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French and Italian Stoicisms

Pierre Hadot

Chapter 13

Pierre Hadot

Stoicism as a Way of Life

Matthew Sharpe

In a series of articles and books beginning in 1972, the philologist and philosopher Pierre Hadot developed a reading of Stoicism as a philosophical way of life that has had widespread influence. Hadot's conception of Stoicism is given its most extended expression in his magisterial 1992 study of Marcus Aurelius, *La Citadelle intérieure: Introduction aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle*, together with a later work, co-authored with Ilsetraut Hadot (2004), on Epictetus' *Handbook* and the Neoplatonist Simplicius' commentary on this text. Since the translation of *La Citadelle intérieure* (1998, henceforth cited parenthetically as IC), alongside Hadot's cognate studies on ancient philosophy more widely in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (1996c) and *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (2000), Hadot's conception of Stoicism has been taken up by a range of global, internet-based "Stoic" communities, committed to proselytizing and practicing Stoicism as a manner of life.

Part 1 of this chapter examines the bases and sources of Hadot's approach to ancient philosophy as a way of life (*manière de vivre, mode/genre de vie*), situating it in relation to Thomas Bénatouil's distinction between two traditions in the twentieth-century French receptions of Stoicism. Part 2 addresses Hadot's reading of the Roman Stoic Epictetus, which provides what he terms the "key" to his conception of Stoicism as a lived philosophy: the notion of three exercise-topics or "disciplines" (those of action, assent, and desire) aligned with the three parts of Stoic philosophical discourse (those of ethics, logic, and physics). Part 3 examines

Hadot's reading of Marcus Aurelius in this light, attentive particularly to Hadot's remarkable development of the notion of "lived physics" as he finds it in the *Meditations*.

1. Hadot's way of reading the ancients: sources and contexts

For Hadot, to become a Stoic in the ancient world was not simply to agree to a set of theoretical claims, or to learn to use a distinctive technical vocabulary. It was to undertake to deeply internalize Stoic theoretical discourse, so that it could become one's own inner discourse, reshaping one's beliefs, motivations, and actions (Hadot 2010a: 210–15). To enable this, the student would be enjoined by a teacher to undertake regimens of what Hadot famously called—in the article of 1977 (1996a) bearing this title—"spiritual exercises." Such exercises include practices of listening, reading, and inquiry, like we practice today as students of philosophy (1996a: 81–2). Yet others of these exercises (like forms of fasting or bodily exercise) are not simply or primarily "intellectual," whence Hadot's wider adjective: "spiritual." They instead aim at the therapy of the passions (1996a: 83, 86, 94–5) or transforming students' perceptions of the world, cultivating what Hadot calls an "objective spirit" capable of viewing particular experiences *sub specie aeternitatis* (1996a: 95–101). These exercises call upon the will, imagination, and memory of the agent, as well as their reason—indeed, "the entire psychism" or *esprit* of the philosophical aspirant (1996a: 82).

In his contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, Thomas Bénatouil (2015: 541–4) hence positions Hadot within one of two lineages which he identifies in French receptions of Stoicism in the twentieth century. Hadot, Bénatouil contends, belongs within an existentialist-influenced, "experience-" or "will"-based reception of Stoicism. This reception prioritizes Stoic ethics and looks back to Jean-Paul Sartre and before him, Alain (Bénatouil 2015: 541–4). This tradition is opposed to a competing lineage, which positions Stoicism "as a logic of events and a system," as in the works of Émile Bréhier, Victor Goldschmidt, and Jules

Vuillemin (546-9). For Bénatouil, indeed, who is here echoing criticisms of Thomas Flynn (2005), Hadot can be read as “appl[ying] to the whole of philosophy as it was pursued in Antiquity the existentialist principle of the priority of choice over knowledge, which Sartre traced back to Stoicism” (2015: 549).

In fact, both the genealogical and metaphilosophical picture is importantly more complex than this. Bénatouil rightly points to the formative influence of Henri Bergson on Hadot’s thought (Hadot 2009: 9). Hadot also considered writing his doctoral thesis on Heidegger and Rilke, before opting for Marius Victorinus (Hadot 2009: 19). Nevertheless, alongside Hadot’s own abiding interest in forms of mysticism—originating in his own youthful experience, “provoked by a sense of the presence of the world, or of the Whole” (2009: 15)—other influences shaped Hadot’s approach to Stoicism and ancient philosophy more generally.

The principal question or problem Hadot’s readings of ancient philosophy respond to arises from Hadot’s training as a philologist, working on the interpretation of ancient texts. To quote Hadot at some length, since the passage so directly qualifies his “existentialist” reception:

Concerning the genesis of the notion of philosophy as a choice of life or of the notion of spiritual exercises in my work, it should also be said that I began by reflecting on this problem [of] how to understand the apparent inconsistencies of certain philosophers... This is a rather important point, I believe. I did not begin with more or less edifying considerations about philosophy as therapy, and so on ... No, it was really a strictly literary problem ... for what reasons do ancient philosophical writings seem incoherent? Why is it so difficult to recognize their rational plane? (2009: 59)

In this philological light, it was Hadot’s 1959 encounter with Ludwig Wittgenstein, as against Bergson, Heidegger, or Sartre, that would prove decisive in shaping his readings of the ancients.

For the later Wittgenstein, Hadot saw, each speech-act gains its significance only within the context of a particular “form of life.” It supposes an entire situation or “language game” within which agents with divergent interests and aims are trying to do specific things, according to a series of usually-unstated norms and expectations. Outside of this informing context, any utterance will tend to lose or alter its meaning. So, Hadot uses the example of the laconic saying: “God is dead” (1962: 339–40). He compares its significances within ancient religious cults, Christian theology, Nietzsche’s *Gay Science*, or a philosopher’s mouthing it, having been prompted on camera to “say something philosophical.” To understand ancient texts, Hadot hence came to hypothesize, we will need to resituate them within the historical forms of life in which they originated. We should ask questions like: what role did philosophical writings play in teaching, and what relationship did they have to the spoken teachings within the ancient schools? For which readerships were they intended: school insiders or laypeople, advanced or beginning pupils? And what goals did they set out to achieve, not simply at the conceptual level, but in terms of their perlocutionary effects upon these audiences? Could it not be, Hadot came thereby to propose, that the “inconsistencies” we lament in ancient texts hail less from the texts themselves, than from our failure to conceive how ancient philosophers were engaged in playing more and different language games than we play in the later modern world (1962: 340)?

Hadot’s article “Jeux de langage et philosophie” hence ends with a passage which effectively lays out his research itinerary concerning ancient philosophy for the coming four decades:

It would be necessary, in this light, to consider as different language games these so profoundly diverse literary genres, whether the dialogue, the protreptic or exhortation, the hymn or prayer ... the handbook, the exegetical commentary, the dogmatic treatise and the

meditation ... One will often note that the very fact of being situated in one of these traditions predetermines the very content of the doctrine which is expressed in this language game: the “common places” are not so innocent as one might believe. (Hadot 1962: 342–3)

Arnold Davidson comments (at Hadot 2009: 58) that it is in fact in this 1962 article that Hadot first uses his signature notion of “spiritual exercises.”¹ Hadot concurred:

It was also in relation to language games that I had the idea that philosophy is also a spiritual exercise because, ultimately, spiritual exercises are frequently language games ... Moreover, in the same context, Wittgenstein also used the expression “form of life.” This also inspired me to understand philosophy as a form ... or way of life. (2009: 59)

Relative to Bénatouil’s “existentialist” and “systematizing” lineages within twentieth-century French receptions of Stoicism, we begin to see that Hadot might better be positioned as initiating a post-Wittgensteinian *tertium quid* or stream. This stream will look at ancient Stoicism, and philosophy more widely, as a form of life: “a phenomenon in the sense of not only a mental phenomenon, but also a social, sociological phenomenon” (Hadot 2009: 35). It will understand Stoic philosophizing as a situated, embodied, intersubjective activity, with institutional forms, protreptic and pedagogical as well as doctrinal dimensions, and more or less established (if evolving) literary, rhetorical and argumentative conventions. It will begin from an openness to the possibility that ancient philosophers were trying to do different things with words than we do today when we publish monographs, articles, chapters and reviews. Above all, it will try to read ancient authors’ texts in the ways that they understood themselves, within the ancient philosophical forms of life from whence they hailed, in ways we will see vividly in Part 3 below.

To emphasize Hadot's debt to Wittgenstein is not to downplay two other decisive influences on his conception of ancient philosophy and the Stoics. The first of these is Paul Rabbow's 1954 study *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike*, which Hadot tells us that he had read by around 1968 (2009: 35–6). Rabbow contended that the practices stipulated for the Christian aspirant in Ignatius Loyola's work, *Spiritual Exercises*, had antecedents in the ancient pagan philosophical and rhetorical schools. In these ancient schools, Rabbow had argued, we see the prescription of "procedures or determinate acts, intended to influence oneself, carried out with the express goal of achieving a moral effect ... It always ... repeats itself, or at least is linked together with other acts to form a methodical ensemble" (at Hadot 1996b: 127). Hadot's conception of philosophical "spiritual exercises" is avowedly indebted to Rabbow's conception of these "moral exercises," like the premeditation of death or of evils, at the same time as he contests Rabbow's restriction of the adjective "spiritual" to describe only Christian practices (1996b: 126–7).

The second, decisive influence upon Hadot's approach to Stoicism is the work of his wife, Ilsetraut Hadot. When the two met in 1964, Hadot reflects that he had had no idea that Ilsetraut was working on "a doctorate under the direction of Paul Moraux at the *Freie Universität* of Berlin on the theme of Seneca and the tradition of spiritual direction in antiquity," (2009: 34) which would be published in 1969. His wife's work, Hadot adds, "has exercised a very important influence on the evolution of my thought" (2009: 34). Indeed, to Ilsetraut Hadot's extraordinary study of Seneca, Pierre Hadot discernibly owes several key dimensions of his approach to ancient philosophy: firstly, his developing understanding of the persona of the ancient philosopher as a "spiritual director"²: a persona that Ilsetraut Hadot situates within ancient cultures of friendship and patronage, and traces back to Homeric councillor-figures like Phoenix

in the *Iliad* (2014: 36–45). Secondly, Hadot will return repeatedly throughout his *oeuvre* to key passages in his wife’s book on Seneca and her contemporary article on Epicurean pedagogy, in which she proposes that ancient philosophical teaching was carried out on two planes (I. Hadot 1969). On the first, in a centrifugal process, the student was progressively exposed to increasingly demanding conceptual material. On the second, in a centripetal movement, the student was frequently returned to the principal teachings of the school, so he would deeply internalize these dogmata as the basis for his way of life. It is precisely as an exercise in this diastolic-systolic spiritual direction that Ilsetraut Hadot proposes we read Seneca’s *Letters to Lucilius*, a text to which Pierre frequently recurs, but which he never makes the object of his own dedicated treatment (2014: 116–17).

With these sources of Pierre Hadot’s distinct approach to ancient philosophy in place, we turn to his dedicated readings of Epictetus and then Marcus Aurelius.

2. From the three parts of philosophy to the three disciplines: Hadot’s Epictetus

There can be no question about the centrality of Stoicism within Pierre Hadot’s larger conception of ancient philosophy as a way of life. Alongside Plotinus, on whom Hadot continued to work until the end of his life, Marcus Aurelius is the only other ancient to whom Hadot devoted a whole monograph. Stoic philosophy features centrally in Hadot’s ground-breaking 1977 “Spiritual Exercises” article, as well as in important pieces on the division of the parts of philosophy in antiquity (1979), the spiritual exercise of the “view from above” (1988; 1993a), the figure of the sage (1991), and the value of the present moment in the ancient philosophies (1993b). Surveying the *comptes rendus* of Hadot’s courses at the École Pratique des Hautes Études between 1964 and 1980 (Hadot 2010d), we see Hadot beginning to lecture on Marcus Aurelius from 1971-1972, teaching on Stoic logic from 1972 to 1974, then returning to the *Meditations* between 1976 and 1978. Before the appearance of *La Citadelle intérieure*:

Introduction aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle in 1992, Hadot had published pieces on physics as a spiritual exercise in Marcus Aurelius (1972), on the interpretive “key” he finds in Epictetus’s *Discourses* for the interpretation of the *Meditations* (1978), on Marcus’ alleged opium addiction (1984), and on the Stoics’ division of the parts of philosophy (1991).

In fact, Hadot takes perhaps the key distinction in his metaphilosophical work on ancient thought, that between philosophy as a way of life and “philosophical discourse,” from Diogenes Laertius’ account of the doctrines of the Stoics (DL 7.39-41).³ The Stoics, Diogenes Laertius tells us, divided “philosophical doctrines” (*hoi kata philosophian logoi*) into three parts: ethics, logic, and physics (DL 7.39). Philosophy (*tēn philosophian*), by contrast, was depicted by them as an animal, an egg, a field, a city: “[n]o single part, some Stoics declare, is independent of any other part, but all blend together” (DL 7.40). Moreover, some—like Zeno of Tarsus—“say that these [the distinctions between ethics, logic, and physics] are divisions not of discourse (*tou logou*), but of philosophy itself (*autēs tēs philosophias*)” (DL 7.41). For Hadot, what these passages indicate is the non-identity for the Stoics between “philosophy itself” and “philosophical discourse,” as a more or less systematic doctrine, divisible into different parts (Hadot 2011a: 220–1; 1991: 205–6). For the Stoics, as Hadot reads them, “philosophy itself, being an exercise of virtue and wisdom, is a single act, renewed at each instant” (2010a: 220). This act, undertaken by an embodied, living person, will be shaped and justified by the philosophical discourse which the student has deeply internalised. But it is irreducible to this discourse: a work of formation, as against information, in one of Hadot’s favourite formulations, drawn from Victor Goldschmidt (e.g. Hadot 1962: 341). We have in this distinction between philosophy and philosophical discourse, in effect, the ‘Stoicizing’ template for understanding ancient philosophies as modes of life that Hadot contends can be applied to Epicureanism,

Scepticism, and even to the classical Platonic and Peripatetic philosophies (Hadot 2000: 172–233).

So, what then in Hadot's view are the "general characteristics of Stoicism" (IC 74), as such a lived philosophy? In key places, Hadot will refer above all to Émile Bréhier's work to explain his orientation, in a way which again suggests how Hadot triangulates Bénatouil's "existentialist-systematizing" dichotomy of twentieth-century French receptions of Stoicism. At stake is what Bréhier identifies as the ultimate, unifying ontological grounding of Stoicism. This grounding resides in its doctrine of a single unifying *Logos* which structures physical events and the relations between human beings, with which the human mind—its small fragment—can harmonize itself. Because of this interconnectedness of all things, Bréhier comments, in words Hadot repeatedly cites:

It is impossible that the good man would not be a physicist and a dialectician, for it is impossible to realise rationality separately in these three domains, and for example to completely grasp the presence of reason in the unfolding of events within the universe without realising, at the same time, the demands of rationality in one's own conduct.⁴

This is not to say, for Bréhier or for Hadot, that we cannot distinguish ethics, logic and physics, in order to teach and understand. It is nevertheless clear, Hadot stresses, that there was disagreement within the school as to which part of the philosophical *logoi* to teach first, given that each part was so closely interrelated with, indeed in different ways dependent upon the others (DL 7.40-41). This interrelation between the parts of philosophical discourse the Stoics characterized as one of *antakolouthia* ("reciprocal implication"), as Hadot notes, citing Victor Goldschmidt (2010b: 136; Goldschmidt 1977: 66). The Stoics hence exemplify what Hadot in his works on ancient divisions of the parts of philosophy describes as a non-hierarchical mode of

such division, characterized by “a dynamic continuity and reciprocal interpenetration between the parts of philosophy” (2010b: 135).⁵ With Bréhier and Max Pohlenz (a pioneering German scholar of Stoicism) in view, Hadot traces this feature of Stoicism back to its systematic bases:

This unity of the parts of philosophy is founded on the dynamic unity of reality in Stoic philosophy. It is the same *Logos* which produces the world, which illuminates human beings in their faculty of reasoning and which is expressed in human discourse, all the while staying fundamentally identical to itself in all the degrees of reality. Physics thus has for its object the *Logos* of universal nature. Ethics... has as its object the *Logos* in the reasonable nature of human beings. Finally, logic examines this same *Logos* as it is expressed in human discourse. (Hadot 2010b: 135)

There is thus an apparent tension that Hadot faces between the division of the three parts of Stoic philosophical discourse and the single living “act” of Stoic philosophizing he identifies. This tension is resolved by Hadot in 1978 in the pivotal essay, “Une clé des *Pensées* de Marc Aurèle: les trois *topoi* philosophiques selon Épictète.” This essay presents for the first time what becomes the organizing claim in Hadot’s understanding of Stoicism as a way of life. We mean the claim that the three parts of Stoic philosophical discourse correspond to what Epictetus in the *Discourses* identifies as three exercise-topics or *topoi*. As Hadot acknowledges, the term *topos* is used in Stoic texts to identify the parts of philosophical discourse (IC 90). Yet, Hadot contends that, in Epictetus, the same term is used to also identify “the domains in which the practice of philosophical spiritual exercises should be situated” (1978: 170). Alongside *Discourses* 1.4.11, Hadot’s principal proof text for this claim is *Discourses* 3.2.1:

There are three topics (*topoi*) in philosophy, in which whoever aims to be beautiful (*kalon*) and good (*agathon*) must exercise himself (*peri hous askēthēnai dei*): that of [1]

the desires and aversions, that he may not be disappointed of the one, nor incur the other; that of [2] the pursuits and avoidances, and, in general, the duties of life ...; the third [3] includes integrity of mind and prudence, and, in general, whatever belongs to the judgment.⁶

The third *topos* here, Hadot contends, is readily identified with logic, “which constitutes a method of education of [one’s] exterior and inner discourse” (1978: 172). The second *topos*, concerning the duties of life and actions, is readily identified with ethics. The connection between the exercise of desires and aversions and physics “is more difficult to grasp and nevertheless, on reflection, it is also completely evident” (1978: 172). Hadot claims:

The discipline of desire consists on the one hand of only desiring what depends upon us, and on the other hand, in accepting with joy what does not depend upon us, but comes from universal nature, that is to say, for the Stoics, God himself. This acceptance thus demands a ‘physical’ vision of events, capable of stripping these events of the emotive and anthropomorphic representations that we project onto them, so as to place them in the universal order of nature, in a cosmic vision. (1978: 172)

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this claim concerning a “correspondence” between the three parts of philosophical discourse and the three *topoi* “in which whoever aims to be beautiful and good must exercise himself” (Epictetus, *Diss.* 3.2.1) in Hadot’s vision of Stoicism.⁷ Hadot will call these exercise-*topoi*, respectively, those of a lived (*vecue*) logic, a lived ethics, and a lived physics (2010a: 216–20), juxtaposing them to theoretical logic, ethics and physics as parts of philosophical discourse, as per [figure 1](#) (IC 90, 44).

Hadot is very open, especially in this 1978 piece, about assigning this key to his reading of Stoicism as a way of life to Adolph Friedrich Bonhoeffer, writing almost 90 years previously,

in *Epictet und die Stoa: Untersuchungen zur stoischen Philosophie* (1894).⁸ The basis of Epictetus' conception of the three exercise-topics, according to Hadot and Bonhoeffer, lies in a conception of the psyche which seems to have been introduced into Stoicism by Epictetus, perhaps on the model of the Platonic tripartition of the soul (IC 83, 86; I. & P. Hadot 2004: 29).⁹ This conception sees it as performing three "fundamental activities" which "cover all the field of reality, as well as the whole of psychological life" (Hadot 1978: 173; IC 84)

The first of these activities is the forming of judgments. Herein, says Hadot, "the soul tells itself what a given object or event is; in particular, it tells itself what the object is for the soul, that is, what it is in the soul's view" (IC 84). Desire and impulse, the activities at play in the other exercise-*topoi*, both depend upon this capacity for forming judgments. If we desire something, it is because we have assented to the judgment that it is beneficial to us. If we have the impulse to do something, similarly, it will be because we have assented to the idea that it is a good thing (IC 84). As Hadot comments: "leaving aside doctrinal refinements, we can say that for the Stoics in general, desire and impulses to action are essentially acts of assent" (IC 125).

The key principle governing Stoic lived logic is that articulated in *Enchiridion* V: that it is not things which trouble people, but their beliefs (*dogmata*) concerning those things. Marcus Aurelius will echo Epictetus' formula, when he comments that "everything is a matter of judgment" for us, or indeed, that "if you are grieving about some exterior thing, then it is not that thing which is troubling you, but your judgment about that thing." (2.15; 8.47; IC, 125-7, 107) The sage will only assent to those representations which are "comprehensive" or, as Hadot translates *katalēptikē*, "adequate." As he explains, the usual translation:

gives the impression that the Stoics believed a representation to be true when it
'comprehends' or seizes the contents of reality. In Epictetus, however, we can glimpse a

wholly different meaning of the term: for him, a representation is *katalēptikē* when it does not go beyond what is given, but is able to stop at what is perceived, without adding anything extraneous to that which is perceived. (IC 84)

Epictetus accordingly tells his students at *Discourses* 3.8.1-2 that “[i]n the same way that we train ourselves to be able to face up to sophistic interrogations, we ought also to train ourselves to face up to representations (*phantasiai*), for they too ask us questions” (IC 84). What kind of questions? Epictetus illustrates by examples:

A certain person’s son is dead. [What do you think of that?] Answer: the thing is not within the power of the will: it is not an evil. A father has disinherited a certain son. What do you think of it? It is a thing beyond the power of the will, not an evil. Caesar has condemned a person. [What do you think of that?] It is a thing beyond the power of the will, not an evil. The man is grieved at this. Grief is a thing which depends on the will: it is an evil. He has borne the condemnation bravely. That is a thing within the power of the will: it is a good. (*Diss.* 3.3.3 ff.)

This veritable “representation [*sic*] of moral life as a dialectical exercise” (IC 85), as Hadot calls it, hence involves an exercise in restricting what the individual assents to solely to what presents itself in events. We must train ourselves to withhold assent, by contrast, to any and all extraneous “value-judgments” concerning those events: indeed, from any evaluations that do not concern virtue or vice, according to the Stoic teaching that virtue is the only good. A constant self-reflective vigilance is thereby enjoined of the Stoic. As Epictetus adapts Socrates’ apology: “the unexamined representation is not worth having” (*Diss.* 3.12.14-15; IC 97, 111, 119).

Turning to the second *topos*: virtue is the only good, for the Stoics. Yet the sage must concern himself with “indifferent” things beyond his control, to the extent that he wishes to act

in the world. The discipline of lived ethics for Hadot concerns itself with the “impulse to act, as well as action itself” (IC 86). Its preeminent material is the *kathēkonta*: “that is, those actions which, in all probability, may be considered as ‘appropriate’ to human nature” (IC 86), closely related to the Stoics’ theorization of the differential value (*axia*) indifferent things have, depending upon whether they accord with, or oppose our nature (IC 203-204). The *kathēkonta*, Hadot notes, are grounded in the natural human impulses to self-preservation and sociability: “thus, both active impulse and action itself will be exercises above all in the domain of society, of the state, of the family, and of relations between human beings in general” (IC 86). Following Max Pohlenz, Hadot thus distinguishes chapters in Epictetus’ *Encheiridion* on duties towards the gods (XXXI-II), and duties towards oneself in the context of one’s social relations (XXXIII, XXXV-XLV). At stake in the latter chapters are counsels against engaging in gossip or raucous laughter, making oaths or attending banquets; to moderate one’s bodily desires; not to defend oneself against criticisms or take part in spectacles, boast, engage in vulgar obscenities, or be anxious before those in power (I. & P. Hadot 2004: 37); then again, duties regarding how to relate to women or comport oneself at table, and how to choose a profession (I. & P. Hadot 2004: 38). Here again, Hadot notes the importance that monitoring one’s representations plays in the Stoic life, testimony to the *antakolouthia* of the different exercise *topoi*, like the different *topoi* within philosophical discourse (Hadot 1978: 173):

The last chapters... highlight the importance of inner discourse... (to say to oneself this or that) which presides over action... [F]or example, in the attitudes which we take with regard to the other, it is necessary to tell oneself that the latter has believed himself to be acting well (chapters XLII and XLV)...; it is necessary equally to know how to find the discourse which will prevent us from becoming angry at another (by telling oneself, for

example, not “he has injured me,” but “he is my brother”), or which will prevent ourselves from feeling superior to others (chapters XLIII-IV). (I. & P. Hadot 2004: 38)

Lived physics, as we have indicated, has as its goal the reshaping of the desires of the Stoic. In the words of *Enchiridion* VIII, s/he should not “desire that things happen as he wish[es] but wish that they happen as they do happen.” We desire things which we consider beneficial and evince aversion towards those things we consider harmful. Yet, Hadot emphasizes, Epictetus is very clear that we can only know what is truly good and bad for us, if we understand our place in the larger Whole of nature: ethics logically presupposes physics. It is necessary thus to “examine what, according to Chrysippus, is the administration of the world, and what place rational animals occupy therein. Then, from this point of view, consider who you are, and what good and evil are for you” (*Diss.* 1.10.10; IC 94). In short, we must try to reflectively shape what we desire “according to nature (*kata phusin*)” as described by Stoic physics. To struggle against what is necessary, because willed by Nature or Zeus, according to the providential order, is an exercise in futility. As the *Encheiridion* counsels:

if you wish your children, and your wife, and your friends to live forever, you are stupid;
for you wish to be in control of things which you cannot, you wish for things that belong to others to be your own ... (*Ench.* XIV; cf. *Diss.* 3.24.84; IC 119, 111)

Hadot stresses that the goal of lived physics in Epictetus “consists not only in accepting what happens,” in a more or less fatalistic spirit, “but in contemplating the works of God with admiration,” with a more or less grateful disposition (IC 96). With this in view, he cites Epictetus’ exhortation early in the *Discourses*: “for us, nature’s final accomplishment is contemplation, becoming aware, and a way of living in harmony with nature. Make sure that you do not die without having contemplated all of these realities ...” (*Diss.* 1.6.19-25; IC 96).

Nevertheless, from 1972 onwards, Hadot develops his thoughts about this discipline of lived physics, in particular, much more in relation to the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius than in relation to Epictetus, the philosopher-slave.

We turn now to Hadot's reading of Marcus Aurelius and his *Meditations*.

3. Hadot's Marcus Aurelius

The history of the reception of Stoicism can be written, in one dimension, according to which of the ancient sources authors have had access to or focused upon: whether the Roman Stoics Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, or the fragments of the early Stoa. (The works of Musonius Rufus, Cleomedes, Hierocles, and Herculaneum papyri have not yet made much of an impact beyond highly specialized studies). Hadot's reception of Stoicism focuses primarily upon Marcus Aurelius, with two qualifications. The first is that, following an anecdote Marcus reports in book I of the *Meditations* concerning his teacher Rusticus, Hadot reads Marcus as, above all, a faithful disciple of Epictetus (1.7; IC 9-10, 66-69). The second is that, in contrast to most anglophone commentators, Hadot sees both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius as in no way epigones, lacking the philosophical rigor of the Hellenistic founders, and prioritizing ethics to the exclusion of physics and logic (IC 64). As Hadot writes, invoking Bréhier and Bonhoeffer:

Epictetus himself ... went back to the origins ... It can be said that Epictetus subscribes to the most orthodox Stoic tradition: that which, beginning with Chrysippus, apparently continued through Archidemus and Antipater; he makes no allusions to Panaetius or Posidonius. Through Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius was able to go back to the purest Stoic sources. (IC 82)

What arguably most singles out Hadot's reading of the Roman Stoics is his simultaneous stress on the lived dimension of this philosophy *and* his denial that this implies a downgrading of the theoretical dimensions of Stoicism. As we mentioned, Hadot spent three years teaching on

Stoic and ancient logic in 1972-1974 (cf. 2010d). Émile Bréhier's and Victor Goldschmidt's accounts of the Stoic system remain formative for Hadot's understanding of Stoicism, as we will continue to see. Nevertheless, Hadot sees each part of Stoic philosophical discourse as essential, precisely for the role it can play in shaping the inner discourse, hence the judgments, impulses, and desires of the Stoic. In this sense only might we say that each part of Stoicism is "ethicized," in Hadot, at the same time as it keeps its distinct principles and theoretical integrity.

Hadot's first contribution to the reception of Marcus Aurelius involves his attempt to recover a sense of the literary form of the so-called *Meditations*, so that we can understand its philosophical intentionality. Commentators across the centuries have tried to read the text as the draft of an unwritten treatise, or else as a "*journal intime*" (IC 25-7). In the twentieth century, Dodds claimed to see in the text testimony to Marcus' having suffered an "identity crisis," giving vent to his "morbid" propensities (IC 246); the psychosomaticians, Dailly and Effenterre, discerned in the *Meditations* the symptomatic outpourings of an individual suffering from a gastric ulcer (IC 246-8); while Africa would see the text as issuing from its author's opium addiction (IC 252-5; cf. Hadot 1984). For Hadot, closer here to Ian Rutherford's 1989 work on which he draws on several occasions (IC 13, 257-280; 2014: 243-4, 275), these readings highlight the grave interpretive errors which moderns can make, when they remain unaware of the language games in which an ancient philosophical text was situated.

The literary form of the *Meditations* is, of course, very different from the genres in which scholars write on philosophy today (IC 28-30). The text is divided into some four hundred and seventy-three sections and twelve books. Yet the divisions between what we enumerate as books were marked only by two-line breaks in the *Vaticanus* manuscript, and the sections were not numbered (IC 28). Some sections are aphorisms: "receive wealth without arrogance and be ready

to let it go” (8.33); or, famously, “the best revenge is to not become like him who has harmed you” (6.6). Others involve reflections spanning over forty lines of modern editions. Yet others are highly rhetorically-crafted (IC 257-260). There are staged dialogues (e.g. 4.12) and compelling images, like: “if a man should stand by a limpid pure spring, and curse it, the spring never ceases sending up potable water... How then shall you possess a perpetual fountain?” (8.51; cf. 7.59). Perhaps most puzzlingly from our perspective, there is a great deal of repetition, sometimes direct, as for example the phrase: “nothing is so capable of producing greatness of soul” (3.11.2; X.11.1), but more often with small changes. Hence, compare: “how could that which does not make a man worse, make life worse,” with “that which does not make a man worse than he is, does not make his life worse either” (2.11.4 with 4.8; cf. IC 49-51).

To approach such a text, Hadot contends (per Part 1), we need to understand for whom it was written and why, placing it in the context of the Stoicism which Marcus Aurelius had embraced in his youth (IC 11-4). It is of the highest importance for Hadot that the text appears never to have been intended for publication, instead being found amidst Marcus’ mortal remains. Marcus Aurelius himself thus appears to have been the only intended reader of these notes, as the title *Ta Eis Heauton* (“Things for Himself”) given it—according to Hadot—by Arethas in the ninth or tenth century registered (IC 24). If we look for any Stoic rationale for such an endeavor, we find Epictetus enjoining in the very opening chapter of the *Discourses*, concerning the key Stoic distinctions: “These are the thoughts that those who pursue philosophy should ponder, these are the lessons they should write down every day (*kath’hēmeran graphein*), in these they should exercise themselves” (*Diss.* 1.1.25). Again, in book III, Epictetus enjoins his interlocutors to: “[l]et these thoughts be at your command (*prokheiron*) by night and day: *write these things (tauta graphein)*, read them, talk of them ...” (*Diss.* 3.24.103 [our italics]) To write down the

basic principles of Stoic philosophy, these Epictetan sayings indicate, was an essential spiritual exercise in the ongoing efforts of the *prokoptōn* (“progressor”) to internalize the Stoic principles, so they could be called upon readily, facing challenges of different kinds. Such ‘memory-aids’ (*hupomnēmata*) could then be read over, in order to recall to mind what once had been assented to, in order to “reactivate” these ideas at need (IC 30-4; cf. Foucault 1997). Marcus himself indicates this much, Hadot notes, when he asks himself:

How can our principles become dead, unless the impressions [thoughts] which correspond to them are extinguished? But it is in your power continuously to fan these thoughts into a flame. I can have that opinion about anything which I ought to have. If I can, why am I disturbed? (7.2)

In this light, the frequent repetitions and circling around established themes takes on rationality. Many of these fragments (like 2.1, 4.3, 4.26, 7.22.2, 8.21.2, 11.18, 12.7, 12.8, and 12.26), Hadot argues, condense into “chapter-heads (*kephalaia*)”—entire chains of Stoic reasoning concerning ethics, logic, and physics: as such, both reflecting and facilitating Marcus’ effort to continually recall these *dogmata* to mind (IC 37-40). Such features of the *Meditations*, and not least the frequency of repetitions, thus do not reflect Marcus’ intellectual turpitude, or the work’s status as a putative “draft” (IC 25-8). Once we understand the genre of the work as involving *hupomnēmata*, we can see that these features reflect *the sheer difficulty of realizing* the Stoic philosophy in impulse, thought, and deed. As Hadot reflects at the end of *The Inner Citadel*:

In world literature, we find lots of preachers, lesson-givers, and censors, who moralise to others with complacency, irony, cynicism, or bitterness, but it is extremely rare to find a person training himself to live and to think like a human being ... the personal effort appears ... in the repetitions, the multiple variations developed around the same theme

and the stylistic effort as well, which always seeks for a striking, effective formula ... when we read [the *Meditations*] we get the impression of encountering not the Stoic system, although Marcus constantly refers to it, but a man of good will, who does not hesitate to criticise and to examine himself, who constantly takes up again the task of exhorting and persuading himself, and of finding the words which will help him to live, and to live well. (IC 312-3; cf. Hadot 1972: 229)

Are there then no organizing principles, underlying the circumambulations of Marcus' *hupomnēmata*, in Hadot's perspective? As we have indicated, from as early as 1978, Hadot was convinced that Epictetus' division of the three exercise-topics we examined in Part 2 also shapes Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. Hadot thus draws our attention to threefold formulations in Marcus' apparently aleatory reflections, which reproduce Epictetus' division of the disciplines of assent (logic), desire (physics), and action (ethics). Thus, consider, with our interpolations:

What then must you practice? ... [1] thoughts devoted to justice and actions in the service of the community [ethics/action], [2] speech which can never deceive [assent/logic] and [3] a disposition which gladly accepts all that happens, as necessary, as usual, as flowing from a principle and source of the same kind [desire/physics]. (*Med.* 4.33.5; cf. 8.7, 9.7) Everywhere and at all times it is in your power to [1] piously acquiesce in your present condition [desire/physics], and [2] to behave justly to those who are about you [ethics/action], and [3] to exert your skill upon your present thoughts, that nothing shall steal into them without being well examined [logic/assent]. (*Med.* 7.54)

We cannot examine in detail all the exemplifications and adumbrations of the three Stoic disciplines that Hadot examines in *The Inner Citadel*. What interests us is only what Hadot sees as *different* about the practice of these disciplines in Marcus' text, compared to Epictetus'.

Concerning the discipline of assent, for example, Hadot spends most time in *The Inner Citadel* analyzing *Meditations* 12.3 under the heading of “circumscribing the self” (IC 112-125). *Meditations* 12.3 sees Marcus enjoining himself to “separate yourself” from everything that is not his true self: the *hegemonikon* or “governing part” (IC 119). If you separate yourselves from the four “circles” of what others do and say; the past and future; our involuntary, proto-emotional responses to externals; and “the rushing tide [of external events] which bathes you with its waves,” then “you will be able to live the time that is left to you, up until your death, untroubled, benevolently, and serenely.” The general principle presiding over this exercise, Hadot notes, is the opening distinction of Epictetus’ *Encheiridion* I (IC 114). It is a question of directing attention only to what is within one’s control. Yet this exercise is not simply then one of assent: it also implicates ethics, how to respond to others, and physics, concerning “the rushing tide which bathes you” (IC 118). One could be forgiven for supposing here a Platonic influence on the *Meditations*, or on Hadot’s reading of the text (cf. [Plato], *Alc. I*, 133b-134a; *Phaedo*, 64c-67e).¹⁰

Concerning ethics or the discipline of action, Hadot again spends a good deal of his time on an exercise that we might associate more closely with the disciplines of assent or desire: namely, the practice of acting with “reservation” concerning our action’s *skopoi* (goals, targets), whose achievement is beyond our control (IC 190-3, 204-6). As Hadot notes, this cultivation of a sage caution in action is closely tied to the *praemeditatio malorum*, the effort to anticipate even the worst “outcomes” in advance, so one is not taken by surprise (IC 206-8). Hadot also sees in Marcus a greater interest in justice than we find in Epictetus, so that it “is so important that [concern with justice] is sometimes sufficient to define the discipline of action, as for instance in 7.54: ‘To conduct oneself with justice with regard to the people present’” (IC 218). Hadot will

even venture that the three exercise disciplines, in Marcus, are aligned with the specific virtues of justice (ethics), temperance (desire), and wisdom (assent), in ways not modelled in Epictetus (IC 323-238; cf. 44).

Nevertheless, it is above all in the discipline of desire or physics that Hadot sees Marcus Aurelius as going farthest beyond his teacher. Marcus' physical reflections were already the subject of Hadot's ground-breaking 1972 essay, "La Physique comme exercice spirituel ou pessimisme et optimisme chez Marc Aurèle," and they occupy the longest chapter in *The Inner Citadel* (IC 128-180). In "La Physique," it is above all Marcus' exercise of "dividing and disenchanting" seductive appearances, skirted above in Epictetus, that Hadot focuses upon. The most famous instance of this exercise involves Marcus enjoining himself to look at Falernian wine as only grape juice; the imperial purple as dyed fabric; and sex as the rubbing together of two bodies, ending in the ejaculation of slimy fluid (6.13; IC 165-6; cf. Hadot 1972: 229-33). Hadot contends that such an exercise, far from expressing Marcus' morbidity, is carried out by the philosopher-emperor "in a quite determinate manner, in accordance with a quite determinate method" (IC 164): notably, when he reminds himself to analytically divide the form, matter, and duration of the thing he might be tempted to valorize (Hadot 1972: 232). Marcus' repeated reminders to recall the transience of phenomena—such as when he asks himself to "acquire a method for contemplating how all things are transformed into each other" (*Med.* 4.48.3; cf. X.11; IC 166, 171)—hence also belong squarely within the Stoic tradition. It is not a matter of pessimism or optimism, so much as an attempt to cultivate a realistic, Stoic view of things that is at issue: in Hadot's words, "to see things in their naked, 'physical' reality" (IC 165), shorn of the anthropocentric values we assign to appearances (IC 164). The flipside of this exercise in disenchantment comes in sections of the *Meditations* which describe how even the most

incidental things take on an interest and even a beauty, when they are looked at purely disinterestedly. To cite one of Hadot's favorite sections of the *Meditations*:

We must also bear in mind things like the following: even the accessory consequences of natural phenomena have something graceful and attractive about them. For instance: when bread is baked, some parts of it develop cracks in their surface. Now, it is precisely these small openings which, although they seem somehow to have escaped the intentions which presided over the making of the bread, somehow please us and stimulate our appetite in a quite particular way ... Ears of corn which bend toward the earth; the lion's wrinkled brow; the foam trailing from the mouth of boars: these things, and many others like them, would be far from beautiful to look at, if we considered them only in themselves. And yet, because these secondary aspects accompany natural processes, they add a new adornment to the beauty of these processes, and they make our hearts glad. Thus, if one possesses experience and a thorough knowledge of the workings of the universe, there will be scarcely a single one of those phenomena which accompany natural processes ... which will not appear to him, under some aspect at least, as pleasing (*Med.* 3.2; IC 168-69; cf. Hadot 1972: 237-8).¹¹

It is only when one achieves what Hadot calls "a cosmic perspective" that things can thus appear as "both beautiful and valueless: beautiful, because they exist, and valueless, because they cannot accede to the realm of freedom and morality" (IC 171). Such a perspective is what is at stake, in Marcus as in other ancient authors, in the exercise Hadot (1998, 1993a) dubs the "view from above." In many sections of the *Meditations*, Hadot notes (9.32, 7.47, 11.1.3, 6.36, 12.32, 7.48; IC 172-173), Marcus enjoins himself to "embrace the totality of the cosmos in your thought" (9.32; cf. 11.1.3), and to look down upon the events that make up human lives. As

Hadot writes, this exercise “furnishes powerful instigations for practicing the discipline of the desire.” (IC 173) In particular, it enables Marcus to re-perceive just how small and passing are human affairs, in the scale of the Whole, evaluating ‘indifferents’ according to what the Stoics see as their “true proportions”. (IC 173) In Marcus as in other authors like Boethius and even Petrarch, this exercise is adduced particularly to quell Marcus’ desire for fame. When we recall how “short is the time which each of us lives; [how] puny the little corner of earth on which we live; how puny, finally, is even the lengthiest posthumous glory,” our desire for fame—at most a preferred indifferent—is tempered (*Med.* 3.10.2; IC 175-176).

Finally, in *Inner Citadel*, Hadot—whose debts here specifically to Victor Goldschmidt’s remarkable study, *Le Système stoïcien et l’idée de temps*, are both clear and acknowledged¹²—lays particular stress upon exercises in what he terms “circumscribing the present.” At issue here are those sections in the *Meditations* which lay stress on focusing one’s attention upon the present moment. Hadot interprets Stobaeus’ claim that for the Stoics “there is no present time, in the proper sense of the term; rather, it is spoken of only in an extended sense (*kata platos*). Chrysippus says that only the present ‘actually belongs’ (*huparchein*)” (LS 51B) as pointing to a distinction between a mathematical present, infinitesimally small, and the lived present, which “belongs to a subject” and as such has an experiential “thickness” (*platos*) (IC 135-6). Marcus is concerned only with this lived present, and the existential importance of its “circumscription.” Firstly, such a circumscription serves to diminish our sense of the difficulty of challenges, by dividing them into a sequence of individually bearable, present moments. If we divide a seductive melody into its notes, it will lose its power over us, Marcus notes. Just so, we should “transpose this method ... to life in its entirety.” (11.2; IC 133) In doing so, we shall see that it is unprofitable, even meaningfully *unreasonable*, to “trouble yourself by representing to yourself

the totality of life in advance ... try[ing] to go over all the painful hardships, in all their varying intensity and number, which might possibly happen” (8.36). Indeed, dividing difficulties into present moments will “make your reflective faculty ashamed” that it could worry about not bearing up to what we might call a sequence of “minutiae” (8.36; IC 132).

Secondly, Marcus’ focus on the present moment, as Goldschmidt had identified (1977: 168–86), reflects for Hadot the Stoic perspective which sees it as the only “tense” in which we can act, feel and suffer, whereas the past is unchangeable, and the future of our worries we cannot presently change. It is, Hadot says, “a matter of increasing the attention we bring to bear upon our actions, as well as the consent we grant to the events which happen to us” (IC 132). In doing so, rather than remaining attached to futural concerns and events we cannot control, we “exalt the consciousness of our existence and our freedom,” as Hadot puts it (IC 134). The result is the kind of joy which Hadot asks us to see as overwhelmingly characterizing the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius (IC 238-242), as when Marcus reflects that:

All the happiness you are seeking by such long, roundabout ways, you can have it all right now ... I mean, if you leave all of the past behind you, if you abandon the future to providence, and if you arrange the present in accordance with piety and justice. (12.1.1-2; IC 134)

4. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we have argued that it is imprecise, with Bénatouil, to align Pierre Hadot’s reception of Stoicism with existentialism, because of the stress he lays upon reading Stoicism as a way of life; or indeed, that it is inaccurate to construct just two, more or less mutually exclusive, phenomenological and systematizing strands of 20th century “French Stoicisms.”

As we have seen, Hadot instead argues that the exercise disciplines in Epictetus align with the three parts of systematic Stoic philosophical discourse: logic, ethics, and physics. Ethics, the exercise of choice or the will, does not take all. Hadot's reading of the Roman Stoics Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius instead positions them as orthodox inheritors of the Stoic system, as reconstructed by figures like Bréhier and Goldschmidt, to whom Hadot is directly and avowedly indebted. Hadot retains respect for the Stoic systematizing pursuit of knowledge. But, following Wittgenstein, he situates this systematizing activity within a network of philosophical language games. And this approach in his work establishes a bridge between theory-construction and the experiential/existential dimension we see so vividly at work in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. The deepest challenge posed to us by Hadot's re-conception of Stoicism and the other ancient philosophies as ways of life, as well as theoretical achievements, is then that of thinking together both sides of ancient Stoicism.

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Figure 13.1 Hadot’s Epictetan “key” to (later Roman) Stoicism as a way of life

Table 13.1

	Lived logic	Lived ethics	Lived physics
Psychological function	Judgments, thoughts, and “assents” (<i>synkatatheseis</i>)	Impulses (<i>hormai</i>) to act and not to act	Desire (<i>orexis</i>) and aversion (<i>enklisis</i>)
Objects, materials	Concerning truth, rightness, goodness and their opposites	Regarding others, and appropriate actions (<i>kathēkonta</i>).	Concerning external objects and events

¹ At Hadot (1962: 58).

² See e.g. Hadot (2010a: 211); see I. Hadot (2014: esp. 36-50, 313-319); and Sharpe (2018: 109–18). The author would like to dedicate this chapter to Ilsetraut Hadot, in gratitude and admiration for her work, support, and critique.

³ Similarly, Hadot’s emphasis on the importance of the present moment in ancient thought also arguably hails from his engagement with Stoicism, mediated by Victor Goldschmidt’s *Le Système stoïcien et l’idée de temps* (1977). See Part 3 below.

⁴ Bréhier 1961: 303, at IC 74; Hadot (2010a: 221, 1991: 209, 2010b 135–6).

⁵ Cf. IC 79; Hadot (1991: 208–9).

⁶ Translations from Epictetus are my own, adapting from the Perseus text by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and with thanks to Kurt Lampe.

⁷ Following Max Pohlenz, for instance, Hadot has argued that we can use this “key” to understand the structuring of the 53 sections of Epictetus’ *Enchiridion* or *Handbook*. The opening chapter, in qualifying the things that are *eph’ēmin*, already sets out the three domains of exercise: “[w]hat depends upon us are value-judgments (*hupolēpseis*) [3], impulses towards action (*hormē*) [2] and desire (*orexis*) or aversion [1]; in short, everything that does not depend upon us.” (*Ench.* 1.1) After the opening chapters, chapters III-VI relate explicitly to the discipline of judgment: a fact which Hadot deems pedagogically significant (Cf. 1978: 171.) VII-XI, XIV-XXI and then again XVI-XVIII relate to the discipline of desire, punctuated by sections (XII-XIII; XXII-XXV) concerning what “progressants” in Stoic philosophy should attend to. Chapters XXX-LXV concern the discipline of impulses; while the last part (XLV-LIII) returns to counsels specifically directed at the “*progressants*,” culminating in a final section adducing maxims from Cleanthes, the *Crito* and *Apology* “presenting the fundamental attitude of those who learn to philosophise as a consent to the will of Nature and Destiny” (I. & P. Hadot 2004: 35–40). Long, notably, takes Hadot’s reading of Epictetus as authoritative (see 2002: 116–7, 125).

⁸ Hadot writes of Bonhoeffer: “he has magisterially developed the content of the three *topoi* of Epictetus, clearly recognized this division into three *topoi* was a work original to Epictetus, and even seen that Marcus Aurelius reproduced this division in his ternary schemas” (1978: 189). In private correspondence, William O. Stephens, translator of Bonhoeffer’s *The Ethics of the Stoic Epictetus* (1996), has noted that while the connection of the domains and the psychological

functions is explicit, their alignment with ethics, logic and physics is not directly claimed by Epictetus or Bonhoeffer.

⁹ Epictetus' division of the parts of the psyche, also, is non-hierarchical, like the Stoic division of the parts of discourse (IC 86). Equally, for the Stoics contra Plato, even the passions are not the products of any one, lower part of the soul, but transformations of the entire psyche, including the ruling faculty. See I. & P. Hadot (2004: 29).

¹⁰ Compare the criticisms of Hadot, based on his ongoing work on Neoplatonism, in Cooper (2012: 17–22, 402–3 n. 4–5).

¹¹ Hadot talks of a Stoic “realistic aesthetics” (IC 170).

¹² Goldschmidt (1977: esp. 168–86); Hadot (1972: 321 n. 1).