

RHETORIC AND SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN MARCUS AURELIUS' *MEDITATIONS**

by

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ABSTRACT: The traditional view that the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius were devoid of rhetoric and literary beauty has been recently questioned by a number of scholars. It is now believed that even though the Emperor probably never had in mind the publication of his *hupomnemata*, he consciously used the art of rhetoric in his work. The purpose of this was to enhance the effect of spiritual exercises which are at the heart of the *Meditations*. The article demonstrates the use of some rhetorical devices in the work, such as enumerations, fictitious dialogues, the use of diminutives and superlatives, and their spiritual purpose.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of Book Two of his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius says to himself:

Put away your books, be distracted no longer, they are not your portion. Rather, as if on the point of death, reflect like this: “you are an old man, suffer this governing part of you no longer to be in bondage, no longer to be a puppet pulled by selfish impulse, no longer to be indignant with what is allotted in the present or to suspect what is allotted in the future”. (II 2)¹

Is this to be taken as an anti-intellectual stance of the old Emperor? And what are τὰ βιβλία here? Epictetus, Plato or other classics of Greek philosophy? Or maybe the great Roman poets? Cicero perhaps? We do not know. Another question is what it means for Marcus Aurelius to get rid of his books. Is it merely because they are no longer necessary, since their content has already become an

* I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reader of the article for suggesting changes which helped me to make the composition more clear and to emphasise more strongly some points of this contribution.

¹ ἄφες τὰ βιβλία· μηκέτι σπῶ· οὐ δέδοται. ἀλλ' ὡς ἤδη ἀποθνήσκων ὧδε ἐπινοήθητι· γέρων εἶ· μηκέτι τοῦτο ἑάσης δουλεῦσαι, μηκέτι καθ' ὀρμὴν ἀκοινώτητον νευροσπαστηθῆναι, μηκέτι τὸ εἰμαρμένον ἢ παρὸν δυσχερᾶναι ἢ μέλλον ὑπιδέσθαι. (Greek text and translation according to the edition by FARQUHARSON 1968).