

The 1,898th birthday of **Marcus Aurelius** falls on April 26th of this year.

He once said.....'*How small a part of the boundless and unfathomable time is assigned to every man! For it is very soon swallowed up in the eternal. And how small a part of the whole substance! And how small a part of the universal soul! And on what a small clod of the whole earth you creep!*' (XII.32)

His point isn't that we should not care about our affairs because, you know, in the long run we'll all be dead. The objective, rather, is to counter the universal human attitude that the ancient Greeks called *hubris* – the tendency to overestimate our own importance and abilities. I don't know about you, but I'm willing to place a large bet that the modern world would be a significantly better place if more politicians, economists, specialists, indeed all so-called leaders were to take up Marcus' habits of self-reflection and humility. Oh, yeah, and use reason a bit more, but in that context.

Marcus put it more fully thus: "Make for thyself a definition or description of the thing which is presented to thee, so as to see distinctly what kind of a thing it is, in its substance, in its nudity, in its complete entirety, and tell thyself its proper name, and the names of the things of which it has been compounded, and into which it will be resolved. For nothing is so productive of elevation of mind as to be able to examine methodically and truly every object which is presented to thee in life, and always to look at things so as to see at the same time what kind of universe this is, and what kind of use everything performs in it, and what value everything has with reference to the whole, and what with reference to man, who is a citizen of the highest city, of which all other cities are like families; what each thing is, and of what it is composed, and how long it is the nature of this thing to endure.—
MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS. 121-180

So

IF ONLY WE COULD

If only we could.
*go deeper than debt,
be richer than retribution,
live fuller than forgiveness,
and renew radical trade;
in trust, in need, in justice,
in community, internationally;
fed from the Commons
of throbbing earth,
stirred by its dedicated sojourners*

*Then as body, soul, mind
we'd recognise and absorb each other.
Thus, being in touch,
we blend soil, soul and society
so that 'pastoral compassion',
breeding true charity,
mingles with 'prophetic challenge',
effecting structural change.*

*Economic rent returns
to source in ecological community.
Consumptive slavery gives way to
the enterprise of, mutuality,
and money is lent into existence,
free of compounding interest;
that social infrastructure
and the human spirit
may flourish unimpeded
across endless generations.*

[*Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus*; 26 April 121 – 17 March 180) was [Roman emperor](#) from 161 to 180 and a [Stoic philosopher](#). He was the last of the rulers known as the [Five Good Emperors](#), and the last emperor of the [Pax Romana](#), an age of relative peace and stability for the [Roman Empire](#). He served as [Roman consul](#) in 140, 145, and 161.]