CHAPTER 23

The *Meditations* as a (Philosophical) Autobiography

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The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius are in many respects an outstanding and singular piece of ancient literature. The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius composed a very personal text in the Greek language, which is to be taken as a literary text with autobiographic elements and tendency. The so-called *Meditations*[1] of Marcus Aurelius comprise 12 books; they do not have any sort of preface, prooimion, or prologos. They do have a structure, although not a very strict one. Some great themes and subjects the author is concentrating on: relation of a man towards himself, to other people around him, towards the gods, nature, and death. Themes are loosely connected, often in a very associative manner. Sentences are often incomplete, highly aphoristic. In many clauses the verbal phrase is missing, in many other clauses we only find indefinite verbal forms instead of imperatives. The character of quick noting can be seen, the pragmatics of memorizing short, but important sentences with important (philosophical) rules as well.

While older research (e.g. Farquharson (1944)) was tempted to consider the original *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius as lost, and to consider the transmitted text as a kind of disrupted and interrupted sort of *florilegium* of the original work, later scholars (e.g. Dalfen (1967)) interpret structure, themes, and content as very specific, but still in terms of literary traditions (e.g. consolation, diatribe, paraenetic i.e. protreptic literature, meditation literature). Certainly the *Meditations* must be seen as a kind of autobiography, but things are a bit more complicated than in other cases. The first problem is the still-discussed typology of genre or the discussion, if there is something similar to the modern understanding of autobiography in antiquity or before Augustine's *Confessions* at all, which are mostly considered to be the first 'real' autobiography.[2]

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Therefore we first have to sketch the literature under discussion in terms of ancient Greek autobiography before the *Meditations*.

1. What Does 'Autobiography' in Antiquity Mean? The *Meditations* in Literary Context

Ancient autobiography is a hybrid and complex genre. There is no established ancient term for the phenomenon we call today 'autobiography' (Momigliano (1971) 14f.). There was no specific literary form in which 'autobiography' could be found (Misch (3rd edn. 1949) 6f.); there is no normative typology or any theoretic reflection on autobiography in ancient Greek literature, although we detect the phenomenon itself existing in ancient literature and can formulate some single criteria (but there are not many).[3] The strongest characteristics of autobiographic literature are identity of author and protagonist, the identity of writer i.e. narrator and described person, and a specific autobiographic intention: theoretic reflection about oneself and one's life. This means not only describing, but simultaneously constructing (more than reconstructing) identity by referring to one's character, deeds, life – always referring to the past (Thomä (1998) 165; Pascal (1960); Bourdieu (1994)): therefore, when talking about ancient autobiography, we circulate between 'récit rétrospectif' and 'poetics of autobiography' (Lejeune (1973) 138; comprehensive is Wagner-Egelhaaf (2nd edn. 2005) 5–10). We tend increasingly to interpret the writing on one's past as constructing one's past, as omitting and emphasizing certain things, standard not only in literary composition but also conditioned by faulty human memory.[4] Furthermore, we can add to this an important condition, described by Philippe Lejeune as 'pacte autobiographique', meaning that the audience relies on the identity given between author, narrator, and protagonist.[5] In general, autobiographic texts always have a reference to reality as the author of this text is a real, existing person, marking a specific difference with fictional texts (Lejeune (1973) 155). But increasingly we realize that we are confronted with more or less subjective, or even fictional, transformations of personal records in autobiographic literature (Eakin (1985) 3; Holdenried (2000) 37–43). Besides, in many autobiographic texts, we can identify a certain tendency, not only to draw a complete picture of person and life, but also to accentuate deeper coherencies. Self-reflection is to be seen as the impetus to write about oneself (Dilthey (1927) 71–74, 196–204; Pascal (1960)); the individual subject is becoming the object to be analyzed (Aichinger (2nd edn. 1998) 170–99, esp. 180). It is this very coincidence of identity of author, narrator, and protagonist and the character of constructing coherence which gives every autobiographic text its own subjective or sentimental melody and its specific, surely not objective truth

(Misch (3rd edn. 1949) 13). Another important criterion is whether the autobiographer intends to publish his text or not: autobiographic texts which turn out to be a self-display or a self-portrait of their author in a specific situation are associated with this sort of text, described by W. Schulze as 'ego-documents' (Schulze (1996) 11–30). Texts which bear witness to a degree of introspection and show intense self-perception, and which are written for a mass readership and display the author's past with reference to the author's present and future, are to be seen as autobiographic in a stronger sense. These features can be found in many literary genres, even beyond strict boundaries of genre. Autobiographic writing does not form an independent literary genre; it is more a habit of writing than a genre of its own; furthermore, it is preferable not to use the term 'autobiography' in discussing ancient literature, but of autobiographic writings or texts, or even better of 'autobiographic elements', as Jacoby first proposed.[6] These are to be found in various contexts and adapted to the conditions of the literary genre in which they are drawn (e.g. biography, romance, diary, letter, historiographical records).[7]

As a kind of subtle preliminary to later autobiographies one could describe the fictional characters in Homer's epic poem *Odyssey* when talking about their lives, deeds, and events.[8] But, already in this very inception of Greek literature and literacy, we find interesting variants among the aforementioned criteria in terms of autobiography: if one considers Homer's *Odyssey* and the fact that Odysseus, while being a host of the Phaeacians at Scheria and while relaying his adventures after the end of the Trojan War, is narrator and narrated (protagonist) in one person, we come close to the field of self-display, self-fashioning, and autobiography. Of course, the main narrator – usually we call him 'Homer' – is staging Odysseus referring to his past and survived adventures and, of course, we should rather talk here of something like 'auto-bio-logia' than 'auto-bio-graphia'. Despite this difference, we can get an early glimpse of the so-called 'autobiographical pact' since the audience, the Phaeaceans, trust in Odysseus being at once the narrator and that which is narrated. That there is a lot of fantasy and fiction in Odysseus' stories is beyond doubt, but what connects Odysseus' self-display with later autobiography, is the very fact that while reflecting on his own (dramatic) past and while narrating an important part of his life, Odysseus is not only constructing a story, but he is also regaining his original identity and self-perception as a hero (Rösler (2005) 29–43, esp. 30–35).

The very first poet in whom we can find autobiographic elements, often in the shape of a 'seal' (Sphragis), in the real sense is Hesiod from Askra (circa 700 BC). In his *Theogony* (esp. 22–35) as well as in his *Works and Days* (esp. 633–62) he gives information and hints about important aspects of his personal life. We can find autobiographic hints and records of personal impressions in older Greek poets, especially in Archilochos, Solon, in early geographical literature (e.g.

Skylax of Karyanda) and in historiographical literature of the fifth and early fourth century (Herodotus, Thukydides, Xenophon).[9]

But the great philosopher Plato and the rhetorician Isocrates are usually the first authors on whom we focus while describing the phenomena of early Greek autobiographic writings in more detail (Lehmann (1997) 170; Sonnabend (2002) 59–61): Very often Isocrates' *Antidosis* (Oratio 15) is found to be the very first ancient 'autobiography' (Misch (3rd edn. 1949) 158) in a stricter sense (published in about 355/4 BC). The 82-year-old Isocrates recapitulates his career as a professor of rhetorics and education, and dresses his apologetic self-display as a (fictitious) forensic speech. He defends himself against the accusation of having corrupted the Athenian youth by his rhetorical education and getting paid for it. In his apology he insists on the political aspects and close connection with Athenian politics and thereby blends his own literary activity and public life of Athens.[10] Even with all the well-known differences to the historical Socrates, Isocrates is still modeling himself after the example of Socrates, who defended himself against the false accusation of corrupting the Athenian youth. At least since Plato's pseudo-autobiography of Socrates (the fictive *Apologia*, esp. 18e–24b) Socrates was renowned for insisting on his constant identity and for declaring he had always been the very same.[11] Socrates therefore became the model for a philosophical life(-style), setting up his own personality exclusively under strict philosophical, even ethical standards. And Socrates, of course, had to defend himself, which always makes necessary the display of verifiable facts of one's own deeds and life and which always provides a referential dimension to such apologetic speeches or writings. Isocrates is also emphasizing his consistent identity through all the years of educational and political activity: He, his conviction, his teaching, through all his life was always the very same – he simply never went astray (Fuhrmann (1979) 685–90; Marquard (1979) 690–99). And everybody can be identified as an individual person – not least through literature and the autobiographic elements involved. So we realize that autobiographic writing (as in the *Antidosis*) for Isocrates is a vehicle of self-knowledge and self-display together. In general, we see the precedence of apologetic tendencies and autobiographic writing in close context (Most (1989) 114–33). With this in mind, we see very easily how much ancient (pagan) autobiography is owed to the figure of Socrates (Dalfen (2000) 191).

As we said earlier, besides Isocrates' *Antidosis* the *Seventh Letter* of Plato is arguably a very early autobiographic text. The authenticity of this letter is still under discussion:[12] if it turned out to be biography disguised as autobiography (written by a pupil of Plato or somebody belonging to the Academy) or if it proved true autobiography, composed by Plato himself, an argument modern scholars seem to favor,[13] it would not be such a great leap in terms of autobiographic features. In any case, the narrator in this letter (for reasons of pragmatics let's call him Plato), is describing his own development in terms

of a philosophical life, which impressed the young Dion from Syrakus, whose friends beg for support after his death. The 74-year-old Plato gives a retrospective of his philosophical and political life during the years 404–354 BC. Plato discusses his motivation to go into Sicilian politics, declaring his philosophical persuasion, and embeds this into politics and into facts of his life, which are not given coherently, but are selected and incomplete.[14] The *Seventh Letter* (around 354/3 BC) is composed as an open letter, almost certainly intended for publication. We learn from Plato's very philosophical and political self-display that autobiographic elements are embedded in a mainly apologetic context (Erler (2005) 81). In comparison with Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* in Isocrates' *Antidosis* and Plato's *Seventh Letter* we note a lack of self-reflection, the strict turn to the inner self, while Isocrates and Plato are presenting and defending themselves as 'official' persons in public (cf. Misch (1976) 189–215, esp. 214f.).

In Hellenistic and Roman times (from 323 BC onwards) signatures of artists, self-epitaphs of poets,[15] and *hypomnemata* of politicians and rulers are en vogue. In our outline of the tradition of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius here we focus on the *hypomnemata*, as there are some important elements to keep in mind for interpreting Marcus' autobiography and as he himself uses the very close diminutive term *hypomnematia* (private notebooks) in describing his own writings (III 14). In what way did he compose *hypomnemata* in a wider sense? First of all we must realize a wide range here: Hellenistic *hypomnemata* (notebooks or aide-mémoires) sometimes refer to more private drafts, sketchy notes without formal interests, for private use of remembering (as a sort of cheat sheet) or providing material for writing to be done at a later date. And sometimes *hypomnemata* are carefully considered documents of self-display from the outset aimed at a mass readership (Engels (1993) 26f.). These texts play an important role in establishing, creating, and correcting public opinion. The Athenian politician Demetrios of Phaleron gave an account of his administration in Athens during the decade 317–307 BC in his *hypomnema* titled *perì tes dekaeteías* ('Above the ten years'; *FGrHist* 228); the Achaean politician Aratos of Sikyon wrote (around 215 BC) 30 books of *hypomnemata*, in which he vindicates himself for his promacedonian politics and which were in parts well preserved through Polybios and Plutarch (*FGrHist* 231). Ptolemaios VIII Euergetes II (second century BC) composed 24 books of *hypomnemata* with a broad range of subjects, of which we get a glimpse via quotations of Athenaios (*FGrHist* 234).[16]

Very common in the Roman context of republican times are autobiographic writings of politicians, more or less records and accounts of one's life and deeds – in the beginning still composed in Greek (e.g. P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus Maior: letter [*FGrHist* 232; *HRR* I 44–46]; P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica Corculum [*FGrHist* 233; *HRR* I 47–48]).[17] In the first century

BC the politician Sulla wrote 22 books or *commentarii* with autobiographic content.[18] What we see when we look at the Roman *commentarii* is a much more widespread tendency for self-presentation than in the Hellenistic *hypomnemata*.[19] It seems to be the case that vindication of one's own deeds and merits was very important in the competitive context of Roman aristocracy, whose members had to contend for administrative positions. But here we have to determine that the Roman *commentarii* as vehicles for autobiographic self-display are addressed not to an anonymous public, but to a confined audience, e.g. members of the family, friends, colleagues, or members of the same political classes.[20] Even the Roman emperors from Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Vespasian, Titus, Trajan, until Hadrian composed writings with autobiographic contents and elements, mostly very extensive *commentarii* in many books.[21] A strong feature of these imperial *commentarii* is their main stress on political and military activities and merits, which are clearly foregrounded. The emperor is displaying himself in his role as emperor, not as an individual human being or even as a private person; he obviously wants to be remembered as ruler in fame and glory.[22]

We are searching in vain here for complete and coherent curricula of lives or descriptions of the individual development of an imperial person. We scarcely get a view from inside of an individual's own soul and his inner self (Scholz (2003) 172f.; Pascal (1965) 30ff.). So we draw the conclusion that such a self-display of personal deeds and awards and the resulting control of public opinion obviously do not provide moments of serious personal record (Strasburger (1982) 1102).

In contrast to many *hypomnemata* and Roman *commentarii* the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius have no public character, and were not primarily supposed to be for a public audience. Of course, we always have to keep in mind that Marcus as the Roman emperor must have been aware of being a public person, however, and of the likelihood of his writings emerging into the public domain posthumously. However, their publication was not Marcus' main motivation.[23] As in many passages of his *Meditations* Marcus evokes things, persons, or events not explicitly or by name, but only in general, and makes allusions with universal words (e.g. pronomina). We are still unable today to decipher these enigmatic allusions (e.g. 'the oracle in Caieta' he mentions in I 17. 21 or 'the incident between Antoninus Pius and the tax officer in Tusculum' in I 16. 28).[24] Features such as these bring the *Meditations* closer to the genre of diary, which is not primarily intended for public reading (Kurczyk (2006) 27f.). In contrast to earlier autobiographic writings of leading Roman politicians and emperors, who were all obviously most interested in an idealized portrait, Marcus focuses on a critical evaluation of his inner life. By doing so he meets a condition required for an autobiographic writing since St. Augustine's *Confessions* and therefore as a forerunner he must be integrated into this tradition as

a starting point.[25] While respecting the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the extremely close connection of *hypomnemata* with memoirs is very important: In memoirs, which are in general much more literary as *hypomnemata*, usually a person comments on himself (Boemer (1953) 210–50, esp. 222f.). The writer as the protagonist in the narrative of memoirs describes his relation to his whereabouts and people around him; his focus on others is almost the same as on himself; he represents himself in the context of others. Sometimes memoir authors give the impression of being somewhat passive, only describing. Often we find apologetic moments in memoirs. But what marks Marcus' *Meditations* out from the genre of memoirs is his strong focus on his inner self, his own soul and character, what we have already described as different from the known *hypomnemata/commentarii*. As the *Meditations*, at least while being written, were not intended for publication, and do not present a systematic reflection on Marcus' whole life and as they are composed in certain situations, they are quite familiar with so-called 'journals of existence' (Stauffer (2nd edn. 1964); see Kurczyk (2006) 37f.), related to 'ego-documents'. But again we discover a remarkable difference: 'journals of existence' are mostly concentrated on the present. But Marcus in his *Meditations* is reflecting extensively on past times, which makes him better able to cope with present and future challenges. Until now, we may sum up that the *Meditations* display a very special, singular kind of a personal *hypomnema*, which the emperor Marcus has composed for himself.

2. Autobiographic Facts, Traces, and Shadows in the *Meditations*

As we can see from various internal historical facts alluded to, the whole of the *Meditations* must have been written around the last decade of Marcus' life, and in any event after he became emperor:[26] he talks about being old (II 2. 6. 11; X 36; cf. VI 30) and quite often he thinks of his own death (e.g. X 34; VIII 25 and 37; X 31; esp. book XII). Some superscriptions are lost, but the first editor Xylander's annotations to the codex labeled 'P' provide at least some localization, allowing for a rough dating of the *Meditations*: The *superscriptio* above book II says 'written among the Quadi, on the river Gran', above book III 'written at Carnuntum'.[27] The war against the Sarmats is mentioned only once in the *Meditations* (X 10). If the superscriptions are authentic, they give the military atmosphere of the wars and battles Marcus Aurelius had to fight around the composition of the *Meditations* and as such a kind of atmospheric 'flavor' of the conditions around Marcus (cf. I 17; II 17). Here we catch a shadow of the emperor's experience of realm during his last war campaigns against Marcomanni, Quadi, and Sarmats in his last years, far away from Rome and from home, along the battlefields. It does not seem the most comfortable

ambience conducive to relaxed writing and reflecting on his life. Marcus is facing death every day, everywhere around him: apparently a plausible reason for his frequently reflecting about blood, bones, flesh of the body, all described in dramatic and dark colors (e.g. II 2; cf. VIII 37; III 8; III 13; IV 39; VIII 34; cf. X 10). It seems to be this very situation, these extreme whereabouts, always writing between battles, between dangerous moments, and the omnipresent threat of death, let alone the responsibility for his warriors, in which Marcus Aurelius focuses on what is most important for him, on his inner self, his own life, and ethical development. In terms of autobiography, book I (cf. V 31) is especially interesting. According to the evidence given in the *editio princeps* P, which is based on codex P (now lost) and codex A, our book I was prefixed later (as an introduction), since our book II was undoubtedly denoted book I (Farquharson (1944, repr. 1968) vol. I, lxixf.). Our book I does in fact deviate from the other books of the *Meditations* in terms of content, structure, and style. It consists of a catalogue of 16 people in separate passages. All these persons are acknowledged by certain virtues and, for this reason, they all function as examples and standards. We encounter members of his family, such as, for example, his grandfather Verus, his biological father, his mother, his great grandfather, and his brother (I 1–4; 17) as well as important teachers, i.e. Diognetos, the stoic philosopher Rusticus, Apollonius, and Sextus, then Alexander, the philologist, the famous rhetorician Fronto, Alexander, the Platonist, and Catulus, the Peripatetic philosopher Severus and Maximus (I 6–15).[28] In a very personal and affectionate manner Marcus pays homage to his adoptive father Antoninus Pius, who is an extremely important figure for Marcus (I 16), and whom he mentions again in VI 30. Marcus retrospectively expresses his thanks to all these affiliated persons because of certain qualities, virtues, and features, which he learned from them, and by the end of his catalogue he proves himself grateful to the gods for having become acquainted with all these people and others in addition, such as his wife, and for his good luck in life (I 17). Marcus takes stock of his own development in the form of a retrospective catalogue, and reflects on the influences he underwent in terms of character, behavior, and ethics prosaically. He seems to adore such systematic records – an example is in book VI (48), in which Marcus describes qualities of character as recommended standards of which one should always be aware. Besides, it is extremely interesting to see how Marcus adapts the old form of catalogue, which since Homeric times reflects a characteristic aristocratic interest in demonstrating and constructing genealogy and by doing so, of course, constructing authority and legitimacy. But Marcus is presenting not a usual genealogical tree of aristocrats (as we might easily expect from a Roman emperor), but a very individual and private catalogue of people around him, who mark the genealogy, development, and formation of his own mind, intellect, and soul. Furthermore Marcus declares that still he is not really

able to cope with these high standards actualized by these people, that they describe ideals he still has to achieve. All the qualities, which Marcus attributes in chains of rich adjectives to certain men, are mentioned with a specific relevance to himself.[29] They figure as a kind of ethic purpose he strives to accomplish, so we can conclude a protreptic function. Corresponding with that is a passage in book V (31) on his social context: there Marcus looks gratefully back on his life and examines how he has conducted himself against his fellow men and what he himself has given in a moral sense or in the form of benefits (correct Misch (3rd edn. 1949) 493). As a whole we must take the specific catalogue in book I not only as an autobiographic document expressing thanks and commitment, but also as a singular record of unsparing self-criticism.[30]

What else are we able to get out of the *Meditations* in terms of autobiographic hints? While mentioning illnesses and an ill body (e.g. VI 29; IV 44) we may guess that Marcus' physical health was not the best. Many times he comes to speak about how to cope with aches, but always he qualifies statements like this and declares physical pain to be nothing else than natural, which therefore must not discourage from fulfilling necessary duties (VI 33; VII 33 and 64). And indeed, Marcus' later biographers (Cassius Dio; *Historia Augusta*) confirm chronic diseases particularly in his youth, but later on as well (e.g. Cassius Dio 71, 36, 3). Besides, from the *Meditations* we gather that Marcus worried about a possible successor, when he mentions the loss of several children (mostly in the 260s; X 34) or the actual illness of a child (VIII 49) or when he makes a remark on a pregnancy of his wife (IX 3), who has borne at least 11 children.[31] And when Marcus is concerned about how he was perceived and assessed in public (which his biographers again confirm), we get a further autobiographic spot in the *Meditations* (III 4; IV 18; V 3. 25. 28; VIII 1; IX 5; XII 2f.; cf. *HA* 7, 1; 29, 5).

3. The *Meditations* as a 'Philosophical' Autobiography

What we have to consider first here is the enduring problem the ancient Greeks, and first and foremost philosophers (e.g. Aristotle, Plutarch),[32] had with presenting and displaying themselves explicitly. Just to make it clear: the ancient Greeks certainly did display themselves, but when we see the historian Xenophon narrating about himself in his (more or less) autobiographic *Anabasis* not only in third person, but also assuming a pseudonym, just to appear as neutral as possible, and when we see the rhetorician Isocrates apologizing at the beginning of his *Antidosis* for talking about himself, or the philosopher Plato explicitly making clear that with his autobiographic

Seventh Letter he is only reacting to the request of Dion's friends, then we have to notice a certain reluctance to display oneself – at least from a moral point of view.[33] Therefore Isocrates and Plato (and, earlier, Socrates) combine their self-display, however they were motivated, with a strong apologetic countenance; to put it another way, obviously it belongs to apologetic contexts to speak about oneself, usually considered as embarrassing.[34] On the contrary the Romans were not so reluctant to talk about themselves, as it was common and even necessary in political respects. With this in mind we can understand that what Marcus Aurelius is doing is much more Greek than all the autobiographic writings of the previous Roman emperors since Hadrian – not to mention that he is writing in Greek. Marcus does not describe himself in a modern egomaniac sense; furthermore we do not witness self-presentation in an established imperial mode, but a very special philosophical dialogue of Marcus with himself. What is most striking is the dialogue structure underlying the whole text. Of course, when Marcus is talking with himself, he uses a pattern very common in Greek literature from the very beginning: in Homer's epic poems heroes talk with their 'heart' (e.g. *Iliad* 11, 404–10; *Odyssey* 20, 18), the tragic poet Euripides lets his Medea talk with her 'heart' (*Medea* 1056ff.), which was a favored classical text for Stoic philosophers.[35] What Marcus is presenting is a very similar kind of conversation with himself. He even apostrophizes his own soul explicitly (II 6 and X 1). By doing so, he manages to distance him from himself. So he is staging a second 'ego' inside himself, towards whom he turns, to whom he submits his admonitions, reflections on life and death, and thanks. So here we deal with the phenomenon of Marcus splitting up his self into an 'inner self' and a 'reflecting self'. When reflecting on anything, Marcus is addressing himself (Dalfen (2000) 193; van Ackeren (2006) 54–67, esp. 56). Usually we recognize as a constant phenomenon of many ancient and even more modern autobiographic texts a lack of distance between author and what he represents, which must surely be ascribed to the identities of the people representing and represented (Kurczyk (2006) 25). But we do not see such subjectivity at all in the *Meditations* – on the contrary Marcus tries hard to get the greatest possible distance from himself. This enables him to analyze and to diagnose his own merits and demerits without any mercy or self-pity. At this point we must emphasize a remarkable difference between our concept of an individual subjective self (a concept mostly shaped by Christianity) and the ancient, above all Stoic, concept of a self, to be taken to mean a small part of the comprehensive cosmos, whose nature is governing the human nature and human self and is providing structure and destination (microcosmos – macrocosmos; van Ackeren (2006) 57). And from many points of view we notice Stoic philosophical beliefs, structures, and doctrines in Marcus' *Meditations*, but also Cynic and perhaps even Platonic ones (Gill (2007) 175–77; Perkins (1992) 269).

What is more, Marcus is analyzing, criticizing, or reflecting on himself in order to become a morally better person. Marcus is deploying a method of reflection often related to the Stoic philosophers Seneca the younger (circa AD 4–65) and Epictetus (circa AD 55–135), but which goes back to an old method well known from the Pythagorean tradition of meditation. We should respect that already Seneca's and Epictetus' practice of soul-searching under philosophical (ethical) standards is to be related not only to the Hellenistic methods of meditation and therapy of self (e.g. Epicurus), but finally to the methods and therapies of the Pythagorean sect, quoted explicitly by Seneca (e.g. *Epistulae* 52, 10; 90, 6; 94, 42; esp. 108, 17–19) and Epictetus as well (e.g. referring to the so-called 'Golden Verses' ascribed to Pythagoras himself: *Diss.* III 10, 2f.).[36] It is important to keep in mind that the Pythagoreans came up again around the middle of the first century BC at Rome, where we can grasp a groundswell of interest in old Greek philosophers and their doctrines (esp. Pythagoras and Plato). We know about individuals and philosophers, first Nigidius Figulus, then Quintus Sextius and his pupil Sotion, the later teacher of Seneca the younger, who all combined Pythagorean doctrines, methods, and style of life with Stoic philosophy (Seneca, *Epistulae* 59, 7; 64, 2f.; 108, 17–23; *dialogi* 5, 36, 1 = *de ira* 3, 36, 1–3).[37] From here we get some impressions of a characteristic Roman amalgamation of Greek philosophy, mainly concentrated on aspects of practical application and adaptation to daily life. As far as we are aware, there were many Neopythagorean philosophers and adherents during the first and second centuries AD.[38]

Marcus is aligning himself into this Stoic-transformed, but older, tradition of meditation first by the method of daily recapitulating his own merits and demerits and correcting himself, which must be assigned to the old concept of 'care of the self'.[39] The *Meditations* are to be seen as an exemplar of the Hellenistic culture and fashion of *encheiridia* (little handbooks), which are produced mainly for one's own purposes – in order to have important philosophical maxims, sentences, or doctrines at hand in a moment, when needed. Marcus himself defines as necessary to keep philosophical sentences and doctrines always available in the same way a medical doctor must have prepared and available his instruments for procedures suddenly necessary (III 13; cf. III 11). Philosophical tenets and theorems are to be seen as instruments for the soul to be equipped to meet the demands of life. Since Pierre Hadot's important research we call meditative writings based on reflections and sentences 'spiritual exercises', a genre to which Epictetus' *Encheiridion* as well as Marcus' *Meditations* obviously belong (see Hadot (2nd edn. 2005) esp. 69–98). These 'spiritual exercises' are good examples of Hellenistic philosophy's bias towards practical ethics. We must now take into account the fact that the Stoic practice of meditating leads to the shaping of the inner self and towards autobiographic writing (cf. Cacciatore (1995) 257). Such spiritual

texts of philosophical provenance generate a very personal sort of text – personal notebooks – which usually are not handed down because of their personal, not readily adaptable character (Hadot (2nd edn. 2005) 69ff.). Therefore we must approach texts like the *Meditations* as private philosophical reflections, quasi-private liturgical texts. Often Marcus admonishes and urges himself, to focus only on important things (e.g. II 4) or to think of all the famous (named here are Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Socrates) and the not-famous people before and now dead (VI 47).[40] In so many contexts Marcus appeals to authorities, either fellow-men or philosophers, either implicitly or explicitly. What he learned from them or what he gained from their writings, he reproduces by heart (Dalfen (2000) 192 and (1967)). Once more we gather some autobiographic information, now about Marcus and his attitude towards books and bookishness: time and again Marcus reminds himself to banish books (e.g. II 3; III 14; IV 30), which means articulation of a certain philosophical worldview. From these and familiar remarks we may infer that the young Marcus was an enthusiastic student of philosophical, mainly even logic, literature, but when he grew older, he grew more and more skeptical as regards strict intellectual disciplines and their relevance for life (V 6. 14. 28; VI 14. 44; VII 55. 64. 68. 72; VIII 7; XI 1).[41] In his later critics on a pure intellectual scholarship his main interests in practical ethics, in modes and methods of living a morally modest life become clear. As he ages, Marcus favors writing on himself and to himself, reflecting his errors and merits, his experiences, his social relations, which has practical ethical pertinence. Here we detect an originally Greek practice of self-analysis aiming for 'care for the self' shaped in typical Roman manner concentrated on practical relevance (see Erler (1998) 381). Therefore autobiography in the *Meditations* comes out as analysis of self, in the strict concentration on one's own soul. This includes abstraction of the daily whereabouts, of his job as emperor, of himself and instead reduction to the real essentials and includes a 'view from above' to all human affairs (for details see Hadot (2nd edn. 2005) 123–35). He admittedly sometimes considers himself to be the Roman emperor (III 5; VI 26. 30; 44; IX 29; X 31; XI 18. 1), but mostly simply to be a human being – in usual physical, psychological, intellectual, and social respects. It is this very reduction of Marcus to the level of an ordinary human being which may count as a specific philosophical feature. In addition, it might have been quite unusual for a Roman emperor to regard himself mainly as a Roman citizen (II 5; III 5; VI 44; cf. III 14) and to abandon political aspects (Brunt (1974) 2). But Marcus understands Rome as metaphor for the Stoic conception of cosmopolitanism. He adopts via Posidonius the idea of the world being a coherent organism in which all is interrelated, a theory which incorporates the metaphor of the world being a *polis.* So Marcus can label himself as Roman, as belonging to Rome the cosmopolitan city, symbolizing the cosmos of the whole world including every single individual

(VI 36. 38; see further Neuenschwander (1951)). We even see how Marcus subordinates himself under the rule of the cosmos (II 4). Whether Marcus is adopting this 'view from above' or cosmic perspective based on ethical or rather physical reasons is still under discussion, but in any event the concepts of cosmopolis and the equality of mankind include ethical and physical ideas.[42] This strategy of methodically examining himself, his circumstances, nature, and all events around him we may call an analytic stripping-off or diaheretic procedure,[43] sometimes even with an embarrassing or uncomfortable flavor (e.g. IX 36). In this procedure things are reduced to their real being, and seemingly important or threatening things become explainable or even unimportant, and fear disappears. So his autobiographic writing even has a consolatory function for Marcus. But just to make it clear: he is not indulging himself in sentimental consolations and reviews; always critical on himself, he sticks to his future aims of constituting moral identity and self-improvement – at least as far as possible (Dalfen (2000) 201). Different from traditional autobiographic writings also in the Roman context Marcus is not interested in displaying his own life as successful, but in giving a paraenetic and protreptic inventory of his inner self in terms of self-correction. We may claim this method to be relevant especially in autobiographic terms: for it is identity-establishing and -constructing and belongs, together with the selective character of every autobiography (as retrospective), to the aforementioned standards of autobiographic writings. Just to mention an interesting fact last here: What is specifically 'philosophical' in the *Meditations* as an autobiographical text, is the internalization of 'life' by reflecting less on events during his life than on (related) persons, habits, and behaviors which made an impact on his soul. To compound this point we should keep in mind the 'retreat into himself' Marcus mentions over and over (e.g. IV 3; VI 3) to be a striking philosophical and – as an ascetic – for an emperor, a most unusual feature of an autobiographic notebook.

4. Conclusion

First, of course, it is the given fact of identity of author, narrator, and protagonist which allows us to declare the *Meditations* of Marcus as an autobiographic writing. We find autobiographic traits not as central features, but mostly associative allusions – as well as book I where Marcus presents his catalogue of exemplary persons.[44] As Marcus is addressing himself, often it is enough to indicate the events. Above, the *Meditations* are to be called a 'philosophical' autobiography for several reasons. What Marcus is doing is analyzing himself in a quite rigorous manner. In Marcus' times meditating and care for self have already been transformed and made Roman, but in fact Marcus finds old Greek philosophical reflections a convenient method, as used

in the Stoic school of his times. We understand his self-analysis in the context of construction of identity. Marcus is working hard on improving himself in moral terms and on achieving the right attitude towards everything and everybody. In doing so he does not claim to have an absolutely identical identity, being always the same, a feature often considered to be a constitutive element of ancient autobiography (cf. Isocrates' *Antidosis*; Fuhrmann (1979)). Moreover he formulates aims and targets he still has to reach. But what is interesting here is the fact that Marcus, although not always having been the same, puts his main focus on the always same and identical philosophical *purposes* he seeks to achieve.[45] In XI 21 Marcus makes clear: 'Who does not have one and the same *skopos* [aim in life], cannot be the same his whole life long.' In the context of all ancient philosophical schools this aim '*skopos*' i.e. '*telos*' means 'happiness', which naturally is determined by every school in a different way. This teleological view has no reference to his life in general (Niggl (1992) 58–65, esp. 59 and (2005) 5), but to his internal development in terms of philosophical and ethical aims.[46] Identity of a person for Marcus therefore has to do with identity of aims (Dalfen (2000) 201). By shifting the usual trait of identity from individual to common human aims Marcus presents once more an outstanding aspect of his *Meditations*, which are – nevertheless – in terms of genre to be considered a fascinating unique and hybrid philosophical and autobiographic text.[47]

NOTES

1. Xylander, the editor of the *editio princeps*, used the title *Eis heauton* ('To himself'), which is supposed to be inauthentic; cf. the speculations of modern interpreters (Dalfen (2000) 192f. n. 20). The text is quoted from the edition of Dalfen (2nd edn. 1987).
2. Cf. for instance Spengemann (1980) 1–33, but better see Dalfen (2000) 187f.
3. Trédé-Boulmer (1993) 13–20; cf. de Man (1979a) and (1979b), who takes autobiography as a figure of reading.
4. Pietzcker (2005) 15–27, esp. 18f.; Reimer (2001); Fried (2003); Wagner-Egelhaaf (2nd edn. 2005) 43f., 47f., 87–91.
5. Lejeune (1973) 137–62. Cf. Bruss (1974) 14–26, who argues that this pact does not work, if a greater temporal distance is given between author and audience.
6. Jacoby (1909) 1157–63. Modern authors often use this term without referring to Jacoby (e.g. Zimmermann (2005) 238; Dalfen (2000) 188).
7. A still excellent outline of the genre within the scope of biography is Momigliano (1971).
8. First Suerbaum (1968) 150–77, then following Zimmermann (2007) 3–9.
9. Overview in Momigliano (1971) esp. 23–58. For autobiographical hints in poets see Niedermeier (1919); for the historians see Zimmermann (2002) 187–95.

10. Momigliano (1971) 59f.; cf. the late antique autobiography by the rhetorician Libanios (*Oratio* I); Norman (1965).
11. Cf. Socrates in Plato's *Phaidon*, see Erler (2005) 88–92.
12. Outline in Brisson (3rd edn. 1997); id. (2000) 15–24 and Erler (2005) 75f. tend to take it for authentic, but also stress the fact that an open letter has to be seen as an autobiographic discourse anyway. Questions of authorship therefore are to be neglected.
13. After Momigliano (1971) 60–22 see mainly Brisson (2000); Erler (2005).
14. Cf. the stronger modern definition of autobiography to be criticized, see Starobinski (2nd edn. 1998) 200.
15. Poets compose their own epitaphs blending real autobiographic facts and autobiographic fictions, see Männlein-Robert (2007) 363–83.
16. Meister (1990) 83–89 and Engels (1993) 19–36, esp. 20f.
17. Examples in Kurzcyk (2006) 48ff.; Engels (1993) 33.
18. Scholz (2003) 172–96. For the discussion, if there was a Greek version of Sulla's *commentarii* as for other Roman *commentarii* as well, see Lewis (1993) 697f.
19. Misch (3rd edn. 1949) 247; for a more detailed typology see Reichel (2005) 56ff.
20. Kurczyk (2006) 50 and esp. Scholz (2007) 385–405, esp. 396.
21. In greater detail see Lewis (1993) 629–706; Dalfen (2000) 189.
22. For more details see Malitz (2003) 227–42 and Pausch (2004) 303–36.
23. Misch (3rd edn. 1949) 450 takes publication as given; *pace* Dalfen (2000) 192.
24. Cf. also I 7; II 4. 1; XI 16. 2f. See Brunt (1974) 5; more evidence in Dalfen (2000) 193 n. 21.
25. *Pace* Kurczyk (2006) 43 with further literature.
26. Farquharson (1944, repr. 1968) vol. II, lxxxiii; Birley (1968) 382f.; for dating in detail (e.g. book I: before AD 175, books II–III: AD 171–75) see Brunt (1974) 1–20, esp. 18f.
27. Farquharson (1944, repr. 1968) vol. I, esp. lxixf.; Rutherford (1989) 45–47.
28. Cf. *HA* 2, 7–3, 3 and Cassius Dio 72, 35; more detailed is Rutherford (1989) 115–25.
29. For instance when mentioning the irascibility he is often struggling against (II 1; 10; 16), while his teachers had a good grip on themselves (e.g. I 1; cf. 9. 9; 15. 6).
30. Rutherford (1989) 90–115; Dalfen (2000) 193–96; but cf. Birley (1968), who takes book I as a 'testament'.
31. See outline in Birley (1968) 422.
32. Cf. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* IV 3, 1125a19–34; *Politica* III 1–4; Plutarch, *De laude ipsius*, esp. c. 2; see Pernot (1998) 102 n. 2.
33. Reichel (2005) 69; but cf. Thukydides IV 104, 4 with Reichel (2005) 59.
34. For the phenomenon of *periautologia* ('talk about oneself') in orators and rhetoricians see Pernot (1998) 101–24, esp. 105.
35. Regarding the interest of the stoic philosopher Chrysippus in that phenomenon, Gill (1996) 226–39.
36. These are a collection of sentences ascribed to Pythagoras, but actually enclosed Hellenistic material mostly about ways of living, from questions of diet up to soul-searching, Riedweg (2002) 159–61.

37. See Newman (1989) 1473–1517 and Kahn (2001) 90–93, 139–46.
38. Serious ones are e.g. Moderatos of Gades, Nikomachos of Gerasa; cf. the much discussed Apollonios of Tyana.
39. Humphries (1997) 125–38; cf. Thomä (1998) esp. 298f. (without referring to Marcus Aurelius).
40. Cf. VII 19, where Chrysippus, Socrates, and Epictetus are mentioned.
41. Cf. his teacher Fronto, *Epistulae ad Marcum Caesarem* IV 13, 2; *De eloquentia* 2, 13; 2, 17; 5, 4.
42. Discussion is outlined by Gill (2007) 175–87.
43. In greater detail Hadot (2nd edn. 2005) 73ff.; without any reference to Marcus Aurelius, but to modern autobiography see Niggl (1992) 599f. for self-analysis in autobiography.
44. So with Dalfen (2000) 206, who with good reason mentions ((2000) 206f., in context of catalogues in autobiography) a letter written by Fronto addressed to Marcus Aurelius (*De nepote amisso* 2, 8f. Van den Hout); cf. Erler (1998) 379, who points again (after Dalfen (1967) 194ff.) to parallels with the catalogues of Lucretius. For discussion of physical symptoms in the letters between Marcus and Fronto see Perkins (1992) esp. 270–72.
45. For moral identity see Haker (1999) in detail.
46. Cassius Dio, one of the biographers of Marcus Aurelius, states in his summary that Marcus has always been the same and that he was a good man (Cassius Dio 71, 34, 5; cf. *HA* 14, 5) – we cannot decide whether Cassius Dio says that after having examined other evidence, or whether he takes for granted Marcus' own ideal standards; skeptical about that is Rosen (2002) 421–25.
47. For the hybrid mix of various literary genres see van Ackeren (2006) 59f.

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