

PHILOSOPHY

as a Way of Life

PIERRE HADOT

Edited and with an Introduction
by Arnold I. Davidson



Philosophy as a Way of Life

Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault

Pierre Hadot

Edited with an introduction by
Arnold I. Davidson

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Translated by
Michael Chase



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Translator's Note

The thought of Pierre Hadot is based on a lifetime's study of, and meditation upon, ancient Greek and Latin philosophical texts. In the course of this long period, he has, of course, developed his own methodology for the study of such texts. Based as it is on the methods of his own teachers, such as Paul Henry and Pierre Courcelle,¹ this method is distinctly his own, and he has transmitted it to a whole generation of French scholars in the field of late antique thought.

The first stage of Hadot's method is a scrupulous, textually critical reading of the original texts, followed by an equally exacting translation of these texts into French.² Only on the foundation of the intense, detailed confrontation with the text which real translation demands, Hadot feels, can one begin the processes of exegesis, interpretation, and, perhaps, criticism. Thus, Hadot's thought is, at least to a large extent, based on his methods of translation. This being the case, it is impossible to understand the former without understanding the latter.

Such a situation presents obvious difficulties for Hadot's translators. Given the importance he accords to the study of ancient texts, Hadot tends to quote them frequently and extensively, in his own translations from the Greek, the Latin, and the German. Now, a translator's normal procedure would be to dig up the already existing English translations of the respective texts, and insert them where Hadot's own translations had stood in the original. After much consultation, we have found this method inadequate, for the following reasons:

- 1 Many existing English translations are themselves inadequate; some are old and outdated; others based on different textual readings from those adopted by Hadot. In the case of still others, finally, no English translation exists at all.
- 2 There is no such thing as an "objective translation." All translators base their work on their own conception of what their author was trying to say. Naturally, Hadot has often arrived at views of what his authors meant which differ from those of the various other translators; his own translations consequently differ, sometimes fundamentally, from the existing English versions.³

- 3 The use of existing English translations would often make Hadot's thought impossible to understand. If we were to insert, for example, a 60-year-old English translation of, say, Marcus Aurelius into the text, and then follow it with Hadot's explanation of the passage, the result would be ludicrously incoherent. Most importantly, it would make it impossible for the reader to gain any notion of the genesis and development of Hadot's thought – which is, after all, the goal of this publication. As I have said, the origin of Hadot's thought is to be sought in his interpretation of ancient texts, and his translations of these texts are both the result and an integral part of his hermeneutical method. Deprived of his translations, we could simply not see how Hadot had arrived at his particular interpretations of particular ancient texts, and consequently we would be at a loss to understand the conclusions he has based on these interpretations.

This being the case, the method I have chosen to follow in the translation of *Spiritual Exercises* is the following: in the case of each of Hadot's quotations of passages in Greek, Latin, or German, I have begun by a simple English translation of Hadot's French version. I have then checked the result against the original Greek, Latin, or German. If the English translation of Hadot's version, read on its own, then seemed to me to be a good translation of the original text, I let it stand; if not, I modified it slightly, with two goals in mind: first, to bring it into accord with modern English usage; secondly, to make sure the English transmitted, as far as possible, all the nuances of the original languages. In cases of particular difficulty, I have benefited from Hadot's thoughtful advice and comments, partly by correspondence, and partly during the course of a memorable stay at the Hadot's home in the summer of 1991.⁴

The resulting translations therefore often bear little resemblance to existing English translation; this is especially so in the case of authors like Plato, Marcus Aurelius, and Plotinus, to whom M. Hadot has devoted a lifetime of study. Nevertheless, we have decided to include references to the most accessible – not necessarily the best – extant English translations, in case the interested reader should care to consult the ancient authors cited in this book.

Such a method is, obviously, more time-consuming than the usual slapdash method of translation. My hope is that the result justifies the delays incurred: I would like to think the result is a scholarly and above all faithful version of Hadot's thought.

NOTES

1 Cf. above

2 Among the results of his work on this stage of his method are Hadot's projects

- for completely new translations of those thinkers who have particularly occupied his attention: Plotinus, Marcus Aurelius, Marius Victorinus, etc.
- 3 This is so even in the case of so eminent a student of Plotinus, and so conscientious a translator, as A.H. Armstrong. Although he, too, has devoted a lifetime of careful study to Plotinus, he often reaches conclusions in the interpretation of particular Plotinian passages which differ from those of Hadot. The reason for this is not hard to seek: Plotinus is an extremely difficult author, and his writings are susceptible of many different interpretations.
 - 4 Here I should like to express, on behalf of my wife Isabel and myself, our deep gratitude for the Hadots' wonderful hospitality.

Abbreviations

- ACW*: *Ancient Christian Writers, The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, eds Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, Westminster MD/London.
- ANF*: *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, eds Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, American Reprint of the Edinburgh Edition, revised and chronologically arranged, with brief prefaces and occasional notes, by A. Cleveland Coxe, Buffalo.
- FC*: *The Fathers of the Church. A New Translation*, Washington DC.
- GCS*: *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Jahrhunderte*, ed. Kommission für Spätantike Religionsgeschichte der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin.
- GW*: *Gesammelte Werke*, Søren Kierkegaard, Düsseldorf/Cologne 1961.
- LCL*: *Loeb Classical Library*, London/Cambridge MA.
- PG*: *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1844–55.
- PL*: *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1857–66.
- SC*: *Sources chrétiennes*, Paris 1940ff.
- SVF*: *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. Von Arnim, 4 vols, Leipzig 1903.

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Introduction: Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy

I believe it was in 1982 that Michel Foucault first mentioned Pierre Hadot to me. Struck by Foucault's enthusiasm, I photocopied a number of Hadot's articles, but, to my regret, never got around to reading them until several years after Foucault's death. I immediately understood, and shared, Foucault's excitement, for Hadot's work exhibits that rare combination of prodigious historical scholarship and rigorous philosophical argumentation that upsets any preconceived distinction between the history of philosophy and philosophy proper. Expressed in a lucid prose whose clarity and precision are remarkable, Hadot's work stands as a model for how to write the history of philosophy. This collection of essays will, I hope, help to make his work better known in the English-speaking world; the depth and richness of his writing contain lessons not only for specialists in ancient philosophy, but for all of us interested in the history of philosophical thought.

Pierre Hadot has spent most of his academic career at the *École pratique des Hautes Études* and at the *Collège de France*. Appointed a *directeur d'études* of the fifth section of the *École* in 1964, Hadot occupied a chair in Latin Patristics, where he gave extraordinary lectures, many of which remain unpublished, on, among other topics, the works of Ambrose and Augustine. In 1972, in response to Hadot's interest in and work on non-Christian thought, the title of his chair was changed to "Theologies and Mysticism of Hellenistic Greece and the End of Antiquity." Hadot gave courses on Plotinus and Marcus Aurelius, but also began to devote increased attention to more general themes in the history of ancient philosophical and theological thought. In February 1983 he assumed the chair of the History of Hellenistic and Roman Thought at the *Collège de France*. He has published translations of and commentaries on Marius Victorinus, Porphyry, Ambrose, Plotinus, and Marcus Aurelius. His essays on ancient philosophy range over virtually every

topic of major significance, and constitute nothing less than a general perspective, both methodologically and substantively, on how to approach and understand the development of the entire history of ancient thought. A reading of Hadot's complete corpus of writings reveals, as one might expect, important essays on the history of medieval philosophy, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, brilliant contributions to our understanding of Goethe, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein. Hadot has also been increasingly preoccupied with the pertinence of ancient thought for philosophy today, recognizing that ancient experience raises questions that *we* cannot and should not overlook or ignore.

This collection of essays is based on the second edition of *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, originally published in 1987 and now out of print.¹ But it also includes a number of essays that were written subsequent to the book, essays that take up, develop, and extend the themes of *Exercices spirituels*. Moreover, Hadot has made revisions in some of the chapters for their inclusion in this volume, and he has rewritten his discussion of Marcus Aurelius in light of his commentary on the *Meditations*.² Thus this collection represents an expanded discussion of the topics of spiritual exercises and ancient philosophy.

In my introduction, I shall not summarize the individual essays. Rather, I shall try to indicate the general orientation of Hadot's thought, as well as relate these essays to other questions and problems – methodological, historical, and philosophical – treated elsewhere by Hadot. Instead of concentrating on questions of detail, I shall try to highlight some of the philosophical lessons and insights offered to us by Hadot's work.

1 Method and Practices of Interpretation in the History of Ancient Philosophy and Theology

In the summary of his work prepared for his candidacy at the Collège de France, Hadot wrote:

The problems, the themes, the symbols from which Western thought has developed were not all born, quite obviously, in the period that we have studied. But the West has received them for the most part in the form that was given to them either by Hellenistic thought, or by the adaptation of this thought to the Roman world, or by the encounter between Hellenism and Christianity.³

The historical period he has studied has led Hadot to be especially sensitive to the ways in which different systems of thought – Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Christian – have interacted with one another. At the end of antiquity, one is faced with a

vast phenomenon of transposition, a gigantic *meta-phora* in which all the forms of structures, political, juridical, literary, philosophical, artistic, have crossed over into new environments, have contaminated themselves with other forms or structures, thus modifying, more or less profoundly, their original meaning, or losing their meaning, or receiving a new meaning (which sometimes is a “mistranslation”) [*contresens*].⁴

For example, the development of a Latin philosophical language required the adaptation of Greek models, so that to each term of this technical Latin language corresponded a quite specific Greek term; but “on the occasion of this translation many slippages of meaning, if not misinterpretations,” were produced.⁵ Furthermore, when it was a question of the philosophical and theological exegesis by Latin Christian writers of biblical texts, additional problems were posed by the presence of Latin versions of Greek versions of the original Hebrew. Along with the misinterpretations brought about by these translations, Christian writers added their own lack of understanding of Hebraic ideas. Hadot gives the wonderful example of Augustine, who read in the Latin version of Psalm IV: 9 the expression *in idipsum*. Although the Hebrew text contains wording that simply means “at this very moment” or “immediately,” Augustine, prompted by Neoplatonist metaphysics, discovers in this *in idipsum* a name of God, “the selfsame.” He thus discovers here a metaphysics of identity and divine immutability, interpreting the expression as meaning “in him who is identical with himself.”⁶ Both a Latin translation and a Neoplatonist metaphysics come between his reading and the text.

To take another example, in Ambrose’s sermon *De Isaac vel anima*, we find undeniable borrowings, indeed literal translations, from Plotinus; more specifically, the use of texts from Plotinus that relate to the detachment from the body and to the withdrawal from the sensible as a condition of contemplation. These texts of Plotinian mysticism are joined to texts of Origenian mysticism that derive from Origen’s commentary on the *Song of Songs*. But in this encounter between Plotinian and Origenian mysticism, Plotinian mysticism loses its specificity. One does not find in Ambrose any important trace of what is essential to Plotinus’ thought, namely the surpassing of the intelligible in order to attain the One in ecstasy. Such texts concerning the mysticism of the One are translated by Ambrose in such a way that they lose this meaning and are related to the union of the soul with the Logos. So Hadot speaks of “a Plotinian ascesis put in the service of an Origenian mysticism that is a mysticism of Jesus.”⁷ Thus Ambrose can identify the Good and Christ, since with respect to the Good he brings in Paul’s Colossians I: 20, which does indeed concern Christ. Yet, as Hadot remarks, “this identification is absolutely foreign to the whole economy of the Plotinian system.”⁸ Borrowings, *contresens*, the introduction of a logic into texts that had a different logic⁹ – this whole phenomenon is central to the development of ancient thought, and, as Hadot makes clear, not to ancient thought alone.

In his essay "La fin du paganisme" Hadot examines the struggles, contaminations, and symbioses between paganism and Christianity at the end of antiquity. We can relatively straightforwardly reconstruct the philosophical struggles and divergences; for instance, the claim on the part of pagan polemicists that at the time of his trial and death Jesus did not behave like a sage, the pagan philosophy of history that charged Christians with lacking historical roots and that denied them the right to claim that their tradition was the sole possessor of the truth, the pagan argument that the Christians imagined God as a tyrant with unforeseeable whims who carries out completely arbitrary and irrational actions, such as the creation of the world at a specific moment of time, the election and then rejection of the Jewish people, the incarnation, the resurrection, and, finally, the destruction of the world.¹⁰ We can also discover in the pagan world certain attempts to assimilate Christian elements, and even, in certain epochs, the phenomenon of symbiosis between pagan and Christian thought. Thus, for example, the emperor Alexander Severus used to render honor to certain portraits (*effigies*) of men who, thanks to their exceptional virtue, had entered the sphere of divinity. Among these men were Orpheus, Appollonius of Tyana, Abraham, and Christ, and so the emperor made a place for Christ in his pantheon.¹¹ In the case of some individuals one could legitimately wonder whether they were pagans or Christians. The *Hymns* of Synesius could be considered as having been inspired by the Christian trinitarian doctrine or, on the contrary, as a representative of a pagan theology that one could link to the tradition of Porphyry.¹²

More historically subtle is the process that Hadot has labeled "contamination," that is, "the process according to which paganism or Christianity were lead to adopt the ideas or the behaviors characteristic of their adversary."¹³ Such contamination, which could operate with different degrees of awareness, extended from specific doctrines and behaviors to very general ideas and institutions. Eusebius of Caesarea could bring together the doctrines of Plotinus and Numenius on the First and Second God with the Christian doctrine of the Father and the Son and their relations.¹⁴ And the emperor Julian could wish to impose the organization of the Christian church on paganism, wanting the pagan church to imitate the Christian church's activities.¹⁵

Most important from a philosophical point of view, Christianity borrowed the very idea of theology, its methods and principles, from paganism. As Hadot has shown, both pagans and Christians had an analogous conception of truth; truth was an historical reality of divine origin, a revelation given by God to humanity at a particular time. As a consequence, their conceptions of philosophy and theology were identical – "human thought could only be exegetical, that is, it must try to interpret an initial datum: the revelation contained in myths, traditions, the most ancient laws."¹⁶ Not only was

Christianity contaminated by the pagan idea of theology, but the ancient Christian idea of hierarchical monotheism, so central to early Christianity, could be found within the evolution of paganism itself, especially under the influence of the imperial ideology. The conceptions of monotheism and hierarchy that served to define the Byzantine Christian world were thus also contaminations from the pagan world; indeed, these ideas could be said to sum up the entire essence of late paganism.¹⁷ These contaminations inevitably led to distortions, deformations, misunderstandings of all kinds, but the overlap and intersections brought about by these contaminations also led to the evolution of thought, the development of fresh ideas, the creation, by way of creative misinterpretations, of new concepts, categories, arguments, and conclusions.

In the first century BC, as a consequence of the destruction of most of the permanent philosophical institutions in Athens (which had existed from the fourth to the first century BC), the four great philosophical schools – Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism – could no longer be supported by the Athenian institutions created by their founders.

In order to affirm their fidelity to the founder, the four philosophical schools, scattered in different cities of the Orient and Occident, can no longer depend on the institution that he had created, nor on the oral tradition internal to the school, but solely on the texts of the founder. The classes of philosophy will therefore consist above all in commentaries on the text.¹⁸

The exegetical phase of the history of ancient philosophy was characterized by the fact that the principal scholarly exercise was the explication of a text. Exegetical philosophy conceived of the philosopher not as a “solitary thinker who would invent and construct his system and his truth in an autonomous way. The philosopher thinks in a tradition.”¹⁹ For the philosopher during this period, truth is founded on the authority of this tradition, and it is given in the texts of the founders of the tradition.

Perhaps the most extraordinary instance of the weight and pressures of exegetical thought is to be found in the example, extensively discussed by Hadot, of the appearance of the distinction between “being” as an infinitive (*to einai*) and “being” as a participle (*to on*). In a series of articles Hadot has shown that this distinction arose as a result of the need to give a coherent exegesis of Plato’s second hypothesis in the *Parmenides*, “If the one *is*, how is it possible that it should not participate in being [*ousia*]?”²⁰ The Neoplatonist exegesis of the *Parmenides* required that each of Plato’s hypotheses correspond to a different hypostasis; thus, this second hypothesis corresponded to the second One. Since this second One must participate in *ousia*, and since by

“participation” the Neoplatonists meant “receiving a form from a superior and transcendent Form,” the second One’s participation in *ousia* is understood to be participation in an *ousia* in itself which transcends the participating subject. However, according to good Neoplatonist doctrine, above the second One there is only the first One, and this first One, absolutely simple, cannot be an *ousia*. The first *ousia* must be the second One. So how could Plato have spoken of an *ousia* that precedes the second One? An anonymous Neoplatonist commentator on the *Parmenides*, whom Hadot has identified as Porphyry, squarely confronted these difficulties: “influenced by the exegetical tradition characteristic of his school, the words of Plato evoked for him the entities of a rigid system, and the literal text became reconcilable only with difficulty with what he believed to be Plato’s meaning.”²¹ Porphyry’s solution to this difficulty would consist in presenting an exegesis according to which Plato had employed the word *ousia* in an enigmatic way, instead of another word whose meaning is close to the word *ousia*, namely the word *einai*. If Plato speaks of an *ousia* in which the second One participates, he wants it to be understood that the second One receives the property of being a “being” (*to on*) and of being “ousia” from the first One, because the first One is itself “being” (*to einai*) “not in the sense of a subject but in the sense of an activity of being, considered as pure and without subject.”²² Thus, as Hadot shows, we can see appear for the first time in the history of onto-theology a remarkable distinction between being as an infinitive and being as a participle. Being as an infinitive characterizes the first One, pure absolutely indeterminate activity, while being as a participle is a property of the second One, the first substance and first determination that participates in this pure activity. This distinction arises from the formulation used by Plato at the beginning of the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, joined to the Neoplatonist exegesis of the *Parmenides* and the need for Porphyry to try to explain, from within this system of exegesis, why Plato said what he did.²³ The result, according to Hadot, was “certainly a misinterpretation, but a creative misinterpretation, sprung from the very difficulties of the exegetical method.”²⁴ This creative misunderstanding was to have a profound influence on the development of a negative theology of being, and, by way of Boethius’ distinction between *esse* and *id quod est*, was decisively to affect the history of Western philosophical thought.²⁵

As early as 1959, Hadot described a phenomenon, constant in the history of philosophy,

that stems from the evolution of the philosophical consciousness: it is impossible to remain faithful to a tradition without taking up again the formulas of the creator of this tradition; but it is also impossible to use these formulas without giving them a meaning that the previous philosopher could not even have suspected. One then sincerely believes

that this new meaning corresponds to the deep intention of this philosopher. In fact, this new meaning corresponds to a kind of possibility of evolution of the original doctrine.²⁶

Not all such bestowals of new meaning are creative misunderstandings, as Hadot well realizes. But some of them have led to new ideas of great philosophical significance. We must study the history of these exegeses, discover how these misunderstandings have been used, what philosophical consequences and what paths of evolution have resulted from them, in order to determine whether they have indeed been creative. In the most interesting of cases, we may find that a history of misinterpretation and a history of philosophical creativity are intimately linked.²⁷

In his inaugural lecture to the Collège de France, Hadot writes:

It seems to me, indeed, that in order to understand the works of the philosophers of antiquity we must take account of all the concrete conditions in which they wrote, all the constraints that weighed upon them: the framework of the school, the very nature of *philosophia*, literary genres, rhetorical rules, dogmatic imperatives, and traditional modes of reasoning. One cannot read an ancient author the way one does a contemporary author (which does not mean that contemporary authors are easier to understand than those of antiquity). In fact, the works of antiquity are produced under entirely different conditions than those of their modern counterparts.²⁸

Hadot's studies of the history of ancient philosophy and theology have always included the analysis of "the rules, the forms, the models of discourse," the framework of the literary genre whose rules are often rigorously codified, in which the thoughts of the ancient author are expressed.²⁹ Such analysis is necessary in order to understand both the details of the work, the exact import of particular statements, as well as the general meaning of the work as a whole. Literary structure and conceptual structure must never be separated.³⁰ Describing his method of study for Latin Patristics, Hadot has invoked an exceptionally illuminating analogy, comparing what happens in these studies to what takes place in those curious paintings where

one sees at first sight a landscape that seems to be composed normally. One thinks that if there is, in such and such a place in the picture, a house or a tree it depends solely on the imagination of the artist. But if one looks at the whole painting from a certain angle the landscape transforms itself into a hidden figure, a face or a human body, and one understands then that the house or the tree was not there out of pure

fancy, but was necessary because it made up part of the hidden figure. When one discovers the structure or the fundamental form of a text, one has an analogous experience: certain details that seemed to be there only in an arbitrary way become necessary, because they make up an integral part of the traditional figure used. And just as one can contrast or compare the sense of the face and the sense of the countryside, one can compare the meaning of the traditional form or structure, considered in themselves, and that of the text which has borrowed them . . . We often have the impression when we read ancient authors that they write badly, that the sequence of ideas lacks coherence and connection. But it is precisely because the true figure escapes us that we do not perceive the form that renders all the details necessary . . . once discovered, the hidden form will make necessary all of the details that one often believed arbitrary or without importance.³¹

This description brilliantly captures the significance of placing the work studied in the framework of its literary genre, the transformation in understanding brought about when one moves from the insignificant and arbitrary to the meaningful and necessary. Hadot's methodological prescriptions can be fruitfully applied at virtually every level in the analysis of ancient thought.

I want to consider briefly a series of examples not taken up by Hadot in order to emphasize the depth and accuracy of his analogy. I have in mind the extraordinary work on mystical cryptography undertaken by Margherita Guarducci. By carefully delineating the historical and geographical context and by discovering "a *coherent and rational system*,"³² Guarducci was able to show that certain ancient graffiti, both pagan and Christian, contained hidden and almost dissimulated thoughts of a philosophical and religious character.³³ The situation that results is precisely one in which phenomena that were neglected or unacknowledged now assume a profound significance. So, for example, she has demonstrated that the letters *PE*, the two initial letters of the name *Petrus*, sometimes take on the form of the characteristic monogram $\begin{matrix} P \\ E \end{matrix}$ or $\begin{matrix} P \\ \bar{E} \end{matrix}$, that this monogram represents the keys of the first vicar of Christ, and that the monogram sometimes even visually resembles, with the three teeth of the *E* adjoined to the *P*, a key — $\begin{matrix} P \\ \bar{E} \end{matrix}$.³⁴ Peter's monogram can also be adjoined to a monogram for Christ ($\begin{matrix} \chi \\ \rho \end{matrix}$), so that we find on wall g of the Vatican this kind of graffiti, $\begin{matrix} \rho\rho \\ \chi E \end{matrix}$, expressing the indissoluble union of Peter and Christ.³⁵ By unraveling the rational and coherent system formed by this mystical cryptography she can show that an inscription that previously found no plausible explanation can be clearly and convincingly explained. Thus the inscription found on a tomb (and shown in plate I.1) wishes life in Christ and Peter to the deceased. The bivalence of the Greek *rho* and the Latin *pi* is used to superpose the monogram of Christ ($\begin{matrix} \chi \\ \rho \end{matrix}$) with the letters *PE* thus forming,

Y which is inserted within the preposition *in*.³⁶ Just as Hadot has described it, these are cases where “once discovered, the hidden form will make necessary all of the details that one often believed arbitrary or without significance.”³⁷

This mystical cryptography can also be found in the pagan world, where a form that can seem to be intrinsically insignificant is transformed, once the hidden figure is discovered, into the expression of a philosophical doctrine. Thus not only did the Pythagoreans recognize in the letter *Y* the initial letter of the word *ὕγεια* and therefore the concept of “salvation”; they also used this letter to represent graphically the ancient concept of the divergent paths of virtue and vice, the doctrine that life presented a forking path and that one must choose between the path of virtue on the right, which will lead to peace, and the path of vice on the left, where one will fall into misery.³⁸ A funereal stele, datable from the first century AD, of a deceased man named “Pythagoras” exhibits a large *Y* that divides the stone into five sections (shown in plate I.2). Each section contains various scenes inspired by Pythagorean doctrine. In the center is an image of the deceased (or perhaps of his homonym, Pythagoras of Samo); to the right are scenes personifying virtue, to the left are scenes personifying dissoluteness. Guarducci concludes that it is “easy to recognize in the succession of these scenes that which the literary sources have handed down to us . . . : the Pythagorean *Y*, symbol of the divergent paths of virtue and of vice, one of which brings . . . eternal pleasure, the other . . . definitive ruin.”³⁹ It is indeed easy to come to this recognition, once one has uncovered and deciphered the genre of mystical cryptography. But if one fails to perceive the rigorously codified rules, one will see nothing of importance, one will be forced to resort to lapidary error and accident to explain away various features, one will find no coherence in many of the inscriptions.⁴⁰ The difference between recognizing profound significance and trivial error or arbitrariness will depend on whether the true form has escaped us or has transformed our understanding.⁴¹

One might well imagine that the endeavor to hide religious and philosophical thoughts within inscriptions and graffiti would require that we discover the hidden form necessary to give coherence and sense to these graffiti. But one might also assume that when we are confronted with extended philosophical writing, ancient texts, like many modern ones, will exhibit their structure more or less on the surface. And then when we fail to discern this structure, we conclude, as Hadot remarks, that ancient authors “write badly, that the sequence of ideas lacks coherence and connection.”⁴² That the assumption on which this conclusion is based is false, that the structure of even extended ancient philosophical texts may not lie easily open to view, is clearly shown by Hadot’s own discovery of the underlying structure or fundamental form of Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*. Indeed, Hadot’s description of the experience of seeing a text transform itself once one has discovered its hidden form very compellingly represents, years before the fact, his own discovery about Marcus Aurelius’ text.