

Philosophy as a Way of Life

Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault

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Every person – whether Greek or Barbarian – who *is in training for wisdom*, leading a blameless, irreproachable life, chooses neither to commit injustice nor return it unto others, but to avoid the company of busybodies, and hold in contempt, the places where they spend their time – courts, councils, marketplaces, assemblies – in short, every kind of meeting or reunion of thoughtless people. As their goal is a life of peace and serenity, they contemplate nature and everything found within her: they attentively explore the earth, the sea, the air, the sky, and every nature found therein. In thought, they accompany the moon, the sun, and the rotations of the other stars, whether fixed or wandering. Their bodies remain on earth, but they give wings to their souls, so that, rising into the ether, they may observe the powers which dwell there, as is fitting for those who have truly become citizens of the world. Such people consider the whole world as their city, and its citizens are the companions of wisdom; they have received their civic rights from virtue, which has been entrusted with presiding over the universal commonwealth. Thus, filled with every excellence, they are accustomed no longer to take account of physical discomforts or exterior evils, and they train themselves to be indifferent to indifferent things; they are armed against both pleasures and desires, and, in short, they always strive to keep themselves above passions . . . they do not give in under the blows of fate, because they have calculated its attacks in advance (for foresight makes easier to bear even the most difficult of the things that happen against our will; since then the mind no longer supposes what happens to be strange and novel, but its perception of them is dulled, as if it had to do with old and worn-out things). It is obvious that people such as these, who find their joy in virtue, celebrate a festival their whole life long. To be sure, there is only a small number of such people; they are like embers of wisdom kept smouldering in our cities, so that virtue may not be altogether snuffed out and disappear from our race. But if only

people everywhere felt the same way as this small number, and became as nature meant for them to be: blameless, irreproachable, and *lovers of wisdom*, rejoicing in the beautiful just because it *is* beautiful, and considering that there is no other good besides it . . . then our cities would be brimful of happiness. They would know nothing of the things that cause grief and fear, but would be so filled with the causes of joy and well-being that there would be no single moment in which they would not lead a life full of joyful laughter; indeed, the whole cycle of the year would be a festival for them.¹

In this passage from Philo of Alexandria, inspired by Stoicism, one of the fundamental aspects of philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman eras comes clearly to the forefront. During this period, philosophy was a *way of life*. This is not only to say that it was a specific type of moral conduct; we can easily see the role played in the passage from Philo by the contemplation of nature. Rather, it means that philosophy was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life.

For the ancients, the mere word *philo-sophia* – the love of wisdom – was enough to express this conception of philosophy. In the *Symposium*, Plato had shown that Socrates, symbol of the philosopher, could be identified with Eros, the son of Poros (expedient) and of Penia (poverty). Eros lacked wisdom, but he did know how to acquire it.² Philosophy thus took on the form of an exercise of the thought, will, and the totality of one's being, the goal of which was to achieve a state practically inaccessible to mankind: wisdom. Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being.

Thus, philosophy was a way of life, both in its exercise and effort to achieve wisdom, and in its goal, wisdom itself. For real wisdom does not merely cause us to know: it makes us "be" in a different way. Both the grandeur and the paradox of ancient philosophy are that it was, at one and the same time, conscious of the fact that wisdom is inaccessible, and convinced of the necessity of pursuing spiritual progress. In the words of Quintillian: "We must . . . strive after that which is highest, as many of the ancients did. Even though they believed that no sage had ever yet been found, they nevertheless continued to teach the precepts of wisdom."³ The ancients knew that they would never be able to realize wisdom within themselves as a stable, definitive state, but they at least hoped to accede to it in certain privileged moments, and wisdom was the transcendent norm which guided their action.

Wisdom, then, was a way of life which brought peace of mind (*ataraxia*), inner freedom (*autarkeia*), and a cosmic consciousness. First and foremost, philosophy presented itself as a therapeutic, intended to cure mankind's

anguish. This concept is stated explicitly in Xenocrates,⁴ and in Epicurus:⁵ "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." This was also a prominent idea for the Stoics⁶ and for the Skeptics, apropos of whom Sextus Empiricus⁷ utilizes the following splendid image:

Apelles, the famous painter, wished to reproduce the foam from a horse's mouth in a painting. He was not able to get it right, and decided to give up. So, he threw the sponge he used to wipe his brushes against the painting. When the sponge hit the painting, it produced nothing other than an imitation of a horse's foam. In the same way, the Skeptics start off like the other philosophers, seeking peace of mind in firmness and confidence in their judgments. When they do not achieve it, they suspend their judgment. No sooner do they do this than, by pure chance, peace of mind accompanies the suspension of judgment, like a shadow follows a body.

Philosophy presented itself as a method for achieving independence and inner freedom (*autarkeia*), that state in which the ego depends only upon itself. We encounter this theme in Socrates,⁸ among the Cynics, in Aristotle – for whom only the contemplative life is independent⁹ – in Epicurus,¹⁰ and among the Stoics.¹¹ Although their methodologies differ, we find in all philosophical schools the same awareness of the power of the human self to free itself from everything which is alien to it, even if, as in the case of the Skeptics, it does so via the mere refusal to make any decision.

In Epicureanism and in Stoicism, cosmic consciousness was added to these fundamental dispositions. By "cosmic consciousness," we mean the consciousness that we are a part of the cosmos, and the consequent dilation of our self throughout the infinity of universal nature. In the words of Epicurus' disciple Metrodorus: "Remember that, although you are mortal and have only a limited life-span, yet you have risen, through the contemplation of nature, to the infinity of space and time, and you have seen all the past and all the future."¹² According to Marcus Aurelius: "The rational soul . . . travels through the whole universe and the void that surrounds it . . . it reaches out into the boundless extent of infinity, and it examines and contemplates the periodic rebirth of all things."¹³ At each instant, the ancient sage was conscious of living in the cosmos, and he placed himself in harmony with the cosmos.

In order better to understand in what way ancient philosophy could be a way of life, it is perhaps necessary to have recourse to the distinction proposed by the Stoics,¹⁴ between *discourse about philosophy* and *philosophy itself*. For the Stoics, the parts of philosophy – physics, ethics, and logic – were not, in

fact, parts of philosophy itself, but rather parts of philosophical *discourse*. By this they meant that when it comes to teaching philosophy, it is necessary to set forth a theory of logic, a theory of physics, and a theory of ethics. The exigencies of discourse, both logical and pedagogical, require that these distinctions be made. But philosophy itself – that is, the philosophical way of life – is no longer a theory divided into parts, but a unitary act, which consists in *living* logic, physics, and ethics. In this case, we no longer study logical theory – that is, the theory of speaking and thinking well – we simply think and speak well. We no longer engage in theory about the physical world, but we contemplate the cosmos. We no longer theorize about moral action, but we act in a correct and just way.

Discourse about philosophy is not the same thing as *philosophy*. Polemon, one of the heads of the Old Academy, used to say:

we should exercise ourselves with realities, not with dialectical speculations, like a man who has devoured some textbook on harmonics, but has never put his knowledge into practice. Likewise, we must not be like those who can astonish their onlookers by their skill in syllogistic argumentation, but who, when it comes to their own lives, contradict their own teachings.¹⁵

Five centuries later, Epictetus echoed this view:

A carpenter does not come up to you and say, "Listen to me discourse about the art of carpentry," but he makes a contract for a house and builds it. . . . Do the same thing yourself. Eat like a man, drink like a man . . . get married, have children, take part in civic life, learn how to put up with insults, and tolerate other people.¹⁶

We can immediately foresee the consequences of this distinction, formulated by the Stoics but admitted by the majority of philosophers, concerning the relationship between theory and practice. An Epicurean saying puts it clearly: "Vain is the word of that philosopher which does not heal any suffering of man."¹⁷ Philosophical theories are in the service of the philosophical life. That is why, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, they were reduced to a theoretical, systematic, highly concentrated nucleus, capable of exercising a strong psychological effect, and easy enough to handle so that it might always be kept close at hand (*procheiron*).¹⁸ Philosophical discourse was not systematic because it wanted to provide a total, systematic explanation of the whole of reality. Rather, it was systematic in order that it might provide the mind with a small number of principles, tightly linked together, which derived greater persuasive force and mnemonic effectiveness precisely from such systematization. Short sayings summed up, sometimes in striking form,

the essential dogmas, so that the student might easily relocate himself within the fundamental disposition in which he was to live.

Does the philosophical life, then, consist only in the application, at every moment, of well-studied theorems, in order to resolve life's problems? As a matter of fact, when we reflect on what the philosophical life implies, we realize that there is an abyss between philosophical theory and philosophizing as living action. To take a similar case: it may seem as though artists, in their creative activity, do nothing but apply rules, yet there is an immeasurable distance between artistic creation and the abstract theory of art. In philosophy, however, we are not dealing with the mere creation of a work of art: the goal is rather to transform *ourselves*. The act of living in a genuinely philosophical way thus corresponds to an order of reality totally different from that of philosophical discourse.

In Stoicism, as in Epicureanism, philosophizing was a continuous act, permanent and identical with life itself, which had to be renewed at each instant. For both schools, this act could be defined as an orientation of the attention.

In Stoicism, attention was oriented toward the purity of one's intentions. In other words, its objective was the conformity of our individual will with reason, or the will of universal nature. In Epicureanism, by contrast, attention was oriented toward pleasure, which is, in the last analysis, the pleasure of existing. In order to realize this state of attention, however, a number of exercises were necessary: intense meditation on fundamental dogmas, the ever-renewed awareness of the finitude of life, examination of one's conscience, and, above all, a specific attitude toward time.

Both the Stoics and the Epicureans advised us to live *in the present*, letting ourselves be neither troubled by the past, nor worried by the uncertainty of the future. For both these schools of thought, the present sufficed for happiness, because it was the only reality which belongs to us and depends on us. Stoics and Epicureans agreed in recognizing the infinite value of each instant: for them, wisdom is just as perfect and complete in one instant as it is throughout an eternity. In particular, for the Stoic sage, the totality of the cosmos is contained and implied in each instant. Moreover, we not only *can* but we *must* be happy *right now*. The matter is urgent, for the future is uncertain and death is a constant threat: "While we're waiting to live, life passes us by."¹⁹ Such an attitude can only be understood if we assume that there was, in ancient philosophy, a sharp awareness of the infinite, incommensurable value of existence. Existing within the cosmos, in the unique reality of the cosmic event, was held to be infinitely precious.

Thus, as we have seen, philosophy in the Hellenistic and Greek period took on the form of a way of life, an art of living, and a way of being. This, however, was nothing new; ancient philosophy had had this character at least

as far back as Socrates. There was a Socratic style of life (which the Cynics were to imitate), and the Socratic dialogue was an exercise which brought Socrates' interlocutor to put himself in question, to take care of himself, and to make his soul as beautiful and wise as possible.²⁰ Similarly, Plato defined philosophy as a training for death, and the philosopher as the person who does not fear death, because he contemplates the totality of time and of being.²¹

It is sometimes claimed that Aristotle was a pure theoretician, but for him, too, philosophy was incapable of being reduced to philosophical discourse, or to a body of knowledge. Rather, philosophy for Aristotle was a quality of the mind, the result of an inner transformation. The form of life preached by Aristotle was the life according to the mind.²²

We must not, therefore, as is done all too often, imagine that philosophy was completely transformed during the Hellenistic period, whether after the Macedonian domination over the Greek cities, or during the imperial period. On the one hand, it is not the case, as tenacious, widely-held clichés would have us believe, that the Greek city-state died after 330 BC, and political life along with it. Above all, the conception of philosophy as an art and form of living is not linked to political circumstances, or to a need for escape mechanisms and inner liberty, in order to compensate for lost political freedom. Already for Socrates and his disciples, philosophy was a mode of life, and a technique of inner living. Philosophy did not change its essence throughout the entire course of its history in antiquity.

In general, historians of philosophy pay little attention to the fact that ancient philosophy was, first and foremost, a way of life. They consider philosophy as, above all, philosophical discourse. How can the origins of this prejudice be explained? I believe it is linked to the evolution of philosophy itself in the Middle Ages and in modern times.

Christianity played a considerable role in this phenomenon. From its very beginnings – that is, from the second century AD on – Christianity had presented itself as a philosophy: the Christian way of life.²³ Indeed, the very fact that Christianity was able to present itself as a philosophy confirms the assertion that philosophy was conceived in antiquity as a way of life. If to do philosophy was to live in conformity with the law of reason, so the argument went, the Christian was a philosopher, since he lived in conformity with the law of the Logos – divine reason.²⁴ In order to present itself as a philosophy, Christianity was obliged to integrate elements borrowed from ancient philosophy. It had to make the Logos of the gospel according to John coincide with Stoic cosmic reason, and subsequently also with the Aristotelian or Platonic intellect. It also had to integrate philosophical spiritual exercises into Christian life. The phenomenon of integration appears very clearly in Clement of Alexandria, and was intensely developed in the monastic movement, where we find the Stoico/Platonic exercises of attention to oneself (*prosoche*),

meditation, examination of conscience, and the training for death. We also re-encounter the high value accorded to peace of mind and impassibility.

The Middle Ages was to inherit the conception of monastic life as Christian philosophy, that is, as a Christian way of life. As Dom Jean Leclercq has written: "As much as in antiquity, *philosophia* in the monastic Middle Ages designates not a theory or a way of knowing, but a lived wisdom, a way of living according to reason."²⁵ At the same time, however, the medieval universities witnessed the elimination of the confusion which had existed in primitive Christianity between theology, founded on the rule of faith, and traditional philosophy, founded on reason. Philosophy was now no longer the supreme science, but the "servant of theology;" it supplied the latter with the conceptual, logical, physical, and metaphysical materials it needed. The Faculty of Arts became no more than a preparation for the Faculty of Theology.

If we disregard, for the moment, the monastic usage of the word *philosophia*, we can say that philosophy in the Middle Ages had become a purely theoretical and abstract activity. It was no longer a way of life. Ancient spiritual exercises were no longer a part of philosophy, but found themselves integrated into Christian spirituality. It is in this form that we encounter them once again in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius.²⁶ Neoplatonic mysticism was prolonged into Christian mysticism, especially among such Rhineland Dominicans as Meister Eckhardt.

Thus, the Middle Ages saw a radical change in the content of philosophy as compared to antiquity. Moreover, from the medieval period on, theology and philosophy were taught in those universities which had been creations of the medieval church. Even though attempts have been made to use the word "university" in reference to ancient educational institutions, it appears that neither the notion nor the reality of the university ever existed during antiquity, with the possible exception of the Orient near the end of the late antique period.

One of the characteristics of the university is that it is made up of professors who train professors, or professionals training professionals. Education was thus no longer directed toward people who were to be educated with a view to becoming fully developed human beings, but to specialists, in order that they might learn how to train other specialists. This is the danger of "Scholasticism," that philosophical tendency which began to be sketched at the end of antiquity, developed in the Middle Ages, and whose presence is still recognizable in philosophy today.

The scholastic university, dominated by theology, would continue to function up to the end of the eighteenth century, but from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, genuinely creative philosophical activity would develop *outside* the university, in the persons of Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz. Philosophy thus reconquered its autonomy vis-à-vis

theology, but this movement – born as a reaction against medieval Scholasticism – was situated on the same terrain as the latter. In opposition to one kind of theoretical philosophical discourse, there arose yet another theoretical discourse.

From the end of the eighteenth century onward, a new philosophy made its appearance within the university, in the persons of Wolff, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. From now on, with a few rare exceptions like Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, philosophy would be indissolubly linked to the university. We see this in the case of Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger. This fact is not without importance. Philosophy – reduced, as we have seen, to philosophical discourse – develops from this point on in a different atmosphere and environment from that of ancient philosophy. In modern university philosophy, philosophy is obviously no longer a way of life or form of life – unless it be the form of life of a professor of philosophy. Nowadays, philosophy's element and vital milieu is the state educational institution; this has always been, and may still be, a danger for its independence. In the words of Schopenhauer:

Generally speaking, university philosophy is mere fencing in front of a mirror. In the last analysis, its goal is to give students opinions which are to the liking of the minister who hands out the Chairs. . . . As a result, this state-financed philosophy makes a joke of philosophy. And yet, if there is one thing desirable in this world, it is to see a ray of light fall onto the darkness of our lives, shedding some kind of light on the mysterious enigma of our existence.²⁷

Be this as it may, modern philosophy is first and foremost a discourse developed in the classroom, and then consigned to books. It is a text which requires exegesis.

This is not to say that modern philosophy has not rediscovered, by different paths, some of the existential aspects of ancient philosophy. Besides, it must be added that these aspects have never completely disappeared. For example, it was no accident that Descartes entitled one of his works *Meditations*. They are indeed meditations – *meditatio* in the sense of exercise – according to the spirit of the Christian philosophy of St Augustine, and Descartes recommends that they be practiced over a certain period of time. Beneath its systematic, geometrical form, Spinoza's *Ethics* corresponds rather well to what systematic philosophical discourse could mean for the Stoics. One could say that Spinoza's discourse, nourished on ancient philosophy, teaches man how to transform, radically and concretely, his own being, and how to accede to beatitude. The figure of the sage, moreover, appears in the final lines of the *Ethics*: "the sage, in so far as he is regarded as such, is scarcely at all disturbed in spirit, but, being conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, by a

certain eternal necessity, never ceases to be, but always possesses true acquiescence of the spirit."²⁸ The philosophies of Nietzsche and of Schopenhauer are also invitations to radically transform our way of life. Both men were, moreover, thinkers steeped in the tradition of ancient philosophy.

According to the Hegelian model, human consciousness has a purely historical character; and the only lasting thing is the action of the spirit itself, as it constantly engenders new forms. Under the influence of Hegel's method, the idea arose among Marx and the young Hegelians that theory cannot be detached from practice, and that it is man's action upon the world which gives rise to his representations. In the twentieth century, the philosophy of Bergson and the phenomenology of Husserl appeared less as systems than as methods for transforming our perception of the world. Finally, the movement of thought inaugurated by Heidegger and carried on by existentialism seeks – in theory and in principle – to engage man's freedom and action in the philosophical process, although, in the last analysis, it too is primarily a philosophical discourse.

One could say that what differentiates ancient from modern philosophy is the fact that, in ancient philosophy, it was not only Chrysippus or Epicurus who, just because they had developed a philosophical discourse, were considered philosophers. Rather, every person who lived according to the precepts of Chrysippus or Epicurus was every bit as much of a philosopher as they. A politician like Cato of Utica was considered a philosopher and even a sage, even though he wrote and taught nothing, because his life was perfectly Stoic. The same was true of Roman statesmen like Rutilius Rufus and Quintus Mucius Scaevola Pontifex, who practiced Stoicism by showing an exemplary disinterestedness and humanity in the administration of the provinces entrusted to them. These men were not merely examples of morality, but men who lived the totality of Stoicism, speaking like Stoics (Cicero tells us explicitly²⁹ that they refused to use a certain type of rhetoric in the trials in which they testified), and looking at the world like Stoics; in other words, trying to live in accord with cosmic reason. They sought to realize the ideal of Stoic wisdom: a certain way of being human, of living according to reason, within the cosmos and along with other human beings. What constituted the object of their efforts was not merely ethics, but the human being as a whole.

Ancient philosophy proposed to mankind an art of living. By contrast, modern philosophy appears above all as the construction of a technical jargon reserved for specialists.

Everyone is free to define philosophy as he likes, to choose whatever philosophy he wishes, or to invent – if he can – whatever philosophy he may think valid. Descartes and Spinoza still remained faithful to the ancient definition: for them, philosophy was "the practice of wisdom."³⁰ If, following their example, we believe that it is essential for mankind to try to accede to

the state of wisdom, we shall find in the ancient traditions of the various philosophical schools – Socratism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Cynicism, Skepticism – models of life, fundamental forms in accordance with which reason may be applied to human existence, and archetypes of the quest for wisdom. It is precisely this plurality of ancient schools that is precious. It allows us to compare the consequences of all the various possible fundamental attitudes of reason, and offers a privileged field for experimentation. This, of course, presupposes that we reduce these philosophies to their spirit and essence, detaching them from their outmoded cosmological or mythical elements, and disengaging from them the fundamental propositions that they themselves considered essential. This is not, by the way, a matter of choosing one or the other of these traditions to the exclusion of the others. Epicureanism and Stoicism, for example, correspond to two opposite but inseparable poles of our inner life: the demands of our moral conscience, and the flourishing of our joy in existing.³¹

Philosophy in antiquity was an exercise practiced at each instant. It invites us to concentrate on each instant of life, to become aware of the infinite value of each present moment, once we have replaced it within the perspective of the cosmos. The exercise of wisdom entails a cosmic dimension. Whereas the average person has lost touch with the world, and does not see the world *qua* world, but rather treats the world as a means of satisfying his desires, the sage never ceases to have the whole constantly present to mind. He thinks and acts within a cosmic perspective. He has the feeling of belonging to a whole which goes beyond the limits of his individuality. In antiquity, this cosmic consciousness was situated in a different perspective from that of the scientific knowledge of the universe that could be provided by, for instance, the science of astronomical phenomena. Scientific knowledge was objective and mathematical, whereas cosmic consciousness was the result of a spiritual exercise, which consisted in becoming aware of the place of one's individual existence within the great current of the cosmos and the perspective of the whole, *toti se inserens mundo*, in the words of Seneca.³² This exercise was situated not in the absolute space of exact science, but in the lived experience of the concrete, living, and perceiving subject.

We have here to do with two radically different kinds of relationship to the world. We can understand the distinction between these two kinds by recalling the opposition pointed out by Husserl³³ between the rotation of the earth, affirmed and proved scientifically, and the earth's immobility, postulated both by our day-to-day experience and by transcendental/constitutive consciousness. For the latter, the earth is the immobile ground of our life, the reference point of our thought, or, as Merleau-Ponty put it, "the womb of our time and of our space."³⁴ In the same way, nature and the cosmos are, for our living perception, the infinite horizon of our lives, the enigma of our

existence which, as Lucretius said, inspires us with *horror et divina voluptas*, a shudder and a divine pleasure. As Goethe put it in admirable verses:

The best part of man is the shudder.
 However dearly the world makes him pay for this emotion,
 He is seized by amazement when he feels the Prodigious.³⁵

Ancient philosophical traditions can provide guidance in our relationship to ourselves, to the cosmos, and to other human beings. In the mentality of modern historians, there is no cliché more firmly anchored, and more difficult to uproot, than the idea according to which ancient philosophy was an escape mechanism, an act of falling back upon oneself. In the case of the Platonists, it was an escape into the heaven of ideas, into the refusal of politics in the case of the Epicureans, into the submission to fate in the case of the Stoics. This way of looking at things is, in fact, doubly false. In the first place, ancient philosophy was always a philosophy practiced in a group, whether in the case of the Pythagorean communities, Platonic love, Epicurean friendship, or Stoic spiritual direction. Ancient philosophy required a common effort, community of research, mutual assistance, and spiritual support. Above all, philosophers – even, in the last analysis, the Epicureans – never gave up having an effect on their cities, transforming society, and serving their citizens, who frequently accorded them praise, the vestiges of which are preserved for us by inscriptions. Political ideas may have differed from school to school, but the concern for having an effect on city or state, king or emperor, always remained constant. This is particularly true of Stoicism, and can easily be seen in many of the texts of Marcus Aurelius. Of the three tasks which must be kept in mind at each instant, alongside vigilance over one's thoughts and consent to the events imposed by destiny, an essential place is accorded to the duty always to act in the service of the human community; that is, to act in accordance with justice. This last requirement is, moreover, intimately linked to the two others. It is one and the same wisdom which conforms itself to cosmic wisdom and to the reason in which human beings participate. This concern for living in the service of the human community, and for acting in accordance with justice, is an essential element of every philosophical life. In other words, the philosophical life normally entails a communitary engagement. This last is probably the hardest part to carry out. The trick is to maintain oneself on the level of reason, and not allow oneself to be blinded by political passions, anger, resentments, or prejudices. To be sure, there is an equilibrium – almost impossible to achieve – between the inner peace brought about by wisdom, and the passions to which the sight of the injustices, sufferings, and misery of mankind cannot help but give rise. Wisdom, however, consists in precisely such an equilibrium, and inner peace is indispensable for efficacious action.

Such is the lesson of ancient philosophy: an invitation to each human being to transform himself. Philosophy is a conversion, a transformation of one's way of being and living, and a quest for wisdom. This is not an easy matter. As Spinoza wrote at the end of the *Ethics*:

If the way which I have pointed out as leading to this result seems exceedingly hard, it may nevertheless be discovered. It must indeed be hard, since it is so seldom found. How would it be possible, if salvation were easy to find, and could without great labour be found, that it should be neglected by almost everybody? But all excellent things are as difficult as they are rare.³⁶

NOTES

- 1 Philo Judaeus, *On the Special Laws*, 2, 44–8.
- 2 Cf. above.
- 3 Quintillian, *Oratorical Institutions*, bk I, Preface, 19–20.
- 4 Xenocrates, fr. 4 Heinze.
- 5 Epicurus, *Letter to Pythocles*, §85.
- 6 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 9, 31.
- 7 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I, 28.
- 8 Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, 2, 14.
- 9 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10, 7, 1178b3.
- 10 Epicurus, *Gnomologium Vaticanum*, §77.
- 11 Epictetus, *Discourses*, 3, 13, 7.
- 12 Cf. above.
- 13 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 11, 1.
- 14 E.g. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 7, 39.
- 15 *Ibid*, 4, 18.
- 16 Epictetus, *Discourses*, 3, 21, 4–6.
- 17 Cf. below.
- 18 On the concept of *procheiron*, see above.
- 19 Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, I, 1.
- 20 Plato, *Apology*, 29e1ff.
- 21 Plato, *Republic*, 486a.
- 22 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10, 7, 1178aff.
- 23 Cf. below.
- 24 Justin, *Apology*, I, 46, 1–4.
- 25 J. Leclercq, "Pour l'histoire de l'expression 'philosophie chrétienne'," *Mélanges de Science Religieuse* 9 (1952), p. 221.
- 26 Cf. below.
- 27 A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols, Indian Hills CO 1958, London/Toronto 1909, ch. 17, vol. 2, pp. 163–4.
- 28 Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 5, Prop. 42, p. 270 Elwes.

- 29 Cicero, *On Oratory*, I, 229ff.
 30 René Descartes, *Principii philosophiae*, Foreword to Picot.
 31 See the references from Kant, Goethe, and Jaspers cited above.
 32 "Plunging oneself into the totality of the world." Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 66, 6.
 33 E. Husserl, "Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum phänomenologischen Ursprung der Räumlichkeit der Natur" (= Umsturz der Kopernikanischen Lehre), in Marvin Faber, ed., *Philosophical Essays in Memory of E. Husserl*, Cambridge MA 1940, p. 132.
 34 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie et autres essais*, Paris 1953, p. 285.
 35 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, 6272ff.
 36 Spinoza, *Ethics*, pp. 270–1.

Postscript: An Interview with Pierre Hadot

M.C. Pierre Hadot, you were born in Reims, France, in 1922. What were the earliest and strongest influences on your spiritual and intellectual development?

P.H. I received a very intense Catholic religious education. I gradually became detached from it, but it played a considerable role in my formation, both because of the first impressions it made upon me, and because of the problems it raised for me.

The first philosophy I came across was Thomism, which I encountered especially in the books of Jacques Maritain; thus it was a kind of Aristotelianism tinged with Neoplatonism. I think it was a good thing for me to have begun my philosophical studies with a highly systematic, structured philosophy, which was based on a long ancient and medieval tradition. It gave me a lasting distaste for philosophies which don't clearly define the vocabulary they use. Besides, it was thanks to Thomism, and especially to Étienne Gilson,¹ that I discovered very early on the fundamental distinction between essence and existence, which is dear to existentialism.

At the time, I was very much influenced by Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. Newman shows in this work that it's not the same thing to give one's assent to an affirmation which one understands in a purely abstract way, and to give one's assent while engaging one's entire being, and "realizing" – in the English sense of the word – with one's heart and one's imagination, just what this affirmation means for us. This distinction between real and notional assent underlies my research on spiritual exercises.

My religious education also made me come face to face with the phenomenon of mysticism, which I probably didn't understand at the time, but which has continued to fascinate me all my life.

We would need a very long discussion if we were seriously to approach the problem posed by the survival of Christianity in the modern world. From the point of view of my own personal experience, I can say that one of the great