

released. It provides the reader with a better feeling for what Nietzsche was doing and of how he was trying to do it."

In an era when new books on Nietzsche erupt at an alarming rate, *The Nietzsche Canon* is something special: a truly useful volume which is likely still to be in print when the vast bulk of our contemporary "Nietzsche literature" will have long since fallen from fashion and been forgotten.

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Pierre Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Translated by Michael Chase. Edited by Arnold I. Davidson. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995. Pp. x + 309. Cloth, \$84.95. Paper, \$24.95.

Pierre Hadot. *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Paris: Gallimard, 1995. Pp. 461. Paper, FF 66.

Pierre Hadot, well known in Europe for his distinguished work on the thought of late antiquity, especially on Plotinus and Marcus Aurelius, begins to be better known in North America.¹ His studies rest upon both meticulous exegeses and philosophical vision. The two books under review articulate this vision and can therefore be regarded as a natural whole. *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (henceforth QPA) is designed as a detailed but accessible introduction to ancient philosophy. *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (henceforth PWL) is a translation of *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris, 3rd edition, 1993), consisting of articles previously published in specialized journals. The English edition has, however, been enriched by substantial revisions and a long and helpful introduction by Arnold Davidson.

While PWL is mostly synchronic and QPA mostly diachronic, both attempt a reconstruction of what Hadot calls "the very essence of the phenomenon of *philosophia*" (PWL, 56, 269; QPA, 16ff.). His wager is considerable: to give a definition of philosophy which would be valid for all ancient philosophical schools (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism and Pyrrhonism). Although controversial, his thesis, based upon substantial textual exegeses, is largely convincing. It can be summarized as follows. Ancient philosophy is not primarily a theory but a therapy, not primarily a system of thought but a preparatory exercise to wisdom: it is a way of life (*bios*). Philosophy does not only engage cognitive faculties but the whole of existence: it is first of all a conversion, the choice of a new life (PWL, 82; QPA, 21–23).

Hadot deliberately challenges a modern preconception, namely, the equation of

¹ Hadot's *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris, 1963, 3rd ed., 1989) has recently been translated as *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision* by Michael Chase, with an introduction by Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1993). Among his other works: *Plotin, Écrits. Traité 38* [VI, 7] (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988), *Plotin, Écrits. Traité 50* [III, 5] (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1990), *La citadelle intérieure. Introduction aux pensées de Marc Aurèle* (Paris: Editions Fayard, 1992), *Plotin, Écrits. Traité 9* [VI, 9] (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1994).

philosophy with conceptual and logical analysis. As a result of this view, Hadot points out, "historians of philosophy pay little attention to the fact that ancient philosophy was, first and foremost, a way of life" (PWL, 269, 76; QPA, 17). Hadot also seeks to explain the presence of logical or doctrinal inconsistencies in ancient philosophical writings (PWL, 61, 106). He endeavors to recover the original meaning of *philosophia* and to explain these inconsistencies. In this far-ranging enterprise, Hadot acknowledges his special debt to two previous publications: Paul Rabbow, *Seelenführung. Methodik der Exercitien in der Antike* (Munich, 1954) and Ilsetraut Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Berlin, 1969) (QPA, 23). P. Hadot intends to enlarge Rabbow's concept of "exercise" by showing, first, that it applies not only to Stoicism and Epicureanism, but to the whole of ancient philosophy and, second, that philosophical practices are not limited to a code of conduct but, more fundamentally, involve a way of being (PWL, 126). In comparison to these two historians, Hadot's ultimate intention is not historical: he seeks "the understanding not only of ancient thought, but of philosophy itself" (PWL, 82, 208). The ancient conception of philosophy as a way of life forms, according to him, an interrupted but never entirely broken tradition whose importance and relevance needs reaffirming today (PWL, 81, 126; QPA, 380).

Hadot's main methodological principle consists of situating ancient writings in the context of their living praxis, namely oral instruction (PWL, 62). Oral instruction, as practiced in the various school traditions, is centered on specific "exercises" (*askeseis* or *meletai*). These exercises are of three kinds, varying in emphasis according to the school and the period: discussions (dialectical or rhetorical), reading and exegesis, and systematic treatises (PWL, 89–125). Doctrinal systematization in written form remains, Hadot insists, fundamentally therapeutic and pedagogical in intention, echoing oral instruction and aiming at facilitating persuasion. Hadot characterizes these "exercises" as "spiritual" (and "existential"): they pertain to the individual's whole spirit and include the activities of imagination and sensibility, as well as those of thought and will (PWL, 128). For all the schools, philosophy is a "meditation upon death and an attentive concentration on the present moment in order to enjoy it or live it in full consciousness" (PWL, 59, 135–39; QPA, 291–309). The final goal sought is freedom, understood as autonomy (*autarkeia*) (PWL, 64, 104). Philosophy is primarily a "therapeutics of the desires" (PWL, 38).² It is precisely this subordination of theory to practice and the pedagogical constraints it entails that explain, Hadot rightly maintains, most of the logical and doctrinal inconsistencies found in ancient writings.

Hadot's thesis rests upon the fundamental distinction between philosophy as discourse and philosophy as a way of life. While this distinction is, he admits, only implicit in Plato and Aristotle, it becomes explicit in Hellenistic philosophy, especially in Stoicism and Epicureanism (PWL, 281). "Theory is never considered an end in itself; . . . it is put in the service of practice" (PWL, 60). Hadot distinguishes between two ways in

² M. C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), included in QPA's bibliography, may be mentioned here as an interesting complement to Hadot's work.

which theory was subordinated to practice: "As for philosophical theories they were either placed in the service of spiritual practice, as was the case in Stoicism and Epicureanism, or else they were taken as the objects of intellectual exercises, that is, of a practice of the contemplative life which, in the final analysis, was itself nothing other than a spiritual exercise" (PWL, 104). The latter typically refers to the Aristotelian ideal of the *bios theoretikos*. The relationship between theory and practice, therefore, is not to be understood, as Hadot rightly points out, in the modern sense, as an opposition, nor at a single level: the distinction between theory and practice is located within every field of philosophy. According the formalized division of Hellenistic times, while there is a theoretical discourse concerning logic, physics, and ethics, there is also a practical or lived logic, a practical or lived physics, as well as an applied or lived ethics (QPA, 265ff.). Physical or cosmological studies, for instance, liberate us from a partial, all-too-human viewpoint, by relocating us in the perspective of the whole, by making us see things "from above" and thus acquire the universality and objectivity of thought (PWL, 238–50). The philosophic effort to live and to think according to the rational, transcendent norm of wisdom, is exemplified in the figure of the sage, the most famous of whom was Socrates. The sage, the educator *par excellence*, can however only teach his own sustained *effort* towards wisdom: for all the schools, with the possible exception of the Epicurean, the ideal life is a never-ending progression (PWL, 59).

Hadot also highlights the continuity of this never entirely forgotten phenomenon. The Socratic appeal to the individual's "spiritual" education largely explains the fascination it exerted on, for instance, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, "two great Socratics" (PWL, 148). Socrates' erotic irony, characterized by indirect communication, enacts, according to Hadot, the very limits of language. One finds in Hadot's rapid survey in the history of philosophy insightful and well-documented remarks on such spiritual kin as Montaigne, Goethe, Kant, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and Foucault (PWL, 206–37; QPA, 379–407).

Hadot's enormously learned and deeply humanistic studies have the rare merit of showing the extent to which the Socratic call "to take care of oneself" (Plato, *Apology* 29d-e, 36c) may be true of the whole of antiquity. His thesis is particularly convincing for Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Neoplatonism. One may regret, however, that Pyrrhonism is not treated in any detail, especially since its central concern for inner peace (*ataraxia*) would have further illustrated his thesis (QPA, 174–77, 222–26). And the virtual absence of the Presocratics, ambiguously called "philosophy before philosophy," is indicative of restrictions to be put on his very broad definition of ancient philosophy (QPA, 27–30). Indeed, tendencies towards pure theory, devoid of any "spiritual" dimension, can be found, as Hadot himself admits, both in the Platonic academy and in the Aristotelian school (QPA, 217, 231). Moreover, it would not be amiss to signalize a possibly misleading ambiguity in Hadot's account of the relationship between discourse and practice. In PWL, in an interview published as "Postscript" to the book, he claims that philosophical discourses are clumsy attempts "after the fact" (underlined in the text) at justifying the decision of a form of life (PWL, 282). In QPA however, his formulation tempers this antiintellectualist and existentialist view: there he characterizes the relationship between discourse and practice, albeit paradoxically,

as both “incommensurable” and “reciprocal”; it is reciprocal because “the choice of life determines the discourse, and the discourse determines the choice of life by justifying it theoretically” (QPA, 269). Without this reciprocity between discourse and practice, philosophy would fall into the other extreme, which Hadot equally deplores: practice devoid of any cognitive content. While ancient philosophy clarifies a latent vision of the world already implied in a choice of life, it also *questions* and therewith transforms this choice—except, of course, when it succumbed to dogmatism.

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