

### On the Virtue of Antoninus Pius

Source: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 1.16. William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II: *Rome and the West*. Scanned by: J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Prof. Arkenberg has modernized the text.

*Antoninus Pius (born 86, reigned 138-161 CE) had a singularly untroubled reign, although there is reason to believe that the forces which later ruined the Roman world were allowed by him to work unchecked. No one, however, has questioned the purity of his life and the simplicity and nobility of his character. His personality is described by his adopted son - the famous Marcus Aurelius. It is a high tribute to the ancient civilization and the Stoic philosophy that they could produce two such characters and bestow on them successively the government of the world.*

In my father [Antoninus Pius] I observed his meekness; his constancy without wavering in those things which, after due examination, he had determined. How free from all vanity he carried himself in matters of honor and dignity (as they are esteemed); his laboriousness and assiduity, his readiness to hear any man that had aught to say tending to any common good! how generally and impartially he would give every man his due: his skill and knowledge when rigor or extremity, when indulgence or moderation were in season. His moderate condescending to other men's occasions as an ordinary man, neither absolutely requiring his friends that they should wait on him at his ordinary meals, nor that they should of necessity accompany him in his journeys. His sociability, his gracious and delightful conversation never reached satiety, his care of his body was within bounds and measures, not as one who did not wish to live long, or overstudious of neatness and elegancy; yet not as one that did not regard it, so that through his own care of his health he seldom needed any medicine.

He was not easily moved and tossed up and down, but loved to be constant, both in the same places and businesses; and after his great fits of headache he would return fresh and vigorous to his wonted affairs. He was very discreet and moderate in exhibiting public sights and shows for the pleasure and pastime of the people; in public buildings, *congiaria*,<sup>1</sup> and the like. He did not use the baths at unseasonable hours. He was never curious or anxious about his food, or about the style or color of his clothes, or about any mere matter of external beauty. In all his conversation, he was far from all inhumanity, boldness, incivility, greediness, or impetuosity; never doing anything with such earnestness and intention that a man could say of him, that he flew into a heat about it, but contrariwise, all things distinctly, as at leisure, without trouble, orderly, soundly, and agreeably. A man, in short, might have applied to him what is recorded of Socrates.

Remember Antoninus Pius' constancy in things that were done by him in accordance with reason, his equability in all things; how he would never give over a matter until he understood the whole state of it fully and plainly; and how patiently and without any resentment he would bear with them that did unjustly condemn him; how he would never be overhasty in anything, nor give ear to slanders or false accusations, but examine and observe with the best diligence the several actions and dispositions of men. He would easily be content with a few things---mere lodgings, bedding, the ordinary food and attendance. He bore with those who opposed his opinions and even rejoiced if any man could better advise him, and finally he was exceedingly religious without superstition.

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<sup>1</sup> General distribution of money or corn doles.