

Observations on Pierre Hadot's conception of Philosophy as a Way of Life

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We live in an age of epigones who have persuaded themselves that the death of the master-builders is equivalent to their own originality. The message that I infer from the history of the last two centuries is that philosophy is necessarily the asking and answering of 'the big questions'. The answers may be defective in every case, but this does not invalidate the necessity of the questions....So long as we scorn these big questions, our insistence that we live in a post-philosophical age will validate itself.

- Stanley Rosen¹

Introduction

In the interview that was published at the end of our translation of *Philosophy as a way of life*, I had the opportunity to ask Pierre Hadot some of the more pressing questions that had occurred to me as I worked on making his thought comprehensible to an English-speaking audience. Most pressing among these, it seemed to me, for a philosophy that stressed the importance of applying theory to real-life situations, was the following: is the practice of philosophy as described by Hadot, consisting of a series of spiritual exercises, still an option for us today? Are these ideas, thought up by dead white men in a vastly different environment more than two thousand years ago, still relevant to life at the turn of the third millennium?

We recall Hadot's answer: yes, as long as we are willing to separate the wheat from the chaff. To speak very roughly, the great metaphysical constructions of ancient philosophy like Plato's theory of ideas, Epicurean atoms and the void, and the all-pervading fiery Stoic *pneuma* or *logos*, are according to Hadot secondary accretions to a few basic central insights and a few key techniques - called spiritual exercises - aimed at increasing our happiness by transforming the way we see the world, and consequently our very way of being or existing. We can therefore, if we wish, scour these ancient systems for all that is valuable and relevant to our present life-situation, while discarding as outmoded whatever mythic or philosophical assumptions we can no longer accept. By modifying the superstructure of these philosophical constructions, we are not altering their fundamental bases. For instance, both Epicureanism and Stoicism advise us to concentrate on enjoying the present, to the exclusion of worries about the future and the past; and the fact that this spiritual technique recurs among the doctrines of two such opposed philosophical schools suggests that it is in some sense fundamental. We can therefore, if we choose, disregard the theoretical considerations each school later devised to justify the importance of this concentration on the present, precisely because they are, in Hadot's view, secondary and non-essential accretions to a fundamental insight.

¹ S. Rosen 2001, p. 348

Moreover, the wide variety of ancient philosophical schools, which correspond to various personality types or attitudes, increases our chances of finding the elements of a philosophical life that is congenial to us. If we tend to give importance to vigilance, duty and the tension of spiritual striving, we may find Stoicism suitable as a guide for our modern lives; if we emphasize the importance of relaxation, friendship, and relishing the pure pleasures of existence, then Epicureanism may be our cup of tea. Finally, since ancient philosophy in its most fundamental aspect is not a systematic theoretical construct, but consists in a series of practical exercises destined to transform our perception and our being, we are justified in picking and choosing elements of doctrines and techniques from the entire gamut of ancient philosophical schools. The point of Hadot's concept of philosophy as a way of life is not, as in Foucault's adaptation of Hadot's thought, merely to fashion a self that is aesthetically pleasing - this is what Hadot rightly stigmatizes as a "New Dandyism" -, nor, as Alexander Nehamas suggests,² merely to fashion an interesting literary persona for oneself. Instead, by changing our way of looking at the world, we are to transform ourselves to the point of becoming fully integrated beings, mastering our internal discourse in a way a rhetorician masters external discourse in his speeches, harmonizing our will and desires with the course of Nature, recognizing and fulfilling the social obligations placed upon us by the demand for Justice. By all these means, we can achieve a cosmic consciousness that raises us above the petty concerns of our individualistic lives, and makes us aware that we are parts of the All. This final goal is equivalent to happiness, in the sense given to this concept in Hellenistic philosophy: freedom from anxiety, anguish, worries, and despair.

All this, of course, seems very far removed from philosophy as it is taught today in most university philosophy departments, be they of the analytic or the continental persuasion. Such ideas may have motivated a Marcus Aurelius, as Hadot has shown,³ but can they still be relevant

² A. Nehamas, 1998. See the reviews of this work by R. L. Anderson & J. Landy, 2001, and by M. Nussbaum 1999. Robert Nozick seems to offer an approach to what has been called the "personal tradition" of philosophy that is less aesthetic and therefore closer to Hadot's views. To quote Elijah Millgram, although Nozick "is aware that constructed figures can have 'artistic impact' and be 'artistically interesting' (Nozick, *The examined life*, 255), becoming more real is not primarily an aesthetic process, because aesthetic qualities like beauty are...only some dimensions of the many along which one's reality can be augmented" (p. 179). Yet while Nozick's goal of "increasing reality" seems very close to Hadot's goal of "causing us to be to a greater extent", Nozick still seems to remain within the Foucaultian-Nehamasian terms of "persona construction", and the very term "persona" has connotations of artificiality and lack of authenticity that I believe Hadot would wish to avoid. Hadot's project is not to modify or increase the reality of our persona, but of our self: that which we are at the deepest, most authentic level.

today, in a world where we take for granted technological advances so great that Marcus could never have dreamed of them?

By way of a possible answer to this question, I'd like to propose a brief case-study, in which we can observe the impact of Hadot's ideas on a person not far removed from us in space, time, and aspirations.

I. The Philosophy of Martin O'Hagan

The case I have in mind is that of Martin O'Hagan, who grew up in Ulster in the 1960s, receiving a strict, pre-Vatican II Catholic education. Dissatisfied with what he had been taught, in his twenties he turned to radical Marxism, joined the military wing of the IRA, and served several years in jail for gun-running in the early 1970s. He had left school at 15, but while in jail as a "political prisoner", he began to study philosophy through the Open University, studies which he later continued at the University of Ulster. Upon his release from prison, O'Hagan began to work as a reporter, covering the seamy world of the Belfast underground, with its gun-running, protection scams, and narcotics trade. He eventually got a job with the newspaper Sunday World, where he gained a reputation as a no-holds-barred investigative reporter, who often surprised his colleagues with a determination and courage that sometimes bordered on foolhardiness. As he continued to unveil the racketeering and drug-dealing activities of both Catholic and Protestant extremists, O'Hagan managed to make himself unpopular with some factions of the IRA - he was expelled from the group for his "disruptive attitude" after thirteen years of membership, and in 1989, he was abducted, bound and hooded, by the IRA and subjected to lengthy interrogation. At the opposite end of the political and religious spectrum, he also incurred the anger of paramilitary Protestant Loyalist forces. O'Hagan had written a series of articles exposing the illegal activities of the notorious Billy Wright, leader of the hard-core group LVF (Loyalist Volunteer Force), for whom O'Hagan had coined the nickname "King Rat". Threats from Wright forced O'Hagan to leave Ulster and move first to Dublin and then to Cork, before Wright's murder in prison in 1998 put a temporary end to O'Hagan's worries. Or so it seemed.

In March 1998, O'Hagan submitted a study project to a professor at a distance-learning philosophy institute called Pathways, in which he sketched his own philosophical development and spoke of his plans for future study.⁴ A few excerpts from this project will give us an idea of his philosophical orientation:

I came across the Stoics and the rest of the Greeks, whose approach to philosophy flew in the face of the discourse that was being promoted. Philosophy as a way of life interested me. It was a mode of existing in the world that should transform my mediocre being.

3 Pierre Hadot, *The inner citadel: the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. by M. Chase, HUP 1998.

4 See Martin O'Hagan, "Philosophical considerations on discourse/praxis", <http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/ptpdlp/students/martin.html>.

In Symposium Plato had shown that Socrates could be identified with Eros, the son of Poros (expedient) and Penia (poverty). Eros lacked wisdom but he did know how to acquire it. Philosophy took on the form of an exercise of thought, will and the totality of being. Its goal is wisdom.

The search was for a way of life that brought peace of mind, inner freedom and cosmic consciousness. [...] Epicurus [...] said, "We must not suppose that any other object is to be gained from the knowledge of the phenomena of the sky...than peace of mind and a sure confidence".

During the Middle Ages the scholastic university was dominated by theology. Here professionals trained other professionals. Education was no longer directed towards people with the sole purpose of becoming fully developed beings. It is no accident that between the 16th and the 18th centuries genuine philosophical advances were made outside the universities. We have just to look at Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz.

Schopenhauer wrote that university philosophy was mere fencing in front of a mirror. He claimed its goal was to give students opinions that suit the local establishment. He wrote 'and yet if there is one thing desirable in the world, it is to see a ray of light fall onto the darkness of our lives, shedding some of the light on the mysterious enigma of our existence'.

...I discovered a Stoic practice that embodied an art of living to be found in Epictetus, Roman slave and philosopher. There should not be a separation between theory and praxis. For the first time Marx's words that philosophers only interpret the world...etc. took on a new meaning. It was the beginning of a return to Ancient philosophy as a philosophy of practical wisdom.

I went in search of meaning and discovered a potential for morality and inner peace. Marxism is no longer the be-all and end-all but a tool to help cope and understand a world rapidly changing in several respects. My model, if that is the proper term, is Augustine who by philosophically re-examining his life came to his own conclusions. His wisdom did not merely make him know, it made him 'be' "in a certain way."

Although he does not state his source, O'Hagan clearly draws his inspiration here from Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a way of life*. We easily recognize many of Hadot's favorite themes: the myth of Poros and Penia from Plato's *Symposium*; the idea of ancient philosophy as an exercise not only of thought, but also of will and one's entire being; philosophy's goal as peace of mind, inner freedom and cosmic consciousness; Hadot's historical views on how philosophy as a way of life was de-emphasized during the Middle Ages as a result of its co-option, first by Christianity and then by Scholasticism and the concomitant rise of the University; its gradual re-emergence, after the Renaissance, in the work of extra-Academic thinkers like Descartes, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Above all, what

O'Hagan seems to have found in Hadot's work is the idea of a philosophy that is no longer just theoretical, but that can be practically applied. Unlike the study of philosophy as typically carried out in the university, philosophy as a way of life seemed to O'Hagan to be able to offer a promise of morality and inner peace. It promised a "wisdom", that could be achieved by a philosophical program of self-improvement and development, beginning with self-examination and self-understanding.⁵ In a word, philosophy as a way of life promised not just the accumulation of knowledge or the display of cleverness, but a process of genuine transformation, whose goal was to enable the practitioner first to change his or her way of looking at the world, and then, as a consequence, to *be* in a new and different way.

A number of O'Hagan's other philosophical essays from this period also display Hadot's influence. This is especially clear at the end of his short paper entitled "Epictetus and Stoicism"⁶:

In short, what ancient philosophy proposed was an art of living. By contrast, modern philosophy appears as structured technical jargon in the positive sense reserved for an elite inside the hallowed walls of Academia. [...]

Today, the professors of philosophy have abandoned the big questions that once gave their discipline its point and meaning. Philosophy now finds itself in the midst of a self-imposed crisis. This calls for a radical avant gardism that won't be a return to some religious formula but one that helps us mortals find meaning in an increasingly disenchanting and alienated universe.

In a paper entitled "Ancient and modern philosophy", O'Hagan expands on what he sees as the decadent condition of university philosophy studies. He had come to philosophy, he writes, moved by "The notion that maybe I would find that my otherwise meaningless existence would make sense to me". Yet this hope was soon disappointed:

It now appears no longer fashionable to consider the big questions of why we are here or what is this life all about...The desire to try and find an answer to haunting questions is branded romantic nostalgia and a longing for a world that is gone and never to return.

Anglo-American philosophy has perfected an academicism in which issues that matter to most human beings are largely ignored. English language philosophy rarely amounts to anything more than an exhibition of the masterly and often dazzling skill that is the devil in the small detail of form. Nowhere does this undoubted ability seek to *inform*.⁷

5 As Hadot notes (1995, p. 90), the Greek dictum "Know thyself" is the presupposition for any further spiritual exercises, insofar as it invites us to establish the requisite relations of our self to our self.

6 In *Philosophy Pathways*, Issue 30. Available at http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_20.html.

7 This last remark seems to be a slightly garbled allusion to one of Hadot's favorite quotes: Victor Goldschmidt's statement that the goal of the Platonic dialogue is more to form than to inform. Cf., for instance, *Philosophy as a way of life*, p. 119 n. 101, and A. Davidson, *ibid.*, p. 20.

In the letter that accompanied his study project, O'Hagan wrote to his supervisor: "...the notion of philosophy as a way of life could ... be ... a subject for serious academic study. Let me know what you think. I'm anxious to get started".

Unfortunately, O'Hagan did not have time to pursue research on his project. On September 21, 2001, while he was walking home with his wife from a pub on a Friday night, a car pulled up beside the couple and opened fire. O'Hagan barely had time to push his wife to safety in a nearby hedge before he took two bullets, killing him instantly. He was 51 years old.

II. An Innocent in Vancouver: my encounter with analytic philosophy

"The chief danger to our philosophy, apart from laziness and woolliness, is scholasticism, the essence of which is treating what is vague as if it were precise and trying to fit it into an exact logical category".

Frank P. Ramsay, 1931⁸

We've just seen that Pierre Hadot's concept of philosophy as a way of life could provide an option for a person who, excluded from and/or disillusioned by academic philosophy, still felt the need to search for answers to a few centrally important questions that had direct impact on his life.

My own itinerary was much less dramatic than O'Hagan's, and I certainly don't want to equate it with his courageous pursuit of truth. My story may perhaps be of interest, however, simply because it is so typical that it illustrates the experience of a large number of philosophy students over the last couple of generations or so.⁹

Like O'Hagan, I was a bit rebellious as a teenager. In high school I had what are now referred to as "authority issues" with my teachers, which led to a mutually beneficial separation between myself and the small-town high school in Duncan, Vancouver Island, Canada, which I attended for a grand total of a couple of months. At the time, the school seemed to me like a concentration camp: I was interested in learning, whereas the teachers and school administrators seemed mainly concerned about keeping me and my fellow-students or inmates off the streets and out of trouble for a few hours each day.¹⁰ Things went much better when I was able to take my last two years of high school by correspondence: I traveled, read, argued long distance with my teachers, none of whom I ever met,

8 F. P. Ramsey, 1931

9 Cf. T. May 2000

10 I emphasize "seemed" here. In actual fact I'm sure the great majority of my high-school teachers were honorable men and women trying to do the best job they could in difficult circumstances.

and began to get good marks. By the time I entered my first year at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver I knew that what mattered to me was studying and discussing a certain number of “big questions”: What is the meaning of life? How should I live? What is happiness, and how can I attain it? What is the nature of the mystical experience, and is it completely illusory or does it reveal something of the actual nature of reality? This need to discuss these questions found a propitious environment in my first year of university studies, where I entered a kind of Great books program at UBC called Arts One, led by some gifted and dedicated professors.¹¹ Here I enjoyed a taste of what I had always believed genuine education must be: sincere, widely-read professors guiding their students in a relaxed, non-hierarchical atmosphere in the discussion and consideration of ideas that really matter, and that have a direct bearing and impact on the way we live our lives.

When, after my first year, I had to decide on a major, it was a no-brainer: I chose philosophy. Where better, I thought, could I pursue my quest for discovering the Meaning of Life?

It didn't take long for disillusionment to set in, as it did in other circumstances for O'Hagan. Most lower-level courses in UBC's philosophy program consisted in sitting with hundreds of other students in cavernous amphitheatres, and taking notes while a professor, or often one of his assistants, read from the textbook he had either already published or was soon to publish. There were also smaller philosophical seminars, of course, but here I was introduced to reading some of the most boring material I had ever encountered. There were endless technical discussions of whether one could be mistaken about one's own sensory presentations, whether a private language was possible, whether sensations were identical with electro-chemical impulses in the brain, and similar arcane matters, most of them stated in bizarre-looking pseudo-mathematical formal-symbolic language. Many professors seemed primarily interested in punching holes in the arid and scarcely comprehensible reasoning of one of their colleagues by means of even more arid and less comprehensible considerations.¹² The mode of argumentation was often about as far removed from actual life-experience as could be imagined: when examining a philosophical thesis, we were often advised to consider hypotheses of alternate possible worlds: “consider a universe in which all that existed was a banana and a kangaroo: would the thesis be true for that universe?”.

11 The program still exists : see <http://arts1.arts.ubc.ca/>.

12 Cf. N. Swartz 1994: “ ... while the exposing of error is an essential part of the doing of philosophy, it is not all there is to doing philosophy. Far too much of the practice of philosophy, both written and dialogical, has become one-sided: finding what is wrong in someone else's work and failing to find what is right, useful, and meritorious in that work.[...] it is possible to do philosophy extremely well without savagery. [...] But, by and large, or at any rate, to a greater extent than is warranted, philosophy has a vicious streak. If we really care about our profession, we need to reverse its destructive tendencies...”.

This is a caricature, of course, but just barely.¹³ In ethics, where the dominant theory was a particularly tedious variety of utilitarianism, our professor enthusiastically set forth his latest theory, according to which, if you were walking down the street and saw a person get hit by a car, you could justify not going over to help him or her on the grounds that, in the same time you would have taken to do so, you could have maximized the total quantity of human happiness in any number of much more efficient ways....

I gradually became aware of what was going on: UBC's philosophy department was in the grip of a philosophical style or method that had dominated Anglo-Saxon philosophy since the early 1900s: analytic philosophy. A great deal of ink has been spilled on the characteristics of analytic philosophy, and we'll return to the subject a little later on. For the moment, I understand it in the terms specified by Reiter in *The Philosophical gourmet*¹⁴:

Analytic philosophers, crudely speaking, aim for argumentative clarity and precision; draw freely on the tools of logic; and often identify, professionally and intellectually, more closely with the sciences and mathematics, than with the humanities.

Clearly, there is nothing wrong with clarity and precision,¹⁵ and I found some aspects of the analytic program interesting. Logic, for instance, which was completely new to me, was fun to learn, and I could see the usefulness of being able to analyse arguments, identify theses, and recognize foggy thought and invalid inferences when one came across them. Yet other aspects of the analytic approach, at least as I experienced it at UBC, were deeply antipathetic to me. They are alluded to by some other

13 Compare the list of “exotic thought experiments” given by J. Peijnenburg 2000, 370-371 : “ Searle's ‘Chinese room’, Block's ‘Chinese robot’, Putnam's ‘twin earth’, Block's ‘inverted earth’, Lewis' ‘counterpart world’, Quine's ‘adical translation’, Putnam's ‘brains in a vat’, Dennett's ‘cranes and skyhooks’, Nagel's ‘identification with a bat’, Jackson's ‘Mary, the blind colour scientist’, and so on”.

14 <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/analytic.htm>. The quotation is from the 2000-2001 version. Needless to say, there is a vast number of other definitions of analytic philosophy, many of them mutually contradictory. Some other elements that seem to me important: analytic philosophy is “primarily concerned with the analysis of meaning” (John Searle, “Contemporary philosophy in the United States”, in N. Bumin and E.P. Tsui-James (editors) *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford, 1996); the most recent and up-to-date analytic philosophers “think and write in the analytic spirit, respectful of science, both as a paradigm of reasonable belief and in conformity with its argumentative rigour, its clarity and its determination to be objective” (A. Quinton, “Analytic Philosophy” in T. Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford 1995). Needless to say, it would be wrong to give the impression that analytic philosophy is either monolithic or exempt from historical evolution, but an accurate portrayal of all its historical manifestations is beyond the scope of the present paper.

15 Is analytic philosophy *really* all that clear? Most of the papers published in *Mind* are rigorously incomprehensible to the uninitiated; perhaps what is meant by “clarity” might be better stated as “expressed in terms of predicate logic”. Note, however, Reiter's caveat, which he adds to the above quotation: “It is fair to say that ‘clarity’ is, regrettably, becoming less and less a distinguishing feature of ‘analytic’ philosophy”.

current definitions of analytic philosophy. For Michael Dummett, analytic philosophy is characterized by

...the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained (my emphasis).¹⁶

While for John Skorupski, it manifests

[...] a deflationary conception of philosophy - a conception according to which philosophical problems are pseudo-problems, problems to be dissolved not solved.¹⁷

Statements like these troubled me in their reductiveness and exclusivity: could it really be the case that questions like that of the meaning of life, that had obsessed the hearts and minds of geniuses and simple working stiffs alike since the beginnings of recorded history were in fact simple mistakes? Many of the greatest creations of art, literature, and religion have arisen, throughout the ages, in response to such questions: were they all based on fairly obvious misunderstandings? Had all human beings prior to Frege really been that stupid?

I had by now developed an interest in ancient thought, particularly Plato and Aristotle. Analytic philosophy's lack of interest in the history of philosophy was pointed out as far back as 1936 by Nagel,¹⁸ and I found the situation at UBC reflected this fact. Western philosophy up until the late 19th century was often dismissed with smug contempt. Ancient thinkers - or rather Plato, Aristotle, and a few Pre-Socratics, who were the only ones studied - were often treated, sometimes with indulgence, sometimes with impatience, as obtuse philosophical debutants or picturesque primitives, who were to be praised only when they stumbled across ideas that adumbrated our current philosophical opinions (the only correct ones, needless to say). I did not think then and I don't think now that Plato and Aristotle, for instance, are infallible. I do feel, however, that a body of thought that has inspired mankind for millennia, from their successors in the Academy and the Peripatos to their continuations and transformations in the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, their Neoplatonist commentators first in Late Antiquity, and then in Medieval Arabic, Jewish, and Byzantine thought, not to mention the generations of scribes and illuminators who copied their manuscripts with excruciating care - all this, I felt, deserved our respect. Instead, ancient philosophy was often dismissed with a patronizing pat on the head, as if we had to do with inept schoolchildren who meant well, of course, but were utterly incapable of generating valuable philosophical ideas because they lacked our own 20th century sophistication. It struck me as inherently unlikely that philosophers had all been morons until the advent of Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein, so the chances are there was more depth to the thought of the Ancients than met the eye at first glance. It also seemed to me that in order to

criticize, much less dismiss, a body of thought, one ought to understand it first. But it was far from clear that my professors actually understood Plato and Aristotle; or if they did, they failed to communicate that understanding to us students. I was later to discover that one can easily spend a lifetime studying Plato, Aristotle, or any one of a number of other ancient philosophers, without exhausting the wealth of their thought, and without even achieving the certainty that one has definitively understood everything they have to say. Admittedly, this insight is perhaps not one professors should choose to emphasize before their undergraduate students.

Way back in 1936, Ernst Nagel spoke of the emerging trend of analytic philosophy as committed to a "common-sense naturalism" that accepts the discoveries of the natural sciences as matters of fact:

...the men with whom I have talked are impatient with philosophical systems built in the traditional grand manner...[T]hey take for granted an authentic knowledge acquired by the special sciences and are concerned with...clarifying its meaning and implications¹⁹.

Nagel was, of course, referring to people like Moore and Wittgenstein at Cambridge, Schlick in Vienna, Carnap in Prague, and Lukasiewicz in Warsaw, all of whom were concerned with methods of scientific analysis. To be sure, things had changed since the 1930s, but it seemed to me that analytic philosophy in the 80s was still enamored of the macho, non-nonsense "hard sciences", and anxious to imitate them in every aspect, perhaps in the belief that if all one did was to manipulate logical symbols and produce quasi-scientific studies of perception and brain physiology, then one's "hard scientific" colleagues - and, not incidentally, one's deans, evaluating committees, and grant-distributing organizations - would at last take one *seriously*. Analytic philosophers often seemed slightly embarrassed about being "philosophers" at all, to the point that their goal, sometimes implicitly and sometimes avowedly, was the elimination of philosophy itself.²⁰

It was not that I thought nobody should study the kinds of logical, linguistic, and epistemological issues that made up the UBC philosophical curriculum. Most of these interests struck me as inherently worthy of study, and some, like logic, as being pretty well indispensable, at least as a tool and training device. Yet this curriculum was presented to me and to my fellow students as *all there was* to philosophy: other philosophical options were somehow illegitimate, or at least sub-philosophical. Once, sensing my discontent, the kind-hearted chairman of the philosophy department called me into his office to encourage me to enrol in the course that was going to be

16 M. Dummett 1993, p. 4. Compare R. Rorty 1967

17 J. Skorupski 1997, p. 77

18 E. Nagel 1936

19 E. Nagel 1936, pp. 6 ; 9, quoted by H. Sluga 1998, 100.

20 Richard Rorty begins his 1999 paper as follows: " Many analytic philosophers do not like to think of their discipline as one of the humanities. They regard their own brand of philosophy as the disciplined pursuit of objective knowledge, and thus as resembling the natural sciences...Philosophers of this sort prefer to be placed, for administrative purposes, as far as possible from professors of literature and as close as possible to professors of physics. "

offered on Hegel by a visiting professor.²¹ I ought not to miss this opportunity, he told me, "because you're never going to get another chance to study something like that here."

In a nutshell, I was struck by what I perceived as an all-pervading reductionism in current philosophical studies. Materialism, I was told, had shown that the mind and/or soul, like all so-called "mental" phenomena, were in fact just brain waves; Wittgenstein and above all his Logical Positivist successors had shown that all talk of metaphysical entities and ethical ideals, being unverifiable, was in the strict sense meaningless.²² As far as my thirst for answers to the "big questions"²³, like "What is the meaning of life?" was concerned: well, it turns out that they were simply ill-phrased questions and/or "category mistakes"; that is, questions which, arising out of misinterpretations of language, have no answer, and should not even be asked.²⁴ It did not take long for me to get the impression that philosophy as studied at the university level was monumentally boring: dry, abstract, far removed from the questions that haunted me and many of my friends; in other words, irrelevant.

This was especially true of the study of ancient philosophy, which in fact meant a few works by Plato and Aristotle, read in dry-as-dust translations. It was a nightmare to wade through the tedious translations of chapters from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, which I could not understand, or to break down the "arguments" - most of them sophistical or badly thought out, we were told, of Plato's Socratic dialogues. Yet nothing could compare to the torture of having to slog through an un-annotated translation of the central books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, unless it was the endless and apparently senseless definitions of the *Sophist* and the *Gorgias*: one came away with the impression that the authors of these works were probably insane, but insane in a singularly uninteresting way. At no point were we told how all this hung together: what was the author's purpose in pursuing such abstract speculations? Why did Socrates' interlocutors limit themselves to answering with a simple "yes" or "no", often swallowing what our professors told us were fallacious

arguments? How could one account for the differences in emphasis and even outright contradictions that appeared within the writings of a single author, like Plato or Aristotle? The standard explanation was that both these thinkers started out professing certain simple beliefs, then revised them as they grew more philosophically sophisticated: in fact, the works and thought of Aristotle, and especially Plato, could be divided into early, middle and late periods on the basis of the sophistication they displayed, and these divisions could then be used to date their works and explain the evolution of their thought. This seemed problematic to me: the reasoning seemed circular, and somehow too facile and artificial: Plato and Aristotle were treated exactly as if they were contemporary thinkers, rushing off to publish, as quickly as possible, every new idea that entered their heads in the Ancient Greek equivalent of *Mind* or *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Was there no underlying unity to their thought, no unifying, non-anachronistic explanation of the seemingly bizarre form and content of their works?

After a couple of years of suffering, I left UBC and joined the philosophy program at the University of Victoria, also in Canada. Here matters were less depressing, mainly because of the presence of a maverick professor who offered courses outside of the analytic tradition.²⁵ I thus became aware that philosophy did not consist exclusively in breaking down arguments, manipulating logical symbols, and in general fussing about esoteric details that could be of interest only to initiates and specialists. At Victoria I was at last able to begin to read philosophers from the past like Hegel and Nietzsche, and contemporaries like Foucault and Habermas. I was finally being initiated into the other branch of the Great Philosophical Divide between Analytics and Continentals: if I had been disillusioned with the likes of Quine and Ayer, Max Black and J.J.C. Smart, then I had better hope these Continentals would be more to my liking, because they were, I was told, the only other game in town. The more I advanced in my studies, the more philosophy was presented to me as a two-horned, mutually exclusive dilemma: there was analytic philosophy, and then there was continental philosophy: *tertium non datur*, and never the twain shall meet.

Continental thinkers like Foucault and Habermas seemed more relevant to my life and my interests than the clever but shallow reasonings of most contemporary analytic philosophers. For one thing, they seemed aware that philosophy is not done in a vacuum, but is the product of history; here, then, was the realization that to understand the philosophical thought of any period - including today's - it was necessary to understand the social and cultural context in which that thought was expressed. In the study of ancient philosophy, continental thinkers had progressed beyond the anachronistic isolation of arguments and their summary dismissal on the grounds that they do not always correspond to our current philosophical likes and dislikes. Yet these "continental" thinkers also had their off-putting aspects. The idea that all philosophical statements are historically conditioned could easily lead to a kind of facile relativism that, among students, often resulted in the

21 A young Robert Solomon.

22 "All statements belonging to *Metaphysics*, regulative Ethics, and (metaphysical) Epistemology have this defect, are in fact unverifiable, and, therefore, unscientific. In the Viennese Circle, we are accustomed to describe such statements as nonsense." R. Carnap, *The Unity of Science*, London 1934, 26-27, quoted by H. Putnam 2002, 18.

23 On the "big questions", Stanley Rosen (2001, 345) remarks: "it is very striking that, by and large, contemporary philosophers do not pose 'the big questions', whereas some natural scientists, in particular cosmologists, are very much engaged in speculations that could only be called 'metaphysical'....we may be dependent upon theoretical physicists and cosmologists for the preservation of a genuinely speculative, and indeed, synthetic or universal philosophical tradition. This is especially interesting in view of the fact that the loss of interest by philosophers in 'big questions' is due in large part to the influence of modern science."

24 Cf. M. Dummett 1978, 438: "Philosophy is concerned, not to establish truths of a very general kind, not even truths which can be arrived at by ratiocination alone, but to rectify certain kinds of misunderstanding, the misunderstandings we have of our concepts."

25 John Michelsen.

conviction that any and all of any student's beliefs were equally valid and profound as those any philosophical author. The ideas, expounded by the early Foucault and the Frankfurt school, that knowledge is power and that all intellectual productions are conditioned by forces beyond the control of individual agents seemed to lead to a kind of determinism which, if one accepted the doctrine hook, line, and sinker, seemed to lead to a fatalistic quietism and acceptance of the *status quo*; or else, if one approached the doctrines critically, to be self-refuting, for how did Foucault and Adorno themselves - or Karl Marx, for that matter - manage to escape this universal determinism and write whatever they chose?

Perhaps the most off-putting aspect of this initial exposure to continental thinkers was the fact that they expressed themselves in what seemed to be an unnecessarily recondite jargon; of course it did not help matters that we read these authors only in translation. Often, when I had expended tremendous efforts on deciphering the meaning of a meandering phrase from the *Archaeology of knowledge*, I came away with the feeling that the basic point the author was trying to make was either dubious or banal, and in much of the secondary literature on post-modernism, this jargon seemed to become an end in itself. Elegant, or at least recondite verbal pyrotechnics and etymological puns often seemed to be all there was to it, without it being obvious that the author actually had anything of substance to say. I was reminded of my first year in University Residence at UBC: as a group of 18 and 19 year-olds, most of us away from home for the first time, one of the first things the kids in each residence did, as they formed themselves into cohesive groups, was spontaneously to form their own jargon, in which they could carry on a conversation that could not be understood by outsiders. It seemed to me that much analytic and postmodern philosophy was just that: a closed society whose members were periodically called upon to give a demonstration, by giving lectures and/or publishing articles, that they could successfully manipulate the group's respective jargon. Successful manipulation of the jargon could, of course, be judged only by the members of the group, since no outsider or layperson could possibly have a clue what they were talking about. Analytic philosophy's fondness for formal languages seemed to fulfill the same function: if one could not manipulate logical symbols with dexterity, one was left on the doorstep of the inner sanctum of analytic philosophy, as if one had showed up for dinner at the Old Boys' Club without a tie.

I did manage to finish my Bachelor's degree in Philosophy at Victoria, but it was with a sense of disillusionment. I had had a taste of both analytic and continental philosophy, the two mutually exclusive branches of the discipline, and neither had satisfied me. Neither seemed able to speak to my thirst for the honest, jargon-free discussions of philosophical issues that genuinely mattered to my life. When it came to pursuing graduate studies, therefore, I switched disciplines, and took a Master's degree in Classical Studies. By studying Greek and Latin, I thought, I would be able to read Plato and Aristotle in the original, thereby bypassing the distorting intermediaries of translators, anthologists, and commentators, be they of the analytic or the continental persuasion. In the course of my

studies I became interested in the thought of the Neoplatonist Porphyry of Tyre, and this led me to encounter the writings of Pierre Hadot, and in particular his masterly study of Porphyry's thought, *Porphyre et Victorinus*. Impressed by this work, I went on to read other works by Hadot, including the little book on Plotinus he had written back in 1963.²⁶

Here was a book on ancient philosophy that was quite unlike any other I had read. For Hadot, Plotinus' philosophy consisted in a call for us to change our lives and transform ourselves, and Hadot seemed to take this claim deeply seriously. He wrote in a style that seemed equally distant from the pseudo-scientific objectivity of Anglo-Saxon scholarship, and the swollen pretentiousness of much of what passed as continental scholarship. His chapters spoke of topics like Love, Presence and Gentleness, yet this was no facile New Age gobbledy-gook: on the contrary, Hadot's discussion was based on the most solid grounding in Greek and Latin philology and the history of Greco-Roman philosophy. Hadot illuminatingly discussed the problems that had frustrated me on the occasion of my first contact with the works of ancient philosophers: if they seemed strange to us, it was not because these authors were childish or stupid, but because they had a conception of the acts of writing and philosophizing as spiritual exercises that was worlds away from our own. Finally, the scales fell from my eyes, as it were, when I read Hadot's brief Postface to the 1973 edition of his book on Plotinus:²⁷

I have tried to speak simply, without using too many technical terms, following in this the advice of Marcus Aurelius: "the work of philosophy is simple and discreet. Let us not get carried away by the swollen puffiness of solemn affectation" (*Meditations*, 9, 29).

I sincerely believe that our most urgent and difficult task today is, as Goethe said, to "learn to believe in simplicity". Might it not be the case that the greatest lesson which the philosophers of Antiquity...have to teach us is that philosophy is not the complicated, pretentious, and artificial construction of a learned system of discourse, but the transformation of perception and of life, which lends inexhaustible meaning to the formula - seemingly so banal - of the love of the Good?

When I read this, I thought the same thing Plotinus is supposed to have said when he met his future mentor Ammonius Saccas: *touton ezêtoun*, this is the one I had been searching for.²⁸ When, in 1988, a grant from the Canadian government unexpectedly allowed me to pursue doctoral studies in philosophy anywhere I pleased, I did not hesitate to hightail it to Paris, to study at the feet of Pierre Hadot.

26 *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, Paris 1963. See *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, translated by M. Chase with an introduction by A. Davidson, Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1993.

27 I quoted this text in my Preface to the work cited in the previous note, p. xi.

28 Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 3, 13

III. Hadot, analytic philosophy, and the Big Questions: Suite et fin

I began studying philosophy, like many of you, because I wanted to answer some big questions that haunted me. In my case, the most important of those questions were whether there was a God and, relatedly, what the point of my being alive was...how it was that I should go about living...At some point in my graduate school education I began to develop different motivations for my involvement in philosophy...It's not that the big questions just went away. Instead, they moved into the background, their urgency replaced by the urgency of more mature philosophical concerns: getting articles accepted for publication, receiving tenure, making an academic name for myself. Now, however, the wheel has turned again. In some ways, it has turned back...perhaps the most important cause is this. I have arrived at an age where the far shore of my life is one that I can see as clearly as - or perhaps more clearly than - the shore from which I set out. I know, more viscerally than I have known before, that sooner or later I will arrive at that far shore, and that when I do the journals that I have published in ...will not mean much to me. It is only the big questions, and the answers that I am able to give to those questions that will matter. And those big questions are, as they have always been, questions about how I am to lead my life.

Todd May²⁹

In the preceding section of this paper, I gave an impressionistic sketch of my encounter with analytic philosophy, and the way in which I found it to contrast rather violently with what I had assumed, no doubt naively, philosophy was, or at any rate should be.

We have already glimpsed that the question of the nature and structure of analytic philosophy is one over which a great deal of ink has been spilled over the past few years, and that experts don't appear to be able to agree in the descriptions they propose. In its origins, analytic philosophy has been claimed to be a continuation or vestige of Aristotelianism,³⁰ or Platonism, or British Empiricism; it has been claimed to begin with the work of Frege, Moore, Russell, or Wittgenstein. Its differences from its adversary continental philosophy have been claimed to consist in a difference in style, in choice of subject-matter and questions discussed, in clarity vs. the lack of clarity,³¹ or in the reliance on or avoidance of rational argument. In an interesting paper published in 2000, the Dutch philosopher Jeanne Peijnenburg³² drew up a list of eight defining characteristics of analytic philosophy. They included a concentration on language and meaning and analysis as the decomposition or the breaking down of wholes; a clear style and the precise definition of terms; the prevalent use of logical symbols and formulae; the avoidance of metaphysical, social, and religious questions; the lack of interest in the

history of philosophy,³³ and a proximity to and respect for the natural sciences. Peijnenburg goes on to argue that while these features characterized analytic philosophy in its origin and heyday, they have all been replaced in the recent history of the discipline by their *opposites*. There is certainly some truth to these observations: clarity, as we have seen, no longer seems to be an exemplary virtue of much analytic thought; the exclusive concern for language and meaning has now been supplemented, if not replaced, by interests in cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and other fashionable fields. It is also true that analytic philosophers have begun to pay attention to fields they used to eschew, such as metaphysics,³⁴ religion, and the history of philosophy, although it could be claimed that when they do venture into these fields, analytic philosophers usually retain many characteristic features that separate them from their "continental" colleagues. In the history of philosophy, for instance, we often find them concentrating on the "arguments" used by ancient thinkers, which are sometimes torn from their original context and translated into the formal language of symbolic logic, a procedure which can lead to rampant anachronism.³⁵

However, Peijnenburg's argument that analytic philosophy now displays the *opposite* features to those that characterized it in its heyday seems less convincing when it comes to the importance of logic and the natural sciences. The study of logic³⁶ continues to flourish, and the so-called "hard sciences" continue to provide the methodological model, implicitly or explicitly, for a great many contemporary analytic philosophers.³⁷ In a very recent paper,³⁸ Richard Rorty has argued that "The biggest difference in self-image [i.e., between analytic and continental philosophers] is that the model of the natural sciences remains much more important for most analytic philosophers than it is for most continental philosophers." In fact, as I mentioned earlier, many analytic philosophers continue to be so awestruck by what they perceive as the success and prestige of the "hard sciences" that they would

29 T. May 2000, 223

30 E. Tugendhat 1976/1982; N. Capaldi 1998.

31 Cf. Searle's "principle of expressivity", affirming that whatever can be thought can be expressed clearly and precisely; cf. M. Dascal 2001, 319.

32 J. Peijnenburg 2000

33 Describing his experience as a recent graduate looking for a philosophy job in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Richard Rorty (1999, p. 3) writes "If you were hoping to get tenure, as I was, there was little percentage in being historically minded".

34 P. Simons 2001, 307. For an interesting and ambitious example of the current rehabilitation of metaphysics in analytic philosophy, see the 1000 + page treatise by Frédéric Nef, *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique*, Paris 2004, especially the first chapter, entitled "La métaphysique n'est pas morte".

35 Cf. H. Sluga 1998, 103: "The arena of history has been widely neglected by analytic philosophers...this lack of historical consciousness has led to curious distortions and limitations in analytic discussions of historical phenomena. Past philosophers are read as if they were writing today...". S. Rosen (2001, 342) goes so far as to speak of the history of philosophy as being "assimilated into the methods and presuppositions of the opposing camps [sc. Analytic and Continental]. There will be a rewriting of history in the style predicted by George Orwell, where the 'old thinkers' are transformed from respected if outmoded ancestors into prophets who anticipated our currently fashionable prejudices".

36 For a survey of the differences in the evaluation of logic in analytic and continental philosophy, see F. D'Agostini 2001.

37 The affinity between analytic philosophy and the natural or empirical sciences is noted, for example, by S. Rosen 2001, 344; P. Simons 2001, 303.

38 "Analytic and conversational philosophy", in C. Prado, ed., 2003.

like nothing better than to be "scientific" themselves. They like to project an image of themselves as hard-nosed investigators, practical men (and a few women) who deal with hard facts and objective reality, avoiding the study of anything that smacks of "metaphysics" as though it somehow cast doubt on their masculinity. What is ironic is that many of these wannabe scientists still work within a nineteenth-century paradigm of science as the study of "objective", quantifiable and measurable reality, a world rather distant from that revealed by more recent scientific developments like relativity, quantum mechanics with its Uncertainty Principle, or String Theory with its quantum geometry.

In fact, so close is the relationship between analytic philosophy and modern science that it has recently been claimed that many features of the former can be explained by the structure of the latter. The Australian philosopher Neil Levy³⁹ has argued persuasively that many features of Thomas Kuhn's description of "normal science" are strikingly reflected in analytic philosophy. In both cases, researchers agree on goals, assumptions, and methodology, which allows them to concentrate on solving increasingly technical puzzles or problems. Instead of publishing books capable of interesting the educated public at large, normal scientists and analytic philosophers publish articles in specialized journals which no one but their colleagues can understand.⁴⁰ Standard analytic philosophy has a limited interest in the history of its discipline, and when it does show such interest - as in the textbooks used to familiarize students with the currently reigning paradigm - the presentation it gives of the thought of its ancient predecessors is often selective and anachronistic. Similarly, according to Thomas Kuhn,⁴¹ the textbooks of normal science

refer only to that part of the work of past scientists that can be easily viewed as contributions to the statement and solution of the texts' paradigm problems. Partly by selection and partly by distortion, the scientists of an earlier age are implicitly represented as having worked upon the same set of fixed problems and in accordance with the same set of fixed canons that the most recent revolution in scientific theory and method has made seem scientific.

Finally, even the characteristic that has returned like a leitmotif throughout this paper - analytic philosophy's tendency to ignore the so-called big questions, such as that of the meaning of life - can be illuminated by means of Kuhn's theories. As Kuhn notes,⁴² scientific revolutions like the one that brought current normal science and analytic philosophy to power

... narrow the scope of the community's professional concerns, increase the extent of its specialization, and attenuate [their] communication with other groups, both scientific and lay.

The end result is that normal science and analytic philosophy concentrate almost exclusively on solving individual problems of detail, in highly technical articles published in specialized journals. In the words of Levy⁴³:

With the acquisition of a paradigm, analytic philosophy (AP) acquired a set of relatively well-delineated problems or puzzles, upon which it was able to focus almost all its attention and thus to make great progress in solving them. *As a result, however, it came [...] to be seen as less and less relevant to the kinds of questions that often drive people to philosophy in the first place....* AP tends to channel its students away from those questions, and in the directions of detailed work on its puzzles.

The unfortunate result of these tendencies is, as we have seen, that people like Martin O'Hagan, who long for the opportunity to discuss these fundamental questions in the search for something to have practical impact upon and give meaning to their lives are left high and dry by most contemporary analytic philosophy. Yet since the need to address these questions is a perennial characteristic of human beings, other tendencies are quick to occupy the field thus abandoned by philosophy: self-help, New Age, and every imaginable variety of esoteric irrationalism step in to supply quick and easy answers.

What does all this have to do with Pierre Hadot and his conception of philosophy as a way of life? Several things, I think. In the first place, it provides an explanation of the current state of analytic philosophy. As we all know, Hadot has explained how ancient philosophy, which originally consisted in a program of spiritual exercises intended to change our way of seeing, and consequently our mode of being, with a view to reducing our unhappiness, lost these characteristics when, on the occasion of the triumph of scholasticism and the concomitant rise of the university, it was subjugated to theology, and henceforth allowed only to serve as its handmaid. I would argue that a similar phenomenon explains analytic philosophy's continuing neglect of the philosophical questions that matter most to most people: this time, however, instead of the slave of theology, analytic philosophy has become the slave of science, or rather of a highly restricted, positivistic, and dated conception of what it is to do science.

Second, Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life, which does not fit neatly into the usual two-pronged division of philosophy into analytic and continental, may provide indications of a third way as an alternative to them both. Unlike analytic philosophy, it does not shun the big questions in an attempt to appear scientific, but deals with issues that interest and affect the lives of people everywhere, both within and outside the academy. It does not, of course, propose a ready-made list of answers in dogmatic fashion, but it gives people access to a wide variety of solutions that ancient philosophers have

39 N. Levy 2003

40 Cf. R. Rorty 1999, 9: "analytic philosophy has few readers outside Anglophone philosophy departments. Most of the other professors in Anglophone universities neither know nor care what goes on in the philosophy department. Insofar as they think about it at all, they dismiss that department as having been taken over by 'technicians' whose work is of no interest to non-specialists".

41 T. Kuhn 137

42 *Ibid.*, 170

43 N. Levy 2003, 299-300.

proposed, as models and guides for further reflection. Yet since Hadot's conception of philosophy is based on the philologically-sound study of Greek and Latin literature and the historical comprehension of ancient thought within its context, it is free from the rampant arbitrariness, superficiality and subjectivity of much New Age thought. Since it tries to express itself in clear, jargon-free language, it avoids the hermeticism of Continental thought and the impenetrable jungles of logico-mathematical symbols favored by many analytics. Yet if it is unconcerned with being fashionably scientific, it also lacks an interest in coinciding with the popular conceptions of continental philosophers. It is neither sceptical, ironic, nor relativistic, but upholds the values of social concern and action in defence of justice, as well as the importance of transcending our limited, individualistic viewpoint in the direction of universality. As Hadot himself has eloquently pointed out, it is this concern with universalization, and the concomitant sense of ourselves as integral parts of the cosmos, that separates his thought from that of a Foucault, whose ideal of self-culture often comes dangerously close to solipsistic and/or narcissistic navel-gazing.⁴⁴

Hadot's clarity and accessibility has already had an effect that he would, I believe, find quite gratifying : people from a wide variety of disciplines, methodological approaches and walks of life have used his work and found it helpful. One would expect him to be used by students of the history of philosophy, and indeed he is: one often finds him mentioned in the same breath as people like Martha Nussbaum, Julia Annas and Alexander Nehamas. Hadot's work is also quite often mentioned in the context of contemporary philosophy, in proximity to the work of such contemporary pragmatists as Stanley Cavell and Hilary Putnam. Yet I think M. Hadot would be especially pleased to learn that his audience is not restricted to professional philosophers: one finds him cited in studies on management, nursing, and education ; his view are cited with varying degrees of approval by clerics, Randian objectivists, ad ecologists.⁴⁵

Finally, Hadot's work is appreciated by people involved in the movements of practical philosophy and philosophical counseling, groups with whom I've had a certain amount of contact in the context of the London-based Society for the Furtherance of the Critical Philosophy. This movement has a wide variety of manifestations, and like all movements it has its positive and negative aspects. Nothing in Hadot's work justifies confusing the study and practice of philosophy with masquerading as a psychoanalyst, and practical philosophy must exercise great care not to claim to treat mental illnesses that are best left to trained medical professionals. That said, the de-professionalization of philosophy strikes me as a positive development, and one that is in accord with Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life.

44 One might add that Foucault's later thought seems to concentrate on appearance rather than reality, as when he speaks of cutting an artful figure in one's public self-presentations ; cf. J. Miller 1998, quoting Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. IV, edd. D. Defert & F. Ewald, Paris : Gallimard, 712-713.

45 Philosophy as a way of life is on the suggested reading list at the site for Sustainable Activism (<http://www.iol.ie/~mazzoldi/toolsforchange/crec/sustainable.html>)

The SFCP, for instance, together with its affiliated organizations in Holland and Germany, carries out Socratic dialogues for people from all walks of life, thereby providing a useful counterbalance to the professionalization and academicization of philosophy that has characterized the last two or three centuries in the West.

If Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life does provide a promising alternative to the endless squabbling between analytic and continental philosophy, what should we do now? Where do we go from here?

I can think of several useful directions in which this new philosophical tendency could be fruitfully developed. On the practical level, one desideratum might be a kind of sourcebook or reader, in which an extensive collection of texts, in Greek and Latin with facing translation, would illustrate the conception of ancient philosophy as a way of life consisting of spiritual exercises. I'm thinking of something along the lines of Long and Sedley's *Hellenistic philosophy*, or the *Neoplatonic Reader* published by Richard Sorabji. After all, Hadot's own thought has developed on the basis of his study of these ancient texts, and they remain the fundamental starting-point, I believe, for any conception of philosophy as a way of life.

On the theoretical front, much work remains to be done. We need to study more carefully the difficult transition from theory to practice: precisely how can we integrate a set of philosophical beliefs into our day-to-day behavior, in order to make them a natural, organic part of our lives? In this regard, the Neoplatonist Porphyry hit the nail on the head back around the turn of the 4th century AD.⁴⁶

The contemplation that leads us to happiness does not consist in the accumulation of discourses and the multiplicity of subject-matter we learn, as one might think, nor can its progress be measured by the quantity of discourse; for if this were the case, there would be nothing to prevent those who have accumulated knowledge of every subject-matter from being happy. In fact, however, not only is it not the case that every item of knowledge contributes substantially to contemplation, but not even the knowledge of true existents so contributes, unless we make it part of our nature and our life.

According to Pierre Hadot, of course, this integration of the fundamental doctrines is the role of the various spiritual exercises. Yet we need a typology of these exercises, as well as contributions from psychologists, education theorists, cognitive scientists and physiologists of the brain, so that we can understand precisely how this process can take place, and consequently how it can be promoted and optimized. It might also be useful to compare the French orientalist Henry Corbin's theory of the internalization of legendary or sacred stories in Islamic literature by means of recitation or *hikâyat*, by means of which the person who recites a story, the story being recited, and the hero of the story all become one.⁴⁷ After all, there is no reason to believe

46 Porphyry, *De abstinentia*, I, 29. My translation from the Greek.

47 See, for instance, Corbin, *En islam iranien*, vol. II, Paris : 1971, especially pp. 200 ff.

Western thinkers had a monopoly on concepts akin to PWL. Pierre Hadot himself has become gradually more interested in Eastern parallels to the concepts of PWL, and other scholars have already noted illuminating parallels in this regard.⁴⁸ On the historical front, more attention needs to be paid to Hadot's thesis of the decline of PhaWoL as a result of Medieval Scholasticism, Christianity, and the rise of the University. Predictably enough, these views have been bitterly contested by some Christian scholars,⁴⁹ and Hadot himself has to some extent modified his views, particularly as a result of the work of Julius Domanski, who has shown that tendencies akin to PhaWoL survived throughout the Middle Ages, albeit often in subterranean form. Here it would be useful to compare the studies by the French Medievalist Alain de Libera, which suggest that the translation of Aristotelian works preserved in Arabic translation led to a kind of renaissance of PhaWoL in the 13th and 14th centuries, which can be observed in the work of Albert the Great and Meister Eckhardt.

* * *

It's time to bring this over-lengthy discussion to its end. In conclusion, I can only hope that the interest in Pierre Hadot's concept of PhaWoL will contribute to the rehabilitation of philosophy as it was before its takeover by Academic philosophy and its latest incarnation of Analytic philosophy. It can be hoped that philosophy will no longer abdicate its responsibility to discuss the so-called big questions : what's the meaning of life? How can I be happy? What's the best way to live? and hosts of others. For, as we have seen, if philosophy neglects these questions, out of some silly desire to ape what are thought to be the procedures of the hard sciences, it will abandon its proper field to the hucksters and mass-marketers, facile esotericists and obscurantists. Yet perhaps philosophers ought not to be quite so concerned about what their academic colleagues and neighbors think of them : so what if the hard scientists down the hall sneer at them for not covering blackboards with mathematical formulae; or if their beret-wearing colleagues over in English, Comp. Lit., Social Sciences and Film Studies smile at their inability to mouth fancy-sounding formulae in Foucaultese or Derridean? Two thousand years ago, philosophers had the courage to ask hard questions that actually had an impact on the way we all live our lives - even philosophy professors -, and some of the answers they came up with provided help, encouragement and inspirations for real-

48 For Hadot's views, see Ch. 12, "Questions and perspectives", in *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, transl. by Michael Chase, Harvard U. Press 2002, pp. 271 ff. For an example of recent studies comparing PhaWoL with Zen thought, see T. M. Preston (2003), and for a comparison with some aspects of Confucianism, see Heesoon Bai, n.d.

49 See, for instance, Mark Shiffman, "Interpreting ancient philosophy", *Modern Age* (Fall 2003), 369-373; Benjamin Balint, "What Christianity did to philosophy", *First Things* 128 (December 2002), 55-58. For a ferocious attack on Hadot's views, see Paige Hochschild, "Unprofessional Conduct", *Christianity Today*. Book and Culture, February 2003, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2003/001/20.36.html>. No doubt the most learned and eloquent of Hadot's Christian critics is Wayne Hankey of Dalhousie University; see, for instance, his "Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians? Iamblichan and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion, Virtue, and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas" *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 59:2 [Le Néoplatonisme] (Juin 2003): 193-224.

life human beings in actual life-situations for centuries thereafter. This is no small accomplishment, and it's still a goal well worth pursuing: today more than ever.

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