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The emperor's old clothes : Marcus Aurelius' attitude towards the christians again

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THE EMPEROR'S OLD CLOTHES: MARCUS AURELIUS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CHRISTIANS AGAIN¹

I. THE PROBLEM

It was always the subject of the scholarly consternation how could such honest and noble character as the Emperor Marcus Aurelius was (he reigned as the Emperor AD 161–180) permit the executions of the Christians in Lugdunum (Lyons) and Vienne in Gaul, AD 177². I myself must confess too that it has been an enigma to me since ever³. Yes, we can ‘understand’ Nero („he was a crazy man” – here a verdict might be issued), we do have also Suetonius’ accounts about another icon of cruelty and insanity – the emperor Domitian and his hostile acts toward the intellectuals at all (Suet. *Nero*, 26–29; *Domit.* 10–11)⁴. But Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, one may wonder? After the lecture of his *Meditations* (Τὰ εἰς ἑαυτόν; Latin: *Meditationes*) one would expect rather something totally opposite⁵. It is a commonplace that the

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¹ I thank Dr. Tatiana Krynicka for Her valuable remarks. Her great knowledge and critical comments strengthened my argumentation. All the remaining faults are mine.

² More details can be found in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5. 1. 3–61 (he wrote his work more than hundred years after the events in Gaul, or even later, see A. M o m i g l i a n o, *Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.*, [in:] *Essays in Ancient History and Modern Historiography*, Oxford 1977, p. 108), quoting the epistle of the Gallic churches to the brethren in Asia and Phrygia; cf. J. B e h r, *Social and Historical Setting*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, eds. F.M. Young, L. Ayres, and A. Louth, Cambridge 2004, p. 60; see M. H u m p h r i e s, *Early Christianity*, London – New York 2006, p. 20 and P. K e r e s z t e s, *The Massacre at Lugdunum in 177 A.D.*, *Historia* 16 (1967), pp. 75–86; cf. also my article *Polemika i retoryka w dialogu Minucjusza Feliksa ‘Oktawiusz’*, *SE* 10 (2009), p. 407.

³ T. Z i e l i ń s k i, *Chrześcijaństwo antyczne*, Toruń 1999, p. 199.

⁴ T. S i n k o, *Zarys historii literatury greckiej* II, Warszawa 1959, p. 333.

⁵ The additional evidence, apparently in many places based on what is known from the *Meditations*, may be found in the biography of Marcus by Iulius Capitolinus, in the compilation today known as *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (*SHA*), or *Historia Augusta*, cf. M. C y t o w s k a and H. S z e l e s t, *Historia literatury rzymskiej. Okres cesarstwa*, Warszawa 1992, p. 574f.

man who composed one of the most profound and spiritual treatises ever written belongs to the most familiar figures from antiquity. With Marcus' intimate diary we do obtain an opportunity, exceptionally rare in the Graeco-Roman literature, to look into one's spiritual life⁶. Other famous personalities were certainly Cicero, whose letters so shocked centuries later Francesco Petrarca, and Saint Augustine of Hippo with his *Confessions*. Accordingly, no wonder that one sees in Marcus the most merciful ruler among the Roman emperors (the Platonic ideal of a philosopher on throne: *studium in eo philosophiae fuit* – SHA, 3. 1)⁷, unable to do any harm to anyone, friendly and kindly oriented toward others, a loyal husband and a tender father⁸. This was, in fact, already the verdict of the ancients themselves, like that of the historian Cassius Dio Cocceianus (71. 29. 3; 71. 35. 6: οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἄλλως τε καλῶς ἐπεφύκει καὶ ἐκ τῆς παιδείας ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ὠφελήθη, Ἑλληνικῶν τε καὶ Λατίνων ῥητορικῶν καὶ φιλοσόφων λόγων, καίπερ ἕς ἄνδρας ἤδη τελῶν καὶ ἐλπίδα αὐταρχήσειν ἔχων, αἰεὶ διετίμματο; ed. U.P. Boissevain) and the sophist Aelius Aristides' speech *To Rome* (or. XIV)⁹. Let us consider also for a while: Marcus' treatise was composed in the circumstances exceptionally unfavourable to any writer, supposedly in the 170s, during the severe military campaigns in the north provinces against the bellicose Quadi and Marcomanni¹⁰ (cf. *Medit.* 1. 17. 8: Τὰ ἐν Κουάδοις πρὸς τῷ Γρανούᾳ; „Written among the Quadi on the Gran”; 2. 17: Τὰ ἐν Καρνούντῳ¹¹; „Written at Carnutum”; ed. A.S.L. Farquharson; tr. C.R. Haines, Loeb¹²). Today we know: the worst was to come – illness (probably a result of the devastating plague, brought to Italy from the East by the troops of Lucius Verus in AD 166)¹³ and death reached

⁶ J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Religion*, [in:] *The Cambridge Ancient History*. Second Edition. Volume XI: *The High Empire A.D. 70–192*, eds. A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone, Cambridge 2000, p. 989. The fundamental paper – a masterpiece of lively learning – still is P.A. Brunt's, *Marcus Aurelius in His Meditations*, *Journal of Roman Studies* 64 (1974), p.1f. Compare, however, the reserved voice of P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel. The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, Cambridge, Mass. 1998, p. 243, who stresses out the conventional nature of ancient literary practices, in which little was left to 'sincere' expressions, and when a conventionality, both in the choice of themes as in the ways of writing according to literary rules, played an enormous role.

⁷ Cf. 27. 7: *sententia Platonis semper in ore illius fuit, florere civitates si aut philosophi imperarent aut imperantes philosopharentur* (ed. D. Magie, Loeb).

⁸ E. g. at *Medit.* 1. 13; there is one mention in the *Meditations* of the loss of a child (1. 8, with 8. 48 and 9. 40), although as a father he witnessed illness and death of many of them.

⁹ Ed. W. Dindorf; cf. J.H. Oliver, *The Ruling Power. A Study of the Roman Empire in the Second Century after Christ through the Roman Oration of Aelius Aristides* [TAPhA 45, 4], Philadelphia 1953.

¹⁰ R.B. Rutherford, *Introduction*, [in:] *Marcus Aurelius, Meditations*, transl. A.S.L. Farquharson; intr., notes R.B. Rutherford [Oxford World's Classics], Oxford 1998, p. ix.

¹¹ Now Haimburg, Hungary.

¹² Respectively: Τὰ εἰς ἑαυτόν. *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius*, Oxford 1944; *The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Emperor of Rome together with His Speeches and Sayings*, Cambridge, Mass. – London 1953 (all the translations of the *Meditations* come from this edition).

¹³ Cf. D.S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD 180–395*, London – New York 2004, p. 17.

the emperor in his headquarters in Vindobona (now Vienna)¹⁴. Nevertheless, there is nothing in his diary which Roman reader, knowing, for example, Caesar's famous *The Gallic Wars* (*De bello Gallico*), might hoped to meet: no battles, no sieges, no bravery acts, no dramatic war accounts (see Sinko, *Zarys* II, p. 333)¹⁵. Instead, when reading Marcus' spiritual notebook, the reader is invited to experience an anatomy of pain – in a lively way, so to speak. Given all that, when one acknowledges the information about the emperor's reluctance towards the Christians, a bit of astonishment arises, and deservedly so. In consequence, many feel that there was in Marcus' dislike of them a tragic misunderstanding¹⁶. However, as it appears, concerning this new religious group at least, rude awakening inevitably comes: unlike Seneca – in the famous opinion of the aggressive Christian apologist, Tertullian (*De anim.* 20: *Seneca noster*) – 'our' honest, noble and fragile Marcus cannot be labeled *anima naturaliter Christiana*¹⁷. Nor was the emperor a predecessor of Constantine the Great¹⁸. In short, even if a scholar feels to find himself surprised, he must – sooner or later – realize that such expectations remain nothing more as a kind of methodological (and ethical, in fact) *petitio principii*. Conversely: why, one may ask, should the Roman emperor be tolerant towards a small religious group¹⁹, with its notorious, strange and suspicious (as it was usually repeated by many at that time) customs, regarded moreover commonly by the Roman elite as a hateful, fanatical group (the famous Tacitean *odium generis humani*: *Ann.* 15. 44), practicing also cannibalistic rites?²⁰ Why should we expect any understanding and merciful treatment from the

¹⁴ M. J a c z y n o w s k a, *Historia starożytnego Rzymu*, Warszawa 1986, p. 258; also M. C a r y and H.H. S c u l l a r d, *Dzieje Rzymu* II, transl. J. Schwakopf, Polish edn. Warszawa 1992, p. 241; C. W e l l s, *Cesarstwo rzymskie*, transl. G. Duliński, Polish edn. Warszawa 2005, pp. 258–259. According to Cassius Dio, 71. 36. 4, the death of Marcus meant the end of *pax Augusta*, a golden epoch (the Ovidian *aurea aetas*) and the beginning of 'an iron age'.

¹⁵ But see reference at 10. 10, with Rutherford's (see n. 10, above) remark, p. 175.

¹⁶ A.R. B i r l e y, *Marcus Aurelius. A Biography*, London – New York 2000, p. 279.

¹⁷ Although it was the same Tertullian who in the *Apologeticum*, 5,5–6, saw in Marcus a good emperor. In the recent Polish literary tradition the name of Marcus is connected with the sublime poems of Zbigniew Herbert, who was in turn a pupil of the acknowledged philosopher and historian of philosophy – Henryk Elzenberg. In one of his most famous essays, Herbert states that in the dark years of the communist reign, the Stoic philosophy and the practicing of the art of the Stoic *ataraxia* was a rescue („Opisać rzeczywistość” [in:] *Wiersze wybrane*, Kraków 2004, p. 395). Herbert's admiration, understandable as it stands, is, however, out of the ancient context.

¹⁸ Although his statue, taken erroneously as representing the portrait of the 'Christian' Emperor Constantine, was thus saved through many centuries.

¹⁹ Cf. K. H o p k i n s, *A Word Full of Gods. Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire*, London 1999, p. 209.

²⁰ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15. 44; Suetonius, *Nero*, 16; Pliny, *Epist.* 10. 96 (with the remarks of A.N. S h e r w i n - W h i t e, *The Letters of Pliny. A Historical and Social Commentary*, Oxford 1966, pp. 691–710, ad loc.). The question has been stated already by Ernst Renan in his *Marcus Aurelius*, English edn. Princeton 1906, pp. xix–xx; see also F. H o o p e r, *The Good Years*, [in:] *Roman Realities*, Detroit (MI) 1979, p. 455. Here it is worth of quoting the words of S. B e n k o (*Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, Bloomington, IN, 1984, p. 43): „Soothsayers, astrologers, and magicians were plentiful in the second century, and their numbers increased still further after the plague of 167 and the Germanic invasions of about the same time. The Christians also attracted many new followers during this period of crisis because they cared for the sick and their philosophy helped

man whose social standing and political position made him the *dominus mundi* and situated him at the peak of the hierarchy, separating thus not only from a poor sect but from other members of the Roman and municipal elite, in fact (cf. P.A. Brun t, *Marcus Aurelius and the Christians*²¹)? And when we answer: it is because of his benevolent personality and friendly character as they are seen in his famous notebook, we immediately face a great difficulty. To some extent, in such expectation we are excused but nevertheless, the dilemma remains still intriguing. This short paper is devoted to this problem: my aim is to suggest that in Marcus' cool attitude towards the Christian sect was nothing paradoxical, nor was his reluctance any coincidence. Instead, I believe that the solution to his dislike of them should be sought elsewhere.

II. WHAT DO WE KNOW?

In the recent scholarly disputes the persecutions against the Christians still remain a matter of controversies, if not – in many particular cases – somewhat mysterious events, regarding especially their direct causes²². The modern literature on this topic is vast and here is no place to recall these discussions, even in a cursory way. Through the epoch of the principate, the Christians remained certainly an insignificant sect, like so many other religious associations at that time²³. There is a consensus that the persecutions committed AD 177 in *Gallia Lugdunensis* and *Gallia Narbonensis* bear the same character as the famous incident in Rome un-

make life meaningful in a time of sudden death. It is not impossible that the magistrates lumped the Christians together with soothsayers and superstitious people". According to Celsus (in Origenes, *Contr. Celsum*, 3.10–12), the Christians were divided into many rivalrous factions and the only evidence for their unity was the common name; see, however, the contrary opinion of M. Cary and H.H. Scullard, op. cit. II, p. 283).

²¹ [in:] *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* I, ed. C. Deroux, Brussels 1979, p. 483f; on the importance and position of the Roman emperor, see F.A. Miller, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, Ithaca, NY 1977; and recently: P. Veyne, *Cesarstwo grecko-rzymskie*, transl. P. Domański, Polish edn. Kęty 2008, ch. 1.

²² Thus W.H.C. Friend, *Persecutions: Genesis and Legacy*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Origins to Constantine*, eds. M.M. Mitchell and F.M. Young, Cambridge 2006, p. 503 states that in the second century AD, the hostile acts against the Christians were undertaken by the provincial governors, but from the third century onwards the emperors themselves intervened in such affairs and quarrels (cf. P. Brown, *Narodziny zachodniego chrześcijaństwa*, transl. J.W. Popowski, Polish edn. Warszawa 2000, p. 38). This observation does not exclude the possibility that Marcus knew what happened in Lugdunum and Vienne (so M. Simon, op. cit., p. 123). Perhaps the ruler's famous mention at 11. 3 of the Christians should be referred just to these events and the rumours about the ways they died.

²³ R.A. Markus, *Wczesne chrześcijaństwo*, [in:] *Cywilizacje starożytne*, red. A. Cotterell, trans. W. Ceran, Polish edn. Warszawa 1991, p. 289; E. Wipszycka, *Państwo rzymskie a chrześcijaństwo*, [in:] *Starożytny Rzym we współczesnych badaniach*, red. J. Wolski, T. Kotula i A. Kunisz, Kraków 1994, pp. 149–189; cf. A. Ziółkowski, *Historia Rzymu*, Poznań 2004, p. 498; see recently M.R. Salzman, *Pagans and Christians*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, eds. S. Ashbrook Harvey and D.G. Hunter, Oxford 2008, p. 195.

der Nero in AD 64 (again Tacitus, *Ann.* 15. 44)²⁴. This opinion was expressed by E.R. Dodds and M. Simon, and here I simply follow their assumption that there was no systematic policy towards the Christians until the end of the second century²⁵. What is clear in both cases is that the circumstances indicate an apparent looking for a scapegoat which could be blamed for the miseries fallen upon a local community²⁶. The case of the year 64 is too familiar to be reminded here but let us pay a closer look at the situation in 177²⁷. As it has been said, the acts of the martyrdom from Lugdunum are preserved in the form of an epistle sent to the Christians in Asia. It has been transcribed by Eusebius of Caesarea²⁸, and scholars see it as a genuine record, although there is no doubt that the style of the epistle is highly rhetorical and pathetic²⁹. In Lugdunum street disturbances were incited by mob but in the Eusebian report there is, however, no word about the causes of the persecutions, so it is inferred today that the main cause was an uneasy atmosphere (probably the devastating plague had a significance, see Ziółkowski, op. cit., p. 502), to which one may add the consequences of continuous wars. As it is well known, in Eusebius' narrative the figures of the bishop Pothinus and the famous servant-maiden Blandina are the most prominent persons. It is also worth of noting that the fate of the Christians depended on the verdict of a tribune who imprisoned the Christians (about 50 in number). Then came the imperial legate and the judicial investigation has begun. Those who confessed to be Christians had been convicted. Some of this group rejected their faith, in fact, and left then the prison³⁰, while the adherents to the Christian faith were tortured – among them was Pothinus who in consequence died. When the imperial decision came what should be done³¹, the group of the Christians in the jail (among them were Maturus, Sanctus, Attalus and Blandina) was sentenced to death in the

²⁴ G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?*, Past & Present 26 (1963), pp. 6–38. On the ancient site, cf. the map no. 17: *Lugdunum*, by E. Berrand, [in:] *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, ed. R.J.A. Talbert, Princeton – Oxford 2000.

²⁵ *Pogaństwo i chrześcijaństwo w epoce niepokoju*, transl. J. Partyka, Polish edn. Kraków 2004, pp. 102–103; M. Simon, *Cywilizacja wczesnego chrześcijaństwa*, transl. E. Bąkowska, Polish edn. Warszawa 1979.

²⁶ On this mechanism see the landmark study by R. Girard, *Kozioł ofiarny*, transl. M. Goszczyńska, Polish edn. Łódź 1991, esp. ch. IX; also Dodds, op. cit., p. 108.

²⁷ There were other acts of persecution during the reign of Marcus: Justin – was executed in 165 in Rome; Polycarp has been burnt about 165–170 in Smyrna, and at that time many other actions occurred against the Christians (cf. Cary and Scullard, op. cit. II, p. 290).

²⁸ J.W. Thompson, *The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177*, American Journal of Theology 16 (1912), pp. 359 – 384.

²⁹ T.H. Bindley, *The Epistle of the Gallic Churches*, London 1900, p. 21; generally S. Swain, *Biography and Biographic in the Literature of the Roman Empire*, [in:] *Portraits. Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, eds. M.J. Edwards and S. Swain, Oxford 1997, p. 29.

³⁰ A procedure known already from the reply of the Emperor Trajan to Pliny, cf. Sherwin-White, op. cit., ad loc. In the year 122 the emperor Hadrian wrote a letter to Minucius Fundanus, proconsul of Asia, forbidding him to punish the Christians on mere demands of the city mob (Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* 6. 4. 9).

³¹ On the Roman decrets against the Christians see D.T. Barnes, *Legislation against the Christians*, Journal of Roman Studies 58 (1968), pp. 32–50.

arena³² – becoming later the famous martyrs from Lugdunum. Yet, leaving aside the province of Gaul, other hostile acts also took elsewhere place: about 165 Justin was put into death in Rome (cf. Simon, op. cit., p. 199). In Smyrna, about 167 a great turmoil occurred – we know that bishop Polycarp was then burnt³³. All the events clearly prove that the period of the Marcus' reign was for the new philosophical school (as the Christians presented themselves) the years „of anxiety” (in Dodds' term). Simultaneously, at that time one may also observe a growing activity of the anti-Christian literary polemics³⁴. Let us make a brief overlook.

In his beautiful dialogue *Octavius* (§9), to be sure written about AD 200 but summarizing the earlier reproaches³⁵, Minucius Felix cites the views of the acknowledged Roman man of letters – Fronto who, according to the pagan Caecilius Natalis (one of the dialogue's persons), accused Christians of *flagitia (id etiam Cirtensis nostri testatur oratio*; eds. Glover, Rendall & Kerr; cf. M. Jaczynowska, op. cit., p. 227). The German scholar M. von Albrecht claims even that the first part of the *Octavius* was based on the Fronto's lost book against the *genus tertium*³⁶. Above all, one must also remember that about AD 180 the first serious polemical book against the new sect was published: I mean, of course, the famous treatise of the emperor's contemporary, Celsus' Ἀληθῆς λόγος (*On the True Doctrine*)³⁷, against which a careful refutation was written about 50 years later by the Christian thinker Origenes³⁸. Celsus' treatise provided the first systematical issue with the new philosophical sect, but besides it, other voices of the famous *litterati* at that time indicate also clearly a growing consciousness of Christian activity: one may cite Lucian' diatribe *De morte Peregrini*, 11–13, that stands out especially revealing here (cf. also his *Alex.* 38)³⁹. Moreover, the works of Apuleius of Madaura (*Apolog.* 56 and *Met.* 9. 14) and the speech of the famous sophist Aelius Aristides (or. XLVI) were certainly widely read. One of the Marcus' spirituals masters (*Medit.* 1. 7; 4. 41; 7. 19; 11. 34), Epictetus (in Arrian, *Diss. Epict.* 4. 7: οἱ Γαλιλαῖοι; probably also 2. 9)⁴⁰, also mentioned critically

³² It was the governor's own idea to put Attalus in the arena, although the imperial decret ordered to kill the Christian citizens by sword; cf. J a c z y n o w s k a, op. cit. p. 228. This case again shows that the first steps taken against the Christian community were made by local governors, see the classic book of Thomas G a t a k e r, *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus I*, Glasgow 1749, p. 23–24.

³³ Some place this incident, however, earlier, in the 155.

³⁴ J.J. W a l s h, *On Christian Atheism*, Vigiliae Christianae 45 (1991), pp. 255–277.

³⁵ Cf. B u r l i g a, op. cit. (note 2, above).

³⁶ *A History of Roman Literature: from Livius Andronicus to Boethius* II. 2, Leiden 1997, p. 1438.

³⁷ G.A. K e n n e d y, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World*, Princeton 1972, p. 608

³⁸ Cf. P. d e L a b r i o l l e, *Historie de la littérature latine chrétienne*, Paris 1920, pp. 31–32, with H. C h a d w i c k, *Myśl wczesnochrześcijańska a tradycja klasycyzna*, transl. P. Siejkowski, Polish edn. Poznań 2000, pp. 29–30.

³⁹ S i m o n, op. cit., pp. 123–124; D o d d s, op. cit., p. 108; Z i e l i Ń s k i, op. cit., p. 199.

⁴⁰ G.R. S t a n t o n, *The Cosmopolitan Ideas of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius*, Phronesis 13 (1968), pp. 183–195.

of the Christians⁴¹. Such, we may assume, was the intellectual atmosphere in which the Emperor Marcus grew, lived, acted, and reigned. Of all these personalities, the eminent figure of Fronto, the ruler's friend and beloved mentor (*Medit.* 1. 11; cf. the correspondence between the two; ed. S.A. Naber, Teubner 1867)⁴² is here especially important, since his friendship with Marcus may be, in a way, a hint enabling us to understand some reluctant and reserved opinions the pupil held about, – or alluded to the Christians (see especially Zieliński, op. cit., p. 199). But I am saying: 'in a way', since although I think Marcus was well acquainted with Fronto's negative views of the Christians, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the former's opinions influenced directly the emperor's views. To state this we simply lack hard evidence in the *Meditations*. What may be found in the treatise itself?

As I have mentioned at the outset, the question of Marcus' opinion about the *genus tertium* attracted many scholars. The Loeb editor of the treatise, C.R. Haines, added to his English translation a valuable appendix on the subject. He analyses one place, where the Christians are mentioned openly by the name (*Medit.* 11. 3), and discovers several other *loci*, in which mere allusions are only made. In the latter case the basis for his arguing (op. cit., p. 384) was the fact that the name of the Christians was avoided by the classical authors (it was a 'taboo'), so one needs to look after allusions to them only. In the *Meditations* Haines finds them at 1. 6; 3. 16; 7. 68; 8. 48; 8. 51⁴³. As the first of them comes Marcus' criticism of the „miracle-mongers” (τῶν τερατευομένων) and „wizards” (γοήτων), whose aim was „to give credence to the statements [...] about incantations and the exorcizing of demons” (περὶ ἐπωδῶν καὶ [περὶ] δαιμόνων ἀποπομπῆς) – probably to the Christians. At 7. 68 the emperor asserts that there is possible to live „in the utmost peace of mind even though the whole world cry against thee what they will, even though beasts tear limb from limb this plastic clay that has ceased thee with its growth” (Ἀβιάστως διαζῆσαι ἐν πλείστη θυμηδίᾳ, κἂν πάντες καταβοῶσιν ἄτινα βούλονται, κἂν τὰ θηρία διασπᾶ τὰ μελύδρια τοῦ περιτεθραμμένου τούτου φυράματος). The words recorded at 8.

⁴¹ The exception to these opinions was the judgment of the famous physician Galen, who, as far as it can be stated, in a way admired the Christians for their contempt of the death and self-discipline. What more, he rightly called them 'philosophers' (I rely on the excellent chapter of S. B e n k o, *Pagan Criticism of Christianity during the Two First Centuries A. D.*, [in:] *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II. 23, hrsg. W. Haase und H. Temporini, Berlin – New York 1980, p. 1098–1100).

⁴² To be consulted in the detailed problems with a comm. by M.P.J. v a n d e n H o u t, *A Commentary on the Letters of M. Cornelius Fronto*, Leiden – Boston 1999, esp. pp. 573–575; see also useful book of A. R i c h l i n, *Marcus Aurelius in Love. The Letters of Marcus Aurelius and Fronto*, Chicago 2006, p. 5–6, who investigates the intimate nature of their correspondence.

⁴³ To his list I would like to apply also two passages: *Medit.* 2. 1 and 4. 28. In the first, the emperor explains why some people are „the busy-body, the thankless, the overbearing, the treacherous, the envious, the unneighbourly (ἀκοινωνήτω)”. Here the last category of men might be, I believe, another allusion to the Christian devotees, who were accused of the avoiding the participation in the public duties; in the second, the author enumerates negative types of character: among many, there is also 'cringing' one (βωμολόχον; at 7. 3 he condemns also 'stage plays', ἐπι σκηνῆς δράματα). There is additional reflection at 6. 27 but it cannot be stated if the Christians are meant: it concerns the problem whether do we be tolerant towards the men who make mistakes. Marcus' advice is to instruct them without showing anger. The same is at 6. 50: he asserts that a true philosopher should act against the will of those who go wrong, since it is his behaviour which is according to the justice.

51 remain similar to this. We find there probably an allusion to the „Christian way of dying” in the arena: if „they kill us, they cut us limb from limb, they hunt us with execrations” (Κτείνουσι, κρεανομοῦσι, κατάραις ἐλαύνουσι), mind of a sage should remain „pure, sane, sober, just” (τὴν διάνοιαν μένειν καθαρὰν, φρενήρη, σὺφρονα, δικάϊαν). Earlier on, at 3. 16, the writer presupposes that even people who „do not believe in Gods and those who fail their country in its need and those who do their deeds behind closed doors” may „have the intelligence a guide to what they deem their duty” (τὸ δὲ τὸν νοῦν ἡγεμόνα ἔχειν ἐπὶ τὰ φαινόμενα καθήκοντα καὶ τῶν θεοῦς μὴ νομιζόντων καὶ τῶν τὴν πατρίδα ἐγκαταλείπόντων καὶ τῶν <ἰστοῦν> ποιούντων, ἐπειδὴν κλείσωσι τὰς θύρας). Suggestive as they are, the passages cannot be taken at face value as a firm proof of the emperor’s open enmity *erga Christianos*, therefore Haines (op. cit., p. 386) infers that there is still no sufficient ground for believing that Marcus was a persecutor of them (cf. the paper of Keresztes, n. 55, below), citing the names of the ancient authorities who praise Marcus’ humanity. True enough, but nor do these passages prove emperor’s approval (see n. 45, below). But there is also a famous chapter 3 in the Book XI. Speaking of the two arts of dying, the reader is told that Stoic soul always should be ready to die (Οἷα ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ ἢ ἔτοιμος, ἐὰν ἤδη ἀπολυθῆναι δέη τοῦ σώματος, [καὶ] ἴτοι σβεσθῆναι ἢ σκεδασθῆναι ἢ συμμεῖναι. τὸ δὲ ἔτοιμον τοῦτο ἵνα ἀπὸ ἰδικῆς κρίσεως ἔρχηται). Dying, the argument runs, must be „associated with deliberation and dignity” (ἀλλὰ λελογισμένως καὶ σεμνῶς). Above all, Marcus suggests, it must differ from the way the Christians die⁴⁴, as they do it in „mere opposition”, in a theatrical manner (μὴ κατὰ φιλήν παράταξιν ὡς οἱ Χριστιανοί [...], καὶ ὥστε καὶ ἄλλον πεῖσαι, ἀτραγῶδως)⁴⁵. The crucial phrase ὡς οἱ Χριστιανοί was sometimes rejected by the editors as being probably a later interpolation, but in his admirable Teubner edition (*Marci Antonini Imperatoris in semet ipsum libri XII*, Lipsiae 1913, p. 137), H. Schenk⁴⁶ retains it as genuine (cf. also the much older but still valuable edition of Meric Casaubon)⁴⁷, and of the same opinion

⁴⁴ So rightly G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?*, [in:] *Christian Persecutions, Martyrdom & Orthodoxy*, Oxford 2006, p. 146.

⁴⁵ Dodds, op. cit., p. 124 believes that in fact Marcus admired the Christian bravery and their determination in the face of death – it is difficult to agree with such a view (the same was suggested by Cary and Scullard, op. cit. II, p. 620, and A. Momigliano, *Some Preliminary Remarks on the Religious Opposition” to the Roman Empire*, [in:] *On Pagan, Jews, and Christians*, New York 1987, p. 137, saying of „respect”). S. Benko, [in:] *ANRW* II. 23, p. 1092 is perhaps nearer to truth when claiming that it is hard to find a condemnation in the emperor’s words. But if no condemnation, the Stoic *apatheia* and little sympathy or approval are certainly visible. I think W. Jaeger (*Wczesne chrześcijaństwo i grecka paideia*, transl. K. Bielawski, Polish edn. Bydgoszcz 2002, p. 52) was right when writing that what was alien to the Roman ruler were (in his eyes) the Christian fanaticism and the inclination to making ‘a show of death’. Above all, the adverb ἀτραγῶδως bears a positive sense but it is used to indicate something opposite: that Christians died τραγῶδως (the similar condemnation of a ‘tragedian’, τραγῶδός, appears at 5. 28). By the way, there is no contradiction between the use of the word here and at 11. 6 (*pace* R.M. Grant, *Second – Century Christianity. A Collection of Fragments*, Louisville 2003, p. 96).

⁴⁶ Also G.H. Rendall, *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus to Himself: An English Translation with Introductory Study on Stoicism and the Last of the Stoics*, London 1890, p. 162.

⁴⁷ M. Casaubon, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus the Emperor Concerning Himself*, London 1692, p. 215 and the notes, pp. 59–60.

are Anthony Birley (op. cit., *Appendix IV*, p. 264) and R.B. Rutherford (op. cit., p. 178, n. 5; see my note 10, above)⁴⁸. Be that as it may, Haines is nevertheless right in supposing that it is the Christians who are the addressee of this disregarding (or even derogatory, in my view) remark. I have suggested above (n. 22) that this cursory remark might have been written directly after the news coming from Lugdunum, as the emperor has got some details about the behaviour of the Christians believers. There remains the last example: the case of the famous letter sent by Marcus to the Common Assembly of Asia, and delivered at Ephesus⁴⁹. The content of it has been repeated by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 4. 13; Justin, *I Apol.* 68, also mentions of it) and some students thought it to be authentic. Following Harnack, Haines accepted this view (op. cit., p. 387)⁵⁰, but S. Benko (cf. note 41, above) is more sceptical and holds it to be rather spurious, just mainly because of its content: the letter guarantees the Christians the freedom of worship – rather an impossible privilege at that time, taking into account the circumstances. It is then believed that the text contains some later interpolations, or presents, on the whole, a forgery⁵¹.

To sum up this section, we may state that the evidence we got at disposal does not really allow us to call Marcus 'a persecutor', in the manner of the later Emperors Decius or Diocletian. But it remains equally obvious that the new sect has no ally in him. It must be bear in mind that first and foremost the *Meditations* are an ἐγχειρίδιον of Stoic ethics (*encheiridion*, literally: 'a handbook'; Latin: *manuale*)⁵², by no means an apology of the Christian beliefs⁵³. This fact should be a methodological *memento*, a warning which makes a fundamental difference and which – what is especially important – has its consequences for us⁵⁴: it never can be forgotten by anyone who attempts at understanding the emperor's dislike or hostility (if it was

⁴⁸ „it is the only explicit reference to Christians in *Meditations*; they clearly did not bulk large in the emperors' horizon, and it has been argued that at this date the sect may not have gained any special prominence in the West?"; see especially P.A. Brun t, *Marcus Aurelius and the Christians*, [in:] op. cit., p. 483f.

⁴⁹ On the Roman imperial activity in the Eastern provinces, cf. J.H. O l i v e r, *Marcus Aurelius. Aspects of Civic and Cultural Policy in the East*, [*Hesperia Suppl.* 13], Princeton 1970, esp. p. xv.

⁵⁰ „The letter [...] if authentic, emanated from him in conjunction with Pius or from him alone”.

⁵¹ One cannot omit the information (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4. 26. 5) of the Christian apology by the famous Melito of Sardis, written to Marcus about 169: it was to be a response to the imperial edicts against the Christians. Melito himself doubts if such 'good' emperor as Marcus was, could be an author of such unjust decrees; cf. Z i e l i Ń s k i, op. cit., p. 199.

⁵² Certainly based on Arrian's *Manual of Epictetus*, cf. *Medit.* 1. 7, where the term *hypomnemat* ('notes') is used, see A.A. L o n g, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*, Oxford 2004, pp. 12 and 41; cf. P.A. B r u n t, *From Epictetus to Arrian*, Athenaeum 77 (1977), p. 29.

⁵³ Cf. the thoughtful treatment by R.B. R u t h e r f o r d, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius: A Study*, Oxford 1991; cf. the thoughtful paper of E. A s m i s, *The Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius*, [in:] *ANRW* II. 36. 3, eds. W. Haase and H. Temporini, Berlin – New York 1989, pp. 2228–2252.

⁵⁴ Acutely observed by H. Arendt in her classic *The Human Condition* (I quote Polish edn.: *Kondycja ludzka*, transl. A. Łagodzka, Warszawa 2000, p. 339); the same idea, concerning the beliefs, appears in the excellent study of A.D. N o c k, *Greek Religious Attitudes*, [in:] *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* II, ed. Z. Stewart, Oxford 1972, p. 548.

really a hostility⁵⁵; cf. Cary and Scullard, *op. cit.* II, p. 620) towards the ‘new’ philosophical school – even if there existed some points of convergence in the two doctrines⁵⁶, most visible in the apocryphal ‘correspondence’ between Saint Paul and Seneca. This is by no means an attempt at criticizing the emperor, but the exceptionally interesting case, showing us a deep divide between traditional system of values and Christian philosophy: indeed, Athens had nothing to do with Jerusalem⁵⁷. In the last part of this paper I shall argue that the ruler’s cold approach and lack of sympathy for the Christians (astonishing to some, at least) had its natural roots nowhere else as in the Stoic ethics: it was just this factor which made the Emperor Marcus a figure so familiar to us, but which – at the same time – has not been recognized enough by some scholars as the real cause of his dislike of οἱ Χριστιανοί.

III. THE KEY TO SOLUTION: STOIC ETHICS

It is difficult to avoid the impression that Marcus’ judgment about ‘theatrical manner’ of the Christians’ way of the death, betrays no attempt at –, and no sign of a serious understanding of their motivation: his austere reaction to the way they died stands (for us) in a sharp contradiction to his tragic consciousness of human existence, pervading his whole diary. Is it possible that the man of such magnanimity (a Ciceronian ideal of *vir altus et excellens magno animo*) was totally blind to the fate and situation of a small religious group? The reply (perhaps regrettably for some) must be: yes.

If judged from the *Meditations* and other sources (the correspondence with Fronto, Cassius Dio, the *SHA* biography), Marcus was an extremely busy administrator who spent a lot of time in realizing various duties (esp. *Medit.* 1. 16; 2. 5; 2. 17; 3. 4; 3. 12; 4. 3; 4. 33)⁵⁸. He was also a talented commander whose great part of life passed on the campaigns during the numerous wars, battling firstly the Parthians, then the German tribes (*Medit.* 2. 17: ὁ δὲ βίος πόλεμος; see the shocking reminiscences at 8. 34). These activities prove that above all he remained the Roman citizen and the emperor who was deeply addicted to rule the vast empire. And indeed, future generations gave him justice: he did his best to save it in the dark times of imminent

⁵⁵ Cf. A. K e r e s z t e s, *Marcus Aurelius a Persecutor?*, Harvard Theological Review 61 (1968), pp. 321–341.

⁵⁶ Concerning this matter see R. M c N e i l, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, transl. G. Long, Woodstock 2007, pp. xii–xiii; see also L. A l s t o n, *Stoic and Christian in the Second Century*, London – Bombay 1906, p. 127f., and A. J a g u, *La Morale d’Epictète et le christianisme*, [in:] *ANRW* II. 36. 3, pp. 2164–2199. R. M a c M u l l e n and E. N. L a n e, *Paganism and Christianity, 100–425 CE: A Sourcebook*, Minneapolis, MN 1992, p. 106 remind of the popularity of the *Meditations* in the Victorian England, when there was a trend to reconcile the Christian and the classical types of education.

⁵⁷ A point stressed out by G. R e a l e, *Historia filozofii starożytnej* IV, transl. E.I. Zieliński, Polish edn. Lublin 1999, p. 169–170, quoting Pohlenz (see n. 67, below).

⁵⁸ L. d e B l o i s, *The Third Century Crisis and the Greek Elite in the Roman Empire*, *Historia* 33 (1984), pp. 365–366.

frontier dangers. It looks as if Marcus continued to realize that famous Augustan legacy, expressed by Virgil (*Aen.* 6. 851–853; ed. O. Ribbeck):

*Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento
(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,
Parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*

What has all that to do with the Stoic philosophy and morality? The problem was restated more than ten years ago by Professor Ch. Gill in his chapter *Stoic Writers of the Imperial Era*⁵⁹: „Marcus' *Meditations* – he writes – present in an extreme form a paradox also raised, though less acutely, by Seneca's philosophical writings: that what seem to be **the deepest reflections of a practicing politician have so little overt reference to his own political life**” (emphasis added – B. B.). To some degree, his observation is valid: we have no means of telling whether the emperor's political, administrative or military decisions were always undertaken with the Stoic precepts in mind⁶⁰. To claim so and to seek any influence of Stoicism in such a way would be an extravagance and a vane effort. Nevertheless, the problem was intriguing to the Romans themselves: it was Cicero who in his *Stoic Paradoxes* (*Paradoxa stoicorum*, 4) considered the dilemma most famously, whether is it possible to employ and follow Stoic beliefs in the real life. Their views, Cicero maintained, „are amazing and contrary to the opinions of everyone”⁶¹, so „I wanted to try to see whether they could be brought into the light” (*Quae quia sunt admirabilia contraque opinionem omnium (ab ipsis etiam παράδοξα appellantur), temptare volui possentne proferri in lucem (id est in forum), et ita dici, ut probarentur*; transl. in: Irwin, see n. 75, below). Although reasonable objections arise, whether the philosophy of ‘the Painted Porch’ constituted an official Roman imperial ideology, one may assert that stoicism provided at least a philosophical background for the Roman public morality (the so called Neo-Stoicism is labeled sometimes ‘Roman’ stoicism)⁶². Firstly, Virgil's proud (if not hybriatic) *credo* of the Roman ideology, pervading the whole *Eneid*, did not stand in any contradiction to the Stoic instructions and teaching on monarchy⁶³. Secondly, as it is well known, this school accepted the existing political order

⁵⁹ [in:] *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, eds. Ch. Rowe and M. Schofield, Cambridge 2000, esp. pp. 611–612; cf. C.F. N o r e ñ a, *The Ethics of Autocracy in the Roman World*, [in:] *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. R.K. Balot, Malden, MA – Oxford 2009, pp. 272–274.

⁶⁰ See especially the thoughtful paper by P.A. B r u n t, *Stoicism and the Principate*, Proceedings of the British School at Rome (PBSR) 30 (1975), pp. 20–23.

⁶¹ On this see H.F. S a n d b a c h, *The Stoics*, London 1975², p. 28f.

⁶² P. G a r n s e y & R.P. S a l l e r, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1987, p. 179. Marcus was known as the ruler who took care over the four philosophical schools at Athens, as Cassius Dio, 73. 31. 3, relates; see J.H. O l i v e r, *Marcus Aurelius and the Philosophical Schools at Athens*, American Journal of Philology 102 (1981), pp. 213–225; cf. Ch. G i l l, *The School in the Roman Imperial Period*, [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. B. Inwood, Cambridge 2003, p. 33f.

⁶³ On the Stoic monarchical ideas, cf. Gill (n. 59, above) and M. S c h o f i e l d, *The Stoic Idea of the City*, Chicago 1999. It is worth of noticing that Marcus' philosophy differs in this respect rather from the remarks in the *Book of Qoheleth*, written probably at the end of the IIIrd century BC, whose

on the ground that thanks to it opportunities of living according to the nature may have been fully realized. It goes also without saying that such Stoic claims attracted the circles of the Roman elite already long before Marcus ascended the throne (see Brunt, *Stoicism and Principate*, p. 7), especially since the times of the influential Greek thinker Panaetius of Rhodes (IInd century BC; his doctrines were adopted by Cicero in his *De officiis*). Looking from a purely pragmatic point of view, Stoic ethics explains the conservative nature of Marcus' reign, aimed at enhancing an *ancien régime*⁶⁴: as a traditional representative of the Roman upper classes, with their system of values, beliefs, prejudices and deep consciousness to serve his fatherland (*Medit.* 1. 16. 6: πάντα δὲ κατὰ τὰ πάτρια πράσων; see 1. 17. 4; cf. Cicero, *De off.* 3. 63), Marcus tried to hold a *status quo* (*Medit.* 1. 16. 7: τι δὲ τὸ μὴ εὐμετακίνητον καὶ ῥιπταστικόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τόποις καὶ πράγμασι τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐνδιατριπτικόν); and trying to realize this goal through his whole reign, he acted both as a Roman as well as a Stoic (*Medit.* 1. 16. 3: καὶ τὸ φυλακτικὸν αἰεὶ τῶν ἀναγκαίων τῇ ἀρχῇ; 2. 5: ὡς Ῥωμαῖος καὶ ἄρρηγ; 4. 33), just fulfilling his duty – his Stoic καθήκον (*kathekon*; Latin: *officium*; cf. *Medit.* 6. 22: Ἐγὼ τὸ ἑμαυτοῦ καθήκον ποιῶ)⁶⁵. The difficulties with the evaluating the 'practical' influence of his diary lie in its character: we cannot apply its general precepts to any particular political steps (unless we do have any proof to do so). However, even if his precepts did not determine directly political decision-making process, they provided at least a background for it and in this sense one cannot be separated from another. In sum, Gill may be right but there is one case at least when a practical influence of Stoic *agoge*⁶⁶ may be seen more clearly – that's, regarding the problem of the Christians.

Here is no room for summarizing the outlines of Stoic ethics. All the topics which were discussed from the times of Zeno and Cleanthes, are in some sense interconnected but here I will deal with one: the relations with others. Concerning this problem on a more practical level, we are often told that the central Stoic conception was οἰκείωσις (Latin: *conciliatio*)⁶⁷. It may be defined 'a peculiarity of beings' (Chrysippus *apud* Diogenes Laertius, 7. 85; Cicero, *Fin.* 3. 5. 16 and 3. 6. 20; Seneca, *Epist.* 121. 14). The great modern authority, A.A. Long, translates it as 'appro-

author expresses his dislike for monarchical form of government (*Ecclesiastes*, 5, 8; 8, 2–9; on the other hand it is a commonplace to say that the two works are often compared on the ground of the similar, extremely pessimistic philosophy of life).

⁶⁴ That's, roughly speaking, a form of conservatism, cf. R. S c r u t o n, *Słownik myśli politycznej*, transl. T. Bieroń, Polish edn. Warszawa 2002, p. 172 (s. v. 'Konserwatyzm').

⁶⁵ Concerning Marcus and Lucius Verus' reign, the writer states with emphasis (*SHA*, 8. 1) that *Adepti imperium ita civiliter se ambo egerunt*; cf. G.R. S t a n t o n, *Marcus Aurelius, Emperor and Philosopher*, *Historia* 18 (1969), pp. 570–587. Regarding the statesman's duties, there are striking parallels in Plutarch's famous essay *Precepts of Statecraft* (*Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*), in his writings called *Moralia*, 800B, 804C, 813C–E.

⁶⁶ The main aim of philosophic school; cf. A.D. N o c k, *Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford 1961, p. 167; above all, P. H a d o t, *Czym jest filozofia starożytna?*, transl. P. Domański, Polish edn. Warszawa 2000.

⁶⁷ Cf. M. P o h l e n z, *Die Stoa. Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung* III, Göttingen 1955, p. 397; see G. R e a l e, *Historia filozofii starożytnej* V, Polish edn. Lublin 2002, p. 160; R. B e t t, *Stoic Ethics*, [in:] *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, eds. M.L. Gill and P. Pellegrin, Malden, Mass. – Oxford 2009, p. 538f.

priatness' or 'emotive relationship'⁶⁸, while P. Chantraine understands it as 'relations familiales, intimité, accord'⁶⁹. Ethics, undoubtedly the most important branch of the Stoic philosophy (cf. Diogenes Laertios, 7. 84; Seneca, *Epist.* 89. 14; Arrian, *Diss. Epict.* 3. 2. 1–5)⁷⁰, was thus based on 'humanity', that famous Greek φιλάνθρωπία (*philanthropia*, Latin: *humanitas*)⁷¹. Accordingly, the view expressed explicitly in the late source, the Marcus-vita in *SHA*, 4.10 (providing a catalogue of the ruler's virtues) confirms this: *Sed ab omnibus his intentionibus studium eum philosophiae abduxit seriumque et gravem reddidit, non tamen prorsus abolita in eo comitate, quam praecipue suis, mox amicis atque etiam minus notis exhibebat, cum frugi esset sine contumacia, verecundus sine ignavia, sine tristitia gratis* (emphasis added – B. B.)⁷². The suggestion is as if a serious study of philosophy could make its adept an isolated person: Marcus was an exception to such a danger, so, although he studied philosophy, he did not lose his *comitas* towards other men, including also these of them who were not his relatives, nor his friends – *minus noti*. Such and similar sentiments may have been drawn from the *Meditations* themselves. On first look, everything agrees in this portrait: emperor's *comitas* in the diary is striking, pervasive and ostentatious. Suffice it to say that a lot of remarks were devoted to remind the reader how should the relations with others look like. At 1. 1 we read that he had „a kindly disposition and sweetness of temper” (τὸ καλόηθες καὶ ἀόργητον), or „modesty” (1. 2: τὸ αἰδέημον). At 1. 3 he says of his „absention not only from doing ill but even from the very thought of doing it” (οὐ μόνον τοῦ κακοποιεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ ἐπὶ ἐννοίας γίνεσθαι τοιαύτης). Later on (1. 12), we are told about the necessity of helping „tho-

⁶⁸ *The Greek Ethics after MacIntyre and the Stoic Community of Reason*, [in:] *Stoic Studies*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1996, p. 172; cf. his *Stoic Philosophers on Person, Property-Ownership, and Community*, [in:] *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy*, Oxford 2004, pp. 351–352.

⁶⁹ *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, Paris 1974, p. 782; cf. H.G. Liddle, R. Scott & H. Stuart-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1996⁹, p. 1202: 'appropriation', 'affinity'; see R. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Leiden – Boston 2010, p. 1056.

⁷⁰ Cf. E. Schwartz, *Die Ethik der Griechen*, Stuttgart 1957, p. 18; J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta (SVF)* III, Stuttgart 1964, p. 28f.; Pohlenz, *Die Stoa* (see n. 67); cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej* III, transl. E.I. Zieliński, Polish edn. Lublin 1999, p. 395; M. Schofield, *Stoic Ethics*, [in:] *Cambr. Comp. Stoics*, p. 233f; vide There are valuable studies of J. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, Cambridge 1969; A.A. Long & D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* II, Cambridge 1987, pp. 341–342. Recent useful works include: B. Inwood and P. Donini, *Stoic Ethics*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds. K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfeld and M. Schofield, Cambridge 1999, esp. p. 684f.; W.B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life. The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*, Oxford 2008, and A. Erskine, *The Hellenistic Stoa: Political Thought and Action*, Bristol 2011².

⁷¹ But see here the acute remarks of P. Veyne, *Humanitas: Rzymianie i nie-Rzymianie*, [in:] *Człowiek Rzymu*, red. A. Giardina, transl. P. Bravo, Polish edn. Warszawa 2000, p. 421.

⁷² Cf. *SHA*, Marcus, 2. 4: *Ac ne in quenquam facile vindicaret, praetorem, qui quaedam pessime egerat, non abdicare se praetura iussit, sed collegae iuris dictionem mandavit; 16. 5: Erat enim ipse tantae tranquillitatis, ut vultum numquam mutaverit maerore vel gaudio, philosophiae deditus stoicae; 17. 1: provincias post haec ingenti moderatione ac benignitate tractavit; also 12. 2: Fuitque per omnia moderantissimus in hominibus deterrendis a malo, invitandis ad bona, remunerandis copia, indulgentia liberandis fecitque ex malis bonos, ex bonis optimos [...].*

se around us” (πρὸς τοὺς συμβιοῦντας [...] καθήκοντα). He confirms that he acted with „placability” (τὸ συγγνωμονικόν: 1. 16. 3) and „without any upbraiding of the others” (τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοις οὐκ ἐξονειδιστικόν: 1. 16. 5), stressing out that he cannot be „wroth with my kinsman and hate him” (οὔτε ὀργίζεσθαι τῷ συγγενεῖ δύναμαι οὔτε ἀπέχθεσθαι αὐτῷ: 2. 1), since „we have come into being for co-operation” (γεγόναμεν γὰρ πρὸς συνεργίαν). At 4. 17 one realizes that famous sentence (every humanist’s credo): „While thou livest, while thou mayest, become good” (ἕως ζῆς, ἕως ἔξεστιν, ἀγαθὸς γενεοῦ; cf. Seneca’s *dum inter homines sumus, colamus humanitatem: De ira*, 3. 45. 3)⁷³. At 5. 31 Marcus considers, whether his attitude towards „Gods, parents, brethen, wife, children, teachers, tutors, friends, relations, household”, was just. At 6. 30. 1, he claims that a philosopher is obliged to „save mankind” (σῶζε ἀνθρώπους), while at 7. 22 he concedes that „It is a man’s special privilege to love even those who stumble”, thus his advice (8. 59) is to „endure” men, since „mankind have been created for the sake of one another”. In the Book IX. 27, when speaking of men’s who „hate or blame thee”, he advices to himself: „must thou feel kindly towards them, for Nature made them dear to thee” (*physei philoi*). At 11. 1. 2 he maintains that „a property of the Rational Soul” (*to idion de logikes psyches*) is „the love of our neighbour”. Much revealing has been also said in the Book XI, par. 18. 1⁷⁴. Here the emperor sees himself as „a ram over a flock or a bull over a herd”, claiming that his duty is to be helpful, since (a repetition, cf. 8. 56) „we came into the world for the sake of one another” (ἀλλήλων ἕνεκεν γεγόναμεν).

So far, so good. All these thoughts, at first glance, rightly won the favour of posterity – a clear evidence for Marcus’ exceptional οἰκείωσις. It is also evident that some of the ancient writers remained under a strong impression of the emperor’s unusual empathy toward others. In the brutish realities of the ancient world, with its great prejudices and social inequalities, such voices must have sounded astonishingly – in a positive sense – no wonder, then, that still they are familiar to ‘our’ modern sensibility.

It was Max Pohlenz who wrote in his seminal study on the philosophy of ἡ στοὰ ἢ ποικίλη (‘The Painted Porch’) that „Die altstoische Ethik baute sich auf dem demokratischen Dogma von der Gleichheit aller Menschen auf, die von der Natur alle auf dieselbe Arete angelegt seien und dieselben sittlichen aufgaben hätten”⁷⁵. In what sense is it true? A fine idea, no doubt but it must be observed that both the Stoics’ as Pohlenz’s approach is certainly an idealistic one: did any admirer of *Stoa Poecile* – one might object – really believe in equality (‘Gleichheit’) of all men? A rhetorical question, undoubtedly, so it is equally obvious that no one should take Marcus’ views literally, especially if he was the Roman emperor. Behind his remarks, noble

⁷³ ‘Let us cultivate humanity’ – M. C. N u s s b a u m, *Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, Princeton 1994, p. 403.

⁷⁴ I think such views were purportedly exaggerated in the senatorial tradition in order to contrast the virtues of ‘good’ emperors with the vices of ‘bad’ rulers.

⁷⁵ *Die Stoa II*, p. 201; see generally J. A n n a s, *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford – New York 1993, pp. 388–410 and T. I r w i n, *Socratic Paradox and Stoic Theory*, [in:] *Companions to Ancient Thought 4. Ethics*, ed. S. Everson, Cambridge 1998, p. 154; see also M. C a n t o-S p e r b e r, *Ethics*, [in:] *Greek Thought. A Guide to Classical Knowledge*, eds. J. Brunschvig, G.E.R. Lloyd and P. Pellegrin, Cambridge, Mass. – London 2000, pp. 114–119.

and honest as they are, there are strong limits⁷⁶, and these limits become clearer when one considers one fundamental question: why should we practice οἰκείωσις? The importance of it is essential and little wonder than it appears in the *Meditations* quite frequently.

It has been remarked that the key of Stoic ethics lies in the division of moral goods into good and bad ones. Here the criterion of such divide was the reason (or: 'Rational Soul', which rules the world: *Medit.* 6. 1, above)⁷⁷, a conviction in that man should live according to the nature, that's in a reasonable way. What happens and what is done according to it, is good; what is opposite to the reason – is bad. All the rest in our life remains morally neutral (ἀδιάφορα; Diogenes Laertius, 7. 102 = v. Arnim, *SVF* III, fr. 117; Stobaeus, *Anth.* 2. 57. 19 = v. Arnim, *SVF* I, fr. 190; III, fr. 70; cf. *Medit.* 2. 11; 7. 31)⁷⁸, including health, beauty, property, poverty and so on. What are consequences of such assumptions? In order to understand this, one must always bear in mind that Stoic ethic is 'fundamentally agent-centred' (Inwood & Donini, [in:] op. cit., p. 690), continuing thus the old Socratic-Platonic advices of taking care for the soul (see also Aristotelle, *NE*, Book I). The care of the soul is the core of Marcus' diary too, being – to a great degree – a talking to it (*Medit.* 4. 3; 10. 1–2; 7. 28; 7. 59; 10. 31; 11. 1). This observation is in fact crucial, and there is little wonder that in the same *Meditations* many other reflections seem to be a modification of the 'purely' humanitarian thoughts quoted above. Let us make a brief overlook.

At 11. 16 it is remarked that life and soul can be happy but this is possible under the strong condition which look like a memento: „Vested in the soul is the power of living ever the noblest of lives, let a man but be indifferent towards things indifferent” (Κάλλιστα διαζῆν, δύναμις αὐτῆ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, ἐὰν πρὸς τὰ ἀδιάφορά τις ἀδιαφορῇ). With this argumentation a peculiar sense of a word 'good' also is proposed: accordingly, to be 'good' is „to agree with nature” (4. 10; 10. 31), since it is the nature which enables us to be good (*Medit.* 8. 5), in a word – our happiness is solely in us (cf. 8. 48: ἀκρόπολις ἐστὶν ἡ ἐλευθέρα παθῶν διάνοια· οὐδὲν γὰρ ὀχυρώτερον ἔχει ἄνθρωπος, ἐφ' ὃ καταφυγῶν ἀνάλωτος λοιπὸν ἂν εἴη)⁷⁹. But if so, what place take the others in the happiness of a perfect sage? Little, if any, the reader may infer, and this observation is crucial for our understanding of Marcus' attitude: I dare even to say that the emperor's views of why should we be benevo-

⁷⁶ By a way of comparison, we may remind of Seneca's famous judgement of slaves, *Epist.* 47. 1. Full of pity as it is, it did not contribute to any change of their position. By saying of 'limits' I do not mean solely that the Stoics accepted the existing political order (see n. 63, above), but that these bounds resulted from the fact that Stoic ethics laid much attention on individual happiness. In this sense, Stoicism was by no means a 'revolutionary' intellectual (less the social) movement.

⁷⁷ On the understanding of this term there are numerous; cf. the definition of R.J. De Vette, *Introduction to Virtue Ethics. Insights of the Ancient Greeks*, Washington, D.C. 2002, p. 147; see Ch. Gill, *Greek Thought [Greece & Rome New Surveys in Classic no. 25]*, Oxford 1995, p. 77–79.

⁷⁸ J. Sellars, *Stoicism*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 2006, p. 110.

⁷⁹ This point has been reminded rightly by P. Hadot in his excellent, not to say, „classical” study *Czym jest filozofia starożytna?*, tr. P. Domański, Polish edn. Warszawa 2000, pp. 177–184. The idea was, however, pointed out as long ago as in the XVIIIth century, with the appearance of the book by E. Gibbon (*Zmierzch cesarstwa rzymskiego* I, trans. St. Kryński, Polish edn. Warszawa 1995, p. 69), quoting Tacitus' opinion about the Stoics. By the way, one may observe that this last credo was repeated by Pascal who concluded that all our dignity relies on our thought.

lent and mild towards others looks like a matter of etiquette, rather than result from a sense of true empathy. Such thinking is entirely logical, since the others were classified by the Stoics in a broad category of ἀδιάφορα – subsequently their fate, miseries or successes were irrelevant to a true Stoic confessor (see especially *Medit.* 6. 22: above all, a Stoic must fulfill his duties, but other things cannot matter him – Ἐγὼ τὸ ἔμαυτοῦ καθήκον ποιῶ, τὰ ἄλλα με οὐ περισπᾶ; cf. also 5. 19: „Things of themselves cannot take the least hold of the Soul, nor have any access to her, nor deflect or move her”). Stoic behaviour toward others should must be preceded thus by a careful consideration, or even – calculation. To put it briefly – it seems that it should be purely pragmatic (see *Medit.* 10. 11: Πῶς εἰς ἄλληλα πάντα μεταβάλλει, θεωρητικὴν μέθοδον κτῆσαι καὶ διηνεκῶς πρόσεχε καὶ συγγυμνάσθητι περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος· οὐδὲν γὰρ οὕτως μεγαλοφροσύνης ποιητικόν). From all that has been said it becomes clear that the best a Stoic sage can do is tolerate others (cf. 5. 20). Nothing can be more evident for supporting such reading of the *Meditations* than the passage from 7. 13, where we read that individuals are a part (*meros*) of a community and „work in conjunction”, but in fact they are separated entities – like limbs of a body which are in one organism. In consequence, a practical advice follows that „not yet dost thou love mankind from the heart” (οὐπω ἀπὸ καρδίας φιλεῖς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους), to the same extent as ‘nor yet does well-doing delight thee for its own sake’ (οὐπω σε καταληκτικῶς εὐφραίνει τὸ εὐεργετεῖν)⁸⁰. To be sure the emperor’s argument is that man can feel some compassion toward others, but by the same he must be conscious that such feeling has nothing to do with a pity in its popular sense. Rather it is, to say, a kind of ‘cosmic’ compassion (having much common with indifference, in fact: see esp. 8. 2; cf. 5. 20), that’s – coming from the conviction that we all are mortal, so we share a common fate (7. 26). This is not whole story, of course. At other places the emperor goes even little further. In the Book VII. 55 he just advises that Μὴ περιβλέπου ἀλλότρια ἡγεμονικά, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖ βλέπε κατ’ εὐθὺ ἐπὶ τί σε ἡ φύσις ὀδηγεῖ („Look not about thee at the ruling Reason of others, but look with straight eyes at this, *To what is Nature guiding thee*”). Earlier, at 4. 18, he confirms that „richness of leisure doth he gain who has no eye for his neighbour’s words or deeds or thoughts, but only for his own doings [...]” (“Ὅσῃν εὐσχολίαν κερδαίνει ὁ μὴ βλέπων τί ὁ πλησίον εἶπεν ἢ ἔπραξεν ἢ διειροήθη, ἀλλὰ μόνον τί αὐτὸς ποιεῖ”). The same line of thinking can be found at 5. 3: in doing what is „in accord with Nature”, philosopher cannot be discouraged by „the consequent censure of others or what they say” (τινων μέμψις ἢ λόγος). To the same degree, a dilemma what choices makes someone’s neighbour, is „a matter of indifference (ἀδιάφορόν ἐστίν) as is his vital breath and his flesh” (8. 56)⁸¹. The thoughts expressed at 9. 1.

⁸⁰ It may be said that for the Stoics the care of self was in fact inseparable from the care for others (Arrian, *Diss. Epict.* 119. 13), but only if one remembers that the problem of how to treat others is evidently less important.

⁸¹ Cf. 2. 7; 2. 8; 2. 9 and 3. 4; 4. 3: the argument runs that we must not to deal with others, since the care of others’ soul did not make anyone happy (see the perceptive remarks of K. Leśniak in his notes to the Polish translation of the *Meditations* [*Rozmyślania*, transl. M. Reiter, Warszawa 1984]: at p. 156 Leśniak quotes two similar passages from Arrian’s *Epicteti Dissertationes*, 3. 23 and 3. 24). This general rule is an acknowledgement of the fundamental opposition: since the nature of the world is something different from the nature of man, it is a waste time to think about the others.

4 and 9. 3. (cf. too again *Medit.* 11.16, above) are also meaningful: in the first case, the reader is instructed that one should be „neutral towards pain and pleasure, death and life, good report and ill report, things which the Nature of Universe treats with neutrality”. The second example is even more revealing in Marcus' heroic exercise in indifference: it is suggested that we should not despise the death, given that in this way we will be disassociated from bad people. To be sure this does not mean that we should treat them with repulsion or arrogance but „deal gently with them”. However, the ruler openly reminds that they are not „men of the same principles” – they are just ‘the others’. The most explicit statement of such thinking may be read in the passage from 4. 3. 1, which looks like the emperor's summary: „nowhere can a man find a retreat more full of peace or more free from care than his own soul”. And then he adds that such retreat can help us to be ready to „send thee away with no discontent at those things to which thou art returning”. Generally, he further concedes (5. 20) that „man becomes [...] as much one of things indifferent as the sun, as the wind, as a wild-beast”. From this elevated and sublime point of view, the people and their earthly affairs constitute for Marcus no more than *σιγίλλάρια νευροσπαστούμενα* („puppets moved by strings”: 7. 3). No wonder than the life of a true sage should consist rather of the watching the stars, „for thoughts on these things cleanse away the mire (*τὸν ῥύπον*) of our earthly life” (7. 47).

IV. CONCLUSION

The picture that emerges from these passages allows us to make a serious improvement to the Stoic idea of *οἰκείωσις*, at least in the case of the *Meditations*. Since Marcus holds that everything what is done must be done after a careful consideration, a true Stoic adept's thinking must be based on the understanding how does nature (conceived as a divine power) work. Subsequently, given all that, one should deal first and foremost with oneself⁸² – this is an entire sense of *οἰκείωσις*. It would be legitimate to say that there is in the emperor's philosophy no idea of a brotherhood of mankind, in fact – save general statements about our temporality and common, deplorable fate. To be sure the emperor often repeats that a sage should make something good for others, yet, as we have seen, there are strict bounds to such commitment: the real fact is that men are to be categorized as friends who share our beliefs and those who do not – the latter, being stupid, act unjustly (*Medit.* 11. 18). It is also clear that the latter category of men is in majority, so every day man of a true wisdom faces (regrettably) a *περιέργω*, *ἀχαρίστω*, *ὑβριστῆ*, *δολερῶ*, *βασκάνω*, *ἀκοινωνήτῳ*. And here it is especially interesting to observe what is Marcus' practical remedy to this fact: he knows that men should be treated gently but,

One must live, to use the famous phrase of Pierre Hadot (cf. note 6, above), in an ‘inner citadel’. Here the words of A. A. Long (concerning Epictetus but equally fitting Marcus' philosophy) are also worth of quoting: Epictetus' ethics, he wrote (*Epictetus*, p. 3), „appeals to self-interest, which asks persons to value their individual selves over everything else”.

⁸² See his epistle to Fronto, mentioned by M. Foucault, *Techniki siebie*, [in:] *Filozofia, historia, polityka. Wybór pism*, transl. D. Leszczyński and L. Rasiński, Polish edn. Warszawa – Wrocław 2000, pp. 258–259.

above all, he knows that the imperial power and authority must be exercised. In result, the noble ‘emperor-ram’s’ philosophy reveals a contradiction, when he – as the *Romanorum imperator* – clearly states (6. 50) that a wise man must act „when the principles of justice so direct”, despite of the will of the people (πρᾶττε δὲ καὶ <αὐ>τῶν ἀκόντων). One may only guess who are those τῶν ἀκόντων, and this question lead us to ask what can be said of the Christians from this interpretation?

To put it briefly, my arguing is that there is some irony in the fact that Stoic philosophy of life – which a modern interpreter rightly wishes to see as the real cause of Marcus’ honesty and his tragic consciousness of human existence – logically presupposed also (and stood exactly at roots of -) the emperor’s indifference and his claims to avoiding any empathy⁸³. He was deeply convicted that since it was impossible to fight the fate, it was also difficult to change people’s minds. Or – to put it frankly – since, as he thought, every man lives for himself⁸⁴, the dealing with others and their problems is a futile effort (cf. M. Simon, op. cit., p. 123)⁸⁵. Certainly, such ‘Olympian’ confession of apathy did not lead the emperor to an open, conscious ‘policy’ of hostility *erga Christianos* (it does not seem that there was something personal in his attitude, although from the Christian perspective the things might certainly have looked differently), yet it remains also beyond the doubt that it might be an important factor in creating and maintaining a ‘cold’, intellectual climate in the Antonine imperial court during his reign (on this role of philosophy cf. Seneca, *Epist.* 16. 3). It follows that to recognize a ‘tragic’ status of human condition in this earthly life did not mean that any social or religious position⁸⁶ of the Christians (and of everyone else) may be changed⁸⁷. But as I have said at the outset, to expect this would be a *petitio principii* and no one can blame the emperor. However, it should be only remembered that it is necessary to seek the main reason for Marcus’ attitude exactly in his ‘heroic’ understanding the fact that one needs accept reality as it exists (cf. Brunt, *Marcus Aurelius in His Meditations*, p. 7). This explains that in his imperial calculations they were nothing, in fact. Marcus’ appeals to hold the Stoic *apatheia* as a strategy of achieving private happiness in the life explain moreover⁸⁸ his astonishing (but logical) observation that in this earthly world people and the-

⁸³ A point stressed out plainly by M. Simon, op. cit., p. 123.

⁸⁴ Cf. P. V e y n e, *Cesarstwo Rzymskie*, [in:] *Historia życia prywatnego*, t. 1: *Od cesarstwa rzymskiego do roku tysięcznego*, red. P. Veyne, Polish edn. Wrocław 2005², pp. 239–240.

⁸⁵ Although I fully agree with Professor Simon in his great and still indispensable book (op. cit., p. 123), when claiming that the imperative of holding the indifference of the soul remained the core of Marcus’ philosophy of life, it is nevertheless difficult to follow his suggestion that the emperor felt any „delight” in his indifference.

⁸⁶ At 9. 1. 1, the autor says that „Injustice is impiety” (Ὁ ἀδικῶν ἀσεβεῖ). Whether this statement should be addressed, among others, to the Christians, is uncertain. But if so, the traditional charge of impiety towards them might have been an additional cause of the emperor’s reluctance. Brunt, *Marcus Aurelius in His Meditations*, p. 14f., rightly reminds that the emperor was a religious personality. The Stoic philosophy did not rejected the traditional Greek mythology and pantheon, so Marcus was in this sense a deeply pious man.

⁸⁷ Ch. G i l l, [in:] op. cit., pp. 598–599.

⁸⁸ Cf. J. A n n a s, *Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality*, Philosophical Perspectives 6 (1992), p. 130; on utilitarianism and happiness, see B. W i l l i a m s, *Morality. An Introduction to Ethics*, Cambridge 1993, p. 82ff.

ir affairs are σιγιλλάρια νευροσπαστούμενα⁸⁹. From his perspective the Christians constituted the smallest group among these „puppets”, if any. The spiritual world in which he lived and the world the Christians lived in, were, undoubtedly, worlds quite apart.

STARE SZATY CESARZA. JESZCZE RAZ O STANOWISKU MARKA AURELIUSZA WOBEC CHRZEŚCIJAN

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł poświęcony został problemowi postawy i polityki cesarza Marka Aureliusza (panował w l. 161–180 po Chr.) wobec chrześcijan, w oparciu o jego słynny duchowy pamiętnik – funkcjonujący w polskiej literaturze naukowej i kulturze pod tytułem *Rozmyślenia*.

Punktem wyjścia rozważań jest uznawana powszechnie słuszna obserwacja, że Marek Aureliusz był jednym z najbardziej wrażliwych, szlachetnych i prawych ludzi, jacy w ciągu kilkunastowiekowej historii Imperium Romanum zasiadali na tronie cesarskim. U wielu badaczy budził jednak zdziwienie fakt, że to właśnie za rządów tego szlachetnego cesarza-filozofa, człowieka łagodnego i hołdującego, mającemu tak wiele na pierwszy rzut oka wspólnego z filozofią chrześcijańską, stoicyzmem, doszło do poważniejszych prześladowań chrześcijan, głównie w Galii (Lugdunum, dzisiaj: Lyon) – w roku 177. Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą wyjaśnienia sprzeczności, jak możliwe było, aby człowiek o tak ogromnej wrażliwości i kulturze osobistej mógł pozwolić na wspomniane akty represji.

Artykuł składa się z czterech części. Po zarysowaniu zasadniczego problemu w części I, gdzie wskazuję, że nasze zdziwienie jest rodzajem nieuzasadnionego *petitio principii* (błędu polegającego na przyjęciu za przesłankę tego, co powinno być dopiero uzasadnione), przechodzę w części drugiej do analizy tego, co wiadomo dziś o samych prześladowaniach (głównie z relacji piszącego znacznie później Euzebiusza z Cezarei): po dokonaniu krótkiej rekonstrukcji wydarzeń w Galii, przypominam o nasilającej się za rządów tego cesarza nagonce na chrześcijan ze strony ówczesnych rzymskich intelektualistów i literatów, wśród których wyróżniali się Fronton, długoletni nauczyciel cesarza, i Celsus. Dodatkowym argumentem, potwierdzającym wzmogoną nagonkę na chrześcijan za panowania Marka Aureliusza, jest zebranie w tekście samego traktatu cesarza tych wypowiedzi, w których można dopatrzeć się negatywnych aluzji do chrześcijan. Analizie poddany został przede wszystkim sławny *passus* z księgi XI, rozdz. 3., gdzie cesarz wprost mówi negatywnie o chrześcijanach, którzy wybierają ‘groteskowy’ sposób umierania, prawdopodobnie na arenie. Najważniejszą częścią artykułu jest część trzecia, w której argumentuję, że źródłem niechęci Marka Aureliusza była właśnie wyznawana przez niego filozofia stoicka i jej podstawowy aksjomat, w myśl którego należy żyć zgodnie z naturą i kierować się rozumem, gdyż tylko to jest w stanie umożliwić osiągnięcie stanu spokoju wewnętrznego (ataraksji). Ład wewnętrzny był miernikiem szczęścia i osobistego zadowolenia, ale można było go osiągnąć tylko samemu, bez

⁸⁹ What reminds of the same comparison in the Polish literary masterpiece, a novel *Lalka* by Bolesław Prus, where one of the main characters, Rzecki, expresses the idea using even the same noun (in Polish: „marionetki”).

jakiegokolwiek pomocy innych – nie ulegając przy tym emocjom i ćwicząc się niejako w zupełnej obojętności na sprawy świata zewnętrznego.

W swoim traktacie cesarz często zaleca, aby względem innych ludzi stoik okazywał uprzejmość, współczucie i zrozumienie, słowem – aby był ludzki. Wypowiedzi te brzmią dla współczesnego odbiorcy znajomo, ale inne uwagi w tym samym tekście wskazują, iż nie chodziło tu bynajmniej o rodzaj równości czy braterstwa, czy współczesnego humanitaryzmu, który wyszedłby poza ogólne stwierdzenia. Przeciwnie, cesarz podkreśla, że tak naprawdę żyjemy dla siebie a los innych nie powinien nas głębiej obchodzić, gdyż z reguły nie mamy nań wpływu. Stoicki postulat „bycia ludzkim” wobec innych miał więc swoje poważne ograniczenia w samej etyce stoickiej, zakazującej wręcz głębszego zaangażowania się w sprawy innych; nosił poniekąd znamiona etykiety. Wypowiedzi cesarza nie dowodzą bynajmniej, iż można tego władcę uważać za ‘prześladowcę’ chrześcijan (istnieją jednak wskazówki, że wydawał prawdopodobnie jakieś dekrety), pokazują jednak wyraźnie, że tego typu postawa etyczna mogła prowadzić w praktyce do zupełnej obojętności i, co za tym idzie, bierności wobec aktów przemocy w stosunku do chrześcijan, jakie miały miejsca w niektórych miastach prowincji rzymskich.

Część czwarta artykułu jest rekapitulacją poprzednich rozważań.