

TO NOT FORGET: PIERRE HADOT'S LAST BOOK ON GOETHE.
 PIERRE HADOT, *N'OUBLIE PAS DE VIVRE: GOETHE ET LA
 TRADITION DES EXERCICES SPIRITUELS*
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French thinker Pierre Hadot is famous for his claim that ancient *philosophia* was conceived in the Greek and Roman schools as a way of life, including existential or “spiritual” practices (such as forms of meditation, memorisation, bodily exercises and privations) to reshape students’ beliefs, desires, and actions.¹ The vision of philosophy that emerges from his work is strikingly at odds with most contemporary conceptions and institutional practices, although it has won a wide audience both within the academy (in some measure via the later Foucault’s avowed debt to Hadot) and amongst a more general readership. ‘Today’, Hadot can quote Thoreau, ‘there are professors of philosophy, but no philosophers’²: the principal products of contemporary philosophy are not philosophical men and women, but theoretical papers and monographs.’

Hadot’s vision of the Hellenistic philosophers which were his principal focus after 1970 (especially the Stoics) is also markedly different than what one finds in leading angloamerican commentators on the philosophy of this period, such as Inwood, Striker, Annas, Engberg-Pedersen, Nussbaum, Long, and Cooper.³ Hadot contends that texts like Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations* or Epictetus’ *Encheiridion* can only be critically comprehended as documents in the Stoic philosophy being ‘applied’, repetitively formulated, varied, and enjoined by an author *eis Heauton* or to beginners (*ta prokoptonta*), with a view to their ethical reformation.⁴ They are not, as we might otherwise suppose, attempts to construct an original theoretical system for its own sake, or for a general audience, on the model of academic philosophical writing today. Hadot’s striking claim that the cultivation of a heightened philosophical attention (*prosoche*) to the living present and the greater whole of nature (*physis*) lay at the heart of both ancient Epicureanism and Stoic philosophy finds no near parallels in contemporary analytic interpretations of these schools. Hadot’s work has indeed attracted criticism from several leading representatives of that tradition for falsely conflating philosophy with ‘religion,’ undervaluing the specific role of rational argument and theoretical construction, and projecting a determinately neoplatonic metaphilosophy back across the other ancient schools.⁵

Yet Hadot’s last book, completed in 2008 and so just two years before his passing, was not on the ancient or Hellenistic philosophers he so loved. The work takes as its subject the modern poet, novelist, scientist, statesman and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Dedicated to his grandson and “haunted” by reflection on his own imminent mortality⁶, Hadot’s 2008 study *N'Oublie pas de vivre: Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels* is a deeply sympathetic and beautiful book. Written in Hadot’s characteristically limpid prose, it represents both a novel intervention in scholarship on Goethe, and a revealing insight into Hadot’s distinct metaphilosophy and *weltanschauung*. The book’s long third chapter on Goethe’s enigmatic “Orphic” poem *Urworte* underscores what the gentle sufficiency of Hadot’s prose can make his readers pass over⁷: the way that his untimely classical style, far from reflecting any shallowness of reflection, was underwritten by the author’s extraordinary erudition, spanning across ancient philosophy, literature, and the West’s mystical, hermetic and esoteric traditions. (169-181, 215-220)

N'Oublie pas de vivre: Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels, which has remained untranslated, has hitherto attracted little scholarly recognition or critical notice, even in its native French. It is this situation that this review essay hopes to redress, in the small way permitted to any such piece of writing. In what follows, we examine in turn Hadot’s framing claims concerning the shaping ends and origins of Goethe’s species of neoclassicism (Part I), his claims concerning Goethe’s debt to the classical or Hellenistic tradition of spiritual exercises (Part II), before our closing remarks (Part III) challenge some of Hadot’s claims concerning the author of *Faust*, and then reflect on the significance of the fact that this last philosophical testament of Pierre Hadot’s was on a modern novelist, scientist, and poet, not an ancient philosopher.

I. ORIGINS, ENDS, FOUNDATIONS

Hadot takes the title of *N'Oublie Pas de Vivre* from Goethe’s characteristic, brief poem of 1826:

One knows of the *memento mori*
 I love best to not resay
 Why I must in the flight of life
 Torture you with the limit!
 This is why, an aging barbarian *Docendo*,
 I recommend to you
 My dear friend, according to the manner which is yours
 No more than *vivere memento!* (Goethe at 11, 147)

Reflecting this poetic counsel, *N'Oublie pas de vivre*’s culminating fourth chapter is given over to expounding what for Hadot represents the core of Goethe’s philosophical message. This in Hadot’s eyes is a full-blooded affirmation of this life and all it contains (“*Le Oui à la vie et au monde*”), as per the key poem “One and All”:
 Into the limitless to sink,

No one, I trow, will ever blink,
 For there all sorrow we dismiss.
 Instead of cravings and wants untold,
 Fatiguing demands and duties cold,
 Surrender of one’s self is bliss. (Goethe at 249-250)

For Hadot, the overwhelming tonality of Goethe’s work is one of a conscious joy in being-there (*freude am dasein/joye d’être-la* (240-245)), captured well in Goethe’s comments to Schiller in a letter of June 1796:

Pleasure, joy, communion with things, it is that which is uniquely real, and all of what produces [true] reality. All the rest is only vanity and deception. (Goethe at 244)

The basis of this celebration of being-there, Hadot (like Karl Löwith⁸) stresses, lay in philosophical and aesthetic foundations which place Goethe in stark contrast to the historicism which was to emerge in Germany in the generations immediately following⁹. For absolutely basic to all of Goethe's work, Hadot argues, was a species of pantheistic naturalism: one which found voice alike in Goethe's biological studies as in his novels and poetry—a remarkable conjunction Hadot examines in his previous work on natural philosophy, *The Veil of Isis*.¹⁰ Goethe's species of pantheism, Hadot underscores, embraces a highly dynamic vision of nature, anticipating later *lebensphilosophie*, but observant of, and responsive to, a primordial register of *physis* beyond what humans, one passing part of the natural whole, typically evaluate as good and evil:

What we see of nature is force devouring force: nothing remains present, all passes, a million germs are destroyed at each instance, a million germs born ... beauty and ugliness, good and bad, all exist side by side with the same right. (Goethe at 248)

Goethe's joyous *Oui* to existence thus extends even to affirming the terrifying (*au terrifiant/das Ungeheuer*). The highest "sentiment of existing" for Hadot's Goethe is thus—as it would later be for Schelling (253) and many of the later modern existentialists—a joy at once tinged with a certain "astonishment [*saisissement*]" or even *angoisse* before that which is "more profound than our selves" (sic.): an *angoisse* with which his Faust identifies "the better part of man" (Goethe, *Faust* I, 6272-4), and Goethe the "primal experience" of life and being:

The immediate perception of originary phenomena plunges us into a sort of anguish ... Before the originary phenomena, when, as they must, they appear to our senses, we feel a sort of fear which can pass into anguish ... (255)

The culminating section of *N'Oublie pas de vivre* hence sees Hadot highlighting the deep proximity of Goethe to his admirer, Friedrich Nietzsche. (11, 256-267) Unlike Nietzsche himself, and most other commentators¹¹, Hadot has less than we might expect to say concerning Goethe's well-known debts to Spinoza. (11; 48; 240; 269) More time is spent by Hadot on Goethe's reading of the great German philologist Winckelmann's influential work on the Greeks. (34-5) Some fine pages are devoted to Goethe's observations of classical ruins in his journey to Italy, and his captivation by representations of ancient life in the mural art at Pompeii and Herculaneum (26-31; 38)—all of which Hadot positions as decisive in moving Goethe away from the *Sturm und Drang* of *The Young Werther* to that mature position the "sage of Weimar" would later express in his conversations with Eckermann: "the classical is what I call the healthy; and the romantic the sickly..." (cf. 22-3; 25)

Indeed, while Hadot situates Goethe within a lineage of modern pantheistic philosophical naturalist thinking, his more idiosyncratic claim in the book is to resituate Goethe as what we might almost call an "ancient": the worthy legatee of a much older Greek heritage of thought. As his subtitle, *Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels* flags, however, this heritage is not that of the Greeks as envisaged in the idealisations of Winckelmann and Schiller, those untroubled lovers of natural beauty and *mesure* (33-36). (We do note, though, that his commentary in *N'Oublie pas de vivre* on Goethe's celebration of ancient art's ability to capture the *eigenblick* evoke this kind of romantic philhellenism closely enough that Hadot feels the need to distantiate Goethe from it. (36-38))¹² The Hellenic (and Hellenistic) heritage Hadot wants to situate Goethe within is rather that which Hadot's earlier work, principally *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, has uncovered. This is a heritage from the *philosophical Greeks*; albeit one in which philosophical discourse, and theoretical accounts of human and wider nature were coupled with specific argumentative, meditative, somatic and rhetorical practices aimed to so deeply impress the results of the schools' theoretical inquiries upon the *psychai* of students that they reshaped their entire sense, and ways, of life. If Goethe valorised and celebrated in the classical Greeks and Romans an elevated species of serenity, Hadot argues: "what Nietzsche saw well [is also true], ... that this serenity was acquired and not primitive, resulting from an immense effort of will ... above all, it existed in the ancient world in a philosophical will to find such peace of the soul by the transformation of the self and its way of seeing the world." (40)¹³

We turn now to Hadot's claims concerning Goethe as conscious legatee of the ancient tradition of philosophical *paideia* or practice: a "voluntary, radical transformation of one's way of living and looking at the world"¹⁴ through existential or spiritual exercises.

II. THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN GOETHE: ATTENTION TO THE PRESENT MOMENT AND THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

The first half of *N'Oublie pas de vivre*, in two lengthy chapters, is devoted to uncovering in Goethe's literary productions, autobiography, correspondences and conversations, key "spiritual exercises" Hadot contends lay at the heart of ancient philosophy, taking varying but deeply cognate forms in the different schools.

The first of these *exercices spirituels* is a mindful attention to the present moment: "the only Goddess I adore," as Hadot quotes Goethe in the title of his first chapter. (15) Despite all their differences, Hadot contends that there is a "*grande analogie*" in the ways both the Stoics and Epicureans enjoined in their adherents a refined attentiveness to the present moment, as a key component of *eudemonia* and characteristic of philosophical enlightenment. (42)¹⁵ In the words of Marcus Aurelius (the subject, beside Goethe, of Hadot's only other book-length study¹⁶ on a single author after his early works on Plotinus,¹⁷ Porphyry and Victorinus¹⁸): "All the happiness you are seeking by such long, roundabout ways you can have right now ... I mean, if you leave all of the past behind you, if you leave the future to providence, and if you arrange the present according to piety and justice."¹⁹ From *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (largely translated as *Philosophy as a Way of Life*²⁰) and Hadot's other texts, Hadot unpacks several chains of reflection underscoring this high valuation of the present moment in Greek thought. *N'Oublie pas de vivre* concisely recounts these philosophical claims, tracing their logic through the extant Epicurean and Stoic texts:

- the recognition that the present alone, as against past and future is that tense in which we can act or suffer, and in which all our experiences, and all the things we can change within them, occur (as per Seneca's advice to Lucilius: "Two things must be cut short: the fear of the future and the memory of past discomfort; [since] the one does not concern me anymore, and the other does not concern me yet."²¹)
- the recognition, which can be reanimated forcefully by *memento mori* (another key theme for philosophical meditation²²), that the present is nevertheless passing and irretrievable, hence singular and precious, to be seized, *sur-le-champ* (as per the Epicurean Horace's famous *carpe diem!* (42)²³); the reflection that the present, just as it is, is what we celebrate and wish to recur when we are happy (this is the aspect Nietzsche later highlights);
- and the acknowledgment that these significances of the present (Goethe's *eigenblick* or the Stoic *kairos* (27)) are nevertheless most often forgotten by us, so that we do 'forget to live': instead becoming caught up in the mundane present (Goethe's *das Gemeine* (24)): our attention lost in concerns for external goods, the objects of unnecessary desires, the consideration of future possibilities and anticipatory rehearsal of responses to them²⁴, the opinions and concerns of others, and futile regrets or *nostalgie* concerning things past.

The key instance Hadot highlights of Goethe's advocacy of such a heightened attention to the present moment comes from the extraordinary second book of *Faust*. It is the moment when Faust, in whom Hadot sees the definitively dynamic modern hero (16), glimpses a brief moment of happiness: almost long enough for him to wish for an instant to stop to say "stay a while, you are so beautiful", and so lose his wager with Mephistopheles. Helen, the paradigmatic symbol of ancient beauty (22), has appeared to Faust. Almost instantly, oneirically, the two fall in love. Together then *les amants* begin to speak in rhyming lines, Faust at first offering to teach Helen this modern conceit (cf. 21), she quickly coming to complete his lines as if out of his own mouth:

Faust—Not backwards, forwards is the spirit's sight,
This moment now, alone ...

Helen—is our delight.²⁵

It is a moment of such intensity that, as Hadot comments, time itself seems for the hero and heroine to stop (19), and neither is untouched by that kind of *angoisse* before the sheer “splendour of being” (22) we met above:

Helen—I feel so far away and yet so near, And gladly say now: ‘Here, I am! Here!’
 Faust—I scarcely breathe, I tremble, speech is dead: This is a dream: time and place have fled.
 Helen—I seem exhausted, yet created new, Enmeshed with you, the unknown and the true.
 Faust—Don’t seek to analyse so rare a fate! Our duty is to live: though but for a day.²⁶

This momentary exchange, that for Hadot so piquantly evokes the possibility of an elusive synthesis of ancient and modern, activity and contemplation (20-26), gives the title of one of Hadot’s essays in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*. In that essay as in *N’Oublie pas de vivre*, though, Hadot is able to cite ample instances of such a valorisation of the present instant in Goethe, notably in the *Marienbad Elegy*’s appeal to “with joyful wisdom / Look the instant in the eye! Do not delay!” (Hadot 1996, 231) Also paradigmatic here for Hadot is Goethe’s tellingly titled “Rule Of Life” of 1815, which closely mirrors Seneca’s cited advice to Lucilius above:

If you would live unruffled by care -
 Let not the past torment you e’er
 Be angered as little as you can
 And let the present be ever enjoyed;
 Never let your heart be moved with hate,
 And as for the future, confide it unto God. (Goethe at 231)

It is the same enigmatic advice Goethe was to give, late in his life, to Eckermann, directly echoing what Hadot takes to be the heart of the ancient philosophical exercises²⁷: “Only persist in this, ... hold fast by the present. Every situation—nay, every moment—is of infinite worth; for it is the representative of a whole eternity.”²⁸ Goethe, Hadot claims, “was in his way of living the present moment, ... ‘half Stoic and half Epicurean.’ He enjoyed the present moment like an Epicurean, and willed it intensely like a Stoic.”²⁹

Such advocacy of attention to, or enjoyment of, the present moment—which Hadot does not shrink from describing as verging on a “mystical dimension” in the Stoics³⁰—raises many questions. It can appear as an unphilosophical celebration of immediacy, as John M. Cooper³¹ has charged against Hadot—and the Neo-Kantians charged of Goethe. Nevertheless, as per Goethe’s cited advice to Eckermann, Hadot stresses that this ancient philosophical valuation of the present was the flipside of a larger sense that the present moment, seen aright, “offers us the whole of reality”³²: as in the Stoic Chrysippus’ enigmatic claim that “If a person has wisdom for one instant, he is no less happy than he who possesses it for an eternity”; and Epicureans’ similarly enigmatic claims concerning the pleasure that was for them the highest good, that “[a]n infinite period of time could not cause us more pleasure than can be derived from this one.”³³

These difficult thoughts open onto the theme of Hadot’s second chapter on Goethe and the legacy of ancient philosophical exercises. This is Goethe’s recurrent use, in reflections upon his own art and in his works themselves, of images of physical elevation and of looking down upon human affairs *en haut*, from above. Once more, readers of Hadot’s better known works will be familiar with this “view from above” as a spiritual exercise Hadot shows to have been advocated by figures like Seneca or Philo, practiced by Aurelius, and suggested in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus* and *Republic*.³⁴ The view from above is an exercise in what Hadot, following the Stoics, calls lived physics (*physique veçue*). In this exercise, the apparently wholly theoretical or contemplative process of ascending philosophically from out of mundane opinions and concerns towards a more general understanding of the natural whole is advocated as a means to generate concrete but elevating ethical effects in practitioners. As Hadot stresses again in *N’Oublie pas de vivre*, cultivating this “view from above” is directed in the ancient descriptions at generating two, complementary existential effects upon the person of the

inquirer. These are, first, what Foucault under Hadot’s influence calls a sense of “the irony of the miniscule”³⁵. Seen from this new perspective, our everyday concerns, in which we have hitherto been caught up, are shown to be almost ant-like: less mountains than mole hills (as when Plato’s Socrates in the *Theaetetus* reports that the true philosopher, whose mind is “borne in all directions ... studying the stars, and investigating the universal nature,” because of this considers all the usual political concerns of his fellows “petty and of no account”³⁶). Secondly, and as a flipside to this reflective distancing of ourselves from our mundane selves, learning to philosophically re-see our lives from this elevated perspective thus involves cultivating a kind of true or philosophical *megalopsychia*: “the *epistēmē* which makes one be above those things whose nature it is to happen to good and bad persons alike,” as the Stoics had redefined this *aretē*.³⁷

These same senses of the view from above, Hadot claims in *N’Oublie pas de vivre*, are also in play at decisive moments in Goethe’s literary and poetic *oeuvre*. As Hadot writes:

.... it is characteristic of the older Goethe to stage on high mountains the decisive moment of inner transformation of his heroes, where they detach themselves from their past, finally to rejoin in some way and to reorient themselves towards a new life ... (119)

Faust, devastated after Euphorion (his progeny by Helen)’s death in *Faust II*, is carried up on his beloved’s vestments “far above all that is vulgar, towards the highest ether”: and is thus able to surmount his sorrow, just as his recovery after Grechen’s death has been occasioned by the “joy” he senses in the living nature around him. Wilhelm Meister, at the opening of the second volume of the *Journeyman Years*, is likewise placed by Goethe on a mountain peak looking down, before undertaking to remodel himself. The liberating release such “looking down” upon mundane concerns occasions, however, is in Goethe’s stagings, as in the ancient texts, the direct reverse of what Goethe presents as a profound re-connection with the larger whole. Consider these extraordinary lines from “Granite”:

Seated on a bare summit, embracing in my regard a vast land, I can say to myself: ‘You rest here immediately on the rock which goes to the profoundest depths of the earth. Nothing is interposed between me and the primitive world.’ In this instant, where the forces of attraction and of movement of the earth are exercised equally upon me, where the influences of the sky encircle me most closely, I am opened to the highest considerations over nature ... Here on the most ancient altar, which is raised without any intermediary on what is most profound in creation, I offer a sacrifice to the Being of beings: I touch the first, the most solid beginnings of our existence, I look on high at the world, the abrupt valleys with their soft slopes, these fertile plains that I see in the distance. My soul is elevated above herself and above all, and it is filled with nostalgia for the sky which is so close to me

For Hadot’s Goethe ‘above all’, though, such an elevation operates not simply as a recurrent image of spiritual transformation within his poetry and novels. It operates also as an image of poetry and artistic creativity itself, and thereby of Goethe’s own existential calling. “The poet, as a bird, can hover above the world,” Goethe writes, and his Faust compares the human spirit itself to a skylark: “it is inborn in every man, that his spirit sours onwards and upwards.”³⁸ In some fascinating passages, Hadot traces Goethe’s fascination with the *Montgolfier*, the hot air balloon first flown in November 1783: which for Goethe in a letter to Schiller becomes an apt metaphor for the elevation he was just then experiencing reading Homer—as if he were himself one of Homer’s deities perched on Olympus looking down on the fields of Ilium below.³⁹ “True poetry”, as Goethe reflects likewise in his autobiography (significantly entitled *Poetry and Truth*):

... is recognised in the way that, like a profane gospel, it is capable of delivering us from the earthly weights that we accept, because it procures to us at the time an inner serenity and external pleasure. Like a hot air balloon, true poetry elevates us, with the ballast which is attached to us, into superior regions where, because of her, inextricable human labyrinths are unravelled under our regard, which sees them now from on high ...⁴⁰

In Hadot’s characteristic language, that is, Goethe’s conception of poetry was deeply philosophical, not simply for the many philosophical themes Goethe undertook to write upon, but as itself a means of spiritual or existential transformation: “to elevate each above himself.” (Goethe at 266)⁴¹

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

N’Oublie pas de vivre is arguably the most personal of Hadot’s works: one which he avows with characteristic candour is a work of love, based upon a lifelong process of returning to and savouring Goethe’s works. (9) The very fact that Goethe was pre-eminently a great poet and that Hadot is comfortable situating him in a legacy of great *litterateurs* (pre-eminently Lucian and Voltaire) who, in his eyes, carried forward the ancient philosophical exercises as institutional philosophy devolved over Western history into “theory alone” reflects what is a distinct signature of Hadot’s meta-philosophy. Hadot has long challenged any simple, hard and fast division between philosophy and literature, based on his sense of philosophy as a practice, and its shared concern with the literary arts always “to produce an effect, a *habitus* within the soul, or to provoke a transformation of the self of [their] addressee[s].”⁴² The focus on this-worldly life-affirmation (“the happiness and duty of existing in the cosmos”⁴³) which Hadot celebrates in Goethe, cultivated through the two exercises of attention to the present moment and its demands, and assuming a reflective “view from above,” undoubtedly reflect the substantive core of Hadot’s untimely image of philosophy as an existentially serious business: “*il ne s’agit pas de s’informer, mais de se former*”. (10) Hadot’s own writing in *N’Oublie pas de vivre*, finally, brings together, in a characteristic coincidence of opposites, Hadot’s classical restraint and encyclopaedic learning with the quiet, insistent affirmation of real existential commitment underlying his authorship. For the Hadot of 2008, as much as in any of his previous works, the ideas he seeks and finds in Goethe concerning how to live, even in the sure knowledge of death’s immanence, *matter existentially*: not descriptions of ways of life only, they are also challenges and calls to self-transformation.

In the brief space available here, let me state two of the many questions Pierre Hadot’s last book may suggest for its reader.

First, from the side of assessing the meaning and force of Pierre Hadot’s Goethe: a critical reader might ask whether Hadot’s attempt to situate Goethe as a legatee of Greek philosophical *bios* and the *exercises spirituels* does not, for all its insight, also blinker us from weighing aright the ways in which Goethe—the man and, as it were, the “human dynamo”—was in some ways definitively *modern*: more Faust than Helen or Hellenistic; and a dedicatee of world-transformation, rather than the serene world-contemplation of the Hellenistic *sophoi*. There is no question that Goethe’s definitive hero, Faust, begins as a good model for appreciating the Hadotian-vision of philosophy. This disgruntled scholar’s restless quest for *life* comes out of the same kind of *ennui* with academic studies that attracts many scholars today to Hadot’s work:

I’ve studied now Philosophy
And Jurisprudence, Medicine,—
And even, alas! Theology,—
From end to end, with labour keen;
And here, poor fool! with all my lore
I stand, no wiser than before ...
That which one does not know, one needs to use;
And what one knows, one uses never.⁴⁴

Yet, if we are to take *Faust* as Goethe’s crowning or emblematic work, as Hadot seems at times comfortable with doing, it is unclear whether Goethe’s hero ever overcomes that restless dynamism that sees him “storm through life,” as he reflects⁴⁵: “every moment ... unsatisfied.”⁴⁶ Nor, short of his final otherworldly beatification, is it wholly clear that Faust achieves any kind of meaningful spiritual *tranquillitas* or *ataraxia* in this life, or ability to look the present moment in the face: the goal of the Hellenistic schools central to Hadot’s later

work. Throughout the poem’s two books, this veritable force of nature “desires, achieves my course, desires again, and so, with force ...”⁴⁷ until we finally see him sighting fulfilment in a project that for the Greeks would surely have seemed definitively *hybristic*: that of trying to subdue the seas, *à la* the Persian King at Salamis.⁴⁸ It is true that, elevated by the *voyage en haut* after Euphorion and Helen depart, Faust does at least begin to place his titanism at the service of others. It is Faust’s envisaging of a “free earth: where a free race, in freedom, stand” that delivers Faust “the developer”⁴⁹ his “highest moment” and mortal rest with the ability to at last say to the present moment: “‘Stay a while! You are so lovely!’”⁵⁰ Yet the final scenes of the epic are famously enigmatic, beginning with Faust’s responsibility for the forcible relocation—like some perverse Zeus—of the elderly, defenceless Baucis and Philemon in the name of his new utopia; continuing through Faust’s “last and greatest act of will”⁵¹ in the creation of “a Paradise /Whose boundaries hold back the raging tide”⁵²; to his death, transfiguration and beatific vision as Doctor Marianus. Even as Faust contemplates the new paradise for “many millions” he foresees, he avows that “[t]he last word wisdom ever has to say” is that “[h]e only earns his freedom and existence, who’s forced to win them freshly every day.”

Just so, the sage of Weimar’s classicism so ably brought out by Hadot formed but one component of that intense spiritual dynamism that saw Goethe himself produce novels, poems, dramas, over 3000 sketches, scientific works, an autobiography, and over 10,000 letters (written up until the very week of his death). Hadot is forced to confront Goethe’s distinctive modernity in his long chapter on the poem *Urworte*, which ends by appealing to hope (*elpis*), in contrast to the well-known ancient cautions concerning the last thing out of the Hesiodic Pandora’s box. Hadot tries, via recourse to Goethe’s pantheism, to interpret the poem in a way consistent with the kind of immanent world-affirmation he sees in the Hellenistic philosophies:

... Hope in *Primal Words* [is] a power which, in turning us towards what is elevated, permits us to reinterpret the destiny which is imposed on us and to act with confidence by situating our action within the perspective of the All and the will of God-Nature. Hope is inherent to life and to action. To hope, it is to be in life, it is to be active ...” (236)

Yet it is difficult, even for Hadot, to square Goethe’s stated conviction late in his life “... of our survival [beyond death] coming from the concept of activity”—*viz.*: “If, until my end, I act without an instant of rest, nature is obliged to assign me another form of existence ...” (235)—with the philosophical dogmata of any of the ancient schools. For all of Goethe’s criticisms of Francis Bacon, this ethical activism indeed stands much closer to Bacon’s influential criticism of the ancient ethical philosophers in *The Advancement of Learning* as privileging the contemplative over active lives, and private contemplative perfection over charitable, dynamic devotion to the public good.⁵³

To criticise Hadot’s rendition of Goethe, however, seems peevish given the many riches, and the unique intellectual perspective, *N’Oublie pas de vivre* brings to the study of the sage of Weimar. Our closing thoughts here then will concern Hadot’s *oeuvre* as a whole, and the particular light this last, lesser-known book on Goethe retrospectively casts back on his better-known studies.

By far the predominant anxiety expressed by Anglo-American critics of Hadot’s work concerns the way that his emphasis on philosophy as cultivating an ongoing state of attention or awareness can be seen to sit in tension with rigorous argumentation and the dispassionate concern for truth. *N’Oublie pas de vivre* will do nothing to allay those academic anxieties about Hadot’s work: arraigning Goethe, a self-professed poet, as a principal modern legatee of classical philosophy, if anything highlights the methodological and substantive distance between his work and predominant, analytic later modern readings of classical and Hellenistic philosophy. While Hadot’s published work turned increasingly to the Hellenistic schools after 1970, the *Compte rendus* of his courses at the *École Pratique des Hautes Etudes*⁵⁴, and three late commentaries on Plotinus’ *Enneads* (*Traités* 9, 38, and 50⁵⁵), shows Hadot’s continuing interest in Western mysticism. It also invites the supposition⁵⁶ that his early experiences and encounter with Plotinus overwhelmingly shaped his wider sense of *philosophia*, as well as his particular sensitivities in reading Goethe. (251)

A more provocative consideration prompted by *N’Oublie pas de vivre*, as it seems to me, concerns the significance of Hadot choosing to write his last monograph not on the ancient thought whose study had made his name, but on the modern personage of Goethe. In *What is Ancient Philosophy?* in particular, the status of modern philosophy in Hadot’s picture is left tellingly underdeveloped: on the one hand, modern purely theoretical philosophical discourse carries forward the subordination of *philosophia* of the Christian era into modernity; while on the other, Hadot briefly invokes a series of figures, from Montaigne to Kant, Thoreau, and Wittgenstein, who he argues have remained aware of, or practiced, varieties of philosophising as a way of life. *N’Oublie pas de vivre*’s work on Goethe clearly serves in part to fill this lacuna in Hadot’s historical narrative, and to show the kind of rereading of modern thinkers opened up for readers by Hadot’s methodology and metaphilosophy. Yet, as his last philosophical testament, this book on Goethe casts a revealing, indirect light on Hadot’s own, seemingly wholly antiquarian, “return to the ancients.” Hadot has been remarkably forthcoming in interviews concerning his intellectual development. In that development, he assigns central, formative places to the moderns Montaigne, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Goethe and Heidegger. Certainly, then, when we turn back via *N’Oublie pas de vivre* to the earlier works, one is struck by just how central Goethe in particular has been in his work: particularly in shaping his key essays in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* on the exercises of attention to the present moment and the view from above.⁵⁷

The placing of *N’Oublie pas de vivre* as Hadot’s effective, last philosophical testament then inescapably raises, on one hand, the question of the influence of the modern philosophical visions Hadot was surrounded with, as a student in the 20th century, and his vision of ancient philosophy. At the deepest level, though, Hadot’s choice to write his final work on Goethe’s living debt to ancient thought and arts of living can I think be seen as emblematic of a much more important register of Hadot’s lifework. This was Hadot’s desire not so much to rearticulate, in either elegiac or celebratory mode, any absolute “ancient-modern” opposition. Hadot’s work, it seems to me, stands as its own distinct kind of challenge to the historicist suppositions that usually underlie such “philosophies of history” altogether.⁵⁸ Hadot’s own way of writing for its part attests that as well as “making people love old truths”, as he once described his goal⁵⁹, his larger ambition was to in effect short-circuit the idea that ancient truths are of interest only to antiquarians. Through sympathetically showing how these old truths speak to continuing human needs and interests, these books aim to inspire new generations of modern readers: as he once described this “indirect communication,” “allowing [sic.] a call to be heard that the reader has the freedom to accept or refuse.”⁶⁰ It is in such a remarkable invitation to new generations to “take up, from scratch, the task of learning to read and to re-read these ‘old truths’” (“for their meaning to be understood, these truths must be *lived*, and constantly re-experienced”⁶¹) that Hadot’s own Lynceus-like⁶² task, *elpis* and “highest moment” surely lay. *N’Oublie pas de vivre: Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels*, which closes with its own veritable hymn to a *joie de vie* that is as much Hadotian as Goethian (273), is a fitting last call in this lifework: not a ‘call for papers’, but for new philosophers.

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NOTES

1. The *locus classicus* in translation is Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (London: Blackwell, 1996) which includes the piece “Spiritual Exercises” which so influenced Foucault. This text largely, but not wholly translated Hadot’s *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*. Préface par Arnold Davidson (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 2002). In what follows, I will cite the translation except when, as in the next note, the essay in question was not reproduced in the translated volume.
2. Pierre Hadot, “Il y a nos jours des professeurs de philosophie, mais pas de philosophes”, in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*. Préface par Arnold Davidson (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 2002), 333-343, at 333.
3. See for some of the key studies in the recent upsurge of Anglo-American studies on Stoicism in particular, Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker eds., *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press 1986); Katerina Ierodiakonou ed. *Topics in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1999); A.A. Long ed. *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. A.A. Long (London: Athlone, 1971); A.A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (California: University of California Press, 1996); F.H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* second edition (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2008); Striker, Gisela. “Following Nature: A Study in Stoic Ethics”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1991), 1-73; Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
4. See Hadot’s book on Marcus Aurelius: Pierre Hadot, *Inner Citadel: On the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* trans. Michael Chase (Harvard: Harvard UP, 1998); and on Epictetus: Pierre and Ilsetraut Hadot, *Apprendre à philosopher dans l’Antiquité: L’enseignement du Manuel d’Epictète et son commentaire néoplatonicien* (Poche: Paris, 2004).
5. Cf. John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 17-21, 404 n. 4; 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, esp. 26 f.; Martha Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 353-4.
6. Pierre Hadot, *N’Oublie pas de vivre: Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), 8. In what follows, due to frequency of citation, page numbers for this text will be given by themselves in brackets in the body of the text, so ‘Hadot *N’Oublie pas de vivre*, 65’, becomes (65), etc. All other texts, including by Hadot, will continue to be referenced in full in these endnotes.
7. Space prevents us from considering this chapter as it would deserve here, a consideration which would in any case stretch the competencies of this author.
8. Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, Foreword by Hans-Georg Gadamer, translated by David E. Green (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1964).
9. Goethe was to fairly lash out in response to Hegel’s claims that nature operates by a “dialectic”: “It is probably impossible to say anything more monstrous. To seek to destroy the eternal reality of nature through a bad sophistical joke seems to me unworthy of a rational man.” At Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 14.
10. Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006), 148-50; 194-5; 254-60; 279-281. It is just such a life-affirmative stance, of course, which Nietzsche admired in Goethe, offering the latter in *Twilight of the Idols* the most extraordinary *encomia* which positions Goethe as a veritable harbinger of the *overman*: “Goethe conceived a human being who would be strong, highly educated, skilful in all bodily matters, self-controlled, reverent toward himself, and who might dare to afford the whole range and wealth of being natural, being strong enough for such freedom; the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength, because he knows how to use to his advantage even that from which the average nature would perish ... Such a spirit who has become free stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the faith that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole — he does not negate anymore. Such a faith, however, is the highest of all possible faiths: I have baptized it with the name of Dionysus.” *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, §49.
11. Cf. for two recent works illustrating the point: Julie D. Prandi, ‘*Dare to Be Happy!*’ *A Study of Goethe’s Ethics* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1993); T. K. Seung. 2006. *Goethe, Nietzsche, and Wagner: Their Spinozan Epics of Love and Power*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
12. Hadot in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* had still aligned Goethe with this lineage (Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 221).
13. Cf. Hadot *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 222
14. Hadot, *loc cit*.
15. Hadot *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 230
16. Hadot, *Inner Citadel*.
17. See Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or the Simplicity of Vision* trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1963]). Hadot continued to work on Plotinus, throughout the period of his later work on philosophy as a way of life: see Pierre Hadot, Plotin, *Traité* 28 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987); Pierre Hadot, *Plotin, Traité* 50 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990); Pierre Hadot, *Plotin, Traité* 9 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994).
18. Pierre Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968).

19. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* bk. XII, ch. 1.1-2.
21. Lucius Seneca, *Letters / Moral Letters to Lucilius*, translated by Richard Mott Gummere (from the Loeb Classical Library edition; volume 1 published 1917; volume 2 published 1920; volume 3 published 1925), at www-site http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Moral_letters_to_Lucilius, last accessed September 2013, *Letter* 78, 14; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 228
22. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 229
23. See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 69; 88; 224.
24. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 223.
25. Goethe, *Faust* II 9381-3
26. Goethe, *Faust* II 9412-6.
27. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 61, 69, 84-85, 88, 96, 131-2, 196, 198, 209, 212
28. at Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 233.
29. See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 230. Although Hadot does not cite this passage, it is clear, in line with Hadot's thesis, that Goethe did not overlook the need for such an attention to be cultivated, through repetitive, even daily practice, as per this advice which closely evokes a famous recommendation of Seneca's in *De Ira* III concerning a nightly examination of conscience: "all the same we value the present too little ... discard most things in order to be free of them. A daily review of what has been achieved and experienced has the effect of making a man aware of his activity and contented with it, it leads to consciousness ... in such a daily diary, errors and mistakes come to light of their own accord, the illumination of the past profits the future ..." (Goethe, at Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 212).
30. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 230.
31. John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, 20-22, 404, n. 4-5
32. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 229
33. Plutarch, *Common Conceptions*, 1062a; Cicero, *De Finibus*, 1,19,63; both cited at Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 228, 224.
34. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 242-3.
35. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, ed. Frederic Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2006), 307 note.
36. Plato *Theaetetus*, 173e-174a; cf. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 245-6.
37. Diogenes Laertius VII 128; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 244
38. At Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 238.
39. See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 239, 247
40. Cited by Hadot at *loc cit*.
41. See more generally for the development of this theme Hadot, *N'oublie pas de vivre*, 265-266.
42. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard UP), 176.
43. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 234.
44. Goethe *Faust* I 354-372: *Faust* (2003: a complete translation, with line numbers, and full stage directions) translation by A. S. Kline, at www-site <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/Fausthome.htm>, last accessed September 2013.
45. Goethe, *Faust* II 11439.
46. Goethe, *Faust* II 11452
47. Goethe, *Faust* II 11440-41
48. Goethe, *Faust* II 11539-44; cf. Marshall Bermann, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (London: Penguin 1988), 60-71.
49. Bermann, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, 60.
50. Goethe, *Faust* II 11580-86.
51. Goethe, *Faust* II 11561.
52. Goethe, *Faust* II 11569-70
53. Francis Bacon *Advancement of Learning* 1605 (Great Britain: Britannica, 1952), Book II, chapter XX, sections 6-11; book II, ch. XXI, sec. 1-5.
54. Pierre Hadot, *Études de Patristique et D'Histoire des Concepts* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010), 67-168.
55. See Pierre Hadot, Plotin, *Traité 28* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987); Pierre Hadot, *Plotin, Traité 50* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990); Pierre Hadot, *Plotin, Traité 9* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994).
56. Hadot was an exacting philologist, who cannot lightly be accused of anachronistic readings of ancient texts, although in John M. Cooper's recent *Pursuits of Wisdom* he has received this criticism, concerning an alleged projecting backwards of a late-imperial paradigm of philosophising onto the Hellenistic and classical thinkers. See again John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, 20-22, 404, n. 4-5.
57. More widely, Hadot's claim that to become a philosopher in the ancient sense involved an existential commitment to a

way of life which might, seemingly, precede or be independent of argumentative persuasion, for instance, stands in tension with the way ancient thinkers tended to present the philosophical *bios*. (Hadot 2002, 102, 103, 129, 132, 176; cf. Cooper 2007, 26-27) Cf. Cooper's remark: "there is no reason to think that any ancient philosopher made a choice first to be a Stoic and live a Stoic life, or any other specific philosophical life. For one thing, many of them studied at more than one of the Athenian schools, simultaneously or in sequence, before finally settling in one philosophical milieu or another. First came the decision to live a philosophical life (perhaps, of course, under the influence of the attractions of some particular version of it)—to live according to reason. Even if at the same time one decided to live as a Stoic or an Epicurean or a Platonist, that specific choice was logically subsequent." (Cooper 2007, n. 6) I think Cooper is partially right here, although he is too quick to downplay the role that philosophical reasoning still plays in Hadot's vision of the philosophical life.

58. Notably, Hadot's emphasis in his work on the ancients on the primacy of a practical or ethical role for philosophy, even in its most theoretical or contemplative forms, already unsettles one opposition (primacy of theory/ancient versus practice/modern) around which the distinction of modern from ancient thought has often been articulated. For Hadot, here like the young Jürgen Habermas, all forms of human inquiry are grounded in human needs and interests: the issue being what kinds of such interests and needs the human animal, as a rational animal capable of philosophical inquiry and reflection, is taken as having.

59. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 108.

60. Pierre Hadot, *Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold L. Davidson*, translated by Marc Djaballah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 147; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 285.

61. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 108.

62. The Lync-eyed Lynceus represents a much more contemplative human possibility than that of Goethe's titanic hero: "In all I behold / Ever-comely design," Lynceus tells us, in almost-Stoic terms: "As its virtues unfold / I take pleasure in mine." (Goethe, *Faust* II 11296-9)