

## *οὐ φιλοσόφος?:* The Significance of Philosophy to Fronto

In this paper, I contest one of the reasons why modern scholars have shied away from reading the surviving letters between Marcus Cornelius Fronto and his pupil, the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Namely, I combat the concept that Fronto deeply hated philosophy, and thus Aurelius' later philosophical nature marks an utter failure of Fronto's rhetorical education. Scholars have had other objections to the letters; the damage done to the manuscript by Cardinal Angelo Mai upon their discovery in 1815 made the already untidy manuscript incredibly difficult to work with. Some of Mai's contemporaries disliked the homoerotic relationship that some, most fully and recently Amy Richlin (2006), see as playing out between Fronto and Aurelius in these letters. Additionally, many of the scholars who have deigned to work on Fronto's corpus believe it to be simply bad Latin, which is not encouraging for prospective readers of the letters. However, I believe that Fronto's supposed hatred of philosophy is one of the largest factors in these letters' general neglect. If Fronto's rhetorical education, carried out through these letters, was entirely ineffective, then why bother to read them? In this paper, I will dispel this myth, and show that Fronto purposefully and frequently used philosophy as a tool to interest his young student. Far from forbidding philosophy, he integrated it into his teaching. If we accept this, then Fronto may have had a larger impact on Aurelius' life, reign, and philosophy than is currently thought.

To make my argument, I will begin with the current state of thought on Fronto's feelings towards philosophy. C.R. Haines' Loeb editions (1919, 1920) promote the concept that Fronto disliked philosophy, and point out a parting of the ways in *ad M. Caesarem* 4.12, in which he believes Aurelius declares he will pursue philosophy at the expense of rhetoric. Michael van den

Hout (1988, 1999), author of the only full commentary on the letters, claims in several places that Fronto hated philosophy, particularly in *de Nepote Amisso* 2, where Fronto scoffs at philosophy's claims to provide solace for grieving parents. Jo-Marie Claassen (2009) recently has taken a less hard line, and argues that Fronto disliked philosophy, but did not necessarily hate philosophers, and points to *ad Amicos* 1.2, where Fronto recommends someone because he is *οὐ φιλόσοφος* (not a philosopher). However, each of these letters has been read somewhat out of context, and I will show that while philosophers occasionally receive some of Fronto's criticism, they are often one in a string of criticized groups, none of which scholars claim Fronto hated wholesale.

After addressing these misunderstood letters, I will introduce letters which instead show Fronto utilizing philosophers and philosophical *exempla* as templates Aurelius should imitate for his life and study. In *de Feriis Alsiansibus* 3 and *ad M. Caesarem* 3.16, Fronto uses philosophers as models for moderate living, and as exemplars of master practitioners of rhetoric, whose philosophy would not exist without their particular brands of eloquence. Finally, I will address *Additamentum* 8, in which Fronto adopts the role of Socrates in a speech written in the style and situation of Plato's *Phaedrus*, with the intention of encouraging Aurelius towards a greater appreciation of rhetoric, the exact opposite of Socrates' intentions in the original. Such reworking of and attention toward a philosophical dialogue is not the behavior of one whose hatred of philosophy would have put him at odds with his pupil's philosophical interests. On the contrary, I believe that this paper will show that Fronto is far from hating philosophy. I hope to correct this assumption, and thereby provoke a more careful reading of Fronto in his own words, and a larger consideration of what importance he held in his role as Aurelius' teacher.

## Bibliography

- Claassen, Jo-Marie. 2009. "Cornelius Fronto: A 'Libyan Nomad' At Rome." *Acta Classica* LII: 47-71.
- Haines, C.R. 1919, 1920. *Fronto: Correspondence, Volumes I-II*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mai, Angelo. 1815. *M. Cornelii Frontonis Opera Inedita Cum Epistulis Item Ineditis Antonini Pii, M. Aurelii, L. Veri et Appiani*. Mediolanum.
- Richlin, Amy. 2006. *Marcus Aurelius in Love: The Letters of Marcus and Fronto*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 111-129.
- van den Hout, Michael Petrus Josephus. 1988. *M. Cornelii Frontonis Epistulae: Schedis Tam Editis Quam Ineditis Edmundi Hauleri Usus Iterum Edidit*. Leipzig: Teubner.
- van den Hout, Michael Petrus Josephus. 1999. *A Commentary on the Letters of M. Cornelius Fronto*. Mnemosyne. Leiden: Brill.