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Philosophy As Activity

Hugo Letiche & Jean-Luc Moriceau

Introduction

Managers and organizations have often been described as 'sick' or as 'sick making'. They are supposedly narcissistic (Kets de Vries, 1985), hyperreal (Boje, 2011), and working in denial of emotion and mortality (Sievers, 1994). Juxtaposed to this negative evaluation of the spiritual quality of organization, there have been positive or appreciative theories, such as of: the 'learning organization' (Senge, 2006), dialogue in organization (Isaacs, 1999) and becoming healthier by knowing organizational reality (Argyris, 1982). So-called mushroom management – keep them in the dark and feed them dung – epitomizes the negative assessment of what middle level managers and employees know, and senior management does.

In this chapter, we explore a deeply optimistic voice about (organizational) knowing and awareness. Leadership here entails addressing human problems and dilemmas. Not avoidance but exploration; not senseless cliché but valuable advice; not alienation but care for the self is involved. The tradition explored here is humanist --- that is, it assumes that the problems of human existence can only be addressed by humans and with human means. Human crises and dilemmas have to be met with thought, ideas and spirituality, which are human created and implemented. There are no gods here; it is a radically secular tradition that will be explored. The argument is not atheist; it is just that belief and answers, convictions and crises, are all defined in purely human terms. We deal here with human dilemmas, with human intellectual and spiritual means.

In this view, philosophy is activity; it is a way of life, a way for a better life. One does not just learn or understand philosophy, s/he has to perform it. P. Hadot

(1995, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2008a, 2008b) and (the late) M. Foucault play the main role in this exploration. We will first sketch out its origins and then expose one of its most original devices: the spiritual exercises and how they were practiced in the ancient Greek philosophical schools. Drawing on an interview we made with P. Hadot, we will debate three contradictions we see between his books and attitudes. We will conclude on the possibilities of philosophy as activity in our times, and on the different positions one may take, and on the questions the interview left unanswered.

Care for self and the cosmos: the origins of this conception

Michel Foucault's (1983, 2001, 2006, 2011a, 2011b) 'care for self' is a key resource in the contemporary humanist tradition. Of course, according to Foucault, contemporary society is hyper-disciplined and very restrictively organized. Physical and social technologies structure, limit and control production, communication and entertainment. Discipline of every type prevails – employers of employees, social sciences of thought, social groups of behaviour. And it is naïve to think that social scientists can step outside of disciplining to see it or analyze it. We are all inside the control mechanisms that produce goods and services, wealth and social restrictions, and which are characteristic of our society. But we can attend to 'self' – i.e. be aware of one another and try to collectively address the existence of insights, emotions, affects and awareness. It is this possibility of self-care that Foucault explored in his last work and which opens the possible debate about the quality of human existing. We can ask ourselves about the quality of our existence and try together (i.e. in organization) to address our dilemmas, fears and existential needs.

Foucault's starting point for his exploration of 'care for self' was his reading of Pierre Hadot (1922-2010); Hadot was a French scholar who critically studied and edited ancient manuscripts, especially of Plotinus and Marcus Aurelius. Plotinus was a neo-Platonist who emphasized the One or unity that precedes any or all divisions or dyads. Before the thinker and her/his object of thought, there is single infinite transcendent holism. Human happiness supposedly entails transcending all divisions and experiencing existential unity in

contemplative consciousness. The 'oceanic' existential principle can be called mystical. Though Hadot distanced himself from Plotinus, after publishing a book on him in 1963, the 'oceanic' experience remained crucial to Hadot throughout his life.

Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor and Stoic; representative of his thought: *So what is left worth living for? This alone: justice in thought, goodness in action, speech that cannot deceive, and a disposition glad of whatever.* Fame and success will fade into nothingness; but the intrinsic value of service and duty are absolute. Virtue, truth and justice are their own reward. Egocentric and individualist pursuits are divisive, misleading and illusionary; behaviour consistent with the very nature of the cosmos is the only thing that can touch on permanence. Again, here the universe is conceptualized as 'one' – i.e. as the 'cosmos' and agreement with the 'one' is crucial. Unity in Plotinus was more mystical; in Marcus Aurelius it entails humility, service, and the radical lack of all pretension.

The 'orphyic' attitude of honouring and respecting the unity of nature in the 'one' of the cosmos persisted throughout Hadot's oeuvre. From Marcus Aurelius, Hadot got the idea of texts that admonish one to live more at one with existence; i.e. texts that support right behaviour and the spiritual quality of existence. These texts supposedly are not written to be analyzed or valued for their conceptual rigour, but they can help the reader to live better. These texts have therapeutic and ethical value in fighting distress, despair and confusion. They help humanity to be virtuous, just, and truthful towards existence.

Hadot's key inspiration was to expound on text(s), as so many existential means, to a better life. Hadot, the philologist, analyzed, translated and commented on ancient texts, but the work that would make him famous had to do with revealing the constructive or developmental value of the texts. He championed texts that unite persons with their world, and offer them possibilities for a good life. Philosophical texts can be read together and read repeatedly to oneself. One can use the texts to buoy self-confidence, to avoid

despair, and to pursue 'right action'. Texts can encourage truth, evoke beauty and support restraint. One can read to promote modesty, restrain passions and encourage moderation. One can read not to analyze and criticise an author's argument but to find answers to one's problems, conflicts and doubts. The text can be valuable as a companion to better living, and not as a perfect work of rationality or argumentation.

It is this radical humanist idea of the potential of text that Michel Foucault borrowed from Hadot. Hadot's project was to reveal how to make use of texts to support the quality of one's existence. Reading stoic, epicurean, sceptic, Socratic etcetera texts, supposedly could help one to make oneself more true to the real. Philosophical texts could encourage one to distinguish between the essential and the unimportant, to choose for the thought through, and to avoid the superficial, and to know oneself and to avoid hypocrisy. Much of what we now use coaching and therapy for, is (possibly) to be achieved by reading and sharing philosophical texts.

Agamben: The idea that one should make his life a work of art is attributed mostly today to Foucault and to his idea of the care of the self. Pierre Hadot ... reproached Foucault that the care of the self of the ancient philosophers did not mean the construction of life as a work of art, but on the contrary a sort of dispossession of the self. What Hadot could not understand is that for Foucault, the two things coincide. You must remember Foucault's criticism of the notion of author, his radical dismissal of authorship. In this sense, a philosophical life, a good and beautiful life, is something else: when your life becomes a work of art, you are not the cause of it. I mean that at this point you feel your own life and yourself as something "thought," but the subject, the author, is no longer there. The construction of life coincides with what Foucault referred to as "*se deprendre de soi*." And this is also Nietzsche's idea of a work of art without the artist. (Raulff, 2004: 613)

The enormous attraction of Hadot has to do with his embrace of philosophy as activity, as a form of human action, and as agency. Academic philosophy, or philosophy in the university, teaches the history of philosophy and frowns upon 'philosophizing'. Exactitude of textual exegesis is demanded, but direct individual engagement with aesthetics, ethics, cosmology, metaphysics, etcetera, is pretty much excluded. Philosophy students may master argumentation and logic, but they do not learn, as part of their metier, to examine their own beliefs, lives or morals.

Hadot criticised discoursing *about* philosophy without *doing* philosophy. He took the ancient Greeks and Romans as his model: philosophy ought to help us to live better lives and not be characterized by doing formal, rational puzzles. Following Hadot, individuals can practice philosophy as so many 'spiritual exercises', whereby they address their fears, inadequacies and inabilities to act morally, truthfully or wisely. This would seem to point to a prescription for successful leadership: lessons in becoming the personality who attends to what counts, who is focused on the key attributes of the present situation, and who can distinguish successfully between what can be influenced or changed and what cannot. And, all these capacities supposedly are to be developed relationally --- i.e. 'spiritual exercises' are something you learn in and from a group. Wisdom is a product of directed individual effort embedded in a school of action or thought. One can choose to become wise.

Abandoning everyday preoccupations and misdirected anxieties and suffering, may be difficult, but one can choose to set a path to do so. Thus individual choice is celebrated, while at the same time, social relatedness is embraced. Wisdom is to be achieved via shared developmental paths -- whether stoic, epicurean, sceptic, cynic, Socratic and/or Aristotelian. Each 'school' has its exercises and supposedly its contribution to make to human morals and/or self-development.

Thus individual choice and shared development can go hand in hand with wisdom; pursuit of a spiritually rewarding existence can be undertaken socially. Choice and necessity can be combined, by choosing to honour the cosmos and to respect the 'one' of existence. The 'good' can be defined in terms of the cosmos and/or of necessity. Honouring what *is* can entail living in harmony with the *real*, and this can lead to wisdom and the good life. The recipe sounds just a bit too good to be true. What are the roles of evil and failure?

Hadot recognized evil as always already there --- it did not begin with the holocaust but has always reared its head. Hadot wondered if Nietzsche's seemingly radical embrace of what *is* --- i.e. the assertion that lived existence

is inherently good, is not really a battle with despair, evil and the darkside to existence. A totally positive evaluation of the human existential circumstance can logically only exist if the total destruction of human values and relationships lurks, juxtaposed behind it, as its logical counterpoint. The total embrace of what 'is' can only be understood if there is waiting in the background the total moral or experiential destruction of what is – i.e. of 'self'. Hidden in the background of the total embrace of the real is the total destruction of the self. White exists in relationship to black; pure all-powering whiteness (or white noise) destroys everything in its path.

But does this analysis apply to Hadot's own thought? Was his seeming optimism about the possible choice for wisdom, really a masked form of despair? Is the promise of wisdom and self-development a lure for moral decay and individual ineffectiveness? The ambiguity that Agamben pin points is whether the 'self' can really, either for Hadot or Foucault, be the author of the 'self'. Can philosophy really 'make-self' and what does it mean to ask: 'Who or what 'makes' self?', 'How is 'self' made?', and 'How exactly does philosophy contribute to making 'self'?'

The spiritual exercises and philosophical communities

Pierre Hadot championed a radically different take on what philosophy is. To him, philosophy is not about building theoretical system, it is – or at least it was for the ancient Greeks and Romans – a way of life. Philosophy was an activity; it was about performativity, not about truth. Its aim was to change fundamentally one's way of life, and to adopt an attitude that would ensure the philosopher a better life, with a peaceful mind. It was also to encourage the others around one to abandon a too selfish, anxious and miserable mindset, and to learn to live a more rewarding life in accord with their beliefs. To trigger this radical change in one's way of life, one has to gain the spiritual resources needed to face difficult situations; to do this philosophers practice spiritual exercises.

How did Hadot arrive to this conception of philosophy? He was struck by the fact that many ancient philosophers were said to be inconsistent, often

contradicting themselves, and that their texts were ill-structured. He understood that this was because we were expecting them to provide us with a consistent system, whereas that was not their goal. Their goal was to form, not to inform. Their texts were performative and not indicative; they tried to have an effect on their readers, to make them think again about their way of life, and to transform their way of life. The goal was not only to challenge the reader's worldview, but also to change his or her whole attitude towards life, and her or his life itself. As we said, philosophy was not about building systems or representations of the world, it was about choosing a way of life.

However, changing one's way of life is not an easy endeavour, and a new life orientation has to be rehearsed constantly. Learning to live a philosophic life is done thanks to what Hadot calls "spiritual exercises". Spiritual here encompasses physical, intellectual and moral aspects, designed to cause the transformation of the self. Some exercises trained the body to suffer from hunger, cold or sexual abstinence, in order to make the soul more independent. Some others directed concentration towards death or the present, in order to make the person more able to do what she or he needs to do at the moment, or to become grateful for each hour of her or his existence. There were also practices of conscience examination, to account to oneself about one's progresses, and of dilation of the self into the entire cosmos to not see the situation from a too narrow self, and of viewing existence from a great distance in order to relativize one's sorrows, and of guiding the other's conscience, etc.

As we will recall, the ideal way of life was very different, depending on the philosophical school you were following, but every school practiced very similar exercises, each giving them their specific meaning. For example, thinking about death was in the Platonist tradition, a way to detach oneself from one's egoistic individuality, thus becoming more aware of one's place inside the cosmos and one's role in society; whereas for the Stoics, it was a way to free one's mind from the sorrows and anxieties due to vain expectations or regrets. It was a way to concentrate on the present moment, so as to be able to perform right actions, keep the purity of intention, and to conform one's will to that of the universal nature. For the Epicureans, it was a

way to welcome with gratitude for every single moment, as an incomparable gift, and to find the utmost pleasure in the very act of existing (*"Pendant que nous parlons, le temps jaloux a fui, cueille donc l'aujourd'hui, sans te fier à demain"*, Horace, Odes, I 11 7.)

There were exercises for the difficult moments (death of a relative, a downturn in fame or fortune...), and other exercises to daily improve one's attitude. In *Philosophy as a way of life*, P. Hadot proposes this following categorization of spiritual exercises, depending on their aims: learning to live (getting rid of passions, attention to the present, meditations, finding pleasure in friendship...), learning to dialogue (to persuade, to have the other examine one's conscience, to dialogue with oneself, to be open for progress...), learning to die (to loose one's individuality, to gain lucidity, to cherish each moment, to look from a great distance at human affairs...), learning to read (to understand that each text is a way for a master to form his disciples, and cannot be understood apart from the existential attitude underlying its dogmatic edifice).

No one would think of calling somebody a philosopher only because he (or she) would know perfectly the school's doctrine if he (she) would not behave accordingly in his (her) own life and would not practice the spiritual exercises. The changes that philosophy aimed to trigger were not only cognitive; they had also to be practical, and give orientation to life. However, the kind of life one would exercise oneself to live, would depend on the school you chose. There were six main schools that Hadot identifies with the six main existential attitudes that one could find in the different varieties of spirituality: Epicurean, Stoic, Aristotelian, Platonist, Sceptic and Cynic.

If you entered into the Epicurean school, then you would admit that everyone's life is governed by desires and by fears, fears mainly of death and of the gods' anger. But instead of trying to swim against the currents of these tendencies, you must learn to change your mindset, and to let yourself go in the flow. First, you need to recognize that some desires are not natural (such as glory or wealth) and out of reach, so that striving for them would

makes you restless and diverts you from greater joys. Then you would start to focus on the necessary desires, and learn to fulfil them very simply. Being able to feel the total pleasure of drinking a glass of water, and even of walking and breathing, makes you able to fully appreciate each moment of existence, and teaches you to enjoy the incomparable pleasure of existence.

To this school, fearing death is needless because when you are dead you will no longer be here, and so you will not feel any pain or distress. The certitude of a future death makes you cherish all the more every moment of life. Gods are perfection, living happily in pleasure and tranquillity. Gods do not care about your person, but are rather an example to follow. As Epicure put it, you learn to live like Gods among humans. You should choose to live your life serenely in a remote community, gratefully sharing the marvellous gift of being alive. There will be friends and equals, even slaves and women, with whom you can discuss your way of life, and have once in a while, a joyful banquet.

Rather, choosing for the Stoic school, you would exercise yourself to think that the only evil is a moral evil. All the rest (death, disease, ugliness, poverty, downturn of fame...) does not depend on you; and should be regarded as indifferent. If you step back enough, you would realize that everything happens thanks to the unfolding of cosmic laws. You can do nothing against what does not depend upon you, which you can only accept, and even love, as it occurs. As a rock standing constantly in front of a stormy tide, you constantly and consistently need to do what you feel is morally right, focusing on what depends on you.

As a Stoic, you are taught to concentrate on every moment, scrutinizing it in your reasoning, as you have correctly distinguished between what depends and does not depend on you. Then you are trained to look at events from a distance, trying to reduce them to their natural causes ("This [imperial] purple is sheepskin soaked in the blood of a shellfish", p.136). You could be married, be a patriotic or a political servant, you ought to have a serene soul, knowing you are doing the right things, and acknowledging you have absolutely no grasp upon what does not depend on you.

In the same way, Aristotelians devote their lives to scholarship. Keeping away from political and commercial affairs, they use as much as possible of their time to contribute to an encyclopaedic knowledge, mainly of physics, history and literature.

In the Platonic academy, you would learn to 'deconstruct' any certainty or truth. Suspending a priori judgements; you have to decide what you think is the right choice for life and assume responsibility for your ideas.

Trained in the Sceptic philosophy, you would think that value judgements are the causes of suffering. You would be ill at ease, unless you achieve what you think is good or beautiful; you worry about losing the good or beautiful as soon you reach it. By suspending judgement, living very commonly, and limiting your descriptions to sensory representations, without adding any evaluations, you enjoy a peaceful life with a tranquil soul. Philosophy would be the suspension of any critical discourse, in favour of a radical choice for a way of life.

At last, becoming a Cynic, you would learn to reject all the social norms, including cleanliness and courtesy, which soften body and soul. However, you would discover that living in accordance to nature entails a difficult ascense. Enduring hunger, thirst and foul weather, provides freedom, uncaring for social norms, and providing an absence of worries, and a peaceful mind.

***Communio*: Sharing together with Hadot**

We (Hugo Letiche and Jean-Luc Moriceau) went to lunch with Pierre Hadot. Our lunch lasted for more than three hours. It would be an obvious performative contradiction, to write a chapter on the uses of philosophy from the perspective of Hadot based only on his books. Readers really should want to ask us: "What was it like to converse with Hadot?." Was speaking with Hadot a philosophical experience, and if so, what sort of philosophical experience? What was doing-Hadot (or being-with Hadot) really like?¹

¹ Jean-Luc Moriceau met three times with Pierre Hadot; we ate lunch once together; that lunch was recorded and has been transcribed.

During the lunch, Hadot had three basic messages. The first entailed 'not knowing': "Me, I do not know anyone (who does philosophy), and I certainly do not do philosophy myself;"² and, "In fact, I doubt if anyone now does philosophy; the conditions are so very different. It is very hard to explain why, I find it hard to grasp ... people now above all do not, ... now, ... they are used to internet, television and all that".³ "Finally I cannot answer ..."⁴ Hadot is almost eager to not understand. About Merleau-Ponty, whose anti-dualist epistemology he favours, he says: "Much I do not understand ... you know, there are so many things I do not understand".⁵ And he takes the same pose towards Plato: 'Also the ideas ... Plato's theory of ideas, for me I've never understood it. I do not know what it wants to say. I do not know what the ideas correspond to in reality. That is why I have always demanded of myself that I write simply. I have always been furious at those who say things that at every turn I do not know to what they correspond'.⁶ It is crucial to see that Hadot assumes here a correspondence concept of truth. The words that he agrees with are what 'is'; they are just. And words that do not correspond to what he sees, cannot be understood. Simple direct language is valued; complex and obscure language is abhorred. Words that match reality supposedly are simple, understandable and direct. If you cannot explain yourself plainly, your idea evidently is not worth having. However, Hadot does not justify or really explain his extreme adherence to this expressive aesthetic of clarity and minimalism.

Hadot states: "We are in the cosmos and we cannot deny it. We do not know what it is, but we are surely on Earth, we are on an astroid, finally on a planet

² « Moi je ne connais personne, et pas moi non plus ».

³ « Et moi je doute, je pense que les conditions sont tellement différentes, c'est très difficile d'expliquer pourquoi, je n'arrive pas à saisir ... les gens n'avaient surtout ; maintenant, les gens sont habitués à l'internet, à la télé, et tout ça ».

⁴ « Mais enfin là je ne pourrais pas répondre ».

⁵ « Que je ne comprends absolument pas ... vous savez, il y a des tas de choses que je ne comprends pas... ».

⁶ « Même les idées ... la théorie des idées de Platon, pour moi je ne l'ai jamais comprise. Je ne sais pas ce que ça veut dire, je ne sais pas à quoi ça correspond dans la réalité. C'est justement pour ça que je me suis toujours efforcé d'écrire simplement parce que j'ai toujours été en rage contre ceux qui disent des choses dont je ne sais à chaque fois à quoi ça correspond... ».

.. we breath air, we touch matter .. we are in relation to the world”.⁷ But why would ‘earth’, ‘astroid’, ‘planet’, ‘air’, ‘matter’ be more self-evident words than (Sartrian) ‘nausea’, (Platonic) ‘ideas’ or Onfray’s ‘excesses’, which were criticised during the lunch? Hadot reckons some words or concepts to the cosmos – they are self-evidently justified --- and others to human intellectual or expressive excess, and they are not existentially justified. But what gives him the right to make this distinction? He never seems to doubt his ability to split the expressive or communicative world into self-evidently blameless terms and indefensible hyperbole or mystification. This extremely dualist epistemological strategy permeates Hadot’s work. There is the virtue of doing philosophy and the decadence of academic, ‘impartial’, non-engagement. There is the exemplary pursuit of virtue – defined in terms of human self-awareness, which acknowledges the limits and boundaries to human existence; and the deceitful hubris of overreaching and pretending to spiritual knowledge humans cannot possess. But how does Hadot know what should be on the one or the other side of these dualisms? And why is there so little in-between --- this is, white/black, inside/outside thinking.

Hadot’s second basic theme is craftsmanship. He claims to be “a sort that is disappearing! Because, evidently there are not a lot of people who will take the care to spend a whole day to understand one word”.⁸ He is proud of his craftsmanship and believes that some of his translations are very good and that he has every right to be proud of some of his work.

Because ancient philosophers wrote to have an effect on their auditors, their texts are rhetorical; understanding them requires that one try to grasp what influence they were trying to have. But Hadot did not see himself as a rhetorician. The divide results from Hadot not having a theory: “I have never pretended to have a message for my occidental contemporaries. Whatever it

⁷ « On est dans le cosmos, enfin on ne peut pas le nier. On ne sait pas ce que c’est mais on est sur la Terre, on est sur un astre, enfin sur une planète... on respire l’air, on touche la matière... on est en relation avec le monde ».

⁸ « Je suis une espèce en voie de disparition! Parce que, évidemment, il n’y a pas beaucoup de gens qui prennent la peine de travailler pendant une journée pour comprendre le sens d’un mot ».

entails, I have tried to understand ancient philosophy. I realize that ancient philosophy intends the theological-existential development of the reader. But I am completely incapable of developing a theory about what philosophy ought to do today”.⁹

He appeals for the personal experience of philosophy as the ancients called for, but he does not claim to be a stoic, epicurean, Socratic or whatever. About himself, he told two key things. Firstly, that as a young man he had a mystical experience of feeling himself at one with the universe, which had a transformative effect on him. And secondly, that when he went in for a heart operation, there was no question of spiritual growth; being hospitalized was an experience of total panic and degradation.¹⁰ Unlike in stoic thought, in the face of death there was no deep spiritual lesson learned. Hadot went into the hospital hoping to survive, and when he woke up, he was surprised to be there. Being an old man, he was reminded daily of death, but he thought that the best response was to get on with whatever he was doing. In his writing, he has explained the movement of ideas in ancient texts, but he did not claim to embody those ideas. For instance he stressed that ancient philosophy belongs to an oral culture, where talk, discussion and direct speech, are crucial; but he dismissed his ability to talk.¹¹ He championed doing philosophy as speech acts addressing the meaning of life; but claimed to neither have the ability to speak so, nor to really have a conviction about life’s meaning that would make it possible for him to do philosophy. Without admitting to it, Hadot framed himself in a performative contradiction – the man who is not what he calls upon us to be.

Finally, Hadot talked a lot about others in the interview --- sometimes he was favourable (Camus, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger), sometimes negative (Sartre,

⁹ « Alors oui, je n’ai jamais eu la prétention d’apporter un message aux occidentaux contemporains... Quoi qu’il en soit, j’ai essayé de comprendre la philosophie antique, je me suis rendu compte de la dimension théologique formatrice existentielle que l’enseignement philosophique implique ... mais je suis complètement incapable de développer une théorie sur ce que doit être la philosophie d’aujourd’hui) »

¹⁰ « ...mon expérience personnelle, c’est par exemple quand j’ai été à l’hôpital il n’a plus été question d’exercice spirituel ni rien de tout, hein ... c’est la dérive totale... »

¹¹ « moi, je suis absolument nul pour la parole hein ... je bafouille... ».

Onfray), and often he was indifferent (Deleuze, Derrida, Todorov). His relationship to Foucault was especially charged: “the success of Foucault; finally since I’ve drunk some wine, I can tell you that part of Foucault’s success is do to me.”¹² After Foucault read an article by Hadot on spiritual exercises, he started to work on what we now know as the ‘care for self’. Hadot feels just a bit outraged that it was one single article that set Foucault off and not more of his oeuvre. Hadot, in effect, felt that Foucault had lifted the spiritual exercise idea, without earning his way to it. The difference was between years of patient textual scholarship and the rapid extrapolation of an idea’s potential, without doing all the laborious preparatory work. Foucault exploited the contemporary crisis in meaning --- religion was nearly dead, political philosophy no longer evoked passion, and deep attachment to secular belief was seldom seen. Hadot also saw the need, but felt that Foucault had answered too easily.

When Foucault announced to Hadot that he was going to lecture ancient philosophy at the College de France, Hadot took fear that no one would come anymore to listen to himself. Hadot was competitive; for instance he kept an acute eye on his ‘market value’. He told us that six to seven thousand copies of the *Veil of Isis* had been sold, but that *What is Ancient Philosophy?* had sold 60,000 copies. And he definitely wanted many auditors at the College de France and feared the rivalry from Foucault. Applause and audience, and success as a writer, were important to Hadot.

Hadot’s self assessment: “in the relationship between peace of the spirit and the anger one can feel towards injustice --- in effect, I am torn between interior rest and indignation or sadness, when faced by injustice and the suffering inflicted upon humanity .. and also, because of my personal experience, which leads me to attach great significance to the cosmic dimension of human life, but I do not have a theory and I am not capable of creating one” (le rapport entre la paix de l’ame et la colere que l’on peut avoir contre les injustices .. en fait je suis pris entre la recherché de a paix interieure et l’indignation ou la

¹² « Le succès de Foucault enfin, comme j’ai bu un peu de vin je pourrais même dire que une partie du succès de Foucault revient à moi parce que au fond il a ... ».

tristesse devant l'injustice et la souffrance qui accable l'humanité .. et aussi à cause de mon expérience personnelle que j'affiche une grande importance à la dimension cosmique de la vie humaine, mais je ne fais pas de théorie et je n'en suis pas capable ..). The dynamics of this statement are very modern. Opposition to injustice plays a major role in how the person is spiritually positioned. Surely this is much more modern --- Hegelian and neo-Marxist, than ancient. Are not the ideas that suffering can be avoided and that injustice can successfully be politically addressed, typically modern and not ancient at all?

A moment in the interview that captured Hadot's doubt, uncertainty and non-communicability: "Yes, in that will say, ultimately it is by way of ... finally it is almost .. me I never had the intention to be engaged in whatever way ..." ¹³ It is obvious that Hadot had been asked something he was not prepared for and/or to answer to. The stuttering was in answer to Letiche's assertion that just by being there (at the lunch) that they testified to the exceptional power of Hadot's texts to mobilize the contemporary other. Letiche wanted to know how Hadot understood and related to this exceptional position of rhetorical power. Reading Hadot was a spiritual exercise for others; his texts were not received as merely about philosophical (or spiritual) meaning, but as an invitation to pursue philosophical meaning. But Hadot could not answer to this performative position. Doing Hadot was contradictory. Was his refusal to mean a self-conscious effort to insist upon the other developing his or her own sense of meaning? Was Hadot's performativity designed to deny the role of the 'maître penseur' (master thinker) in order to release the other to his own spiritual resources? But he posed no questions, made no demands, and never provoked discussion. He was very judgmental, especially about Nietzsche and Foucault.

He claimed that one has to "concentrate on the present moment; which means that it is not worthwhile to be concerned about the future, nor the past, or all that; but one has to do what one does right now very well .. and finally

¹³ « Oui, dans c'est-à-dire que ... au fond c'est par en ... finalement c'est presque ... moi je n'ai jamais eu l'intention d'agir en quelque manière... ».

that's what guides me"¹⁴ But what present did we share with him? He did not question us; he never adopted the Socratic role. He claimed to have no theory, belief, conviction --- but he did not use this 'ignorance' as a crow bar to pry open our thoughts, assumptions or inconsistencies. In many ways he brought philosophy as self-reflection and pursuit of meaning performatively into doubt. Was this doing philosophy? Why should he need a fixed conviction or 'theory' to do philosophy? Why couldn't he have done philosophy as a sceptic --- as a modern man who doubts and questions all beliefs? And if he was more a stoic or epicurean, why did he not share with us more of his effort to purify himself of unimportant or trivial matters and to relate to the cosmos as aware of existence itself?

After the interview, do we really believe that we can do philosophy? What remained of Hadot as inspiration?

The Genealogy of Doing Philosophy

Question from the audience: Regarding the shift in the methodological focus from the earlier archaeological perspective to what you describe since the 1970s in the essay you wrote on Nietzsche as a genealogical perspective: is this a radical break?

Answer by Michel Foucault: This is a good and hard question: I used these two words in very different meanings and in order to indicate two different sets of problems. I would say that when I used the word archeological research I want to differentiate what I am doing from both social history, since I don't want to analyse society but facts of discourses and discourses, and I also wanted to disassociate this analysis of discourses from what could be philosophical hermeneutics, which is something like the interpretations of what has been said or for the deciphering of something which wouldn't have been said.

With the term archaeological research what I want to say is that what I am dealing with is a set of discourses, which has to be analysed as an event or as a set of events. Something has been said, such and such things have been said, and in a way it is in this kind of discursive events that are like any other events, but they have special effects that are not similar to what can be economic events, law or demographical change. That is what I mean by archaeology: it is the methodological framework of my analysis.

Genealogy is both the reason and the target of the analysis of discourses as events, and what I try to show is how those discursive events have determined in a certain way what constitutes our present and what constitutes ourselves: our knowledge, our practices, our type of rationality, our relationship to ourselves and to the others. So

¹⁴ « ... c'est de me concentrer sur l'instant présent... c'est-à-dire que je me dis que ce n'est pas la peine de s'inquiéter de l'avenir, ni... c'est surtout ça qui me guide... ».

genealogy is the aim of the analysis and the archaeology is the material and methodological framework.

[Michel Foucault replies to questions from the audience at the University of California at Berkeley's Department of History 1983.]

'Genealogy' comes to us via Nietzsche, as the study or critique of the grounds to morals and morality. Genealogy debunks any assumption of transcendent or metaphysical underpinnings to ethics. Ethics are understood to be something people make and people need to live (well). Ethics are discourses --- things people tell themselves and others about life. The development, study and implementation, of these discourses fall under what Hadot calls 'doing philosophy'. Nietzsche is not so sure about the value of 'doing philosophy'; it entails many dead end paths, repressive forms of self-delusion and social forms of domination. Ethics far too often amounts to 'ressentiment' --- i.e. institutionalized jealousy and enforced mediocrity. The mass, forces the individual to conform, to deny her/his creativity, and to behave in a stereotyped manner. Life's energy is sacrificed to governance, and creative existence is disciplined. As rulers and societies have become ever more powerful --- via political bureaucracy, the economics of industrialization and the 'knowledge society' --- they have reified themselves as Truth, God or some other absolute. Power has been institutionalized and absolutized. The only possible economy is capitalist; the only achievable truth is 'scientific'. Ultimately, Nietzsche demands if all 'truths' do not amount to a disciplinary regime of control and repression, which is more anti-life than generative.

Michel Foucault's research obviously was inspired by Nietzsche's questions. Foucault's concept of genealogy addresses the issues of the grounds and results of ethics. To what effect do we repeat, study, and/or make daily use of discourses about good and bad, fairness and injustice, pleasure and hurt? In his historical studies or 'archeologies', Foucault examined how discipline and disciplines have changed, developed, and asserted themselves through history. Mankind has been disciplined and self-disciplined in variety of ways. Hadot thinks that there are a limited number of philosophies of self: Stoic, Epicurean, Sceptic, Cynic, Socratic and Aristotelian. This amounts to a fairly

radical form of spiritual structuralism --- there are six possible non-Christian or non-religious ways of attending to the self. Inter-, multi- or cross- disciplinarity are all possible; but the possible ways of addressing, knowing and dealing with 'self', are limited. And it would appear that no really 'new' forms of attending to or knowing 'self' have developed over time.

Foucault is much less structuralist in his thought. Foucault believed that the discourse of governance – i.e. of how self knows and cares for self – has changed dramatically through history. The structure of how we know or address ourselves, the nature of the episteme of self-knowing, has changed and does alter. Just because 'self' is impermanent, alterable and historic, we can never really (totally) know 'self'. Self changes, becomes other, and can be 'in-between'. Thus, knowing 'self' is a sceptical endeavour; we can never be quite sure what it is we do or do not 'know'.

'Self' is a process of changing interactions. 'Self' is not individual but relational. 'Self' is so many discourses, exchanged, wiped-out, reconstructed and made-up. These discourses stabilize sometimes and lurch off into new terrain on other occasions. What links us to ancient Greece and Rome is that our discourses of self are, less and less, grounded in religion, law or science. We, like the ancients, (increasingly) realize that we are alone as human existence without God(s), social absolutes or truths to guide us. We are forced to attend to ourselves --- humanity is in effect our only 'truth' however fragile or weak it may be. Thus, we need to examine the 'self' of 'care for self' as that is the only source we know of wisdom, awareness or honesty.

Human societies depend on epistemes to make sense of themselves and their circumstances. Structures of discursive assumptions underpin social values and common existence. One does or does not assume that individual rational economic self-interest governs all relationships; and if one assumes homo economicus, then one's existence is very different than if one takes a communitarian position for granted. If one assumes that all identity co-evolves and that consciousness is discursively established and maintained; then the co-operative and shared assumptions of relationship form one's primary

source of existence. There are very different fundamental epistemes available to contemporary persons. How persons understand themselves and others make a huge difference in their (potential) actions. A mechanistic and affectless view of 'self' produces very different discourse and social circumstances than does a dynamic and poetic-aesthetic one.

How we understand 'self' co-constructs who we are and who we think others are. Today, one can understand 'self' as a product of materialism, wherein scarcity, restrictive rationality, and individualism govern. And one can understand 'self' as a set of relationships grounded in a context of holistic inter-relatedness. These extremes define very different epistemes and patterns of self-awareness.

We assume that 'self' can better be seen as a product of relational constructivism and that consciousness needs to be understood as an interactive cultural phenomena of shared communicative interaction. Discourses that allows 'self' to know itself in relationship, as self-constitutive and as co-evolving, forms our 'doing-philosophy'. Hadot is too 'libertarian' for us --- various forms of care for the self are not all alike. The choices are important. Hadot makes a sort of spiritual supermarket of 'care for self' wherein you choose your school and make the best of it --- with or without mixed schools and models. Nietzsche's intensity or awareness of the stakes involved is lost in Hadot.

All sorts of 'care for self' can be coherent; each 'school' defines a consistent and possibly credible point of view. But coherence is not necessarily ethical. The most violent and repressive episteme or model of governance can be highly coherent; but nonetheless inhumane, unworthy of joint action and viciously exploitive. Mere rational consistency is an inadequate criteria for a social belief system. For instance, is the avoidance of suffering and the rejection of futile striving, always wise? Who is to say that a particular *lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life) is worth pursuing and why? That stoicism is credible, that its assumptions are consistent, that one could structure one's existence stoically, may be true. But that does not make

stoicism, necessary, desirable or good. Hadot gives no clues as to how the fundamental existential choices linked to choosing a school of philosophy should be made.

Hadot's own choices seem to have been made for him. Mystical experience brought him to a holistic connectionist conviction. He experienced a perception of radical oneness that determined his beliefs. His beliefs were grounded in a radical experience of transcendence and spirituality, wherein he perceived symbiosis with existence. The confines between self and world were annulled in his experience of mystical unity. Paradoxically, Hadot's own life philosophical assumptions, were not included in the 'schools' he described.

If Foucault is right, the beliefs that constitute the very possibility of self are historical; they change. The underpinnings to 'self' are relational, social, dynamic and interactive. The genealogy of 'self' is not governed by any single principle --- other, than it has known multiple first principles. No single principle or structure determines the development or awareness of 'self'. 'Self' is produced via complex networks of social, cultural, economic and historical relationships. 'Self' is constituted in complex relationships. An isolated individual would be indeterminate, indistinguishable, and featureless without its coordinates in the natural and social worlds. 'Self' is a relational concept. Foucault rejects the mythical 'liberal humanist subject' --- there is no inherent identity or 'self' linked to each particular human body. 'Self' socially co-evolves and is inter-relationally produced. 'Self' is constituted by activity, collective action and communal connection.

An ahistorical and individualized reinterpretation of the philosophical exercises is a possible development that we dread. Hadot understood the philosophical exercises in their context; he stressed that he was a classics scholar and that contemporary applications of the exercises ought to be complex. The philosophical exercises had occurred in their context --- politics, society, culture, economics are all now very different. One cannot simply transport the exercises from their original context to contemporary applications as if

circumstances do not matter.¹⁵ The philosophical exercises were not meant to be forms of idealistic philosophy --- i.e. 'truths' that transcend all aspects of time and place. Philosophical reflection is circumstantial --- it pertains to concrete persons in actual situations. The philosophical exercises were part of the various schools --- a sort of curriculum to help tutees to grasp, remember and apply basic epicurean, stoic, cynic, Platonic ... thought. The exercises were grounded in the schools --- i.e. in the shared pursuit of the 'good life'. If one individualized them and presented them as 'how to' lessons for contemporary philosophical 'do-it-yourself'-ers, one destroys their contextual embedding.

The philosophical exercises can probably be 'sold' as 'self-help' material; i.e. commodified as individual self-exploration. The individual then follows the exercises to get to know him or herself; the goals are self-exploration, self-therapy, and self-enlightenment. In Hadot and Foucault, *souci de soi* (care for self) does not assume the prioritization of individual consciousness as some sort of absolute starting point for reflection. But in the selling of the exercises (see Pavie: 2009, 2010), that is the case. The complex social-historical construction of sense-making --- wherein personhood is problematical, identity and governance are deeply interrelated, and meaning operates in dynamic flows of desire, characteristic of thinkers such as Foucault, is then gone. Foucault (2006) insisted that the Greek subject is different from the modern subject. For the Greek, knowledge cannot enable one to reach the truth; that requires a long lasting commitment in one's existence. In philosophical exercises as self-help, the individual focuses on her or his existence in order to achieve self-understanding, which allows one to minimize or avoid the worst of evils, disasters and tragedies. While Hadot, in the Socratic tradition, saw a major commitment as necessary to undertake self-examination and philosophical reflection; DIY philosophy replaces this with the consumption of an individual choice of self-help, effort and perseverance. The Socratic doubt -- is self-knowledge really possible and if so at what price --- is hereby

¹⁵ For Hadot, Greek ideas need first to be contextualized in their concrete circumstances: spiritual conditions (philosophical tradition, rhetoric or poetics) and material conditions (the school, social milieu, historical situation ...) and only then, can one wonder how they could apply to contemporary existence. (Hadot: 2008a, Ch 4)

reduced to a choice, made for instance via coaching or in a training group. Tragedy, doubt, and the force of indeterminacy are all gone. 'Philosophical meditation' is for the grabbing; contemporaries can learn 'better-living'. The self is turned to the individual, singular and solitary (Pavie, 2009: 203). Social-economic structure is a non-issue; the weight of history does not impinge. The individual is free to embrace stoicism, epicureanism, etcetera. Neither language, culture, nor material circumstances, weigh in limiting human choice or awareness. Foucault's intense awareness of the archaeology, or radical embeddedness of thought, is ignored in DIY thinking. The commodification of the philosophical exercises makes them into the opposite of what we understand them to be. The exercises from Hadot to Foucault, explore the intense desire, complexity, and difficulty for persons in relationship to one another to explore and discover meaning. *Care for self* is fundamentally social in its possibilities and in how it is all too often repressed. It cannot be captured in a scenario, script or handbook; it is double-edged sword between life and death, self and other, consciousness and despair.

The person is a 'particular' of engagement, relationship and participation. The 'self' is not 'general' – i.e. truth driven or defined by essence. Particularity is specific, lived, everyday and relational. By giving voice to one's particularity, one reveals one's perspective, network of beliefs and social perspective. But these never form a closed or deterministic system. The particular is always in-between --- i.e. in between persons, events, meanings and possibilities. Foucault called for the 'particular intellectual' or the singular situated voice to testify to its circumstances and possibilities. He rejected the 'general intellectual', as a generalized falsification that denies the partiality and specificity of existence. Foucault's 'care for self' is dynamic, interactive and qualified. It is never deterministic or reified.

While Hadot claimed that there were a limited number of philosophical gestalts to choose from, Foucault asserts that 'self' is an on-going changing achievement whose underlying epistemes change. How tight or loose those epistemes are, is open for debate. Foucault's genealogy implies that epistemes can be known, studied, compared and reflected upon. Foucault's

performativity – i.e. what he did in his texts --- points to belief as particular, concrete, social action. Hunting for belief patterns and possibilities ('archaeology' in Foucault) reveals human processes of belief formation (the 'genealogy'). These processes are most definitely shared, participative and collective; individualism is rejected. Collective (co-)self-determination and the (co-)evolution of 'self' as activity, is confirmed.

Participative and constitutive 'care for self' is indeed a shared experience of 'doing philosophy'. When meaning about identity, purpose, and ethics is exchanged, 'self' is generated. This entails shared processes of related exploration and exchange. Without existential co-creation there are no ethics, morals or selves. The perspective on individualist ethics is very bleak indeed. There will be shared self-exploration and identity, or there will be nothing but zombies --- i.e. indeterminate beings thrashing about in incoherent states of wanting. Zombies are a real possibility --- the loss of the prospect for 'self' leads to incoherent violence and infeasible relationships. Foucault's 'particular' care for self is fundamentally optimistic, but requires practice to exist. 'Care for self' is something done together or it does not exist. 'Care for self' demands self-constituting inquiry, dialogue and relatedness or philosophical exercises; it is philosophy in action as activity.

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