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Hadotian Considerations on Buddhist Spiritual Practices

Review: David Fiordalis ed., *Buddhist Spiritual Practices: Thinking with Pierre Hadot on Buddhism, Philosophy, and the Path* (Berkeley, CA: Mangalam Press, 2018), 333 pages.

Problems, Arguments – and Ways of Life

David Fiordalis' collection *Buddhist Spiritual Practices: Thinking with Pierre Hadot on Buddhism, Philosophy and the Path* (hereafter *BSP*) represents an invaluable contribution in what promises to be a fruitful emerging research field. *BSP* was conceived by David Fiordalis and the late Luis Gómez, the then Academic Director at Mangalam Research Center for Buddhist Languages, following a dedicated conference on Hadot and the study of Buddhism in 2015 (BSP, ix). The volume builds upon groundbreaking work by scholars such as Matthew Kapstein, Georges Dreyfus, Patrick Ussher and Vincent Eltschinger (as well as several of its contributors)[1] in

1) See Sara L. McClintock, *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason: Santaraksita and Kamalasila on Rationality, Argumentation and Religious Authority* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010); Georges Dreyfus, "Meditation as Ethical Activity," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2 (1995): 28–54; Victor Eltschinger, "Pierre Hadot et les "exercices spirituels": Quel modèle pour la philosophie bouddhique tardive?" *Asiatische Studien Études Asiatiques* 62, no. 2 (2008), 485–534; Patrick Ussher, *Stoicism & Western Buddhism: A Reflection on*

exploring the implications the revolutionary metaphilosophical work of French philologist and philosopher Pierre Hadot for comparative philosophical approaches to Buddhist thought, and indeed for engagements with other nonwestern philosophical traditions.

Intercultural philosophy, as we know, involves the attempt to understand nonwestern philosophical traditions, both in themselves, and by engagement and dialogue with Western approaches to philosophical problems, questions, domains, and ways of living. But we can only comparatively understand other traditions in the light of our conceptions of our own tradition or heritage. Within the field of Buddhist studies, as the editor David Fiordalis opens the collection by addressing, it is twentieth century analytic philosophy and its metaphilosophical self-conception which has hitherto set the standard for comparative philosophical approaches to Buddhist texts (BSP, 1–9). For this tradition, philosophy is carried out in written texts, produced within universities by scholar-professionals and circulated in academic journals and monographs, preeminently for recondite audiences. This philosophizing is characterized exclusively by specialized conceptual analysis and argumentation. Often (although this is also increasingly being challenged) analytic philosophers presuppose when reading texts that arguments and concepts can be "extracted" without remainder from all contextual considerations (concerning where the arguments were made, by whom, in what context, with what audiences and goals in mind). When philosophers look at old ideas, as John Taber illustratively comments, they are solely interested in whether these ideas are "true," independently of where they come from (BSP, 2). All concerns with context, Fiordalis observes, are to be farmed out in the interdisciplinary division of labor to "religious studies," as if there was always (again, without remainder) a perfectly neat "split" to be made between philosophy and religion, or between philosophical and religious studies (BSP, 5–8).

In order to make Buddhism or Buddhist texts "fit" within such a metaphilosophy, we must do a good deal of this kind of argumentative extraction, Fiordalis and several of his contributors note. It will be a question of seeking out "arguments" within the Buddhist corpus and then examining them through "topics and questions already recognizable to modern analytically-trained philosophers" (BSP, 2). As Siderits comments in *Buddhism and Philosophy*, alongside excluding all considerations concerning the literary and rhetorical framing of particular texts: "We will have very little to say about Buddhist institutions, their organization and history. We will say very little about the Buddhist practice of meditation, and nothing at all about such lay Buddhist devotional practices as *stûpa* worship" (As quoted in: BSP, 7).

There are difficulties associated with this methodology for intercultural work in philosophy, when it comes to Buddhist thought. Such a procedure flirts at every moment with artificially imposing literally extrinsic standards upon a different tradition or traditions which developed almost entirely independently of Western influence for several millennia. Buddhism is also one of the world's great religions, at least on the most widely accepted understanding of "religion." And it seems imperative to understand Buddhist texts' relations to that wider tradition, as part of any adequate analytic approach. Some Buddhist texts, including several addressed in *BSP*, seem relatively unconcerned about questions within the framework of what in the West is called epistemology, logic, metaphysics, even ethical theory – which is not to deny, as several of the contributors to *BSP* highlight, that a great deal of other Buddhist texts do consider these subjects, and do lend themselves readily to analytic treatment (BSP, 174–177, 203–213). As Fiordalis remarks:

Two Philosophical Ways of Life (USA: Kindle editions, 2017); James B. Apple, "Can Buddhist Thought be Construed as a *Philosophia*, or a Way of Life? Relating Pierre Hadot to Buddhist Discourses on Self-Cultivation," *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy* 26 (2010): 191–204; Matthew Kapstein, "'Spiritual Exercise' and Buddhist Epistemologists in India and Tibet," in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Stephen M. Emmanuel (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 270–289; "Stoics and Bodhisatvas: Spiritual Exercise and Faith in Two Philosophical Traditions," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns—Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, eds. Michael Chase, Stephen R.L. Clark and Michael McGhee (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 99–115.

> Such an [analytic] approach has the advantage of being able to demonstrate the clear presence of systematic reasoning and argumentation outside the western tradition — something which has been challenged over the years. In this way, scholars can place Buddhist philosophers into conversation with modern western philosophers on questions already deemed philosophical. (BSP, 3)

Nevertheless, as he continues, this "already deemed philosophical" is telling. One can wonder whether presupposing a conception of philosophy, namely *ours*, is the best way to open ourselves to the possibility of learning both about, and learning *from*, a tradition as different to our own as Tibetan Buddhism. Fiordalis calls the predominant use of Buddhist formal analysis and arguments in analytic circles the "problems and arguments" approach to intercultural philosophical study of Buddhism. It is fair to say that *BSP* as a whole challenges its exclusive authority as the means to fruitfully understand and enter into genuine dialogue with Buddhist thought and culture.

It is in service of just this challenge that the work of Pierre Hadot, as well as Michel Foucault's later writings (see BSP, 22–69, 217–224), is called upon in *BSP*. For several decades in Europe, thanks to eminent scholars such as Juliusz Domański, and since the reception in the English speaking world of Pierre Hadot's collection, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: from Socrates to Foucault*, introduced by Arnold Davidson and translated by Michael Chase, there has been a blossoming scholarly (and extra-academic) reception of philosophy as a way of life (hereafter PWL) as a metaphilosophy.[2] As each of the contributors, without exception, notices, Hadot's work would seem to offer great potential for a generally "pluralistic" understanding of different philosophical traditions. This is because, from within Western philosophy, and on the most erudite basis, Hadot challenges the regnant late twentieth century analytic (and indeed continental) conceptions of philosophy and its history.

Hadot does so, as is by now well known, on the basis of a revolutionary analysis of ancient Greek and Roman thought which has both methodological and substantive dimensions. The lesser known methodological basis of Hadot's own approach to ancient texts, as Apple notes (BSP, 105–108), is his own decisive encounter in the late nineteen-fifties with Ludwig Wittgenstein's work on language games. Wittgenstein, reacting against his own earlier logicism, was famously struck in his later work by the plurality of different ways in which language is used, depending on which contexts people are operating within, with which addressees, and with which goals – the very considerations which, we might note, shaped the ancient Greek and Roman rhetorical manuals. Hadot, who was already at this time deeply immersed in the study of later Roman, Neoplatonic, and Patristic thought, immediately saw that Wittgenstein's conception of language opens up new interpretive vistas for reading ancient texts.[3]

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2) For example, see Juliusz Domański, *La Philosophie, théorie ou manière de vivre?: les controverses de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance. Avec une préface de Pierre Hadot* (Paris, Fribourg (Suisse): Cerf presses universitaires Fribourg, 1996); Ilsetraut Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle and Plato*, trans. Michael Chase, Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: From Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995); Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, Or, The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Pierre Hadot. *The Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, trans. Marc Djaballah and Michael Chase, Cultural Memory in the Present Series, Second Revised Edition (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); Michael Chase, Stephen R.L. Clark, and Michael McGhee, eds., *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

3) Pierre Hadot, "Jeux de langage et philosophie," in Pierre Hadot, *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 83–103 [originally published in 1962].

Modern philosophical commentators face a similar set of difficulties and temptations when they approach a complex nonwestern tradition like Buddhism (especially Tibetan Buddhist traditions, which are focused on in this work), as they have to confront the farrago of ancient literary forms in which philosophy has been historically recorded across the world (BSP, 72–74, 105–108, 181–184, 246–253). Ancient philosophers wrote exhortations, didactic poems, dialogues, memorabilia, meditations, therapeutic texts, practical handbooks, epitomes, aphorisms and apothegms, and consolations, as well as more or less systematic presentations, like (to take one example which would still need caveats) Aristotle's exoteric lecture courses. To extract only the arguments from ancient texts, Hadot suggests, runs the real risk not of "getting straight to the philosophical core" of texts like Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* or Epictetus' *Manual*, but of *anachronistically projecting our own conceptions of what these philosophers "should have been doing" onto them*.[4] Thereby, we can mistake their intentionality almost entirely and find ourselves advocating for or tilting at argumentative chimeras.

There is not for Hadot a simple opposition, let alone a zero-sum game, between contextualizing historical texts in the philosophical tradition, and seeking out the validity, soundness, or even the wisdom of their truth-claims. In order to evaluate just what is being claimed in these texts, and what could have motivated their authors to write them in the first place, Hadot instead argues, we must precisely understand the practical, cultural and institutional contexts in which they were recorded. We must as well be sure to have tried to grasp the historically-predominant conception of philosophy and its tasks which were then operative, as attested by philosophers' own statements (see BSP, 72–74, 105–108, 181–184, 246–253).[5]

This Hadotian "methodological" revolution, highlighted by Fiordalis and several of his contributors, is the first of what are two dimensions of his work that is potentially so liberating and enlightening for intercultural philosophical understandings of Buddhism:

> He gives us a different model for comparing exemplars of philosophical discourse from the western tradition with those from Buddhist and other nonwestern intellectual traditions. At the same time, his defense of philological methods of analysis encourages students to learn how to read classical philosophical discourses as much as possible on their own terms. (BSP, 9)

Only in the light of these methodological reflections, as we might call them, did Hadot come to the concepts of philosophy as a "way of life," as Michael Chase has translated *manière de vivre*, and "spiritual exercises" – the notion that features in *BSP*'s subtitle. This is the second dimension in which Hadot's work is so promising for a reconception of Buddhist philosophy and the Buddhist tradition. What Hadot was aiming at by defending the idea of "philosophy as a way of life" was grasping the ancient Greeks' and Romans' sense that philosophy, as a search for wisdom, was considered as the means to self-transformation. To philosophize was to take aim at attaining the best form of human life: one characterized by *sophia,* or as he sometimes delineates things: serenity and *eudaimonia*, inner freedom from destructive passions, and an enlarged conception of self and world or *conscience cosmique* (see BSP, 183, 247–253).[6]

As a form of life, moreover, *philosophia* was pursued by concrete individuals within communities, in pedagogical relations with other individuals, within larger institutional settings. In McClintock's quip, like fishes,

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4) See most notably Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, chapters 1–3.

5) See especially Pierre Hadot, "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: From Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 49–70.

6) See for instance Pierre Hadot, "Philosophy as a Way of Life," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: From Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 264–276.

ancient philosophers were always parts of "schools, schools, schools" (BSP, 74–95), at the same time as they were involved in a work of self-transformation – indeed, in the case of Epicureanism, we know that discussion and criticism from other Epicureans was a regular practice. This work of philosophical self-transformation, Hadot also maintained, involved the self-conscious undertaking of sets of ethical, existential or spiritual "exercises" – from intellectual exercises to forms of therapeutic and ascetic practices, or forms of meditation or contemplation (see BSP, 33–44, 108–110, 152–158). The regimented practice of such exercises was intended to transform the entire ways of being and seeing of the students themselves. Given such an intellectual context, Hadot next reasoned, in order to understand what a given text – like, for instance, Arrian's recordings of Epictetus' discussions with his students known as the *Diatribai* (*Discourses*) – was actually intending to do, we need to understand who is speaking to whom, in what institutional context (in this case, for instance, in discussions which seem to have preceded or succeeded more formal classes), and with what stated aims in mind.[7] If we try instead to doggedly find a single argumentative thread, with beginning, middle and end, in these paratactically recorded "discourses," we will quickly be at a loss. As Pierre-Julien Harter comments, Hadot's substantive reinterpretation of classical philosophy, as well as the methodological reconception upon which it is founded:

> … has functioned as a "wake up call" for many philosophers and philosophers-to-be… Hadot made it possible to reread some texts to appreciate their proper and internal philosophical value, rather than trying desperately to measure them against habits and rules that had become standard over time and inevitably end up excluding these same texts [or large parts of these texts] from the philosophical realm. (BSP, 147)

In a pithy phrase which at once evokes Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and invites us to sense the "verbal" dimension of philosophizing, Harter comments that if Hadot is right, "philosophy declines itself in many different forms," or at least it once did in the West (BSP, 151).

Hadot's openness to the possibility that ancient philosophers were doing a plurality of different things with their words itself opens up the prospect of considering texts which have an openly therapeutic or even soteriological intention as "philosophical" (BSP, 107, 83). Rather than balking at this, we can now see and *say* how they are tied to philosophers' attempts to cure themselves of troublesome passions, like anger or hatred, and cultivate an expanded, more reflective vision of the world, things and their causes.[8] In this way, as anyone who has taught Hadot on the ancients can likely attest, potential parallels and applications to the study of Buddhism and other non-Western wisdom traditions "leap out" at students and readers. Indeed, despite his great caution about opining on traditions which he had not directly studied, Hadot himself could not help later in his life but to make some intercultural conjectures about the nature of philosophy which several of the contributions in *BSP*, led by Collins, duly note (BSP, 28–33). For their part, scholars of Eastern and South Asian Thought have concurred with his assessment of striking continuities inviting further studies.[9]

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7) Hadot, "Forms of Life," 63–64.

8) As in his study of Marcus Aurelius, as Harter points out (BSP 147, 169), Hadot's approach enables us to move beyond modern interpretations which have seen the text as everything from drafts of a treatise, watered-down Stoicism, or reflections of the philosopher-emperor's gastric condition, to seeing them as "meditations": consciously undertaken written exercises whose primary aim was not to "discover new knowledge," but to remind Marcus himself of key Stoic dogmata, and to apply them to the mundane ethical challenges he faced as an emperor and a human being.

9) For example, see Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 278; Hajime Nakamura, "The Meaning of the Terms 'Philosophy' and 'Religion' in Various Traditions," in *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy,* ed. Gerald James Larson and Elliot Deutsch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Exercises, Schools, and Genres

As the title suggests, the essays collected in the volume preeminently concern the questions of how, using Hadot's interpretive approach to ancient pagan texts, we can understand *Buddhist* philosophy, philosophical texts, and forms of Buddhist practice (in particular, in Tibetan traditions), including meditation – although, intriguingly, several of the essays also explore how we can reread Hadot in light of Buddhism.[10] The contributions which make up *BSP* "consider such terms as institution and school, self and person, Buddhist path, dogma and rule-based behavior, meditation (in various types, discursive and non-discursive), study, reason, reading, genre, and wisdom" (BSP, 10). In the light of the framing orientations of *BSP* which we have now established, with its attempt to think with Hadot "on Buddhism, philosophy, and the path," we can divide the work of the different contributions to the collection into three post-Hadotian *topoi*.

The first and primary focus is upon the validity and utility for this endeavor of Hadot's notion of "spiritual exercises" (*topos* 1), drawn from analyzing Greek and Roman texts like Marcus Aurelius', for engaging with Buddhist texts and figures (see esp. BSP, 43–47, 108–110, 117–140, 152–177, 217–224, 249–253). We see this focal concern differently played out in the texts by Collins, Apple, Harter, Heim, and most fully in Tomlinson's chapter, "Philosophy as a Way to Die: Meditation, Memory, and Rebirth in Greece and Tibet," as well as in Fiordalis' own chapter which ends the collection: "Learning, Reasoning, Cultivating: The Practice of Wisdom and the *Treasury of Abhidharma*." Harter gives us a particularly incisive analysis of the exciting comparative vistas that Hadot's work on the Stoic exercises of premeditating harms and death, with their component of rhetorical amplification, can give us when we analyze the Stoic texts alongside Buddhist exercises which share the same intentionality (BSP, 161–163, see also 33–42).

Secondly, in further contrast to analytic "problems and arguments" comparative studies, several chapters consider the question of the nature of *philosophical schools* in classical antiquity, how the activities of these schools affected the kinds of texts produced in the Greek and Roman traditions, and how our understanding of their institutions (the Academy, Lyceum, Stoa and Garden) compares to what we know about the philosophical activities of Buddhist schools in different historical locales (*topos* 2). This interest in locating texts within schools of philosophical practice emerges in Collins' wide-ranging opening chapter, "Some Remarks on Hadot, Foucault, and Comparisons with Buddhism" (BSP, 47–54), and is also taken up in James Apple's "The Spiritual Exercises of the Middle Way-Reading Atisa's *Madhyamakapadesa* with Hadot" (esp. BSP, 111–117). It is absolutely central in McClintock's "Schools, Schools, Schools – Or, Must a Philosopher be like a Fish?", wherein she draws out and applies three conceptions of a philosophical "school" to try to understand ancient pagan and Buddhist philosophies (BSP, 74–81). Victor Eltschinger and his concerns about the epistemic practicability of the Hadotian approach, given the limited availability of historical evidences concerning Indian schools and the place of philosophical writing within them, are constant interlocutors in all of these chapters (esp. BSP, 75–78, 114–117). Meanwhile, for the Hadotian scholar who wrestles with the same epistemic problem concerning the ancient Western schools, Collins and McClintock note, these chapters have an especial interest (see esp. BSP 81–91).

Apple's chapter also raises the third key thematic *topos* in the collection: the question of *genre*, and the way that Hadot's post-Wittgensteinian approach to recovering the different philosophical intentionalities of ancient Western texts can be used to approach the diverse genres of Buddhist philosophical writing (BSP, 9–11, 105–106, 111, 121). Together with Hadot's stress on the preeminently oral character of ancient Greek and Roman philosophizing, this attempt to bring Hadot's pluralistic reconception of genre is focal in Heim's "The 'Fecundity

10) Hadot is a new "point of departure" into the comparative understanding of Buddhist philosophy, as Heim puts it (BSP, 184).

of Dialogue' and the Philosophy of 'Incompletion'" (BSP, 181–184). It is also the subject of the closing section of Harter's important article, "Spiritual Exercises and the Buddhist Path: An Exercise in Thinking With and Against Hadot" (BSP, 169–177).

In the space available here, it is impossible to pursue all of the interpretive and philosophical subjects raised in *BSP* under these three headers. We restrict ourselves accordingly to two tasks: first, considering the insights *BSP*'s work of bringing Hadot to Buddhism in turn generates concerning the ongoing reception of Hadot's own work, in particular his central notion of "spiritual exercises" (*topos 1*); and second, reflecting upon the prospects of Hadot's notion of philosophy as a way of life as a method of intercultural study of philosophy across global cultures.

Thinking with Buddhism on Hadot and Spiritual Exercises

Reading *BSP*, one senses the excitement that attends the opening up of a new research paradigm. There is a refreshing lack of dogmatism that characterizes nearly every contribution, perhaps a testimony to the philosophical sensibilities and practice of the contributors. One feels that one has embarked upon an exploration of new comparative territory, without ever losing sight of the epistemic, ethical, and other hazards that attend the journey.

For readers primarily familiar with Hadot and the literature surrounding his work, one fascinating feature of *BSP* emerges in the articles by Collins, Harter, Tomlinson and Fiordalis. As we indicated above, as well as using Hadot to read Buddhist texts, these texts do not baulk *at reversing the analytic direction, to investigate the possible limitations about Hadot's thought that might show up, when it is put into dialogue with Buddhist philosophy.* It is interesting from this perspective to observe that these articles, indeed – although each written by Buddhist, rather than what we might call "Hadotian" experts – hone in with unerring accuracy upon five issues within existing scholarship on Hadot[11]:

- Firstly, they identify an arguable imprecision in Hadot's key conception of the "spiritual exercise(s)," how these exercises (bodily, therapeutic, meditative, etc.) might be categorized, with reference to what, and how (if at all) they might relate to the differing physical and metaphysical commitments of different philosophical orientations.
- Secondly, they stress the epistemic and related issues concerning Hadot's call to understand philosophical texts in light of their institutional settings, when in the case of both the classical Graeco-Roman and the Indian Buddhist traditions, information about these institutions, their day-to-day activities, and the place of spiritual exercises in their curricula or regimens is not as abundant as we might wish (BSP, 74–95).

11) See Orazio Irrera, "Pleasure and Transcendence of the Self: Notes on 'A Dialogue too Soon Interrupted' between Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 9 (2010): 995–1017; John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), esp. 17–22, 402–403, n. 4–5; Valentin Mureşan "Filosofia ca mod de viaţă sau despre relaţia filosofie-biografi," *Revista de Filosofie Analitică* 4, no. 2 (Iulie-Decembrie 2010), 87–114; Thomas Flynn, "Philosophy as a Way of Life: Foucault and Hadot," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 31, no 5/6 (2005): esp. 616–618; Matthew Sharpe, "What Place Discourse, What Role Rigorous Argumentation? Against the Standard Image of Hadot's Conception of Ancient Philosophy as a Way of Life," *Pli* (2016): 25–54; Thomas Bénatouil, "Stoicism and Twentieth Century French Philosophy," *Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, ed. J. Sellars (London: Routledge, 2015), 541–562; and John M. Cooper, "Socrates and Philosophy as a Way of Life," in *Maieusis: Essays in Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat*, ed. Dominic Scott (Oxford: Oxford UP), 20–42. Compare Brad Inwood, "Review of John Sellars, *The Art of Living: the Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, April 4, 2004, https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23760-the-art-of-living-the-stoics-on-the-nature-and-function-of-philosophy/; also Brad Inwood, "'Introduction' to Lucius Annaeus Seneca," in *Selected Philosophical Letters,* Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. xv.

- Thirdly, they raise the question, what is the exact relationship between philosophical discourse, especially written theoretical texts, and the practice of spiritual exercises within the different schools of philosophy? Which comes first and last? Can they conflict, or can each develop in relative independence of the other?[12]
- Fourthly, they prompt us to ask, just what are the implications of Hadot's conception of the history of Western philosophy for understanding contemporary university philosophy, including the question of whether philosophy is any longer a "way of life" in the West, as well as globally, or a different, perhaps irrevocably changed "way of life," restricted to formal students and academic professionals (esp. BSP, 95–103)?
- Fifthly, the articles examine the status of Hadot's philosophical eclecticism (or agnosticism or mysticism) and attempts to reanimate ancient spiritual exercises today, in particular in relation to his critique of Michel Foucault's similar attempts (BSP, 54–68).[13]

We want to examine the first of these concerns (and in its light the third will also be implicated), as it emerges especially in the key contributions of Harter and Fiordalis to *BSP*. In a spirit of critical solidarity, we will register in turn our own critical hesitations about several of Harter's claims, flagging at the same time how they seem to us to ask many of the right questions, and point the ways forward for further research and development of PWL.

Both Harter and Fiordalis note that "the expression that made [Hadot] famous, *spiritual exercise*, was actually not so unequivocal as one would hope" (BSP, 152, 248–251). Harter gives a kind of inventory of the different definitions that Hadot gave across different points in his *oeuvre*, evincing a loose "list-based" approach (BSP, 152):

> Transformation of the vision of the world and metamorphosis of personality; the internal activity of thought and transformation; exercises that allow the practitioner to come back to oneself, liberated from alienation; voluntary and personal practices aiming to accomplish a transformation of the ego; they can be called the life according to the spirit; they are acts of intellect or of the imagination or of the will characterized by their purpose — thanks to them the individual strives to transform his way of seeing the world, so that he can transform himself. (BSP, 153)

To Harter's list, we might add that Hadot also hesitates, or just never makes any firm and lasting determination, as to how many *species or subclasses* of spiritual exercises there might be. In the famous "annual report" that became the groundbreaking article "Spiritual Exercises," for instance, Hadot distinguishes between exercises of attention, dialogue, learning to die, and learning to read (see BSP, 33–42). But this is not a distinction to which he regularly recurs in other texts. The two lists the same text adduces from Philo of Alexandria are each suggestive (BSP, 250). But each agrees wholly neither with the other, or Hadot's own larger categorization in this essay. In his work on the Stoics, Hadot typically divides exercises according to the threefold division of Stoic philosophical discourse: so there are physical, logical, and ethical exercises.[14] In the important program-

12) See Michael Chase, "Pierre Hadot and his critics on spiritual exercises and cosmic consciousness," *academia.edu*, accessed on November 12, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/40473838/Pierre_Hadot_and_his_critics_on_spiritual_exercises_and_cosmic_consciousness; with Sharpe, "What Place Discourse".

13) See especially Orazio Irrera, "Pleasure and Transcendence of the Self"; Orazio Irrera and Cory Wimberly, "The Joy of Difference: Foucault and Hadot on the Aesthetic and the Universal in Philosophy," *Philosophy Today* 53, no. 2 (2009): 191–202; and Matthew Sharpe, "Towards a Phenomenology of *Sagesse*: On the Philosophical Problematic of Pierre Hadot," *Angelaki* 23, no. 2 (March 2018), 125–138.

14) See especially Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*.

matic piece, "Ancient Philosophy, a Theory or a Practice?", Hadot first distinguishes between intellectual and spiritual exercises, then exercises of teachers and students, before giving the following eclectic *divisio*:

> Alongside the exercise of meditation… inner detachment with regard to objects and persons, or the inner preparation which aims at enabling us to overcome future difficulties, for the Stoics; the memory of past pleasures and fraternal correction amongst the Epicureans; and the examination of conscience, finally, which is common to all the ancient philosophical schools.[15]

Hadot's conception of spiritual exercises has accordingly been criticized along two broad lines: firstly, concerning this lack of uniformity or of any consistent higher order Hadotian organizing concept to delineate different genres of spiritual exercises (let's call this *the categorization issue*); and secondly, concerning the scope of the term "spiritual exercise", since Hadot will indeed at different times lean towards identifying all philosophical activity, or entire books like Marcus' *Meditations* or Montaigne's *Essais* as "spiritual exercises" (call this *the scope issue*).[16] As Fiordalis' and Collins' chapters stress, to these two issues, a third and deeper question is raised by Hadot's stress upon such transformative exercises as belonging to the core of philosophical activity. This is the question as to how their pursuit relates to the philosophical pursuit of truth or insight, if not as an end in itself, then at least as a necessary condition for specifically *philosophical* self-transformation (*the alêtheiac issue*) (BSP, 251–252, see 44–46). To the extent that these issues cannot be resolved, Harter's and Fiordalis' concern is, the utility of Hadot's approach as a means to understand different Buddhist texts and practices must also be limited (especially: BSP, 157). Indeed, its application to Buddhist sources could generate its own species of misunderstandings.[17]

In his attempt to respond to the first, *categorization issue*, Harter proposes that we try to bring order to the phenomena by following a remark Hadot gave in a radio interview wherein Hadot, "on the fly," proposed to distinguish between "exercises of formation" and "exercises of application" (BSP, 154). Exercises of formation are characterized by Harter as "bottom up." His meaning is that they are preparatory or training exercises, like a sportsperson training on weeknights to prepare themselves for the "live" challenges of game day. The Stoic exercises of premeditating possible mishaps at the start of each morning, and of frequently recalling the fact of one's mortality, are clear and distinct examples of such exercises (BSP, 156). In ways that are at least not as *immediately* intuitive (see below), Harter will also list the contemplation of nature, conversion, the "view from above," or "Plotinus' efforts to detach himself from the needs of his body" (BSP, 156) as such exercises of formation. In fact, most of the spiritual exercises Hadot examines are of this formative kind, Harter claims.

Exercises of application are "top-down," in the sense that "they consist of applying rules or principles that have been accepted or incorporated already (the equivalent of the Kantian *determining judgments*)" (BSP, 155). They are exercises comparable to the sense in which we say that a judge "exercises justice," by applying a law to a particular case. Harter lists Stoic indifference to indifferent things and self-control, Plotinus' contemplation of the One and Aristotelian *theoria* as involving exercises of this type (BSP, 155). As against exercises of preparation, Harter stresses that one does not necessarily cast aside these exercises, once their goal is attained. As he explains, "the state of indifference is not a training; it is the actual state that the philosopher strives to achieve" (BSP, 155). So, exercises of application in some way characterize the goal, as well as the path.

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15) Pierre Hadot, "Ancient philosophy: An Ethics or a Practice?," in *Pierre Hadot, Selected Writings: Philosophy as Practice*, trans. Matthew Sharpe and Federica Testa (London: Bloomsbury, 2020 [in press – cited with permission of the translators]).

16) See note 11.

17) Compare Steven Collins, in the latter's wide-ranging opening contribution (BSP, 21–70).

Recognizing the validity of the categorization issue to which Harter is proposing a solution, does this opposition between exercises of formation and those of application promise assistance or does it introduce difficulties of its own? The first thing to note is that Harter himself confesses to some uncertainty. Within a few pages, he tells us that he wishes to modify "the distinction that Hadot proposes because it does not seem to me appropriate to oppose formation exercises to application exercises" (BSP, 160 n. 23).[18] More significant are the questions surrounding the validity of the category of "application exercises" which Harter holds onto, even after replacing "application" with "preparation exercises" as he moves into his criticism of the intercultural philosophical credentials of any Hadotian notion of spiritual exercise(s) (BSP, 160). In what sense is a Stoic philosopher's achieving a lasting state of lasting indifference towards external things the "application" of general principles to a particular case or cases, as against the *actualization* of a certain state or *hexis* in the inquirer herself? Can such a "state," however so ongoing, be best described as an "exercise," even as its preconditions include much preparatory exercising of different kinds? Does such a philosopher who has made progress any longer actively "apply" Stoic principles to their experience? Or is it now a question of these principles completely preshaping their present experience, like a virtuoso performer, so no conscious process of applying anything to anything else is needed?

Leaving the Stoics aside, is it accurate with Harter to describe the Plotinian contemplation of the One, in a unitive experience that would putatively transcend discursive intelligibility, as the "application" of anything to anything else? The same questions arise for Aristotle's contemplative way of life. Aristotle tells us less than we might like him to concerning the *theoria* which he assures us constitutes the basis for the highest, most self-sufficient form of living, the purest and most lasting pleasures, and the most complete fulfilment of our specifically human natures.[19] But again, if anything, a *contemplation* of the universal *archai* at the basis of all sciences seems closer to what is at issue than their *application* to particular cases. Such application of principles to cases, by way of locating middle terms and premises, is the business of *epistêmê*, not *theoria*.[20] Again, as Harter admits, the word "actualization" seems closer to phenomenological accuracy concerning what Aristotle means in *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 7: "the actualisation of the proper capacity of the soul to contemplate a higher principle …" (BSP, 155)

Further questions arise when Harter introduces the category of a "path of vision" in Buddhist practice, ostensibly to name kinds of Buddhist experience which cannot be identified as a spiritual exercise in any Hadotian sense. Harter will call these kinds of experience forms of "contemplations" (BSP, 167). As described by Vasubanhdhu, such contemplations emerge at:

> the moment of the path where the practitioner sees what he has not seen before… the path of vision is not a training to get accustomed to the reality of selflessness. On the contrary, it is characterized by its uniqueness: never before did the practitioner see reality as vividly as he sees it on the path of vision, and never after will he see it differently. (BSP, 166)

The issue is that everything about this passage from Vasubanhdhu recalls nothing so much as Plotinus' descriptions of the sudden, unexpected onset of the highest contemplative state, as in the following remarkable passage from the *Enneads*:

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18) To be fair to Hadot, there are legitimate concerns which will attend our placing too much emphasis on a distinction proposed only once in a live interview and to which he never recurred, as Harter admits (BSP, 154 n. 17). For more, see: Michael Chase, "Pierre Hadot and His Critics on Spiritual Exercises and Cosmic Consciousness."

19) Aristotle, *NE* X, 7.

20) Aristotle, *NE* VI, 3.

> Suddenly, a light bursts forth, pure and alone. We wonder whence it came, from the outside or the inside? It came from nowhere… Here, we put aside all the learning; disciplined to this pitch, established in beauty, the seeker holds knowledge still of the ground he rests on but, suddenly, swept beyond it all by the very crest of the wave of Intellect surging beneath, he is lifted and sees, never knowing how; the vision floods the eyes with light, but it is not a light showing some other object, the light is itself the vision.[21]

Far from being closed to such experiences, Hadot's first work in which the idea of spiritual exercises is applied to a classical thinker is *Plotinus, or the Simplicity of Vision*.[22] Any claim that Hadot's framework cannot account for such transformative contemplative experiences hence needs to be advanced with great caution. Again, there is a real question here, as Harter suggests, as to whether Hadot's language is always as precise as it might need to be, confronted with the variegated practices he encounters in different classical traditions (and that we encounter when we read non-western texts). But to call for greater precision in descriptive language is a different thing than claiming, in effect, that Hadot's framework is totally unable to comprehend such forms of transformative experiences, or accommodate the kinds of denotative languages the variegated phenomena demand.

We turn now to Harter's addressing of the *scope issue*. In the final section of the chapter (BSP, 169–177), Harter sets out to show how Hadot's conception of spiritual exercises can lead to false hermeneutic paths, when it comes to Buddhist texts like the *Ornament of Realizations* (*Abhisamayalamkara*). This is a more purely theoretical text containing no directly practical prescriptions or injunctions. Harter now sets his reading of this theoretical text against what we might call Hadot's "expanded understanding" of spiritual exercise(s), in those passages wherein Hadot (as Cooper also stresses[23]) uses the term as a means to describe all of philosophy. An ambiguity characterizes Hadot's texts, both in the native French and the English, concerning the possible use of *exercise* as both verb and noun (the Greek *askein* / *askêsis* by contrast would disallow any such confusion). When Hadot for instance claims that philosophy just is "the over-riding project of … a vehicle of the transformation of the person through spiritual exercise" (as quoted in: BSP, 159), we can see that "exercise" (without the plural) is being used as a verb. Hadot wants to describe an ongoing activity of philosophizing, a form of life *en large*. This contrasts with when the verb is hypostasized (and pluralized) as "exercises," as in Hadot's claims about specific "exercises," like the view from above, attention to the present moment, and so on.

This ambiguity is regrettable, and inadvertently *made* to produce amphibolies. In any event, Harter takes Hadot's "expanded claims" about philosophy as a spiritual exercise (verb) to license the reading of Hadot which sees him committed to seeing *all ancient philosophical texts* as spiritual exercises (noun), on something like the model of Marcus' *Meditations*. But, he is then rightly able to protest:

> if this seems right in the case of Marcus, does it apply in the same way to Plotinus' *Enneads*? Are Plotinus' "reports" of his experiences of union or contemplation with the Intellect or the One to be treated as practical instructions to incorporate into daily life? Could some texts attempt to address this rising up towards higher principles (*anagôgia*) in a different way, for instance, by taking theoretical approaches to map and ground the whole philosophical position developed by Plotinus? (BSP, 169–170)

21) Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.5.7.33–36.

22) Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or the Simplicity of Vision*.

23) Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, 402–403, n. 4–5.

Something seems wrong to us in any reading of Hadot which would suggest that his global descriptions of philosophy *en large* as an ongoing labor or "spiritual exercise" (verb) aiming at wisdom commits him (or us) to seeing all philosophical writings as "spiritual exercises" (noun). The latter position is evidently implausible. Philosophy as a whole, a spiritual exercise and form of life, can and always has included theoretical inquiry and the production of theoretical texts. If we run together the two senses of "spiritual exercise," as Harter does here, we will be right to criticize Hadot for allegedly being unable to account for impersonal Buddhistic theoretical treatises, written in the third person, like the *Ornament* (BSP, 169–177). For this text, Harter demonstrates, can in no way be read as a set of prescriptions for specific exercises, or as the phenomenological description of the carrying-out of such exercises.

The issue here is that, as we saw above, Hadot's entire post-Wittgensteinian program, as other contributors register – and as Harter himself opens by crediting (BSP, 147–149) – is there to awaken us to the way different philosophical texts have aimed in the past to do different things with words. Some texts are theoretical, like Euclid's *Elements*. Others are more clearly practical in intent, like Epictetus' *Encheiridion.* And the same will foreseeably hold in other traditions. Harter's analysis of the difference in the way that the subject of equality is addressed in the practical Buddhist text, Santideva's *Introduction to Awakened Conduct*, as against the theoretical *Abhisamayalamkara,* hence *perfectly illustrates* the uses of Hadot for scholars of Buddhist philosophy. Its terms closely mirror, in fact, the comparable analysis Heim makes in her chapter, distinguishing between the genres and purposes of the context-specific utterances of the Buddha recorded in the *Suttanta* and the sayings of the *Abhidhamma*, with its "more categorical, abstracted, less contextual mode of knowledge [*pariyaya*], what [commentators] call *nippariyaya*" (BSP, 187). Yet Harter presents this analysis of the *Abhisamayalamkara* to "push back against" Hadot's approach (BSP, 178). In this case, what seems to be being pushed back against is an understandable but real misattribution.

Concluding Remarks

The immediately preceding critique is not intended as dialectical point-scoring. Harter's article asks the right questions of Hadot, and calls legitimately for greater clarity concerning several of the terms and categories Hadot introduces into metaphilosophy. Such clarity will be highly desirable in future comparative studies, as well as in further applications of Hadot's work to Western thought of different periods. Moreover, Harter's intention, shared by Tomlinson (BSP, 217–224), to show how the examination of the Buddhist heritage can throw new critical lights back on Hadot's metaphilosophical work and its limits, seems to us to point to one more of the exciting prospects that *BSP* contributes to opening up. It would be unreasonable for any critic to expect that trail-blazing research in an area as new and complex as applying Hadotian metaphilosophy to Buddhism, and Buddhism to Hadot, could say everything, or say everything uncontroversially. *BSP* as a whole can be read, in one register, as an invitation to the kind of ongoing scholarly inquiry and dialogue which Fiordalis closes his Introduction by evoking, and which Harter and Collins in particular seem to directly begin (BSP, 19). One could also do worse than to recall on this point, with Heim, the shared stress we find in Hadot's understanding of Greek *philosophia*, and Buddhist understandings of the path – that philosophy is always, for essential reasons, characterized by incompletion (BSP, 183–184).

It is this incomplete path, or rather its enabling openness to the sense of philosophy as a lived practice, that strikes both the authors in *BSP* and the reviewers as so potentially fruitful for carrying out new forms of intercultural philosophical studies influenced by PWL. The late Stephen Collins' opening chapter in *Buddhist Spiritual Practices*, with which we wish to close, provides the most comprehensive framing considerations for moving this post-Hadotian intercultural metaphilosophy forwards. Collins calls for global and comparative

study of the different spiritual exercises and technologies of the self (meaning the 'self' in the quotidian and not necessarily metaphysical sense) across different traditions through close reading of texts contextualized for languages, institutions, and the life and thought of particular philosophers: the kinds of studies we in fact find especially in Apple's and Fiordalis' contributions in *BSP*. "What is needed to make progress here," he comments programmatically, "is a detailed examination and comparison of Spiritual Exercises, in both their physical and psychological aspects, by scholars who can make sense of the original languages" (BSP, 33).

Collins in addition notes that while both "spiritual exercises" for Hadot, and "technologies of [the] self" for Foucault, are analogous (and are often treated by commentators as synonymous), they could play distinctive roles in philosophy as a way of life as a method for intercultural philosophy (BSP, 43–46). Hadot's spiritual exercises are conceived as the means toward flourishing or happiness, while Foucault was interested in how different forms of cultural and individual disciplines constitute our subjective life ("create a self"), and if and how we can live more freely and thoughtfully. What unites them, as *philosophical* exercises, is "a concern with finding, and embodying, the Truth which englobes the entire universe, and which necessarily involves a total change in the knowing subject" (BSP, 45). The two conceptions of philosophical practices suggest complimentary but different explanatory and *exploratory* roles, Collins notes: the former (Hadot's) pointing to a model to analyse the different species of *therapia* offered by different philosophies as ways of life, the other (Foucault's) providing the model to comparatively understand which forms of subjectivity are constituted in particular philosophies as ways of life (esp. BSP, 44–45).

To think with Hadot on Buddhism and the path, Fiordalis' collection shows, is less to try to overthrow existing approaches to intercultural philosophy than to *expand* their purview. Instead of (but also potentially in league with) a broad study of the horizons of meaning within a culture, as we might find in more "continental" approaches; or indeed, instead of (but also potentially in league with) a solely analytic-conceptual approach to the dialectical contents of texts, as we find in analytic methodologies, the post-Hadotian intercultural philosopher will focus also on the peculiarities of different philosophical genres of writing in the diverse traditions, and their relations with different institutional and pedagogical forms. S/he will always situate texts within the attempts by practitioners to constitute and take care of their selves, and live good, examined lives. While there is deep diversity in global philosophical practices and discourses, as we move beyond the postmodernist moment it is timely also to recognize the deep, often forgotten unities to be found between different peoples' strivings to live well, as well as striking continuities in how we might go about doing that in an increasingly global, interconnected world. As one of the first scholarly collections to begin exploring this post-postmodernist vista amongst many others, *Buddhist Spiritual Practices: Thinking with Pierre Hadot on Buddhism, Philosophy, and the Path* represents a landmark.