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DISJUNCTIONS AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY IN MARCUS AURELIUS*

In his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius repeatedly presents a disjunction between two conceptions of the natural world. Either the universe is ruled by providence or there are atoms.[1] At 4.3, we find perhaps its most succinct statement: ἀνανεωσάμενος τὸ διεζευγμένον τό· ἤτοι πρόνοια ἢ ἄτομοι (recall the disjunction: either providence or atoms). The formulation of the disjunction differs; at 7.32, being composed of atoms is contrasted with a stronger sort of unity (ἕνωσις) that may survive death. In 10.6 and 11.18 Marcus simply offers φύσις (nature, construed in the Stoic manner as providentialist and causally efficacious) in opposition.[2] On the surface, the contrast between the theory of atomism and the acceptance of providence seems to not warrant the term 'disjunction'; it seems possible to accept both atomism and a causally determined providential universe. Yet, it is agreed on all sides, in the recent literature, that the relevant contrast for Marcus is not between the atomist and the non-atomist views of the constitution of the natural world as such but between two entailments that follow from the atomist Epicurean and the non-atomist Stoic advocacy of these positions. The contrast is between the providential ordering of the Stoic universe and the chaotic chance-ridden Epicurean model.

The repeated invocation of the Epicurean view, Marcus' hypothetical exploration of accepting such a model, and whether this would amount to any significant difference over that of other Stoics, have long led to questions about his commitment to orthodox Stoicism. John Cooper, for example, has argued that Marcus (along with Seneca to a certain extent) goes some way towards abandoning Stoicism for Epicureanism, particularly in the area of physics.[3] This does not mean that Marcus abandons the personal equanimity and the commitment to virtue that characterize Stoic ethics, but it does suggest that such commitments are quite independent of his understanding of natural philosophy. Cooper concludes that Marcus' entertaining of Epicurean atomism suggests a failure on his part to attend to Stoic theory assiduously enough to establish the grounding that would eliminate the Epicurean view from consideration in the first place. Marcus, it seems, abandons the hard-won Stoic practice of theoretical argumentation for a rhetorically focussed quasi-religious mode of self-persuasion.

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[1] 4.27, 6.10, 6.24, 6.44, 7.32, 7.50, 9.28, 9.39, 10.6, 11.18. A similar disjunction is implied at 6.44 and 8.25.

[2] The disjunctions do not form a homogeneous group but are of several different types. This is explored further below.

[3] J. Cooper, 'Moral theory and improvement: Marcus Aurelius', in id., *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good* (Princeton, 2004), 335–68.

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Similar worries have been expressed by John Rist.[4] He sees Marcus as open to *all* natural principles or explanations, including those that are Epicurean, so long as they lead to his desired ethical conclusions, as guaranteed by providence. Ultimately, Rist's Marcus is a man deeply ill-at-ease with the world, subject to a sceptical Heraclitean view of the universe's inherent instability, searching not for doctrine in Stoicism but rather for something closer to philosophically informed therapy suited to provide existential comfort.

That Marcus did not merely veer away from what we might characterize as orthodox Stoic physics in favour of Epicureanism but had little understanding of, or interest in, the subject has long been suggested. Brunt, in his important study of the *Meditations*, puts this thought bluntly: 'He [Marcus] has no use for syllogisms or enquiries into physical phenomena.'[5] Certainly, as we shall see, Marcus does seem to provide explicit testimony that he is not concerned or perhaps unable to pursue physics at the theoretical level or to offer any innovations in the area.[6]

A parallel lapse from Stoic orthodoxy has been noticed in Marcus' comments on the tripartite division of the human person and its relation to his psychology. Sometimes this is a division into body, *pneuma* and the governing part (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν);[7] alternatively *pneuma* is replaced with the soul in a similar formulation.[8] Marcus' tendency to emphasize the governing part, and perhaps identify the self with it, has provoked charges of a flirtation of Platonism, possibly filtered through the 'Middle' Stoic Posidonius.[9] Even a casual look at the *Meditations* suggests a focus on the negative aspects of the physical realities of lived experience and an emphasis on the governing part of the self. This is evident in a certain scepticism about the value of those things that appeal to the senses: Falernian wine, for example, is mere grape juice, luxurious purple fleece, the product of shellfish.[10] How could Marcus so defiantly distance himself from the material world characterized, on the Stoic account, by an immanent rationality?[11]

[4] J. Rist, 'Are you a Stoic?', in B.F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders (edd.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 3 (London, 1982), 23–59.

[5] P.A. Brunt, 'Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations*', *JRS* 64 (1974), 1–20, at 3 n. 15, citing 1.17.8 and 8.1. The criticism of syllogistic reasoning is familiar from Seneca; cf. *Ep.* 45, 48, 49, 82 and 83.

[6] See 7.67, where Marcus appears to give up hope of becoming a φυσικός or a διαλεκτικός. We shall soon return to this passage.

[7] 2.2; cf. 12.3, where τὸ ἡγεμονικόν is replaced with νοῦς. See C. Gill, 'Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*: how Stoic and how Platonic?', in M. Bonazzi and C. Helmig (edd.), *Platonic Stoicism, Stoic Platonism* (Leuven, 2007), 189–207. Gill provides an account of Marcus' apparent flirtation with Platonist psychology that emphasizes his Stoic credentials.

[8] 3.16; cf. 6.32. This circumscribed identification of *pneuma* with the soul and not as the divine power enabling the tensional *hexeis* and individuating qualities of items in the world is itself somewhat at odds with orthodox Stoicism. See D. Sedley, 'Marcus Aurelius on physics', in M. van Ackeren (ed.), *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius* (Malden, 2007), 396–407, at 397.

[9] See 2.2, 4.39, 11.19, in particular for Marcus' identification. For the influence of Posidonius, see Rist (n. 4), 31. Posidonius' integration of Platonist elements within his philosophy is controversial. Galen (see, for example, *Hipp. et Plat.* Books 4–5) insists that Posidonius accepted Plato's tripartition of the soul. This characterization has been subject to recent, widespread scepticism; see, in particular, T. Tieleman, *Chrysippus'* On Affections (Leiden, 2003), 198–287. See A.E. Ju, 'Stoic and Posidonian thought on the immortality of the soul', *CQ* 59 (2009), 112–24 for an account of Posidonius' view of the soul's post-mortem persistence.

[10] See P. Hadot (transl. M. Chase), *The Inner Citadel* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 165–8. Hadot finds at 6.13 one of his strongest pieces of evidence for the theory that the *Meditations* is a personal text intended as a series of therapeutic exercises. Here Marcus seems to be advocating a method of eliminating excess pride and false beliefs in non-virtuous pursuits by examining the physical realities of things. This applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to those things that are unpleasant (6.36). The point, as Hadot suggests, is that the process is intended to help overcome prejudices about the world.

[11] Marcus' disgust with his own physicality is evident in a well-known passage from 8.24: ὁποῖόν

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These concerns have been raised often recently, and there is little in the above account that will not be familiar. Julia Annas provides a similar exposition and attempts to defuse objections to Marcus' commitment to Stoicism, as it was practised at Rome, by demonstrating how frequently he comes down on the side of providence in its disjunction with atomism, and how a willingness to give Epicureanism a chance was in keeping with Senecan thought.[12] On Annas's account, Marcus' willingness to consider alternatives suggests an unusually strong commitment on his part to the power of the intellect: suspending physical and metaphysical grounding, Marcus only needs the functioning of reason to reach the Stoic conclusion of living in accordance with nature.[13] In the end, Marcus' open-ended consideration of non-Stoic physical claims serves to increase his confidence in Stoic ethical principles.

I suggest that Annas and others who have recently sought to defend Marcus' commitment to Stoicism are largely right.[14] My purpose here is not to offer a full-scale defence of these interpretations but rather to suggest two theses that offer a more nuanced take than has been previously offered on Marcus' method of considering alternatives, most often formed as disjunctions, in the sphere of physics. (1) I claim that we can determine that Marcus was in fact committed to enquiring more fully in keeping with the principles of orthodox Stoic natural philosophy than is usually accepted, even if this did not amount to any dedication to theoretical innovation. In conjunction with this, I will maintain that there is no reason to suggest Marcus seriously considers atomism, or any other theory of the natural world, as true, apart from the Stoic view. Versions of this claim have been advanced, but I hope to show how Marcus' use of disjunctions actually supports such a thesis and does not undermine it. (2) Following on from this, I submit that a recognizable philosophical method is at work in the frequent appeal to disjunctions. Strikingly, Marcus' appeal to incompatible theses also appears in the area of psychology, sometimes embedded within the familiar disjunction between models of the natural world.[15] We also find a similar treatment of competing views in intra-Stoic debates on *ekpyrōsis*, the nature of providence, and the post-mortem existence of the soul.[16] This 'method' combines elements of Marcus' *Meditations* that have not received enough attention. I will suggest that construing Marcus' use of disjunctions with reference to his understanding of Stoic contemplation helps us to understand why he is apparently open to non-Stoic doctrines. Ultimately, the appearance of neutrality is

σοι φαίνεται τὸ λούεσθαι: ἔλαιον, ἱδρώς, ῥύπος, ὕδωρ γλοιώδες, πάντα σικχαντά: τοιοῦτον πᾶν μέρος τοῦ βίου καὶ πᾶν ὑποκείμενον.

[12] J. Annas, 'Marcus Aurelius: ethics and its background', *Rhizai* 2 (2004), 103–19, at 107–14.

[13] See also E. Asmis, 'The Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius', *ANRW* 2.36.3 (Berlin, 1989), 2228–52, at 2252. Asmis, though, adopts an eclectic view of Marcus at odds with Annas's presentation.

[14] See, for example, C. Gill, *Marcus Aurelius: Meditations, Books 1–6* (Oxford, 2013), lxix–lxxiv. Gill provides a very helpful overview, though no firm conclusion other than advocating against putting too much stress on these passages for the overall interpretation of the *Meditations*. See also Sedley (n. 8) and T. Bénatouïl, 'Theôria and scholê in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius: Platonic, Stoic, or Socratic?', in A.G. Long (ed.), *Plato and the Stoics* (Cambridge, 2013), 147–73. Although I agree with Annas on Marcus' general attitude towards Stoic physics, I offer quite a different reading of his approach to Epicureanism and a different solution to the most difficult group of disjunctions.

[15] Rist (n. 4), 33 notes this connection. Hadot (n. 10), 151–3 recognizes the complexity of Marcus' use of disjunctions by charting the further 'sub-disjunctions' generated in 9.28.2. My conclusions about the significance of this complex structure very much differ in so far as I do not accept Hadot's identification of the parts of philosophy with the three Epictetan disciplines (τόποι), and thus do not think that Marcus' disjunctive framework serves to reinforce the 'discipline of desire' which Hadot identifies with physics.

[16] 10.7, 9.28 and 4.21 respectively. On this point, see Gill (n. 14), lxviii and Sedley (n. 8), 405–6.

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a product of what I maintain is a general feature of the *Meditations*, and one that reflects their personal (self-directed) character. This figures within the use Marcus might make of his own work, not just in its composition but also in its later study.[17] Marcus' disjunctions, on such an account, are incipient arguments, not fully fleshed out but with enough pieces in place to suggest his ultimate direction and prompt further development.

Of course, the precise use Marcus intended to make of the *Meditations* is not immediately obvious. Even if we were to accept Brunt's case for seeing the work as a personal spiritual diary, the question of quite what use Marcus made of such a work is still left open.[18] I submit that Marcus' focus on contemplation in the Stoic vein allows for a firmer understanding, because it helps to illuminate how Marcus constructs a philosophical tool to alleviate both current and well as future suffering. On such an account, it is crucial that we understand the future-directed nature of Marcus' discussion on the contemplative mode.

John Cooper has made the point that Marcus was a student of the conservative rhetorician Marcus Cornelius Fronto, and that this rhetorical education helps to explain some of the argumentative formulations discernible in the *Meditations*.[19] On this connection, I suggest a different reading: in his use of disjunctions in the area of physics, rhetorical training is being applied to a *genuine* philosophical end. There is an obvious objection here: Marcus is writing for himself, what is the use of rhetorical flourish in such a case? My suggestion is that Marcus' rhetorically inspired disjunctions are aimed at his audience of one and need to be interpreted alongside his frequent appeal to memory.[20] While it is common to interpret such appeals to memory as evidence of attempts at consolation in times of uncertainty, I will show that at least some of the appeals help to structure instances of contemplation. This is not to say that we should think that these two purposes (contemplative and consolatory) are easily separated; on the account I propose, contemplation has a crucial role to play for Marcus in steadying the mind confronted with the vicissitudes of the world and in pointing the way towards the Stoic view. With this in mind, the appearance of Epicurean atomism is less suggestive of Marcus' eclecticism than of his attempts (however successful) to come to grips with Stoic natural philosophy.

MARCUS ON NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

We may begin by getting to terms with what Marcus has to say about physics and its study. Perhaps the most common passage cited by those who wish to deflate Marcus' commitment to the study of natural philosophy is 7.67:

[17] One might think here of Anaïs Nin's widely quoted observation that 'we write to taste life twice, in the moment, and in retrospect'. The point is that we need to take into account how Marcus would have made use of his work after its composition.

[18] Brunt (n. 5).

[19] Cooper (n. 3), 366–8. For Fronto and his historical context, see E. Champlin, *Fronto and Antonine Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 1980).

[20] That we have some forty instances of Marcus telling himself 'to always remember' is frequently cited. See Brunt (n. 5), 3 n. 18 and Rist (n. 4), 24. In this respect, I find much to agree with in M. van Ackeren, *Die Philosophie Marc Aurels* (*Quellen und Studien zur Philosophie* 103.2), 2 vols. (Berlin, 2011), 428–43. van Ackeren's view of the *Meditations* as a self-directed dialogue in which the form in which Marcus engages helps to structure his self-improvement project aligns closely with what I will argue. The crucial difference, however, is that I see no reason to explain away Marcus' interaction with non-Stoic sources. The contemplative framework I suggest provides a justification for Marcus' apparent receptivity.

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μή, ὅτι ἀπήλπισας διαλεκτικὸς καὶ φυσικὸς ἔσεσθαι, διὰ τοῦτο ἀπογνῷς καὶ ἐλεύθερος καὶ αἰδήμων καὶ κοινωνικὸς καὶ εὐπειθὴς θεῷ.

Do not, because you have given up hope of being a thinker or student of science, on this account despair of being free, modest, sociable and obedient to god.[21]

The primary puzzle here is the scope of διαλεκτικός and φυσικός for Marcus. There is good reason to think that they are used as success terms implying mastery of their respective subjects. We can confirm this by looking a few pages later in the *Meditations* where we find verbal forms of both within a demand to subject all φαντασία to scrutiny (8.13):

διηνεκῶς καὶ ἐπὶ πάσης, εἰ οἷόν τε, φαντασίας **φυσιολογεῖν**, παθολογεῖν, **διαλεκτικεύεσθαι**.

Continually and, if possible, on the occasion of every impression, test it by **natural science**, by psychology and by **logic**.

Marcus clearly distinguishes between the possibility of the practice of physics from the attainment of expertise in the subject. It is also worth noting that the sort of ethical character he claims is possible for humans without expertise as both διαλεκτικός and φυσικός is not to be identified with the ideal Stoic life. Certainly, characteristics such as modesty and sociability are compatible with the Stoic ethical *telos* but none necessitates that we think Marcus is restricting his consideration here to something exclusively Stoic. With this in mind, we should be careful not to assume that Marcus is claiming that one could fulfil the Stoic ethical ideal and be deficient in the mastery of logic and natural philosophy.

This sort of distinction between an attempt itself and its successful practice is characteristic of the *Meditations*. Marcus, of course, nowhere claims that he has achieved virtue and is careful to remind himself of his failings. At 8.1, we have an explicit testimony to this effect:

ἀλλὰ πολλοῖς τε ἄλλοις καὶ αὐτὸς σεαυτῷ δῆλος γέγονας πόρρω φιλοσοφίας ὤν. πέφυρσαι οὖν, ὥστε τὴν μὲν δόξαν τὴν τοῦ φιλοσόφου κτήσασθαι οὐκέτι σοι ῥᾴδιον.

To yourself as well as to many others it is plain that you fall far short of philosophy. And so you are marked, and it is no longer easy for you to acquire the reputation of a philosopher.

We can see that Marcus is determined to distance his interest in philosophy from any claim that he has reached philosophical wisdom. Yet, this need not entail that he has abandoned the pursuit of a philosophical life or that he supposed a philosophical life was possible without adequate mastery of such areas (and parts of Stoic philosophy) as logic and physics. This does not suggest that Marcus' approach is innovative in pursuing a Stoic-like philosophy without their characteristic commitment to the integration of physics, ethics and logic. Rather we find Marcus confronting his peculiar situation and the impossibility of being both philosopher and emperor.[22]

[21] I follow the translation of A.S.L. Farquharson, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Oxford, 1944), with modifications throughout. Here I keep particularly close to avoid tendentiousness; however, I take him to significantly undertranslate διαλεκτικός and φυσικός.

[22] Fronto reminds Marcus of this point; see his *De Eloquentia* 2.11–14, in the edition of M.P.J. van den Hout, *M. Cornelius Fronto: Epistulae* (Leipzig, 1988), 140–2. The difficulties of his duties as emperor are a frequent theme. Bénatouïl (n. 14), 155 helpfully cites 2.1, 6.13, 9.36 and 10.31.

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A second passage that suggests a prima facie rejection of the study of natural philosophy occurs at the end of Book 1. Here Marcus seems to suggest that he is pleased he did not concern himself with 'problems above' (1.17.9):

τὸ ὅπως ἐπεθύμησα φιλοσοφίας, μὴ ἐμπεσεῖν εἴς τινα σοφιστὴν μηδὲ ἀποκαθίσαι ἐπὶ τὸ συγγράφειν ἢ συλλογισμοὺς ἀναλύειν ἢ περὶ τὰ μετεωρολογικὰ καταγίνεσθαι. πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα ʻθεῶν βοηθῶν καὶ τύχης δεῖται'.

Although passionate about philosophy, I did not meet any sophist or retire to disentangle literary works or syllogisms or busy myself with problems 'in the clouds'. For all these things require 'the gods to help and Fortune's hand'.

We find the association of logic with physics just as we saw above in Book 7 and the same initial impression that Marcus is aiming to unshackle himself from these two parts of orthodox Stoic philosophy. But that would be too quick. Annas is right to note that all this passage commits Marcus to saying is that he is pleased he did not come upon the more abstruse aspects of philosophy first. This in no way entails he is pleased that he now still struggles with both logic and physics.[23] There *is* quite an echo here of Aristophanes' presentation of Socrates *meteorologikos*, so vigorously disputed in the *Apology*.[24] Farquharson also points to the Stoic Aristo of Chios, a decisive early influence on Marcus, and his notorious claim that physics was beyond humans.[25] Yet, this misunderstands the force of Marcus' point. Marcus may agree that the hurdle for the successful pursuit of the theoretical sciences is exceptionally high and that it requires god's help and good fortune, but this suggests just the opposite of Aristo's claim. When circumstances are right, such matters are implicitly affirmed to be within human reach.

We can confirm this reading by appealing to another passage in which Marcus recommends looking up at the sky by quoting the Pythagoreans (11.27):

οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι: ἔωθεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀφορᾶν, ἵν' ὑπομιμνῃσκώμεθα τῶν ἀεὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως τὸ ἑαυτῶν ἔργον διανυόντων καὶ τῆς τάξεως καὶ τῆς καθαρότητος καὶ τῆς γυμνότητος: οὐδὲν γὰρ προκάλυμμα ἄστρου.

The Pythagoreans say: 'Look up at the sky before morning breaks', in order to remind ourselves of beings who always in the same relations and in the same way accomplish their work, and of their order, purity and nakedness;[26] for a star has no veil.

That Marcus took such a practice to be a useful activity is confirmed by the clear echo of this formulation incorporating the early morning at the beginnings of Book 2 and 5, used to summon a therapeutic clarifying mode. Certainly, Marcus seems to treat Pythagoras as something of an authority. At 6.47, Pythagoras is grouped with two of the strongest non-Stoic influences on the school: Heraclitus and Socrates. The former is referenced repeatedly in the *Meditations*. At 4.46, Marcus urges himself to remember always what Heraclitus said and then proceeds to quote several of his fragments. Verbal echoes and

[23] Annas (n. 12), 116 n. 34.

[24] Pl. *Ap.* 18b–c, 19c and 23d.

[25] Farquharson (n. 21), 487. For Marcus' response to Aristo's philosophy, see Fronto, *Ad M. Caes. et invicem* 4.13, in M.P.J. van den Hout, *M. Cornelius Fronto: Epistulae* (Leipzig, 1988), 67–8. That it is the dissident Stoic that Marcus has in mind is agreed by most but not all. See Hadot (n. 10), 12–14 for a defence and bibliography. For Aristo's claim that physics is beyond human, see *SVF* 1.352.

[26] Marcus often uses the language of nakedness and of stripping things down to their essence. See 3.11, 6.13, 11.2 in particular. Gill (n. 14), xli–xlii makes this point.

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allusions to the Presocratic are frequent and striking.[27] We shall soon turn to a particularly suggestive passage on the subject of Stoic *ekpyrōsis*. Little more needs to be said about the role of Socrates as the Stoics' primary pre-Zeno authority figure; the importance of both Heraclitus and Socrates is confirmed by Marcus at 8.3. This makes Pythagoras' inclusion in this grouping suggestive and worth taking seriously.[28] As such, the evidence of Book 1 is very far from confirming that Marcus had an aversion to natural philosophy.

We may say to conclude then that this initial examination evidences a reasonably strong familiarity with the fundamentals of Stoic natural philosophy, including the details of internal Stoic debates, as listed above. Perhaps this is an obvious point. Yet, if we are to untangle Marcus' attitude to natural philosophy we need to eliminate once and for all the suggestion that it was *ignorance* that allowed for his apparent openness to Epicurean or Platonist positions.

CONTEMPLATION AND MEMORY

We may profitably continue by drawing out a link between two elements of the *Meditations* that have not received enough attention: contemplation (*theōria*) and memory. On the former, there *has* been a considerable effort to distinguish the views of Marcus, and the Stoics more generally, from the views of the Platonists. Of course, there is an important question, which I will leave unanswered, about the role of contemplation in the virtuous life for the Stoics and how this might differ from the Platonist tradition.[29] Our concern is more restricted: what is the place of natural philosophy in contemplative practice for Marcus, and what does this tell us about his characteristic use of disjunctions? It is memory and its invocation, I will suggest, that point to an answer.

First let us determine how contemplation is presented in the *Meditations*. Thomas Bénatouïl has offered the following distinction between the objects of contemplation for Marcus and Epictetus and those for the Platonists: 'Epictetus and Marcus do not contemplate at intelligible and eternal Forms but at the world, its causes, its structure and its evolution as laid down in Stoic physics.'[30] This makes Marcus conform to orthodox Stoic practice and, as Bénatouïl suggests, helps to explain the difference between the cosmic perspective for Marcus and for Platonists.[31] The aim of seeking

[27] See, in particular, 2.17, 4.43 and 9.28. For a list of further references, see A.A. Long, 'Heraclitus and Stoicism', in id., *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge, 1996), 35–57, at 56–7. Long provides the classic account of the role of Heraclitus in the Stoic school. I have argued elsewhere that Heraclitus proved a decisive influence in helping to inform Cleanthes' method of developing the foundation-stone of Stoic epistemology, the kataleptic impression. See also Asmis (n. 13), 2246–9.

[28] Stoic interest in Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism as an important precursor to Plato has received an interesting recent treatment by A.E. Ju, 'Posidonius as historian of philosophy', in M. Schofield (ed.), *Aristotle, Plato and Pythagoreanism in the First Century B.C.* (Cambridge, 2013), 95–117. She concludes that Posidonius sought to examine the relationship between Platonic and Pythagorean thinking and that this allows him to recast his Platonic inheritance by mathematizing it and, in doing so, he 'endorsed Pythagoreanism as an august precedent'.

[29] See, for example, E. Brown, 'Contemplative withdrawal in the Hellenistic age', *Philosophical Studies* 137 (2008), 79–89.

[30] Bénatouïl (n. 14), 157.

[31] See T. Bénatouïl and M. Bonazzi, 'θεωρία and βίος θεωρητικός from the Presocratics to the end of antiquity: an overview', in T. Bénatouïl and M. Bonazzi (edd.), *Theoria, Praxis, and the Contemplative Life after Plato and Aristotle* (Leiden, 2012), 1–14.

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out a global view of things[32] for Marcus is not to seek to transcend the individual's perspective, as the Platonist might, but to enhance it by incorporating results of viewing the richness of the whole.[33]

Marcus clearly ascribes some importance to contemplation as a characteristic and essential feature of humankind. At 8.26, we find Marcus defining what is proper to humans as 'kindness to his fellow man, disdain of the movements of the senses, to discern reliable impressions, *to meditate on Universal Nature and the work of her hands*'.[34] This is in keeping with Diogenes Laertius' depiction, at 7.130, of the relationship between the rational, practical and theoretical lives for the Stoics. Yet, what does contemplation consist in? Surely Bénatouïl is right about the scope of contemplative objects for Marcus, but we can discern a clearer depiction of its practice in the *Meditations*.

Contemplation and change are strongly connected in the *Meditations*. That contemplation should find its objects in the flux of the sensible world, of course, further distinguishes Marcus from Plato and the Platonists and recalls his appropriation of Heraclitus.[35] This second point is worth close inspection. Consider Marcus' description of his contemplative method at 10.11:

πῶς εἰς ἄλληλα πάντα μεταβάλλει, θεωρητικὴν[36] μέθοδον κτῆσαι καὶ διηνεκῶς πρόσεχε καὶ συγγυμνάσθητι περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος· οὐδὲν γὰρ οὕτως μεγαλοφροσύνης ποιητικόν.

Acquire a method of contemplation into the way all things change, one into another, attend continually to this part of Nature and exercise yourself in it, for nothing is so likely to promote an elevation of the mind.

Here we find an emphasis on change as the proper object of contemplation cast in decidedly Heraclitean terms.[37] We find a related appeal to the movements of the stars, similar to the Pythagorean passage quoted above, echoing the importance of elemental change and the ethical aim of contemplation, at 7.47.[38] The influence of Heraclitus on this point is confirmed at 4.46 in an especially important passage for our purposes:

ἀεὶ τοῦ Ἡρακλειτείου μεμνῆσθαι, ὅτι γῆς θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι καὶ ὕδατος θάνατος ἀέρα γενέσθαι καὶ ἀέρος πῦρ καὶ ἔμπαλιν.[39] μεμνῆσθαι δὲ καὶ τοῦ ἐπιλανθανομένου, ᾗ ἡ ὁδὸς ἄγει· καὶ ὅτι, ᾧ μάλιστα διηνεκῶς ὁμιλοῦσι, λόγῳ τῷ τὰ ὅλα διοικοῦντι, τούτῳ

[32] See, for example, 9.30.

[33] Bénatouïl (n. 14), 156–7 helpfully points to J. Sellars, *The Art of Living* (Ashgate, 2003), 150–65.

[34] εὐφροσύνη ἀνθρώπου ποιεῖν τὰ ἴδια ἀνθρώπου, ἴδιον δὲ ἀνθρώπου εὔνοια πρὸς τὸ ὁμόφυλον, ὑπερόρασις τῶν αἰσθητικῶν κινήσεων, διάκρισις τῶν πιθανῶν φαντασιῶν, *ἐπιθεώρησις τῆς τῶν ὅλων φύσεως καὶ τῶν κατ' αὐτὴν γινομένων*.

[35] See Bénatouïl (n. 14), 159–60 and R.B. Rutherford, *The* Meditations *of Marcus Aurelius: A Study* (Oxford, 1989), 157–8.

[36] Cf. Plut. *Cic.* 3.

[37] See, for example, DK B31, DK B76 and DK B90 on elemental transformation.

[38] περισκοπεῖν ἄστρων δρόμους ὥσπερ συμπεριθέοντα καὶ τὰς τῶν **στοιχείων εἰς ἄλληλα μεταβολὰς συνεχῶς** ἐννοεῖν: ἀποκαθαίρουσι γὰρ αἱ τούτων φαντασίαι τὸν ῥύπον τοῦ χαμαὶ βίου. An intriguing parallel to Marcus' discussion of the importance of elemental change to therapeutic contemplation is found in Musonius Rufus, fr. 42 Hense. Musonius shows a similar interest in Heraclitus as well (fr. 18a Hense). This should not be very surprising; Fronto claims that his teacher, Athenodotus, studied with Musonius, suggesting a direct paedagogical line between Musonius and Marcus (*Ad Eloquentia* 1.4, in M.P.J. van den Hout, *M. Cornelius Fronto: Epistulae* [Leipzig, 1988], 135).

[39] Heraclitus DK B36; cf. DK B76 and DK B77.

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διαφέρονται· καὶ οἷς καθ' ἡμέραν ἐγκυροῦσι, ταῦτα αὐτοῖς ξένα φαίνεται·[40] καὶ ὅτι οὐ δεῖ ὥσπερ καθεύδοντας ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν, καὶ γὰρ καὶ τότε δοκοῦμεν ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν:[41] καὶ ὅτι οὐ δεῖ ὡς παῖδας τοκεώνων, τουτέστι κατὰ ψιλόν, καθότι παρειλήφαμεν.[42]

Always remember what Heraclitus said: 'the death of earth is the birth of water, the death of water is the birth of atmosphere, the death of atmosphere is fire, and conversely'. Remember, too, his image of the man who forgets the way he is going; and: 'they are at variance with that with which they most continuously have converse (Reason which governs the universe), and the things they meet with every day appear alien to them'; and again: 'we must not act and speak like men who sleep, for in sleep we suppose that we act and speak'; 'we must not be like children with parents', that is, accept things simply as we have received them.

Many of the Heraclitean themes here are familiar from elsewhere in the *Meditations*: the reason that governs the universe[43] and joins everyone in harmony (7.13, 9.42), the deception of sleep (8.12) and, of course, the elemental change that serves as the paradigmatic object of contemplation. While these Heraclitean reminiscences and quotations are regularly noted, quite what role they serve for Marcus needs exploration. In short: why does Marcus remind himself to 'always remember what Heraclitus had said'?

We have already noted the frequency of these appeals to memory, often in the imperative mood. They are easily taken to reflect moments of self-reproach or attempts to calm an anxious mind. Indeed, such a view is very much in keeping with the interpretation of Marcus' apparent receptivity to Epicurean or Platonist doctrines as his default positions, suggesting the ethical results of accepting either the Stoic or the non-Stoic views. Yet, there is another possibility worth investigating: the appeals to memory are reminders with less obvious or immediate self-therapeutic value but rather more use as indicators of a collection of philosophical antecedents and arguments that might serve as exegetical and argumentative tools for use in future reflection. What I have in mind is that Marcus' appeals to memory might, in certain instances, serve as attempts to outline for himself how he might address philosophical questions by beginning from Heraclitus. The overwhelming emphasis on Heraclitus in Marcus' discussion of contemplation suggests the former's foundational role.

Marcus' use of the image of a river in flux is good evidence for the role of Heraclitus as a philosophical antecedent with value. Immediately before the quotations of Heraclitus given in Book 4, Marcus offers (4.43) the violent torrent of a river as an analogy for the inexorable passing of time (ῥεῦμα βίαιον ὁ αἰών). This image of the river's flux as a poignant metaphor for life is found again at 2.17, in a strongly Heraclitean passage,[44] and does real work for Marcus by helping to demonstrate that the philosophical life is the only one suited to keep one's *daimōn* intact.

[40] Heraclitus DK B71 and DK B72.
[41] Heraclitus DK B73.
[42] Heraclitus DK B74; cf. DK B70 and DK B79.
[43] λόγῳ τῷ τὰ ὅλα διοικοῦντι is, no doubt, a Stoic gloss and not a part of a verbatim quotation from Heraclitus; see C.H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), 104. The notion of *logos* as a governing principle harmonizing opposites is perhaps more akin to its Stoic conception. Yet, we are primarily concerned with what Marcus took to be Heraclitean, and not with what we can safely ascribe to the earlier figure from our vantage point. With this in mind, it seems reasonable to assume that Marcus' gloss represents *his* understanding of what Heraclitus said and thought. Long (n. 27), 51 observes that the Stoics took their notion of the *logos* to overlap significantly, if not fully, with that of Heraclitus.
[44] ὁ δὲ βίος πόλεμος; cf. DK B48, DK B53 and DK B80.

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6.15 presents a similar conclusion, that is, that human life is subjected to continuous vicissitudes but within a more complex appropriation of Heraclitean material. A version of the river-saying is quoted (ἐν δὴ τούτῳ τῷ ποταμῷ, ἐφ᾽ οὗ στῆναι οὐκ ἔξεστιν),[45] and this is connected with the continuous flux of respiration:

τοιοῦτον δή τι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ζωὴ ἑκάστου, οἷον ἡ ἀφ᾽ αἵματος ἀναθυμίασις καὶ ἡ ἐκ τοῦ ἀέρος ἀνάπνευσις: ὁποῖον γάρ ἐστι τὸ ἅπαξ ἑλκύσαι τὸν ἀέρα καὶ ἀποδοῦναι, ὅπερ παρέκαστον ποιοῦμεν, τοιοῦτόν ἐστι καὶ τὸ τὴν πᾶσαν ἀναπνευστικὴν δύναμιν, ἣν χθὲς καὶ πρώην ἀποτεχθεὶς ἐκτήσω, ἀποδοῦναι ἐκεῖ ὅθεν τὸ πρῶτον ἔσπασας.

Truly the life of every man is itself as fleeting as the exhalation of spirit from his blood or the breath he draws from the atmosphere. For just as it is to draw in a single breath and return to it, which we do every moment, so it is to render back the whole power of respiration, which you acquired but yesterday or the day before, at birth, to that other world from which you first drew it in.

Such a connection has a thoroughly Stoic antecedent in Cleanthes' quotation of Heraclitus' B12 for the sake of illuminating Zeno's view of the soul.[46] There the aim is to explain the soul's receptivity to sense data and the necessary conditions for the operation of the kataleptic impression. This is achieved by conceiving of the soul as a vapour allowing its continuous impressibility to sense data. Here, Marcus is exploiting the same connection between respiration and Heraclitus' river to make his point about the deceptive value of vulgar praise.[47]

Yet, it is striking that elements of Stoic doctrine are visible without obvious explanations for their presence. Exhalation of vapour from the blood, which contains πνεῦμα, is part of Stoic orthodox psychology and is understood as the nourishing process of the soul; Galen attributes such a view to Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus.[48] Galen also confirms Marcus' two-fold process of exhalation from both the blood and the atmosphere.[49] There is also an allusion apparent at the conclusion of the quoted passage to a baby's first breath. This seems to point to the Stoic doctrine of the development of the foetus from dense πνεῦμα early in gestation to a lighter, ensouled human at birth after contact with cooler atmospheric air.[50]

What is the relevance of these allusions for the purpose of making sense of Marcus' treatment of Stoic physics? We can get a sense of Marcus' strategy if we look at the passages that surround the quoted section. At 6.14, Marcus provides a *scala naturae* of those things people admire in nature, giving a spectrum of entities individuated by their particular state (*hexis*/*phusis*/*psuchē*). Marcus moves from the inorganic, through the animal, before arriving at the human. The aim is to suggest that, when one recognizes the value of the highest kind, one is no longer interested in the lower orders.[51] The discussion is Stoic, but seems to be somewhat anomalous, as

[45] Cf. Plutarch's quotation of the fragment (*De E apud Delphous* 393B = DK B91). Plutarch paraphrases this fragment at *Mor.* 559C.

[46] *SVF* 1.141.

[47] That the Stoics would find a natural connection between questions of psychology and respiration in Heraclitus is suggested by Aristotle's remark at *De an.* 405a25–7: 'Heraclitus too says that the *arche* is soul, since it is vapour from which everything is composed. And it is very rarefied and in ceaseless flux.'

[48] *SVF* 1.140.

[49] *On Hippocrates' Epidemics* 6.270.26–8 (*SVF* 2.782, LS 53E).

[50] See Hierocles, *Elements of Ethics* 1.15–27. Plut. *Stoic. Repugn.* 1052F–1053A attributes such a view to Chrysippus.

[51] ὁ δὲ ψυχὴν λογικὴν καθολικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν τιμῶν οὐδὲν ἔτι τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστρέφεται.

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Christopher Gill notes.[52] While 6.14 seems to suggest the sort of 'essentialist' move familiar in Plato and Aristotle, in which the highest part of the human being is identified as the essential part, Marcus seems to be adopting a different strategy. 6.16, though not noted by Gill, makes this particularly clear. There respiration (τὸ διαπνεῖσθαι) and, crucially, the ability to receive sense impressions (τὸ τυποῦσθαι κατὰ φαντασίαν) are not worthy of applause or glory. These functions are shared by mere beasts. What is to be valued is understanding yourself, thus making yourself acceptable to yourself, your peers and in relation to the gods.[53]

There is a clear allusion to the Stoic doctrine of social *oikeiōsis*, or ethical development. What interests Gill is that Marcus appears not to argue from facts about our nature, as might be expected, but seems to problematize those very facts: 'Instead of using the characterisation of our nature to provide an ontological basis for ethical claims, [it] suggests that statements about our nature can only take us a certain distance in ethical guidance.'[54]

It is certainly true that Marcus is offering an ethical conclusion here, and he does so by appealing to what makes humans unique on the *scala naturae* and not to what they share with the lower orders. I doubt, though, that this makes Marcus any less essentialist about human nature. There *is* a gap, as Gill stresses, between bare descriptions of human capacities and the proper exercise of those capacities in the pursuit of virtue. Yet, the fact that humans are able to exercise them appropriately, according to nature, is just as much an essential fact as their existence. What really makes Marcus' strategy differ from the familiar approach apparent in Plato and Aristotle[55] is a far more fine-grained distinction between mental capacities and their possessors. At 6.16, Marcus dismisses the mere fact of the capacity to receive sense-impressions as shared with beasts. 3.16 repeats this theme but adds the immoral humans, Phalaris and Nero, to the list. In this respect, Marcus adds the requirement of the proper exercise (and not merely the possession) of essential human capacities to restrict the highest order of his *scala* to the sage alone. The capacities of human *qua* human are no longer the top of the *scala*, but this makes it no less an essentialist picture. In fact, the exercise of intellectual virtue, as the crucial essential capacity of the sage, is depicted in 6.15.

What we find in 6.15 is a picture of intellectual capacities, in action, in the form of contemplation, as Marcus understands it. Marcus begins from Heraclitean flux, the paradigmatic object of contemplation on his account, as we have seen above, to which are added elements of Stoic orthodoxy arranged with a clear ethical focus. These pieces are presented as the tools Marcus uses to think with. It is this functional characteristic of his appropriation of Heraclitus that is paramount. Heraclitus and those elements of Stoic physical theory are employed to clarify his thoughts about the value of praise and glory and to serve the explicit purpose of *theōria* on his account: the elevation of the mind (μεγαλοφροσύνη).[56] The repetition of the *scala naturae* motif in 6.16 confirms this role and suggests how the contemplation demonstrated in 6.15 fits

[52] Gill (n. 7), 200–7.

[53] ἡ δὲ τῆς ἰδίας διανοίας αἰδὼς καὶ τιμὴ σεαυτῷ τε ἀρεστόν σε ποιήσει καὶ τοῖς κοινωνοῖς εὐάρμοστον καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς σύμφωνον.

[54] Gill (n. 7), 205–6.

[55] Gill mentions the *Alcibiades* (128e–130c), the *Republic* (611d–612a) and the *Phaedo* (68a–69d, 78d–84b). He considers this feature in Aristotle in his *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1996), 356–83.

[56] Cf. 10.11 and 3.11. While the latter does not specifically mention *theōria*, the process described there (methodically examining each thing one encounters and its relationship to the *cosmos* as a whole) makes it clear that the process imagined of elevating one's mind is largely the same.

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within Stoic social and ethical development. It is in the assigning of the greatest value to this highest activity that makes one progress in relation to oneself, one's community and the gods. Contemplation, its proper object found in the flux of the natural world, is contributory to the concept of *oikeiōsis* and forms part of its implementation.

My suggestion is that in these passages, suggested by the appeal to Heraclitus, and confirmed by his insistence at the end of 6.16 of the value of διάνοια,[57] we find out how Marcus means to incorporate orthodox Stoic ideas within his particular version of how to contemplate and make sense of the natural world. These ideas further Marcus' overall project in the *Meditations*, namely that of self-improvement by reflection.[58] Crucially, we see Marcus exploring the ethical implications of features of the Stoic world-view, and his process of shaping the argument is visible in this pursuit. We find nothing like a polished version of his reasoning but something much closer to a record of a thought-process, useful for later elaboration of the theme, even if Marcus is writing only for himself.

CONTEMPLATION, PROVIDENCE AND ATOMS

If contemplation is properly directed at the changing world on Marcus' account, the frequent disjunction between providence and atoms (offering contrasting models of the natural world) seems to fall within its scope. The alternatives of the disjunction set out the competing and, apparently, the exhaustive and exclusive interpretations of what change in the world ultimately amounts to. That the themes of death and the resulting fate of its subject frequently stimulate the providence/atoms disjunction suggests this point.[59] Annas takes this connection to support her claim that Marcus is interested in isolating the ethical upshot of either the Epicurean or the Stoic view. It is this point that interests Marcus, as it suggests no obstacle to his Stoic credentials.[60] There is something to be said for this view: Marcus does explicitly appeal to instances of local agreement. At 9.41, for instance, Marcus approves of Epicurus' equanimity in the face of disease and notes that it is an ideal in all the schools to maintain one's commitment to the philosophical project, even in adversity.[61]

Yet, as has often been noted, the providence/atoms disjunctions are not all of one type, and there are instances where the explanations of local agreement or an obvious commitment to the Stoic view are insufficient (4.27 and 11.18). Strikingly, in at least two cases the governing disjunction of atoms or providence is associated with further sub-disjunctions in which points of intra-Stoic debate are canvassed. If we keep in mind the role of Marcus' contemplative method, as illustrated in 6.14–16, we can begin to see how these pieces fit together.

[57] Cf. 9.29: χειμάρρους ἡ τῶν ὅλων οὐσία: **πάντα φέρει** … μὴ τὴν Πλάτωνος πολιτείαν ἔλπιζε, ἀλλὰ ἀρκοῦ, εἰ τὸ βραχύτατον πρόεισι, καὶ τούτου αὐτοῦ τὴν ἔκβασιν ὡς μικρόν τί ἐστι **διανοοῦ**.

[58] I take it that this is complementary with Gill's understanding of the *Meditations* as combining, at a fundamental level, the twin themes of ethical self-improvement and the transient flux of human nature, particularly in relation to death: Gill (n. 14), xxxiv–lii.

[59] Cf. 2.11, 6.10, 6.24, 7.32 and 8.25.

[60] Annas (n. 12), 108–10.

[61] ταὐτὰ οὖν ἐκείνῳ, ἐν νόσῳ, ἐὰν νοσῇς καὶ ἐν ἄλλῃ τινὶ περιστάσει: τὸ γὰρ μὴ ἀφίστασθαι φιλοσοφίας ἐν οἷς δήποτε τοῖς προσπίπτουσι μηδὲ ἰδιώτῃ καὶ ἀφυσιολόγῳ συμφλυαρεῖν, πάσης αἱρέσεως κοινόν. πρὸς μόνῳ τῷ νῦν πρασσομένῳ εἶναι καὶ τῷ ὀργάνῳ, δι' οὗ πράσσεις.

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That contemplation, in Marcus' sense, bears on the providence/atoms disjunction may be further gleaned from 8.25–6. In chapter 25, we seem to find an open-ended opposition of the two alternative world-views, after Marcus has listed the recently dead. On Annas's view, the passage is intended to isolate the ethical implication of death that nothing personal survives and we must act accordingly, a point of agreement between the Stoics and the Epicureans:

τούτων οὖν μεμνῆσθαι ὅτι δεήσει ἤτοι σκεδασθῆναι τὸ συγκριμάτιόν σου ἢ σβεσθῆναι τὸ πνευμάτιον ἢ μεταστῆναι καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ καταταχθῆναι.

Keep these facts in mind, that your own frame is bound to be scattered into atoms[62] or your spirit extinguished or to change its place and be stationed elsewhere.

The atomist view here is contrasted with two Stoic views on the survival of the soul after death (either immediate extinction or temporary survival).[63] Annas's view seems plausible enough, but I would like to suggest an alternative explanation. The mention of memory here (μεμνῆσθαι) does seem to fit the comforting therapeutic reading of such appeals discussed above. Yet, this does not account for Marcus' sub-disjunction of competing Stoic positions and, significantly, for Marcus' account of contemplation in the very next line of the text, in 26. 8.26 is separated out as a new chapter but taking it closely with 8.25 makes good sense.

Let us look at this passage again:

A man's joy is to do what is proper to man, and man's proper work is kindness to his fellow man, disdain of the movements of the senses, to discern reliable impressions, *to meditate on Universal Nature and the work of her hands*.[64]

The distinction made between reliable impressions and the mere movement of the senses provides our first clue. This points to one of the primary challenges of the Stoic conception of contemplation. The Platonist can simply ignore the senses and aspire to transcend them through the contemplation of eternal unchanging entities.[65] However, the Stoic sage, committed to the Stoic criterion of truth grounded in the kataleptic impression, cannot avoid sense perception, but must determine what is valuable and what is irrelevant noise. The connection, examined above, between contemplation and elemental change confirms the centrality of appropriately mediated sense impression.

We can apply this framework to the disjunction of 8.25. Marcus appeals to memory to summon up his familiar opposition between providence and atoms with the aim of contrasting what seems to be the case for the mere movement of the senses (atomism) and what is true upon reflection on nature and what happens in its accordance (providence). Of course, this is not to say that Marcus claims that atomism, as such,

[62] While it is true that atoms are not explicitly mentioned here, there is every reason to believe that the atomist world-view is what Marcus has in mind. A parallel use of σκεδάννυσθαι is found within the atoms/providence disjunction at 6.4; σκεδασμός occurs within such a disjunction at 6.10, 7.32 and 10.7.

[63] Cf. 4.21.

[64] εὐφροσύνη ἀνθρώπου ποιεῖν τὰ ἴδια ἀνθρώπου, ἴδιον δὲ ἀνθρώπου εὔνοια πρὸς τὸ ὁμόφυλον, ὑπερόρασις τῶν αἰσθητικῶν κινήσεων, διάκρισις τῶν πιθανῶν φαντασιῶν, ἐπιθεώρησις τῆς τῶν ὅλων φύσεως καὶ τῶν κατ' αὐτὴν γινομένων.

[65] Sedley (n. 8), 399 helpfully notes the first chapter of Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* (152.10–11), where the objects of knowledge are explicitly said to be intelligible and fundamentally stable. This Platonist position, then, is directly at odds with Marcus' view of the transience of *ousiai*.

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appears to be true on the evidence of unreflective sense experience. It is what atomism entails: chaos and instability. This point is made repeatedly.[66] Thus we might qualify the relevant implications of Marcus' use of his familiar disjunction. Ultimately, the contrast is between a view of nature that is teleologically governed and one that is not. The latter, which Marcus associates with the results of bare or mere sense experience, is firmly placed in the atomist camp. It is not change *per se* that Marcus associates with an atomist world-view but chaotic non-purposive change.

In fact, we might go further and say that those appearances of chaos and instability, which Marcus understands as the product of experiencing human life, are what he takes the atomist to be committed to even after subjecting the results of sense experience to rational testing. The work of the *Meditations* is an effort to eliminate the seemingly incorrigible beliefs produced by sense experience, that is, the appearances of randomness and flux that ultimately support an atomistic non-teleological or non-providential view of the universe. In this category, we may place Marcus' well-known passages expressing disgust and boredom (4.48, 5.32, 6.13, 6.46, 8.24, 9.36). The constant instability and flux, with its analogy in Heraclitus' river, continues the theme.[67] The Heraclitean pedigree goes even deeper. At 6.42, Marcus quotes Heraclitus (B75, unattested elsewhere) to the effect that those asleep are fellow workers in what comes to pass according to providence. This echoes Heraclitus' B1 and suggests that we are all subject to providence and are partners in its operation, even if we fail to notice it in action. For Marcus, the instability of the world, as it appears to our senses, attests to the truth of atomism; the chaotic fleetingness of life suggests the Epicurean position. Yet, on reflection, we can see that providence holds sway.[68] The disjunction is not simply an opposition made between the conclusions of two philosophical schools but a contrast to be found within Marcus' own experience of the world at two distinct levels.

This suggests a different reading of Marcus' seeming openness to the Epicurean line in 8.25. Rather than seeking ethical convergence, Marcus is setting up the terms of the process of contemplation, the activity that seeks to elevate the mind by isolating the evidence for providence that is made clear in the world only when the human mind's capacity for reason (understood as discerning reliable sense impressions) is activated. Marcus appeals to memory to situate the opposed positions. Different Stoic conclusions are canvassed; the tools are brought to bear to achieve the μεγαλοφροσύνη Marcus aims to achieve.

What I am claiming is that we should take contemplation for Marcus to occupy an important position distinct from, and to be contrasted with, the Platonist and the Epicurean views. Contemplative activity provides the means of drawing out reliable knowledge of nature's providential ordering. This can only be accomplished by addressing the evidence of the senses, unlike the Platonist, but also by allying such evidence to trustworthy impressions and Stoic rationality, unlike the Epicurean. Marcus is, of course, presupposing the truth of Stoic doctrine in this process, yet there is a crucial difference between knowing something to be true and knowing how to respond to the barrage of sense impressions that call one's commitment to Stoic truth into question. Contemplation, for Marcus, bridges this gap.

[66] See, for example, 4.3, 6.10, 6.24.

[67] Rist (n. 4), 36–9 takes the pessimism which this entails to be the primary instance of Heraclitus' influence on Marcus' world-view.

[68] Cf. 4.10.

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We find a similar embedding of an intra-Stoic debate within a governing providence/atoms disjunction in 10.5–7, conforming to a strikingly similar strategy. This is one of the more difficult instances of the disjunction to construe without accepting that Marcus was genuinely open to Epicureanism.[69] Yet, we shall see that this is an unnecessary concession.

10.6 begins:

εἴτε ἄτομοι εἴτε φύσις, πρῶτον κείσθω ὅτι μέρος εἰμὶ τοῦ ὅλου ὑπὸ φύσεως διοικουμένου· ἔπειτα, ὅτι ἔχω πως οἰκείως πρὸς τὰ ὁμογενῆ μέρη.

Whether there are atoms or Nature, the first postulate must be: 'I am part of the whole which is governed by nature'; the second: 'I am allied in some way to the parts that are of the same kind with me.'

The text here may be corrupt; Marcus seems to take up immediately the providentialist view and to ignore the initial disjunction. I follow Farquharson's suggestion by taking chapter 6 to correspond to the second half of the disjunction (εἴτε φύσις) and chapter 7.2 to follow on from the first (εἴτε ἄτομοι).[70] While Farquharson is certainly correct to read these two chapters as continuous, the role of the disjunction in the line of thought needs further investigation. One suggestion, made by J. Leopold and followed by Sedley,[71] is to take the statement of the disjunction in 6 to conclude chapter 5 and to be read as follows:

ὅ τι ἄν σοι συμβαίνῃ, τοῦτό σοι ἐξ αἰῶνος προκατεσκευάζετο καὶ ἡ ἐπιπλοκὴ τῶν αἰτίων συνέκλωθε τήν τε σὴν ὑπόστασιν ἐξ ἀιδίου καὶ τὴν τούτου σύμβασιν, εἴτε ἄτομοι εἴτε φύσις.

Whatever befalls you was prepared for you beforehand from eternity and the thread of causes was spinning from everlasting both your existence and this which befalls you, whether there are atoms or nature.

This seems to face the same difficulty of outright contradiction as the positioning of the disjunction at the start of 6. Marcus is insisting on a predetermined causal nexus cast before one's birth and explanatory of everything that happens in one's life. This is far from the Epicurean atomist chaos which guarantees human free will and characterizes Marcus' understanding of their model of the natural world.[72] Rather we seem to find a deterministic sort of atomism implied by Marcus' presentation. This, by itself, might suggest we keep the disjunction at the start of chapter 6, even if it means assuming that some text has been lost. I suggest, on the contrary, that it makes best sense of Marcus' argument in chapters 5 to 7 to assume that he had such a restricted non-Epicurean form of atomism in mind. Indeed, I submit that it is a version of Democritus' atomism that is assumed from chapter 5 onwards.

First, let us determine how chapter 6 develops from 5. In the earlier chapter, Marcus announces his theme of cosmic determination. In chapters 6 and 7, the proper response to the inevitable destruction of both the individual and the cosmos is developed. In this effort, we find Marcus addressing his standard topic of the relation of the human being to nature construed as that of a part to a whole. This has the familiar ethical conclusion

[69] See Gill (n. 14), lxxii.
[70] Farquharson (n. 21), 823.
[71] Sedley (n. 8), 405 n. 2.
[72] See, for example, 6.10.

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of equanimity in the face of apparent adversity deriving from the following two postulates: nothing that benefits the whole injures the part and the whole never injures itself.[73] The proper ethical response to the fear of the destruction of death is thus developed and justified.

The theme continues in the first section of chapter 7 in which the necessity of the destruction of the whole is outlined, that is, the Stoic conflagration. Marcus is at pains to dismiss the possibility that such destruction entails some evil done to the parts but not the whole. A destructive dilemma between two *per impossibile* sources of the introduction of evil into the cosmos (either evil arrives according to φύσις or without its knowledge) is canvassed.

Up to this point, the argument is clear enough, although we have yet to see the relevance of chapter 5. It is in the second section of chapter 7 that the main difficulty is to be found but also where we begin to see how these chapters are unified.[74] In the following, I provide Farquharson's text and translation with a division into the three sections which I take to mirror the run of Marcus' argument.

(1) εἰ δέ τις καὶ ἀφέμενος τῆς φύσεως κατὰ τὸ πεφυκέναι ταῦτα ἐξηγοῖτο, καὶ ὡς γελοῖον ἅμα μὲν φάναι πεφυκέναι τὰ μέρη τοῦ ὅλου μεταβάλλειν, ἅμα δὲ ὡς ἐπί τινι τῶν παρὰ φύσιν συμβαίνοντι θαυμάζειν ἢ δυσχεραίνειν, ἄλλως τε καὶ τῆς διαλύσεως εἰς ταῦτα γινομένης, ἐξ ὧν ἕκαστον συνίσταται. **(2)** ἤτοι γὰρ σκεδασμὸς στοιχείων, ἐξ ὧν συνεκρίθη, ἢ τροπὴ τοῦ μὲν στερεμνίου εἰς τὸ γεῶδες, τοῦ δὲ πνευματικοῦ εἰς τὸ ἀερῶδες, ὥστε καὶ[75] ταῦτα ἀναληφθῆναι εἰς τὸν τοῦ ὅλου λόγον, εἴτε κατὰ περίοδον ἐκπυρουμένου εἴτε ἀιδίοις ἀμοιβαῖς ἀνανεουμένου. **(3)** καὶ τὸ στερέμνιον δὲ καὶ τὸ πνευματικὸν μὴ φαντάζου τὸ ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης γενέσεως: πᾶν γὰρ τοῦτο ἐχθὲς καὶ τρίτην ἡμέραν ἐκ τῶν σιτίων καὶ τοῦ ἑλκομένου ἀέρος τὴν ἐπιρροὴν ἔλαβεν: τοῦτο οὖν ὃ ἔλαβε μεταβάλλει, οὐχ ὃ ἡ μήτηρ ἔτεκεν. ὑπόθου δ' ὅτι ἐκείνῳ σε λίαν προσπλέκει τῷ ἰδίως ποιῷ, οὐδὲν ὄντι οἶμαι πρὸς τὸ νῦν λεγόμενον.

(1) But now suppose one dispensed with nature and expounded facts by way of 'natural law'; how absurd it is in one breath to assert that the parts of the whole change by natural law, and in the same moment to be surprised or indignant as though at an occurrence in violation of natural law, particularly when the dissolution of each is taking place into the elements out of which each is composed. **(2)** For this dissolution is either dissipation of the atoms out of which they were compounded or else a turning of the solid into the earthy and of the vital spirit into its airy part, so that these too are caught up into the reason of the whole, whether the whole returns periodically to fire or is renewed by eternal exchanges. **(3)** And do not imagine this solid body and this vital spirit to be that of its original entry into existence, for all this it took in only yesterday or the day before, an influx from food stuffs and the atmosphere which is respired; what is changing then is what it took in, not what its mother brought into the world. And even suppose that what is changing binds you intimately to the individual self, that is in fact nothing, I think, to affect my present argument.

Section (1), if we adopt Farquharson's text, takes up the second half of the opening, governing disjunction of the chapter: ἄτομοι. We expect Marcus to explore the incessant flux and randomness suggested by this (that is, atomism) and to use this to contrast the

[73] This is reminiscent of the familiar Stoic argument that the whole is never inferior to its parts (Sext. Emp. *Math*. 9.85).

[74] Farquharson (n. 21), 824–31 details the issues and scholarly controversies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries related to this passage. Most we may safely set aside.

[75] Elemental transformations, in addition, are caught up in τὸν τοῦ ὅλου λόγον. What are they in addition to? I suggest it is the dissolved atoms themselves, as will become clearer below; however, it is somewhat opaque how those that take the view that Epicurean atomism is in mind here could construe this in their favour, unless we were to take this phrase in a remarkably weak manner.

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beneficent part/whole relationship supposed by the Stoic providentialist system. Yet, we find a different criticism mounted: the atomist is self-contradictory in accepting natural law (as Farquharson translates κατὰ τὸ πεφυκέναι) while also responding angrily to nature's law when complex compounds are dissolved according to its rule. The temptation, I suppose, is to take the criticism as an ad hominem sort aimed at weak-willed Epicureans faced with death.[76] Yet, such a reading is both deeply unfair to the Epicureans and a poor fit for the sense of Marcus' distinction between φύσις and τὸ πεφυκέναι.

Rather Marcus' point is that a certain atomist view properly adopts causal determinism but fails to carry it through to the extent needed to realize its ethical benefits. Thus its adherents are left with an impersonal naturalistic principle of explanation, but also explicitly one that fails to have the desired ethical dimension which alleviates the anger and indignant response such an atomist has to death. Taking the opening disjunction with chapter 5 supports this reading and makes Democritean atomism the prime candidate for what Marcus has in mind.

A comparison of chapter 5 with Ps.-Plutarch's well-known *testimonium* of Democritus' determinism yields striking results:

μηδεμίαν ἀρχὴν ἔχειν τὰς αἰτίας τῶν νῦν γιγνομένων, ἄνωθεν δ' ὅλως ἐξ ἀπείρου χρόνου προκατέχεσθαι τῇ ἀνάγκῃ πάνθ' ἁπλῶς τὰ γεγονότα καὶ ἐόντα καὶ ἐσόμενα. (*Strom.* 7)

The causes of the things that now come about have no beginning, but absolutely everything that has come about and is coming about and will come about is totally governed in advance by necessity from eternity.

ὅ τι ἄν σοι συμβαίνῃ, τοῦτό σοι ἐξ αἰῶνος προκατεσκευάζετο καὶ ἡ ἐπιπλοκὴ τῶν αἰτίων συνέκλωθε τήν τε σὴν ὑπόστασιν ἐξ ἀιδίου καὶ τὴν τούτου σύμβασιν, εἴτε ἄτομοι εἴτε φύσις. (*Strom.* 10.5)

Whatever befalls you was prepared for you beforehand from eternity and the thread of causes was spinning from everlasting both your existence and this which befalls you, whether there are atoms or nature.

The very same insistence on the eternity of causes and the predetermined character of everything that ever occurs is common to both and is found within notably similar formulations (ἐξ ἀπείρου χρόνου προκατέχεσθαι/ἐξ αἰῶνος προκατεσκευάζετο). We can go even further though and confirm the Democritean background by looking at Marcus' own criticism of the atomist. At 7.31, Marcus makes a punning use of Democritus to stress, not accidentally by using the language of memory, that all exists by law.

ἐκεῖνος μέν φησιν ὅτι ΄πάντα νομιστί, ἐτεῇ δὲ μόνα τὰ στοιχεῖα', ἀρκεῖ δὲ μεμνῆσθαι ὅτι τὰ πάντα νομιστὶ ἔχει: ἤδη λίαν ὀλίγα.

He [Democritus] says: 'All [sensibles] are ruled by law, but in reality the elements alone exist.' It is sufficient for you to remember that all exists by law; now there is little else.

The text here is somewhat doubtful, but the reference to Democritus seems sound enough.[77] The distinction between what exists *per se* (στοιχεῖα, understood as atoms)

[76] So Farquharson (n. 21), 825, citing Lucr. 3.1076.

[77] Farquharson (n. 21), 735–6 discusses the main textual issues. δὲ μόνα is Casaubon's correction of δαίμονα, ἐτεῇ is Usener's suggestion for the manuscripts' ἔτι εἰ and ἔτι ἢ.

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and what exists in relation to the senses (νομιστί) is well attested[78] and the playful use of νομιστί to transform Democritus' sense of 'by convention' to Marcus' 'by law' recalls the earlier mention of Democritus at 3.3. What this passage confirms for our purposes is that Marcus understood Democritus along the same lines as he portrays the atomist of 10.7: halfway towards the right answer. Democritus, in both passages, is also a useful source of a lesson on the comprehensiveness of nature's providential reach.[79] My suggestion, then, is that limiting Marcus' criticism in 10.7 makes best sense of the distinction between rival positions that he opposes and provides a neat solution for the scope of the governing disjunction in the text itself, as well as in the argument of these chapters.

Yet, if Marcus is taking up a limited providential sort of atomism,[80] what is his aim in canvassing this non-Stoic option? The account given above of contemplative practice interweaving Heraclitean flux with distinctive positions within Stoic debate is again relevant in (2) and suggests, once again, the context of *theōria*. This section works by eliciting the result of what the dissolution of compounds amounts to on either of the alternatives posed in the 'atoms or providence' disjunction. If atoms, dissolution means scattering (though not of a random sort, if my reading above is accepted); if φύσις, cosmic re-absorption according to the Stoic account. However, the Stoic position is subdivided into two competing interpretations; the traditional view of periodic conflagrations repeated on an endless cycle, or the understanding of Panaetius, Boethus of Sidon and others, that the world is eternal.[81] The latter is cashed out using strongly Heraclitean language,[82] establishing the contemplative context and continuing the chain of reasoning.

It is remarkable that the elements that emerged in our discussion of 6.14–16 (Heraclitus; the contemplation of change and its ethical role; and the importance of flux as structuring both the objects of contemplation but also us, as humans who contemplate) each has a parallel here in 10.5–7. That final element of continuous human material flux finds a fairly radical exploration, from a Stoic point of view, in (3) where even the standard Stoic solution to the famous 'Growing Argument' (which sceptically denies that anything can grow because any added element makes the subject into a different individual) is downplayed. Marcus takes that standard solution (the 'peculiarly qualified individual', τῷ ἰδίως ποιῷ, which persists immaterially, in spite of material flux) and seems to put it off to one side, maintaining but also minimizing the Stoic position.[83]

[78] See, for example, Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr. vi Williams): Δημόκριτος τὰς ἀτόμους μόνας κατ' ἀλήθειαν εἰπὼν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τοῖς οὖσι, τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ νομιστεὶ ἅμαντα. Cf. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.135.

[79] In this way, I take it that Marcus' judgement is along the same lines as what Aristotle holds at *Ph.* 8, 252a32–b5, on Democritus' failure to establish a strong enough determining ἀρχή over and above pointing to what was prior to any given event. On this reading, Democritus accepted causal determinism in some form but failed to extend this analysis beyond something akin to a theory of regularity; see J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (London, 1982), 430–2.

[80] See 4.27 for another example of a limited sort of atomism being contrasted with providence. There the atomist universe is a 'medley' (κυκεών) but an ordered one (κόσμος). Contrast 6.10.

[81] See Philo, *Aeternitate Mundi* 2.497 M (EK F 99b). See also *SVF* 3.27 (Diogenes Bablonius) and *SVF* 3.5 (Zeno Tarsensis).

[82] εἴτε ἀιδίοις ἀμοιβαῖς ἀνανεουμένου, cf. Heraclitus, DK B90: πυρός τε **ἀνταμοιβὴ** τὰ πάντα καὶ πῦρ ἁπάντων ὅκωσπερ χρυσοῦ χρήματα καὶ χρημάτων χρυσός. The Heraclitean formulation of the opposed positions on conflagration is prefigured by τροπή at the start of (2); cf. Heraclitus, DK B31a. The Heraclitean flavour of this passage is often noted, but little interpreted; see G.S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge, 1962), 337.

[83] This analysis owes a great deal to the exposition of Sedley (n. 8), 400–1. Note too that both the body and the soul are depicted as undergoing continuous flux. Farquharson (n. 21), 396 takes the

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The emphasis on the material flux of the person contemplating is found in both 6.15 and 10.7 in similar terms. In the earlier passage, the constant cycle of respiration was supplemented by the recent (in cosmic terms) acquisition of the power of respiration itself (ἣν χθὲς καὶ πρῴην ἀποτεχθεὶς ἐκτήσω). In (3), the same emphasis on respiration as a representative of human material flux as a whole is repeated using overlapping language (πᾶν γὰρ τοῦτο ἐχθὲς καὶ τρίτην ἡμέραν ἐκ τῶν σιτίων καὶ τοῦ ἑλκομένου ἀέρος τὴν ἐπιρροὴν ἔλαβεν).

What then is the point of underscoring our constant flux as humans in the context of examining change in the world? We can begin to see a solution in the last line of our passage. The mention of the 'peculiarly qualified individual' is made in a near-concessive manner: it is in spite of this commitment that Marcus suggests that his present argument works. This places the emphasis firmly on the constant change of flux and not on the Stoic solution which attempts to unify the person associated with the changing body targeted by the infamous 'Growing Argument'.

David Sedley suggests that the fluid material self is what Marcus takes to be what we really are, as it is this part that is continually distributed and unified with the universe. We can sharpen this point by keeping the contemplative context in view. That the objects of contemplation are of just the same type as the constitution of the one contemplating helps to justify the relevance of the practice and suggests that there is little distinction to be made between contemplation and self-contemplation: they are mutually entailed, as both the self and the external world experience transformation and material flux, both requirements for contemplative objects. Thus by emphasizing our material flux as humans Marcus not only demonstrates the kinship between humans and the external world, but also highlights contemplative practice, that feature which makes us peculiarly human in the first place.

The contemplative context also helps to define what Marcus wishes to gain from associating Heraclitean flux with personal identity. In 6.14–16, we saw that Marcus' appeal to Heraclitus figured within the development of a *scala naturae* with humans, so long as their peculiar understanding (ἰδίας διανοίας) was activated, at the top. It is this understanding that I take to be the result of contemplation; after all, *oikeiōsis*, taken to be the understanding of oneself and one's relations, is a plausible ethical result of contemplation of the changing world. This enquiry need not be of a theoretical or innovative kind, but it must encompass continued focus on the material flux and elemental transformation apparent in the cosmos. So the recognition of the fundamental material flux of both the contemplator and the objects of contemplation emphasizes Marcus' ethical commitments, something he is keen to find in the practice of *theōria*.

Yet, we still might wonder quite why the near concession, or at least seeming diminution, of the standard long-established Stoic understanding of the 'peculiarly qualified individual' might be seen to affect Marcus' present argument (πρὸς τὸ νῦν λεγόμενον). If the aim of this section as a whole is to establish the thoroughgoingness of providential explanation, accepting either the Stoic view or a limited form of atomism, the point seems to be that one must accept material flux to judge dissolution properly. In this way, flux is important because it is on this ground that we ought to consider the options listed above, that is, atomist scattering, conflagration or eternal

'peculiarly qualified individual' to be a concession to the Epicurean view, but this seems to ignore Plut. *On Common Conceptions* 1083C–D. For more on the Stoic response to the 'Growing Argument', see D. Sedley, 'The Stoic criterion of identity', *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 255–75 and J. Bowin, 'Chrysippus' puzzle about identity', *OSAP* 24 (2003), 239–51.

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renewal. Marcus' acceptance of the Stoic 'peculiarly qualified individual' may seem to tone down his commitment to radical flux and subject him to the same contradictory surprise and indignation at death he attributes to the Democritean atomist discussed above. Marcus denies this and commits himself to the combination of observation and rational analysis that characterizes Stoic contemplation and is the only means of deciding between the three options he lists. If we keep the connection made above between the competing understandings of dissolution in 8.25 (both atomistic and Stoic) and the form of contemplation described in 8.26, we can see how Marcus intended to arrive at his judgement here in Book 10.[84] On such an account, Marcus is very far away indeed from accepting, even *ex hypothesi*, Epicurean atomism.

SOME FINAL DISJUNCTIONS

We may turn to one last group of instances of the providence/atoms disjunction. Once again, these are examples where Marcus seems to derive an ethical conclusion from the convergence of apparently opposed ideas. In 12.14–15, three distinct positions are enumerated: unalterable destiny, providence admitting intercession, and ungoverned chaos. The desired ethical response for each is described in each case suggesting that Marcus is leaving open the question of the correct view of the nature of the cosmos. Indeed, he seems to be going one step further in listing two different notions of causal determinism, one rigidly structured and one open to divine intercession. As in our previous passages, these alternative proposals are presumably competing positions within the Stoa. It is here that Annas, following Asmis, finds Marcus' commitment to the power of his intellect, even in the face of doubt. Thus Marcus' concession is real and in the service of a more fundamental ethical commitment.

I agree that Marcus' insistence on the power of his own intellect is of critical importance, but I also maintain that it would be a mistake to take such a position as prior, in the manner Annas and Asmis suggest, to his commitment to Stoic physical principles. The emphasis on the intellect is not an attempt to 'bracket out' or suspend judgement on claims in Stoic physics. What the emphasis on the intellect demonstrates is that Marcus is responding to the very tension identified above between one's seemingly incorrigible experience of the world and one's view upon reflection. It is the intellect that steadies the ship when sailing in deceptive Heraclitean waters:

ἤτοι ἀνάγκη εἱμαρμένης καὶ ἀπαράβατος τάξις ἢ πρόνοια ἱλάσιμος ἢ φυρμὸς εἰκαιότητος ἀπροστάτητος. εἰ μὲν οὖν ἀπαράβατος ἀνάγκη, τί ἀντιτείνεις; εἰ δὲ πρόνοια ἐπιδεχομένη τὸ ἱλάσκεσθαι, ἄξιον ἑαυτὸν ποίησον τῆς ἐκ τοῦ θείου βοηθείας. εἰ δὲ φυρμὸς ἀνηγεμόνευτος, ἀσμένιζε ὅτι ἐν τοιούτῳ κλύδωνι αὐτὸς ἔχεις ἐν σαυτῷ τινα νοῦν ἡγεμονικόν, κἂν παραφέρῃ σε ὁ κλύδων, παραφερέτω τὸ σαρκίδιον, τὸ πνευμάτιον, τἄλλα: τὸν γὰρ νοῦν οὐ παροίσει, ἢ τὸ μὲν τοῦ λύχνου φῶς, μέχρι σβεσθῇ, φαίνει καὶ

[84] Some of the worry commentators have about this passage (see Gill [n. 14], lxxiii, who references Cooper [n. 3], 346–51) is that Marcus appears to raise for examination different models of the natural world which support his ethical conclusions without ever making it clear why the Stoic position must be adopted. Rather Marcus proceeds as if he has indeed demonstrated the Stoic position. 8.25–6 suggests an answer to Gill, but the larger problem with such a worry is that it illicitly expects an explicit argument. If we agree that Marcus is writing for himself and his own self-improvement, we should not think he spelled out every argument he assented to. On the account I have given, this is where the appeals to memory become relevant. Marcus is piecing together the tools he needs to satisfy his own enquiry into Stoic philosophy; he is not attempting to persuade a sceptical audience.

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τὴν αὐγὴν οὐκ ἀποβάλλει: ἡ δὲ ἐν σοὶ ἀλήθεια καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη προαποσβήσεται;

Either the necessity of destiny or an order none may transgress, or providence open to hearing intercession, or an ungoverned jumble without purpose. If then a necessity which cannot be transgressed, why do you resist? If providence open to intercession, make yourself worthy of god's help. If an undirected jumble, be glad that in so great a crash of waves you yourself have a directing intellect; and if the waves carry you off, let it carry your flesh and your spirit, and all the rest of you; for your intellect it will not carry away. Does the lamp-light continue to shine and not lose its radiance until it is put out? Are truth and justice and self-control to be put out in you before the end?

Here it seems that the intellect (ἡγεμονικόν) is being privileged and valued on both determinist and non-determinist accounts. Regardless of what is the case at the level of physical causation, what is important, so this reading goes, is that truth, justice and self-control (ἀλήθεια καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη) be preserved and Marcus' ethical perspective left intact. Yet, this concessive reading is hard to square with how such moral ends could follow. Can 'truth' really be saved independently of whether Stoic providence is accepted? This is doubtful and it is, in any case, an unnecessary question to raise. If we look at two similar passages (9.28 and 9.39), we see that Marcus' approach is not concessive or agnostic but rather psychologically sensitive, though without any hint of surrender. What he is doing is addressing himself at his most unstable and subject to the bombardment of the material flux of the world. His advice to himself is to focus on that part to which he has most certain access: the intellect. If he maintains his confidence in this, it is not that a desirable ethical perspective will follow regardless of one's commitments in natural philosophy. Rather, because of the intellect, one can find the steady ground needed to pursue philosophical enquiry and arrive at a considered position unaffected by the surrounding, but only apparent, instability. Such a strategy entails no concession to non-Stoic views, but does suggest how one might, with lived experience in mind, arrive at the Stoic position.

At 9.28, we have contemplation explicitly raised as Marcus' prescription for curing a mistaken belief in chance:

τὸ δ' ὅλον, εἴτε θεός, εὖ ἔχει πάντα: εἴτε τὸ εἰκῇ, τρόπον [γὰρ] τινα ἄτομοι ἢ ἀμερῆ, μὴ καὶ σὺ εἰκῇ. ἤδη πάντας ἡμᾶς γῆ καλύψει, ἔπειτα καὶ αὐτὴ μεταβαλεῖ κἀκεῖνα εἰς ἄπειρον μεταβαλεῖ καὶ πάλιν ἐκεῖνα εἰς ἄπειρον. τὰς γὰρ ἐπικυματώσεις τῶν μεταβολῶν καὶ ἀλλοιώσεων ἐνθυμούμενός τις καὶ τὸ τάχος παντὸς θνητοῦ καταφρονήσει.

And whether the whole is god, all is well—or whether it be chance, somehow atoms or indivisibles, do not be ruled by chance. In a moment earth will cover us all, then earth, too, will change and what ensues will to eternity and that again to eternity. For one thinks about the continuous waves of change and alteration, and the swift passage of all things mortal, will look upon them with disdain.

A chance-ridden cosmos is not a 'real choice', as Annas has it, but a mere appearance that can be eliminated by turning to the practice of examining elemental change and alteration, the very description of contemplation's practice Marcus provides at 10.11.[85] In 9.39, the theme continues: either there is one fountain of mind (μιᾶς πηγῆς νοερᾶς πάντα) or there is a mechanistic world of atoms (κυκεὼν καὶ σκεδασμός). If the latter, Marcus is to say to his *hēgemonikon*: 'Are you dead,

[85] Annas (n. 12), 112.

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corrupted, made into a beast, play-acting, part of the herd, feeding with it?' The point is not that two models of the cosmos are offered disinterestedly; it is that accepting one of them makes Marcus subhuman in just the same way that beasts who have sense perception are said to be on the *scala naturae* of 6.16.

Thus there is no evidence here in these passages that Marcus is 'open' to the Epicurean view. What we find is something akin to Annas's mention of the Stoic 'mixed-presentation' of the three parts of philosophy.[86] While we need not agree with her point that Marcus is willing to detach himself from Stoic physical and metaphysical claims, it is right to say that Marcus, in the face of psychological confusion,[87] reminds himself of that which is most immediate and accessible.[88] As this is determined to be the intellect, it is from this initial step that a foundation is laid for further enquiry in the Stoic vein. Marcus is not extending an open hand to Epicureanism, he is establishing the route away from its tempting, but misleading, attractions.

The University of Edinburgh BENJAMIN HARRIMAN
Benjamin.Harriman@ed.ac.uk

[86] See Diog. Laert. 7.39–41.
[87] See τί οὖν ταράσσῃ; at 9.39.
[88] There is something of G.E. Moore's 'here is one hand' in this. See his 'Proof of an external world', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25 (1939), 273–300. As Moore appeals to the certainty that one is looking at her hand, Marcus falls back on the certainty of her access to her *hēgemonikon.* In both cases, the examples are given as more certain than one's belief in the arguments of an opponent. In Moore's case, the sceptic's; in Marcus', the atomist's.

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