



Marcus Aurelius's Stoicism in Meditations: A New Dawn

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Abstract:

Philosophical works are always difficult to understand. It is believed that man should be a Philosopher if he wants to understand it. Nothing is permanent in man's life so man should not worry about materialistic things. Marcus Aurelius had an introspective nature and his work Meditations is a fruit of his own experiences. Aurelius was famous for Stoic philosophy during his lifetime which made him different from others. Meditations explores the nature of life and death and the workings of the universe. Meditations is one of the greatest works of philosophical literature and a treasure trove of ancient wisdom that continues to inspire readers centuries later.

Keywords: Aurelius, Stoic, Philosophy, Meditations, treasure, ancient, wisdom, dawn

Introduction:

Life is a mixture of contradictory things like joy and sorrow, heat and cold, hard and soft etc. Man always seeks comfort and happiness in life. It is believed that man proposes and God disposes. Man's life passes through upheavals and sometimes he seems like a puppet in the hands of destiny. Greek tragedians believed in the power of destiny and they proved the same thing through the characters of their plays. In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says that attachment is the cause of man's unhappiness. The man should be free from attachment to attain salvation after death. However, it is a fact that man comes empty-handed and goes empty-handed from the world. Many saints and sages assert the same things in their works. The Stoic philosophers like Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Epictus, and Socrates etc. expressed their own views about life and paved a new way for man. They did not define happiness but they showed the way how to live a contented life.

What is Stoicism?

The Stoic school of thought flourished in Greek and Roman history. It was one of the loftiest and most sublime philosophies in the Western Civilization. The Stoics mainly believed in *the tranquillity of the mind and certainty of moral worth*. The early Stoic philosophers belonged to the Post-Aristotelian schools and they believed in knowledge and its pursuit. The Stoic Philosopher was the most influential man during the Hellenic age. In Hellenic Philosophy, Stoicism presented as a way of accommodation for people to whom the human condition no longer appeared as the mirror of a uniform, calm, and ordered cosmos.

In Stoicism, it is believed that perception is the basis of true knowledge and virtue is an inherent

feature of the world. According to Stoic philosophers, the world is composed with few exceptions divine fire. The Stoic moral theory is based on the unity of human beings. They must play an active role in world affairs, remembering that the world exemplifies virtue and right action. In ancient Greece, Stoicism was founded by Zeno who flourished in the early 3rd century BCE. He was well-versed in Platonic thought. Zeno believed that logic is an instrument and not an end in itself, human happiness is a product of life according to nature; physical theory provides how the right actions are to be determined, and perception is the base of certain knowledge. Zeno is known for his work *Hymn to Zeus* describes stoic reverence for the cosmic order and the power of universal reason and law. He indulged himself in developing Zenonian themes in logic, physics and ethics. He asserted that *logic and Physics are necessary to differentiate good and evil*.

In Rome, Stoicism is found in the philosophy of Lacijs Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Stoic philosophy was found in Roman juridical texts, gathered by St.Isidore of Sevilla, a Spanish theologian. During the second half of the 11th century, the Stoic texts of Cicero and Seneca became important sources for the initial discussion of social and political philosophy. John of Salisbury produced Policraticus in the 12th century in which it was stated that *Stoic doctrines of natural law, society, state, and providence were important elements in his effort to construct a social philosophy on ethical and metaphysical principles*.

Stoicism influenced Christian humanism in which it is stated that all religions have common bases of truth concerning God. According to the Cartesian, morality consists of obedience to the law

of reason, as God has deposited within humans that presupposes a knowledge of nature because humans must learn to know their place in the world. During the 17th century, the Cartesian revolution brought forward several Stoic notions: that morality consists of obedience to the law of reason, which God has deposited within humans; ethics presupposes knowledge of nature. However, Christianity contrasts with Stoicism, human beings must be conceived as being closely and essentially connected with the world.

Marcus Aurelius's Philosophy in Meditations:

Marcus Annius Verus is known as Marcus Aurelius in the history of Roman literature. Aurelius fell from prosperity to adversity in the journey of his life. Marcus was commander-in-chief and victory was due no less to his ability than to his wisdom in the choice of lieutenants, shown conspicuously in the case of Pertinax. Aurelius's wife Faustina is accused not only of unfaithfulness but of intriguing with Cassius and engaging him in feeble rebellion, it must be admitted that these charges rest on no sure evidence; and the emperor, at all events, loved her dearly, nor ever felt the slightest qualm of suspicion. Marcus trod the path beaten by his predecessors, seeking only to do his duty as well as he could and to keep out corruption.

Every word and deed should be according to nature. Aurelius accepted his ups and downs to live a contented life.

Aurelius's *Meditations* is a dialogue with himself. The book is divided into twelve chapters. It was translated into English by George Long. Like other Stoic Philosophers, Aurelius believed that virtue is happiness and vice is unhappiness. One should be careful in the distinction between things which are in our power and things which are not. Desire and dislike, opinion and affection, are within the power of the will; whereas health, wealth, honour, and other such are generally not so. It is believed that Human life is in flux in nature but the perception is dull. Everything which belongs to the body should be considered a stream. On the other hand, the soul is a dream and vapour. Life seems like warfare and after-fame salvation.

Man should observe even the things which follow after things which are produced according to nature contain something pleasant and attractive. The rottenness adds a peculiar beauty to the fruit. Everything is forgotten and looks at the chaos of the infinite and the emptiness of applause, and the changeableness and want of judgment in those who pretend to give praise and the narrowness of the space within which circumscribed, and be quiet at last. Aurelius considered death as a mystery of nature and man's body is composed of nature's elements and mingling into the same.

Everything is beautiful in itself, and terminates in itself, not having praise as part of

itself. *Everything is only for a day, both that which remembers which is remembered.* (Aurelius, 68) Very soon man will be turned into ashes or a skeleton, and either a name; but the name is sound and echo. And the things which are much valued in life are much valued in life are empty and rotten and trifling and like little dogs biting one another, and little children quarrelling, laughing and then straight away weeping. Moreover, Aurelius says that whatever happens to every man, this is in the interest of the universe; this might be sufficient. Whatever is profitable to any man is profitable also to another man. No man will hinder thee from living according to the reason of thy own nature: nothing will happen to thee contrary to the reason of the universal nature.

Aurelius advises man not to disturb himself by thinking of life. Loss should be considered as a change. Nothing is permanent in life.

Aurelius's Meditations: A New Dawn:

Man is a bundle of emotions and he passes through many upheavals in his life. Sometimes man becomes proud of prosperity and forgets the world. The man seems heartbroken when he is sad. Modern man indulges himself in rat race situations in this world and he is devoid of true happiness. However, man knows that every man dies sooner or later, and man clings to materialistic things. Sometimes man neglects the truth of life that makes him unhappy. Man's life is full of troubles and anxiety which is the reason for heart attack and brain strokes. Stoic philosopher Seneca said, "*True happiness is to enjoy the present, without anxious dependence upon the future, not to amuse ourselves with either hopes or fears but to rest satisfied with what we have, which is sufficient, for he that so wants nothing.*" (images.app.goo.gl)

Aurelius shares his own philosophy in his *Meditations*. Man should be contented with what he has and should not worry about his future. If a man wants to live a good life, he should follow virtues and leave the vices. A man should be introspective and avoid bad things. On the contrary, man is indulged in worldly things that make him horrible. P.B.Shelley asserts the same thing in the following manners:

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of the saddest thoughts.

(www.poetryfoundation.com)

The above lines denote the materialism of the world. Aurelius's *Meditations* is a spiritual guide for a man.

Conclusion:

Aurelius's *Meditations* can be a new dawn in man's life if he follows it. A man should be

moderate in his approach and should not be mad after materialistic things. He should not be engaged in worthless things and try to lead a virtuous life. Sometimes it is very difficult to digest Aurelius's philosophy for a common man. A man should try to differentiate between good and bad things by following Aurelius's philosophy.

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