified with the self and as that which guarantees our freedom. It does not, however, refer directly to our rational choice

[146] Med. 6.50
[147] Med. 7.58
[148] Med. 5.17

but rather it sometimes refers to the mind as responsible for rational choice. When it is identified with the self, however, it always refers to the mind in general and not just to rational choice. Furthermore, the freedom that is involved in the use of our *prohairesis* is a moral quality based on that which is "up to us". As Bobzien[149] has adequately shown, both what is up to us and the freedom that depends on it never refer to the choice between alternatives or causally undetermined choice. What we find in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius is not an identification of the self with the practical application of reason, but rather a unitary account of reason in which also its practical application in terms of its intentions is included.

3. Mind and Self in the *Meditations*

Whenever one uses the words "I" or "myself", there is in some sense an idea of the self involved, if only as something these words need to refer to. The use of personal and reflexive pronouns does not imply any philosophical conception of the self, however. Long has noted that Marcus often associates the *hêgemonikon* with reflexive pronouns[150] and that he could also have used "I" and "myself" instead of "*hêgemonikon*" and "itself" and that "describing oneself in terms of a *hêgemonikon* sets up a presumption of first-person agency, authority, and leadership, as in saying 'I am the master of my soul'". When he discusses the self with regard to Marcus Aurelius, Long is not concerned with the status of psychological experience or its underlying subject, however, but rather with psychological structure and personal identity. I think the interesting thing about his observation is not so much that Marcus could have used "I" or "myself" in these cases, but the fact that he doesn't. Again, the association with

[149] Bobzien (1998)
[150] Long (2012) p. 469: "The *hêgemonikon* is what activates and adapts itself, makes itself whatever way it wants, and makes everything that happens appear to itself exactly as it wants" (6.8); "How is the *hêgemonikon* treating itself`" (12.33); What am I making of my *hêgemonikon*?" (10.24).

reflexive pronouns in itself does not imply anything about a conception of the self. Just as Marcus says "the *hêgemonikon* activates and adapts itself", one may say "the computer starts itself", "the plant turns itself towards the sun" or "the star burns itself up". What is interesting is that Marcus describes the *hêgemonikon* just as we would describe the computer, the plant or the star, i.e. objectively. To label Marcus' approach to the *hêgemonikon* in these passages "objective" in the sense of regarding it without reference to what Gill calls a peculiarly private, first-personal sphere of experience to which the person as subject has privileged access,[151] does not, however, imply the impossibility or the non-existence of such a sphere of experience. It only implies that there is at least an objective perspective from which the *hêgemonikon* may be regarded and analysed, a perspective in which the *hêgemonikon* can be regarded in more-or-less the same way as any other object. The question whether there can, or must, be a subjective sphere of experience, the denial of which satisfies Gill's criterion of objectivity, is a separate one from the question whether the mind includes a subject which underlies our psychological experiences. Answers to the latter question range from the Cartesian *ego* that serves as a stage for psychological experience to the Humean denial of the existence of anything except a "bundle of perceptions". In between these we can place the Spinozistic position, in which that which makes up the mind is the idea of the body. This last position neither posits a subject nor reduces the mind to what happens in it, but rather it provides a minimalist account of consciousness in the form of an idea that represents the body. I believe Gill made a mistake in not distinguishing these questions in his characterization of 'subjective' and 'objective'.

One could look for a subjective conception of the self in the *Meditations* on the basis of Marcus' advice to "withdraw into yourself" or isolate yourself from everything external. It is however unlikely that "yourself" in these passage refers to anything close to our modern notion of "your self". In relation to

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[151] Gill (2006), p. 325 ; see also the Introduction to this chapter on page 70.

this, Marcus – in what at first sight may seem a very peculiar passage – writes that "yourself" (*autos*) refers to *logos* but continues by granting that "I am not *logos"*. If nothing else, this passage underlines the supposition that "yourself" is something different for Marcus than "I", the latter of which we would identify with "your self". Marcus' advice to withdraw into yourself is a formulation of the ideal, found also in Epictetus, of never putting one's interest in externals but only in the intentions of the *hêgemonikon* itself:

> "Remember that the *hêgemonikon* becomes invincible when it withdraws into itself and is satisfied with itself, doing nothing which it does not will to do, even if its opposition is unreasonable." (Med. 8.48)

Just as Epictetus, Marcus holds that when one puts one's interest only in one's own intentions and nothing else, i.e. when the *hêgemonikon* focuses on itself and is satisfied with what it itself decides to do, nothing can hinder it, not even the natural desires one has that are not a result of the fact that we have a rational soul but of the fact that our *pneuma* also functions as *physis*. Where Epictetus concentrates on the essence of Stoic ethics as "making correct use of *phantasiai*", Marcus tends to focus more on correct judgements. These are two sides of the same coin, however, because a judgement is an assent to a *phantasia*, therefore judging correctly is the same as using *phantasiai* in the correct way. Furthermore, this is very closely related to where you put your interest because as we have seen we put our interest in that which we think is good. To think of something as good is to judge it as good and thus to assent to the *phantasia* that it is good. Marcus repeatedly exhorts himself to refrain from judging externals either good or bad so that he will not find himself either pursuing or avoiding them.[152] This is connected by

[152] Med. 11.11

Marcus explicitly to the intimate reciprocal relationship of reason with itself that is also behind Epictetus' use of *prohairesis* compelling or hindering *prohairesis*:

> "If you cancel your judgement about what seems to pain you, you yourself (*autos*) stand firm on surest ground. 'What is *yourself*?' '*Logos*.' 'But I am not *logos*.' 'Granted; then do not let *logos* itself trouble itself, but if some other part of you is harmed, let it form its own judgement about itself.'" (Med. 8.40)

The advice in this chapter is based on the idea that, in Epictetian terms, only *prohairesis* can hinder itself. If you judge something external as evil, you are putting your interest in avoiding something outside of the *hêgemonikon*; in this case something that you have already failed to avoid and you therefore automatically subject your *hêgemonikon* to hindrance by that external. If it is the body that is harmed, it suffices to let the body, and the corresponding physical *pneuma*, give its natural reaction to that harm, it is not necessary for the *hêgemonikon* also to harm itself on that account. The remark that 'I am not *logos*' here may seem to indicate a subject separate from thinking, but the last sentence makes clear that the distinction between l*ogos* and "I" is one between the *hêgemonikon* and the whole human being which consists of body, *pneuma* and the *hêgemonikon*. Even if it is granted that one is also one's body, it still holds that the *hêgemonikon* should not let itself be affected by what happens to the body, but each part must form its own judgement about itself.[153] *Prohairesis* in Epictetus as identified with himself is thus not different from the *hêgemonikon* in Marcus Aurelius or traditional Stoic doctrine.

Another passage describes elaborately this withdrawal into yourself:

[153] The same can be found in chapters 7.14 and 7.16

> “People seek retreats for themselves in the countryside, by the seashore, in the hills; and you too have made it your habit to long for that above all else. But this is altogether unphilosophical, when it is possible for you to retreat into yourself (εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀναχωρεῖν) whenever you please; for nowhere can one retreat into greater peace or freedom from care than within one’s own soul” (Med. 4.3)

This passage was perhaps inspired by *Phaedo* 83a, where Socrates explains that philosophers realize that their soul is imprisoned by the lusts of the flesh but that philosophy takes possession of the soul, encourages it gently and tries to set it free, pointing out that the senses are full of deceit and urging it to withdraw from these (ἐκ τούτων μὲν ἀναχωρεῖν) and exhorting it to collect and concentrate itself within itself (εἰς αὑτὴν συλλέγεσθαι καὶ ἁθροίζεσθαι). Marcus does not restrict it to the distinction between the mind and the flesh, however. The first example he uses of something for which this retreat will be a remedy is the wickedness of others. The remedy, moreover, is not to abstract oneself from the flesh as in the *Phaedo*, but recall the doctrine that rational creatures have come into the world for the sake of one another. It is thus not a retreat into a Cartesian subject that Marcus is proposing, but merely to rehearse his ethical doctrines so that his mind may be trained not to respond in the way it might be inclined to do when faced with the wickedness of others. This is part of “colouring the mind with its conceptions” which we find explained more elaborately in Epictetus 2.18.8-14. Just as Marcus says in 6.11: “When the force of circumstances causes you, in some sense, to lose your equilibrium, return to yourself with all speed (ἐπάνιθι εἰς σεαυτὸν)”, Epictetus there says that if you do not correct a false judgement, the ruling centre does not return to its established authority. Also in 7.28 and 8.48 Marcus refers to this “withdrawing into yourself” and emphasizes that in this way the mind is content and unconquerable because it is free from passions and does not do anything except what it wishes to do. In 9.42, Marcus uses the formulations “εἰς σεαυτὸν ἐπιστρέφου” in the face of the wickedness of others, and in this

formulation it is even more clear that Marcus does not advocate a withdrawal or abstraction away from the outside world into himself as a separate subject, but rather that he means that one should turn his attention towards himself and examine his own opinions and doctrines, because they are the reason that one is shocked by the wickedness of others.

The fact that both Marcus and Epictetus use "I", "myself" and "mine" to refer to one's intentions and interests and the fact that Marcus only refers to the actions of others as against their will but never to his own *does* indicate that the first-personal viewpoint involves a sphere of experience that has features that are only accessible to that person himself. Long accepts Kahn's conclusion that Epictetus identifies himself with the practical application of reason and because he identifies *prohairesis* with *sunkatathesis*, he concludes that Epictetus does not take *phantasiai* as constitutive of the self but that, "if my representations are up to me to interpret, accept or reject, there must be a 'me' to which they appear and an 'I' which reacts to them – a subject that is identifiable precisely by the representations that it receives and what it does with them."[154] This identification of a separate subject to which representations appear is in my opinion mistaken. It is mostly based on a passage from the second century Stoic Hierocles, who explains that the first thing appropriate to every animal is its own constitution and the consciousness of this and that this representation of itself is a precondition for all other perception. Before we can perceive anything we have a representation of ourselves and our eyes and ears and are aware that the eyes are the parts that are responsible for visual perception, the ears for auditory etc. Long takes this to mean that "in making self-perception basic to animals' life, the Stoics are saying that, in order to live at all, any animal must have some representation of itself, some sense of itself as the subject of its own experiences" and he goes to identify this subject with the *hêgemonikon*. That the object of this self-perception is something like a Cartesian subject is, in my opinion, an

[154] Long (1991), p. 112

unjustified assumption brought about by post-Cartesian philosophy. Moreover, the Stoics insist that without this self-perception there can be no experience, which makes it unlikely that "self-perception" should be taken to refer to perception of the subject to which experiences appear because that interpretation would imply that this subject exists independently of this self-perception and is already able to perceive. It is therefore unlikely that the *hêgemonikon* should be identified with *the subject to which representations appear*, but rather with the principle of transmission of influences from the whole human being to the *pneuma* in the left ventricle of the heart. This principle of transmission can be called "self-perception" because in virtue of this, any influences to the whole human being are being communicated to a central organ and this again is a prerequisite for experiences in a broader sense, particularly sensory impressions, which in turn are a prerequisite for the forming of conceptions and thus for thinking. These further impressions are then described as qualities of the *hêgemonikon*, i.e. as changes in the *pneuma* that are communicated to the *hêgemonikon*. We find this in Iamblichus' *On the Soul*: "Just as an apple possesses in the same body sweetness and fragrance, so too the commanding-faculty combines in the same body impression, assent, impulse, reason."[155] The faculties of the *hêgemonikon* make up the *hêgemonikon*, and so impressions do not appear to it, but are changes to it. The self-perception of a living thing is a result of the interaction between the *pneuma* and the body which communicates to the *pneuma* around the heart. This communication is essential for any further perception of what happens in the body and in the *pneuma*. The *hêgemonikon* is either defined as the part of the *pneuma* that is located in the heart or as consisting of the representations of the changes in the *pneuma* around the heart. In the first seven years the natural preconceptions arise in the *hêgemonikon* in addition to preconceptions that are acquired by learning, and after that the *hêgemonikon* can be called *Logos*. That these are not to be separated from the *hêgemonikon* itself is further shown by Galen's report that Chrysippus described *logos* as a collection of certain conceptions

[155] LS 53K (p. 316)

and preconceptions.[156] The passage in Hierocles must therefore not be understood as describing the animal's sense of itself *as* a separate subject but rather as describing the first and essential quality that makes up the *hêgemonikon*. This is also confirmed by passages from Diogenes Laertius and Alexander of Aphrodisias, where it is said that the dearest thing to any animal is the consciousness of its own constitution.[157] Brennan has explained "its own constitution" in these passages as referring not to the composite of body and soul but to the soul as a principle of composition of the whole compound.[158] Although I agree with the main line of his analysis, I would like to add that this principle of composition should not be regarded as a static disposition of the soul in relation to the body. I believe it refers to the way the soul is influenced by the body and the way it in turn influences the body. It then becomes clear why the mind is, first of all, a form of self-perception, because it is our experience of this reciprocal interaction of body and *pneuma*, all of which is transmitted to the *pneuma* in the heart. The Stoic conception is thus much closer to that of Spinoza than to the Cartesian one. The mind is not a subject to which impressions appear – not a Cartesian theatre as Dennett calls it[159] - it is only defined as the principle of experience of the interaction between *pneuma* and body. Impressions are consequently not things that appear to the mind, but they are single instances of this experience. Perhaps the Stoic conception can be adequately described as Spinozistic with a hint of the Humean "bundle of perceptions".[160] Apart from this assumption of a separate subject, Long's analysis is actually thoroughly non-subjective and I believe it is right on the mark. He runs into difficulties, however, when he comes to the reciprocal determination of *phantasiai* and beliefs or desires. He notes that neither Epictetus nor Marcus Aurelius evades this problem. Marcus says: "Your mind will be just like the repetition of your representations: for the soul is coloured by its representations" and Epictetus says that we assent to

[156] Galen PHP 5.3.1 (=LS 53V)
[157] DL 7.85 and Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima Libri Mantissa* 150.25 = SVF 3.183
[158] Brennan (2009), p. 403
[159] Dennett (1991), Ch. 5
[160] Stoic ontology further supports this resemblance to Spinoza, their insistence on the separate status of incorporeals as not existing but subsisting, although they are dependent on corporeals, suggests a parallelism that is similar to that between the two known attributes (extension and thinking) of substance in Spinoza.

something because it appears to be the case, i.e. we are predisposed to do so. Furthermore, as we have seen, both for Marcus and Epictetus everyone loves and pursues what he thinks is profitable. To resolve this tension, Long can only take recourse to the idea of examining your *phantasiai* before you assent to them, but this seems to me to be inconsistent with the evidence. Both Epictetus and Marcus hold that we are predisposed to act as we do and thus assent is predetermined to occur on the arising of specific impressions. This is very clear in the chapters in which Marcus talks about the wrongs of others. He says that it is impossible for evil men not to act without reservation, that the wrongdoer does wrong involuntarily, and he tells himself to examine the *hêgemonikon* of someone else in order to see why he acts the way he acts and to remind himself that this person is obliged to act that way.[161]

Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius are both completely committed to a deterministic world-view, but because of their unitary account of reason or the *hêgemonikon*, there is no tension between determination and choice. By identifying the self both with that which chooses and that which determines the choice, we never experience any tension between determination and choice. As long as we put our interest in our own intentions, i.e. in the *hêgemonikon* or *prohairesis*, we will only be determined in the form of self-determination and never as external determination. Thus Marcus says that Diogenes, Heraclitus and Socrates all had a *hêgemonikon* that ruled itself[162] and that you should keep the *hêgemonikon* under its own control.[163] Epictetus' use of prohairesis is meant to emphasize this identification of intentions and tendencies even more and thus to avoid having to face the problem of the compatibility of choice and determination. This means that the first-personal perspective is unique in allowing the use of notions like choice, and most importantly "good" and "evil" which have no value from a third-personal perspective: "Where am I to look for the good and the evil? Within me, in that

[161] Med. 7.22, 7.25, 7.63, 8.14, 10.30, 11.18
[162] Med. 8.3
[163] Med. 9.7

which is my own. But in that which is another’s never employ the words “good” or “evil”, or “benefit” or “injury”, or anything of the sort”.[164] When he says that only *prohairesis* is free, it also means that we can only say something meaningful about choice and freedom in the first-personal perspective. Although there is no evidence for a subjective account of the self in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, we also cannot call their conception of the self objective in the sense of rejecting any unique value to the first-personal perspective. Although the Stoic conception is far less technical than Spinoza’s, it shares with it the idea that the mind and the body are parallel perspectives on the same substance. The difference is that the Stoics insisted that this substance is matter and consequently had difficulties characterizing psychological phenomena and the mind itself whereas Spinoza posited these two perspective as “attributes” of the one substance. The reason why Epictetus and Marcus do not directly express the problem between deterministic fate and choice is because in virtue of their non-subjective conception of the self as made up of *phantasiai*, *sunkatathesis* and *hormai*, which are taken together in the notion or *prohairesis*, they can allow for the unique domain of the first-personal perspective in which the idea of freedom exists in virtue of the fact that choice and action are experienced as self-determined even though they still adhere to a completely deterministic fate. Hadot explicitly connects freedom of judgment in the *Meditations* to freedom of the will and therefore places the *hêgemonikon* as identical to the self above the „web of destiny“.[165] Marcus’ objective approach to the *hêgemonikon* shows exactly that it should *not* be placed outside the chain of causality and that it should not be identified with a “self” in the subjective sense. Long rejects the idea that Marcus takes himself to fall outside of the chain of fate[166] but his explanation of the interdependence of freedom and determinism through the idea that we should will everything that happens and therefore need to believe in determinism to avoid the dissatisfaction that would prevent us to will whatever happens, seems too forced to me. The freedom so often emphasized

[164] Diss. 2.5.5
[165] Hadot (1998), p. 118
[166] Long (2012), p. 477

by Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius is a freedom from external hindrance in the workings of the mind, a freedom that everyone has by nature and cannot give up. There is no tension between this kind of freedom and the idea of determinism; it merely states that external objects cannot be direct causes of whatever we think, even if our experience of the absolute freedom to control what we think is mistaken.

Conclusion

The sometimes apparent separation of the mind or self from the compound of body and *pneuma* in the *Meditations* is a result of several factors. First of all, Marcus explicitly allows for the existence of *pneuma* which serves only as *hexis* or *physis* even in rational human beings and this idea affects his formulation of certain ethical precepts, making it look like he advocates a separation of the intellect from the body or the *pneuma*. Secondly, Marcus' exhortations are sometimes formulated rather extremely, blurring the theoretical underpinnings, because the *Meditations* was an instrument in internalizing Stoic doctrine, and this means that the effectiveness of the exhortation is sometimes given preference over theoretical soundness. Another important factor is Marcus' personality and the circumstances surrounding the writing of the *Meditations*. The terminology used by Marcus was obviously influenced by what he had been reading, who he had been talking to or what was being expected of him in his role as emperor. A clear example of the last is his use of the term *daimôn* which has surprised and intrigued scholars because it seems to show that Marcus elevated the mind to a divine status. Marcus' use of this term could have been stimulated by the practice of worship and sacrifice to the G*enius* of the Roman emperor, which was reinstated during Marcus' campaigns against the Marcomanni and the Quadi. The term was, however, not uncommon to Stoic philosophers of second century Rome or earlier Hellenistic Athens, and even goes all the way back to Stoicisms ancestors Socrates and Heraclitus. In some ways, Marcus is perhaps even too close to the early Stoics for us to immediately recognize it. Like the early Stoics, Marcus considers being a Stoic as more-or-less synonymous with being a Socratic. Like Cleanthes, and perhaps even Zeno, he was impressed by, and took over, the writings of Heraclitus. Moreover, the Stoic conception of the mind and of what we, for lack of a better word, may call the self is as difficult to uncover in the case of the early Stoics as it is in the case of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. With regard to the early Stoics this is partly due to the state of our evidence, for the later ones it is generally the

practical character of the texts that keeps us from getting clear and definitive answers. However, it seems that in both cases it is primarily the ingenuity of the doctrine itself that makes it difficult for us to put the pieces of the puzzle together. From what the *Meditations* tell us, we can infer that Marcus' conception of a human being involves a conceptual, but not an ontological dualism somewhat reminiscent of Spinoza's parallelism of the attributes of thinking and extension. Man is a combination of body and *pneuma* which interact and each one of us is uniquely aware of that interaction. As for Spinoza, this awareness is the necessary prerequisite for the existence of, i.e. the first thing that constitutes, the human mind. In fact, when he refers to himself, Marcus is referring directly to this awareness itself and in what form it is present. The mind is thus fully explainable in non-subjective terms but the fact that we have a unique perspective on it gives this particular conception the merit of being able to provide room for moral responsibility and motivation in a deterministic world-view. Thus the only sense in which Marcus Aurelius provides us with a conception of a separate and irreducible self is that he allows for this conceptual dualism between oneself and others. There is no evidence for a metaphysically separate and irreducible intellect in the *Meditations*, nor for a will, subject or ego that has an existence separate from and irreducible to the activities of the mind.

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