



Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy

Author(s): Pierre Hadot, Arnold I. Davidson, Paula Wissing

Source: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring, 1990), pp. 483-505

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343636>

Accessed: 05/09/2008 13:27

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy

Pierre Hadot

Translated by Arnold I. Davidson
and Paula Wissing

Mr. Administrator,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Each one of you expects two things from me on the occasion of this inaugural lecture: first of all, that I express my thanks to those who made my presence here possible and second, that I present the method that I will use to carry out the task entrusted to me.”¹ Petrus Ramus, who held the chair in rhetoric and philosophy at the Collège Royal, opened his inaugural lecture, delivered in Latin, with words to this effect on 24 August 1551, only twenty years after the founding of this institution. We see that the practice of giving this lecture dates back more than four hundred years and that even at that time its major themes were already set. And I in turn will remain faithful to this venerable tradition today.

More than a year has gone by already, dear colleagues, since you decided to create a chair in the History of Hellenistic and Roman Thought. Shortly thereafter you honored me by entrusting it to me.

Delivered as the inaugural lecture to the chair of the department of the History of Hellenistic and Roman Thought, Collège de France, Friday, 18 February 1983. © 1983 by The Collège de France.

1. Petrus Ramus, *Regii Eloquentiae Philosophiaeque Professoris, Oratio Initio Suae Professionis Habita* (Paris, 1551). See Walter J. Ong, *Ramus and Talon Inventory: A Short-Title Inventory of the Published Works of Peter Ramus (1515–1572) and of Omer Talon (ca. 1510–1562) in Their Original and in Their Various Altered Forms* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 158.

Critical Inquiry 16 (Spring 1990)

© 1990 by The University of Chicago. 0093-1896/90/1603-0009\$01.00. All rights reserved.

How, without being awkward or superficial, can I express the extent of my gratitude and my joy at the confidence you have shown toward me?

I am able to see in your decision a reflection of that freedom and independence of mind that have traditionally characterized the great institution into which you have welcomed me. For, despite my election, I possess few of the qualities that would usually attract notice, and the discipline I represent is not among those in fashion today. In a way I am what the Romans called a *homo nouus*, as I do not belong to that intellectual nobility one of whose principal titles is traditionally that of "former student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure." Moreover, you certainly noticed during my visits to you that I lack that tranquil authority conferred by the use and mastery of the idioms currently spoken in the Republic of Letters. My language, as you will again ascertain today, is not graced with those mannerisms that now seem to be required when one ventures to speak of the human sciences. However, several of you encouraged me to present my candidacy, and during the traditional visits, which so enriched me, I was extremely touched to find so much sympathy and interest, particularly among those of you who are specialists in the exact sciences, for the field of research I have come before you to defend. In other words, I believe I did not have to convince you—you were persuaded already—of the need for the Collège to ensure a way to maintain the close bonds between areas of teaching and research that are too often artificially separated: Latin and Greek, philology and philosophy, Hellenism and Christianity. I thus marveled to discover that at the end of the twentieth century, when many of you on a daily basis employ technical procedures, modes

Pierre Hadot holds the chair of the History of Hellenistic and Roman Thought at the Collège de France. He is the author of many books and articles on the history of ancient philosophy and theology. Among his works are *Plotin et la simplicité du regard*, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, *Marius Victorinus: Recherches sur sa vie et ses oeuvres*, and *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*. **Arnold I. Davidson**, executive editor of *Critical Inquiry*, is associate professor of philosophy and a member of the Committees on the Conceptual Foundations of Science and General Studies in the Humanities at the University of Chicago. He introduced and edited the "Symposium on Heidegger and Nazism" (*Critical Inquiry* 15 [Winter 1989]). He is currently working on the history of horror as it relates to the epistemology of norms and deviations. **Paula Wissing**, a free-lance translator and editor, has recently translated Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant's *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks* (1989). She also contributed translations of articles by Maurice Blanchot, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Emmanuel Levinas for the "Symposium on Heidegger and Nazism."

of reasoning, and representations of the universe of almost super-human complexity that open a future to humanity we could not even conceive of earlier, the ideal of humanism, which inspired the foundation of the Collège de France, continues to retain for you, undoubtedly in a more conscious and critical but also more vast, intense, and profound form, all of its value and significance.

I spoke of a close connection between Greek and Latin, philology and philosophy, Hellenism and Christianity. I believe that this formulation corresponds exactly to the inspiration found in the teaching of Pierre Courcelle, who was my colleague at the Fifth Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études and to whom I wish to render homage today, indeed, whom I succeed, if I may say so, in an indirect line, via the appointment of Rolf Stein. I believe that Pierre Courcelle, who was so brutally taken from us, is intensely present in the hearts of many of us tonight. For me he was a teacher who taught me much, but he was also a friend who showed great concern for me. I will speak now only of the scholar, to recall his immense output of truly great books, innumerable articles, and hundreds of reviews. I do not know if the scope of this gigantic labor has been sufficiently measured. The first lines of his great work *Lettres grecques en Occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore* give a clear idea of the revolutionary direction his work had for his time. "A substantial book on Hellenistic literature in the West from the death of Theodosius up to the time of the Justinian reconquest may seem surprising," wrote Courcelle. First of all, it was surprising for a Latinist to be interested in Greek literature. However, as Courcelle noted, this Greek literature made possible the flowering of Latin literature and produced Cicero, who represented the most complete development of Greco-Roman culture at its apex, and it was this literature that nearly became a substitute for Latin when during the second century A.D. Latin was overshadowed by Greek as a literary language. However, it still must be stated and deplored that, despite Courcelle's initiative and example and owing to a prejudice that has not been totally overcome and that maintains the disastrous break made in French scholarship between Greek and Latin, what he had to say in 1943, forty years ago, is unfortunately still true today: "I know of no synthetic work that examines the Greek influence on the thought and culture of the Roman Empire." Once again it was surprising to see a Latinist devote such an important study to a later period and show that in the fifth and sixth centuries, a time of so-called decadence, Greek literature had undergone a remarkable renaissance, which, thanks to Augustine, Macrobius, Boethius, Martianus Capella, and Cassiodorus, was to make it possible for the European Middle Ages to maintain contact with Greek thought until the Arab translations made possible

its rediscovery in richer sources. Again, it was surprising to see a philologist attack problems in the history of philosophy, showing the key influence exercised on Latin Christian thought by Greek and pagan Neoplatonism, not only by Plotinus but—this was an important detail—by his disciple Porphyry as well. Even more surprising, this philologist based his conclusions on a rigorously philological method. I mean that he was not content merely to reveal vague analogies between Neoplatonic and Christian doctrines or to evaluate influences and originalities in a purely subjective way—in a word, to rely on rhetoric and inspiration to establish his conclusions. No, following the example of Paul Henry, the learned editor of Plotinus who has also been a model of scientific method for me, Courcelle compared the texts. He discovered what anyone could have seen but no one had seen before him, that a certain text of Ambrose had been literally translated from Plotinus, that one of Boethius had been literally translated from a Greek Neoplatonic commentator on Aristotle. This method made it possible to establish indisputable facts, to bring the history of thought out of the vagueness and artistic indistinctness into which certain historians, even contemporaries of Courcelle, tended to relegate it.

If *Les Lettres grecques en Occident* provoked surprise, the *Recherches sur les "Confessions" de saint Augustin*, the first edition of which appeared in 1950, almost caused a scandal, particularly because of the interpretation Courcelle proposed for Augustine's account of his own conversion. Augustine recounts that as he was weeping beneath a fig tree, overcome with pressing questions and heaping bitter reproaches upon himself for his indecision, he heard a child's voice repeating, "Take it up and read." He then opened Paul's Epistles at random, as if he were drawing a lot, and read the passage that converted him. Alerted by his profound knowledge of Augustine's literary procedures and the traditions of Christian allegory, Courcelle dared to write that the fig tree could well have a purely symbolic value, representing the "mortal shadow of sin," and that the child's voice could also have been introduced in a purely literary way to indicate allegorically the divine response to Augustine's questioning. Courcelle did not suspect the uproar his interpretation would unleash. It lasted almost twenty years. The greatest names in international patristics entered the fray. Obviously I do not wish to rekindle the flames here. But I would like to stress how interesting his position was from a methodological point of view. Indeed it began with the very simple principle that a text should be interpreted in light of the literary genre to which it belongs. Most of Courcelle's opponents were victims of the modern, anachronistic prejudice that consists in believing that Augustine's *Confessions* is primarily an autobiographical account. Courcelle on the contrary had understood that the *Confessions* is essentially a theological work, in which each scene may take on a symbolic meaning. One is always surprised, for

example, by the length of Augustine's account of his stealing pears while he was an adolescent. But this is explained by the fact that these fruits stolen from a garden become symbolically, for Augustine, the forbidden fruit stolen from the Garden of Eden, and the episode gives him the opportunity to develop a theological reflection on the nature of sin. In this literary genre, then, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between a symbolic enactment and an account of a historical event.

A very large part of Courcelle's work was devoted to tracing the fortunes of great themes such as "Know thyself" or great works such as Augustine's *Confessions* or Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* in the history of Western thought. Not the least original of his contributions, appearing in several of the major works he wrote from this perspective, was his association of literary study and iconographical inquiry, pertaining, for example, to illustrations produced throughout the ages for the *Confessions* or the *Consolation*. These iconographical studies, which are fundamental in reconstructing the history of religious mentalities and imagination, were all undertaken in collaboration with Mrs. Jeanne Courcelle, whose great knowledge of the techniques of art history and iconographic description greatly enriched her husband's work.

This all-too-brief recollection permits a glimpse, I hope, of the general development, the itinerary, of Courcelle's research. Starting from late antiquity, he was led to go back in time, especially in his book on the theme of "Know thyself," toward the philosophy of the imperial and Hellenistic period, and, on the other hand, to follow, across the years, ancient works, themes, and images as they evolved in the Western tradition. Finally, it is my hope that this history of Hellenistic and Roman thought I am now going to present to you reflects the spirit and the profound orientation of Courcelle's teaching and work.

According to the scheme given by Petrus Ramus, I have just spoken of what he himself called the *ratio muneris officiique nostri*: the object and method of the teaching entrusted to me. In the title of my chair, the word *thought* can seem very vague; indeed it can be applied to an immense and undefined domain ranging from politics to art, from poetry to science and philosophy, or religion and magic. In any event, the term invites one to make breathtaking excursions into the vast world of wondrous and fascinating works produced during the great period of the history of humanity that I propose to study. Perhaps we will accept this invitation from time to time, but our intention is to turn to the essential, to recognize the typical or the significant, to attempt to grasp the *Urphänomene*, as Goethe would say. And specifically, *philosophia*, the way the term was understood then, is one of the typical and significant phenomena of the Greco-Roman world. It is this above all which engages our attention. Nevertheless, we have preferred to speak

of "Hellenistic and Roman thought" to reserve the right to follow this *philosophia* in its most varied manifestations and above all to eliminate the preconceptions the word *philosophy* may evoke in the modern mind.

"Hellenistic and Roman": these words themselves open an immense period before us. Our history begins with the highly symbolic event represented by Alexander's fantastic expedition and with the emergence of the world called Hellenistic, that is, with the emergence of this new form of Greek civilization beginning from the moment when Alexander's conquests and, in their wake, the rise of kingdoms extended this civilization into the barbarian world from Egypt to the borders of India, and then brought it into contact with the most diverse nations and civilizations. The result is a kind of distance, a historical distance, between Hellenistic thought and the Greek tradition preceding it. Our history then covers the rise of Rome, which will lead to the destruction of the Hellenistic kingdoms, brought to completion in 30 B.C. with Cleopatra's death. After that will come the expansion of the Roman empire, the rise and triumph of Christianity, the barbarian invasions, and the end of the Western empire.

We have just traversed a millennium. But from the standpoint of the history of thought, this long period must be treated as a whole. Indeed it is impossible to know Hellenistic thought without recourse to later documents, those of the imperial era and late antiquity, which reveal it to us; and it is equally impossible to understand Roman thought without taking its Greek background into account.

We need to recognize from the outset that almost all of Hellenistic literature, principally its philosophical productions, has disappeared. The Stoic philosopher Chrysippus, to cite only one example among many, wrote seven hundred works, all of which are lost; only a few fragments have come down to us. We would undoubtedly have a very different idea of Hellenistic philosophy if this gigantic catastrophe had not occurred. How can we hope to compensate in some way for this irreparable loss? Obviously, there is the chance that discoveries might sometimes bring unknown texts to light. For example, in the mid-eighteenth century, an Epicurean library was found at Herculaneum. It contained texts of remarkable interest, not only for the knowledge it provided of that school but also regarding Stoicism and Platonism. Even today the Institute of Papyrology in Naples continues to mine, in an exemplary manner, these precious documents, endlessly improving both the texts and the commentaries. Another example: during the excavations, led for fifteen years by our colleague Paul Bernard in Ai Khanoun, near the border between Afghanistan and the U.S.S.R., to find the remains of a Hellenistic town of the kingdom of Bactrian, a philosophical text, unfortunately terribly mutilated, was discovered. The presence of such a document in such a place suffices, furthermore, to make one recognize the extraordinary expansion of Hellenism

brought on by the Alexandrian conquests. Most likely it dates from the third or second century B.C. and represents a fragment, unfortunately very difficult to read, of a dialogue in which it is possible to recognize a passage inspired by the Aristotelian tradition.²

Except for finds of this type, which are extremely rare, one is obliged to exploit existing texts to their fullest, which often are of a much later date, in order to find information about the Hellenistic period. Obviously, it is necessary to begin with the Greek texts. Despite many excellent studies, much remains to be done in this area. For example, the collections of philosophical fragments that have come down to us need to be completed or updated. Hans von Arnim's collection of fragments from the earliest Stoics is exactly eighty years old and requires serious revision. Moreover, there exists no collection of fragments for the Academicians from the period that runs from Arcesilas to Philo of Larissa. On the other hand, mines of information, such as the works of Philo of Alexandria, Galen, Athenaeus, and Lucian or the commentaries on Plato and Aristotle written at the end of antiquity, have never been systematically made use of. But the Latin writers are also indispensable to this line of inquiry. For although the Latinists do not always agree, one has to admit that Latin literature, except for the historians (and even there!), is comprised largely of either translations, paraphrases, or imitations of Greek texts. Sometimes this is completely evident, for one can compare line by line and word for word the Greek originals that were translated or paraphrased by the Latin writers; sometimes the Latin writers themselves also quote their Greek sources; sometimes, finally, one can legitimately speculate about these influences with the help of reliable evidence. Thanks to the Latin writers, a large part of Hellenistic thought was preserved. Without Cicero, Lucretius, Seneca, or Aulus Gellius, many aspects of the philosophy of the Epicureans, Stoics, and Academicians would be irretrievably lost. The Latins of the Christian period are moreover just as precious: without Marius Victorinus, Augustine, Ambrose of Milan, Macrobius, Boethius, or Martianus Capella, how many Greek sources would be completely unknown to us! Two projects are thus inseparable: on the one hand, to explain Latin thought in light of its Greek background, and, on the other hand, to rediscover Greek thought, which has been lost to us, in the works of Latin writers. If both these tasks are to be carried out, any separation of Greek and Latin scholarship is totally impossible.

Here we are witness to the great cultural event of the West, the emergence of a Latin philosophical language translated from the

2. See Pierre Hadot and Claude Rapin, "Les Textes littéraires grecs de la Trésorerie d'Al Khanoum," pt. 1, *Études, Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 111 (1987): 225-66.

Greek. Once again, it would be necessary to make a systematic study of the formation of this technical vocabulary that, thanks to Cicero, Seneca, Tertullian, Victorinus, Calcidius, Augustine, and Boethius, would leave its mark, by way of the Middle Ages, on the birth of modern thought. Can it be hoped that one day, with current technical means, it will be possible to compile a complete lexicon of the correspondences of philosophical terminology in Greek and Latin? Furthermore, lengthy commentaries would be needed, for the most interesting task would be to analyze the shifts in meaning that take place in the movement from one language to another. In the case of the ontological vocabulary the translation of *ousia* by *substantia*, for example, is justly famous and has again recently inspired some remarkable studies. This brings us once more to a phenomenon we discretely alluded to earlier with the word *philosophia*, and which we will encounter throughout the present discussion: the misunderstandings, shifts or losses in meaning, the reinterpretations, sometimes even to the point of misreadings, that arise once tradition, translation, and exegesis coexist. So our history of Hellenistic and Roman thought will consist above all of recognizing and analyzing the evolution of meanings and significance.

It is precisely the need to explain this evolution that justifies our intention to study this period as a whole. Translations from the Greek into Latin are indeed only a particular aspect of this vast process of unification, that is, of hellenization, of the different cultures of the Mediterranean world, Europe, and Asia Minor that took place progressively from the fourth century B.C. up until the end of the ancient world. Hellenic thought had the strange capacity to absorb the most diverse mythical and conceptual themes. All the cultures of the Mediterranean world thus eventually expressed themselves in the categories of Hellenic thought, but at the price of important shifts in meaning that distorted the content of the myths, the values, and the wisdom of each culture, as well as the content of the Hellenic tradition itself. First the Romans, who were able to retain their language, then the Jews, and then the Christians fell into this sort of trap. Such was the price for the creation of the remarkable linguistic and cultural community that characterizes the Greco-Roman world. This process of unification also ensured a surprising continuity at the heart of philosophical and religious literary traditions.

This evolutionary continuity and progressive unification can be seen most remarkably in the area of philosophy. At the beginning of the Hellenistic period an extraordinary proliferation of schools emerged in the wake of the Sophist movement and the Socratic experience. But beginning with the third century B.C. a kind of sorting out occurred. In Athens the only schools to survive were those whose founders had thought to establish them as well-organized institutions:

the school of Plato, the school of Aristotle and Theophrastus, the school of Epicurus, and that of Zeno and Chrysippus. In addition to these four schools there were two movements that are primarily spiritual traditions: skepticism and cynicism. After the institutional foundations of the schools in Athens collapsed at the end of the Hellenistic period, private schools and even officially subsidized teaching posts continued to be established throughout the Empire, and here the spiritual traditions of their founders were their reference points. Thus, for six centuries, from the third century B.C. until the third century A.D., we witness a surprising stability among the six traditions we have just mentioned. However, beginning with the third century A.D., Platonism, in the culmination of a movement underway since the first century, yet again at the price of subtle shifts in meaning and numerous reinterpretations, came to absorb both Stoicism and Aristotelianism in an original synthesis, while all the other traditions would become marginal. This unifying phenomenon is of major historical importance. Thanks to the writers of lesser antiquity but also to the Arab translations and the Byzantine tradition, this Neoplatonist synthesis will dominate all the thought of the Middle Ages and Renaissance and will provide, in some fashion, the common denominator among Jewish, Christian, and Moslem theologies and mysticisms.

We have just given a very brief outline of the main paths of the history of the philosophical schools of antiquity. But as a history of ancient *philosophia*, our history of Hellenistic and Roman thought is less focused on studying the doctrinal diversities and particularities of these different schools than it is on attempting to describe the very essence of the phenomenon of *philosophia* and finding the traits shared by the "philosopher" or by "philosophizing" in antiquity. We must try to recognize in some way the strangeness of this phenomenon, in order then to try to understand better the strangeness of its permanence throughout the whole history of Western thought. Why, you may ask, speak of strangeness when *philosophia* is a very general and common thing? Doesn't a philosophical quality color all of Hellenistic and Roman thought? Weren't generalization and popularization of philosophy characteristics of the time? Philosophy is found everywhere—in speeches, novels, poetry, science, art. However, we must not be deceived. These general ideas, these commonplaces that may adorn a literary work, and true "philosophizing" are separated by an abyss. Indeed, to be a philosopher implies a rupture with what the skeptics called *bios*, that is, daily life, when they criticized other philosophers for not observing the common conduct of life, the usual manner of seeing and acting, which for the skeptics consisted in respecting customs and laws, practicing a craft or plying a trade, satisfying bodily needs, and having the faith in appearances indispensable to action. It is true that even while the skeptics chose to conform to the common conduct of

life, they remained philosophers, since they practiced an exercise demanding something rather strange, the suspension of judgment, and aiming at a goal, uninterrupted tranquillity and serenity of the soul, that the common conduct of life hardly knew.

This very rupture between the philosopher and the conduct of everyday life is strongly felt by nonphilosophers. In the works of comic and satiric authors, philosophers were portrayed as bizarre, if not dangerous characters. It is true, moreover, that throughout all of antiquity the number of charlatans who passed themselves off as philosophers must have been considerable, and Lucian, for example, freely exercised his wit at their expense. Jurists too considered philosophers a race apart. According to Ulpian, in the litigation between professors and their debtors the authorities did not need to concern themselves with philosophers, for these people professed to despise money. A regulation made by the emperor Antonin the Pious on salaries and compensations notes that if a philosopher haggles over his possessions, he shows he is no philosopher. Thus philosophers are strange, a race apart. Strange indeed are those Epicureans, who lead a frugal life, practicing a total equality between the men and women inside their philosophical circle—and even between married women and courtesans; strange, too, those Roman Stoics who disinterestedly administer the provinces of the Empire entrusted to them and are the only ones to take seriously the laws promulgated against excess; strange as well this Roman Platonist, the Senator Rogatianus, a disciple of Plotinus, who on the very day he is to assume his functions as praetor gives up his responsibilities, abandons all his possessions, frees his slaves, and eats only every other day. Strange indeed all those philosophers whose behavior, without being inspired by religion, nonetheless completely breaks with the customs and habits of most mortals.

By the time of the Platonic dialogues Socrates was called *atopos*, that is, “unclassifiable.” What makes him *atopos* is precisely the fact that he is a “philosopher” in the etymological sense of the word; that is, he is in love with wisdom. For wisdom, says Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*, is not a human state, it is a state of perfection of being and knowledge that can only be divine. It is the love of this wisdom, which is foreign to the world, that makes the philosopher a stranger in it.

So each school will elaborate its rational depiction of this state of perfection in the person of the sage, and each will make an effort to portray him. It is true that this transcendent ideal will be deemed almost inaccessible; according to some schools there never was a wise man, while others say that perhaps there were one or two of them, such as Epicurus, this god among men, and still others maintain that man can only attain this state during rare, fleeting moments. In this transcendent norm established by reason, each school will express its own vision of the world, its own style of life, and its idea of the perfect man. This is

why in every school the description of this transcendent norm ultimately coincides with the rational idea of God. Michelet remarked very profoundly, "Greek religion culminated with its true god, the sage." We can interpret this remark, which Michelet does not develop, by noting that the moment philosophers achieve a rational conception of God based on the model of the sage, Greece surpasses its mythical representation of its gods. Of course, classical descriptions of the sage depict the circumstances of human life and take pleasure in describing how the sage would respond to this or that situation, but the beatitude the wise man resolutely maintains throughout his difficulties is that of God himself. Seneca asks what the sage's life would be in solitude, if he were in prison or exile, or cast upon the shores of a desert island. And he answers that it would be the life of Zeus (that is, for the Stoics, the life of universal Reason), when, at the end of each cosmic period, after the activity of nature has ceased, he devotes himself freely to his thoughts; like Zeus the sage would enjoy the happiness of being self-sufficient. Thus the thoughts and will of the Stoic wise man completely coincide with the thoughts, will, and development of Reason immanent to the evolution of the Cosmos. As for the Epicurean sage, he, like the gods, watches the infinity of worlds arising out of atoms in the infinite void; nature is sufficient for his needs, and nothing ever disturbs the peace of his soul. For their part, the Platonic and Aristotelian sages raise themselves in subtly different ways, by their life of the mind, to the realm of the divine Mind itself.

Now we have a better understanding of *atopia*, the strangeness of the philosopher in the human world. One does not know how to classify him, for he is neither a sage nor a man like other men. He knows that the normal, natural state of men should be wisdom, for wisdom is nothing more than the vision of things as they are, the vision of the cosmos as it is in the light of reason, and wisdom is also nothing more than the mode of being and living that should correspond to this vision. But the philosopher also knows that this wisdom is an ideal state, almost inaccessible. For such a man, daily life, as it is organized and lived by other men, must necessarily appear abnormal, like a state of madness, unconsciousness, and ignorance of reality. And nonetheless he must live this life every day, in this world in which he feels himself a stranger and in which others perceive him to be one as well. And it is precisely in this daily life that he must seek to attain that way of life which is utterly foreign to the everyday world. The result is a perpetual conflict between the philosopher's effort to see things as they are from the standpoint of universal nature and the conventional vision of things underlying human society, a conflict between the life one should live and the customs and conventions of daily life. This conflict can never be totally resolved. The cynics, in their refusal of the world of social convention, opt for a total break. On the contrary, others, such as the

skeptics, fully accept social convention, while keeping their inner peace. Others, the Epicureans, for example, attempt to recreate among themselves a daily life that conforms to the ideal of wisdom. Others still, such as the Platonists and the Stoics, strive, at the cost of the greatest difficulties, to live their everyday and even their public lives in a “philosophical” manner. In any event, for all of them, the philosophical life will be an effort to live and think according to the norm of wisdom, it will be a movement, a progression, though a never-ending one, toward this transcendent state.

Each school, then, represents a form of life defined by an ideal of wisdom. The result is that each one has its corresponding fundamental inner attitude—for example, tension for the Stoics or relaxation for the Epicureans—and its own manner of speaking, such as the Stoic use of percussive dialectic or the abundant rhetoric of the Academicians. But above all every school practices exercises designed to ensure spiritual progress toward the ideal state of wisdom, exercises of reason that will be, for the soul, analagous to the athlete’s training or to the application of a medical cure. Generally, they consist, above all, of self-control and meditation. Self-control is fundamentally being attentive to oneself: an unrelaxing vigilance for the Stoics, the renunciation of unnecessary desires for the Epicureans. It always involves an effort of will, thus faith in moral freedom and the possibility of self-improvement; an acute moral consciousness honed by spiritual direction and the practice of examining one’s conscience; and lastly, the kind of practical exercises described with such remarkable precision particularly by Plutarch: controlling one’s anger, curiosity, speech, or love of riches, beginning by working on what is easiest in order gradually to acquire a firm and stable character.

Of first importance is “meditation,” which is the “exercise” of reason; moreover, the two words are synonymous from an etymological point of view. Unlike Buddhist meditation practices of the Far East, Greco-Roman philosophical meditation is not linked to a corporeal attitude but is a purely rational, imaginative, or intuitive exercise that can take extremely varied forms. First of all it is the memorization and assimilation of the fundamental dogmas and rules of life of the school. Thanks to this exercise, the vision of the world of the person who strives for spiritual progress will be completely transformed. In particular, philosophical meditation on the essential dogmas of physics, for example the Epicurean contemplation of the genesis of worlds in the infinite void or the Stoic contemplation of the rational and necessary unfolding of cosmic events, can lead to an exercise of the imagination in which human things appear of little importance in the immensity of space and time. It is necessary to try to have these dogmas and rules for living “ready to hand” if one is to be able to conduct oneself like a philosopher under all of life’s circumstances. Moreover, one has to be

able to imagine these circumstances in advance in order to be ready for the shock of events. In all the schools, for various reasons, philosophy will be especially a meditation upon death and an attentive concentration on the present moment in order to enjoy it or live it in full consciousness. In all these exercises, all the means obtainable by dialectic and rhetoric will be utilized to obtain the maximum effect. In particular, this consciously willed application of rhetoric explains the impression of pessimism that some readers believe they discern in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. All images are suitable for him if they strike the imagination and make the reader conscious of the illusions and conventions of mankind.

The relationship between theory and practice in the philosophy of this period must be understood from the perspective of these exercises of meditation. Theory is never considered an end in itself; it is clearly and decidedly put in the service of practice. Epicurus is explicit on this point: the goal of the science of nature is to obtain the soul's serenity. Or else, as among the Aristotelians, one is more attached to theoretical activity considered as a way of life that brings an almost divine pleasure and happiness than to the theories themselves. Or, as in the Academicians' school or for the skeptics, theoretical activity is a critical activity. Or, as among the Platonists, abstract theory is not considered to be true knowledge: as Porphyry says, "Beatific contemplation does not consist of the accumulation of arguments or a storehouse of learned knowledge, but in us theory must become nature and life itself." And, according to Plotinus, one cannot know the soul if one does not purify oneself of one's passions in order to experience in oneself the transcendence of the soul with respect to the body, and one cannot know the principle of all things if one has not had the experience of union with it.

To make possible these exercises in meditation, beginners are exposed to maxims or summaries of the principal dogmas of the school. Epicurus's *Letters*, which Diogenes Laertius preserved for us, are intended to play this role. To ensure that these dogmas have a great spiritual effectiveness, they must be presented in the form of short, striking formulae, as in Epicurus's *Principal Doctrines*, or in a rigorously systematic form, such as the *Letter to Herodotus* by the same author, which permitted the disciple to grasp in a kind of single intuition the essentials of the doctrine in order to have it more easily at hand. In this case the concern for systematic coherence was subordinated to spiritual effectiveness.

The dogmas and methodological principles of each school are not open to discussion. In this period, to philosophize is to choose a school, convert to its way of life, and accept its dogmas. This is why the core of the fundamental dogmas and rules of life for Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism remained unchanged throughout

antiquity. Even the scientists of antiquity always were affiliated with a philosophical school: the development of their mathematical and astronomical theorems changed nothing of the fundamental principles of the school to which they claimed allegiance.

This does not mean that theoretical reflection and elaboration are absent from the philosophical life. However, this activity never extended to the dogmas themselves or the methodological principles but rather to the ways of demonstrating and systematizing these dogmas and to secondary, doctrinal points issuing from them on which there was not unanimity in the school. This type of investigation is always reserved for the more advanced students, for whom it is an exercise of reason that strengthens them in their philosophical life. Chrysippus, for example, felt himself capable of finding the arguments justifying the Stoic dogmas established by Zeno and Cleanthes, which led him, moreover, to disagree with them not concerning these dogmas but on the way of establishing them. Epicurus, too, leaves the discussion and study of points of detail to the more advanced students, and much later the same attitude will be found in Origen, who assigns the “spiritual ones” the task of seeking, as he himself says, by way of exercise, the “hows” and “whys” and of discussing these obscure and secondary questions. This effort of theoretical reflection can result in the composition of enormous works.

Obviously, these systematic treatises and scholarly commentaries, such as Origen’s treatise on *Principles* or Proclus’s *Elements of Theology*, very legitimately attract the attention of the historian of philosophy. The study of the progress of thought in these great texts must be one of the principal tasks in a reflection on the phenomenon of philosophy. However, it must be recognized that generally speaking the philosophical works of Greco-Roman antiquity almost always perplex the contemporary reader. I do not refer only to the general public, but even to specialists in the field. One could compile a whole anthology of complaints made against ancient authors by modern commentators, who reproach them for their bad writing, contradictions, and lack of rigor and coherence. Indeed, it is my astonishment both at these critics and at the universality and persistence of the phenomenon they condemn that inspires the reflections I have just presented, as well as those I wish to turn to now.

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. I will not discuss the problem of material support: the *volumen* or *codex*, each of which has its own constraints. But I do want to stress the fact that written works in the period we study are never completely free of the constraints imposed by oral transmission. In fact, it is an exaggeration to assert, as has still been done recently, that Greco-Roman civilization early on became a civilization of writing and that one can thus treat, methodologically, the philosophical works of antiquity like any other written work.

For the written works of this period remain closely tied to oral conduct. Often they were dictated to a scribe. And they were intended to be read aloud, either by a slave reading to his master or by the reader himself, since in antiquity reading customarily meant reading aloud, emphasizing the rhythm of the phrase and the sounds of the words, which the author himself had already experienced when he dictated his work. The ancients were extremely sensitive to these effects of sound. Few philosophers of the period we study resisted this magic of the spoken word, not even the Stoics, not even Plotinus. So if oral literature before the practice of writing imposed rigorous constraints on expression and obliged one to use certain rhythmic, stereotypic, and traditional formulas conveying images and thoughts independent, if one may say so, of the author's will, this phenomenon is not foreign to written literature to the degree that it too must concern itself with rhythm and sound. To take an extreme but very revealing example, the use of poetic meter in *De natura rerum* dictates the recourse to certain somewhat stereotypical formulas and keeps Lucretius from freely using the technical vocabulary of Epicureanism that he should have employed.

This relationship between the written and the spoken word thus explains certain aspects of the works of antiquity. Quite often the work proceeds by the associations of ideas, without systematic rigor. The work retains the starts and stops, the hesitations, and the repetitions of spoken discourse. Or else, after rereading what he has written, the author introduces a somewhat forced systematization by adding transitions, introductions, or conclusions to different parts of the work.

More than other literature, philosophical works are linked to oral transmission because ancient philosophy itself is above all oral in character. Doubtless there are occasions when someone was converted by reading a book, but one would then hasten to the philosopher to hear him speak, question him, and carry on discussions with him and other disciples in a community that always serves as a place of discussion. In matters of philosophical teaching, writing is only an aid to memory, a last resort that will never replace the living word.

True education is always oral because only the spoken word makes dialogue possible, that is, it makes it possible for the disciple to discover the truth himself amid the interplay of questions and answers and also for the master to adapt his teaching to the needs of the disciple. A number of philosophers, and not the least among them, did not wish to write, thinking, as did Plato and without doubt correctly, that what is inscribed in the soul by the spoken word is more real and lasting than letters drawn on papyrus or parchment.

Thus for the most part the literary productions of the philosophers are a preparation, extension, or echo of their spoken lessons and are marked by the limitations and constraints imposed by such a situation.

Some of these works, moreover, are directly related to the activity of teaching. They may be either a summary the teacher drafted in preparing his course or notes taken by students during the course, or else they may be texts written with care but intended to be read during the course by the professor or a student. In all these cases, the general movement of thought, its unfolding, what could be called its own temporality, is regulated by the temporality of speech. It is a very heavy constraint, whose full rigor I am experiencing today.

Even texts that were written in and for themselves are closely linked to the activity of teaching, and their literary genre reflects the methods of the schools. One of the exercises esteemed in the schools consists of discussing, either dialectically, that is, in the form of questions and answers, or rhetorically, that is, in a continuous discourse, what were called "theses," that is, theoretical positions presented in the form of questions: Is death an evil? Is the wise man ever angry? This provides both training in the mastery of the spoken word and a properly philosophical exercise. The largest portion of the philosophical works of antiquity, for example those of Cicero, Plutarch, Seneca, Plotinus, and more generally those classified by the moderns as belonging to what they called the genre of diatribe, correspond to this exercise. They discuss a specific question, which is posed at the outset of the work and which normally requires a yes or no answer. In these works, the course of thought consists in going back to general principles that have been accepted in the school and are capable of resolving the problem in question. This search to find principles to solve a given problem thus encloses thought within narrowly defined limits. Different works written by the same author and guided according to this "zetetic" method, "one that seeks," will not necessarily be coherent on all points because the details of the argument in each work will be a function of the question asked.

Another school exercise is the reading and exegesis of the authoritative texts of each school. Many literary works, particularly the long commentaries from the end of antiquity, are the result of this exercise.

More generally, a large number of the philosophical works from that time utilize a mode of exegetical thinking. Most of the time, discussing a "thesis" does not consist in discussing the problem in itself but the meaning that one should give to Plato's or Aristotle's statements concerning this problem. Once this convention has been taken into account, one does in fact discuss the question in some depth, but this is done by skillfully giving Platonic or Aristotelian statements the meanings that support the very solution one wishes to give to the problem under consideration. Any possible meaning is true provided it coheres with the truth one believes one has discovered in the text. In this way there slowly emerges, in the spiritual tradition of each school, but in Platonism above all, a scholasticism which, relying on argument from authority, builds up gigantic doctrinal edifices by means of an extraordinary rational reflection on the fundamental dogmas. It is precisely the third philosophical literary genre, the systematic treatise, that proposes a rational ordering of the whole of doctrine, which sometimes is presented, as in the case of Proclus, as a *more geometrico*, that is, according to the model of Euclid's *Elements*. In this case one no longer returns to the principles necessary to resolve a specific question but sets down the principles directly and deduces their consequences. These works are, so to speak, "more written" than the others. They often comprise a long sequence of books and are marked by a vast overarching design. But, like the *Summae theologicae* of the Middle Ages that they prefigure, these works must themselves also be understood from the perspective of dialectical and exegetical scholarly exercises.

Unlike their modern counterparts, none of these philosophical productions, even the systematic works, are addressed to everyone, to a general audience, but are intended first of all for the group formed by the members of the school; often they echo problems raised by the oral teaching. Only works of propaganda are addressed to a wider audience.

Moreover, while he writes the philosopher often extends his activity as spiritual director that he exercises in his school. In such cases the work may be addressed to a particular disciple who needs encouragement or who finds himself in a special difficulty. Or else the work may be adapted to the spiritual level of the addressees. Not all the details of the system can be explained to beginners; many details can be revealed only to those further along the path. Above all, the work, even if it is apparently theoretical and systematic, is written not so much to inform the reader of a doctrinal content but to form him, to make him traverse a certain itinerary in the course of which he will make spiritual progress. This procedure is clear in the works of Plotinus and Augustine, in which all the detours, starts and stops, and digressions of the work are formative elements. One must always approach a philosophical work of antiquity with this idea of spiritual progress in mind. For the Platonists,

for example, even mathematics is used to train the soul to raise itself from the sensible to the intelligible. The overall organization of a work and its mode of exposition may always answer to such preoccupations.

Such then are the many constraints that are exercised on the ancient author and that often perplex the modern reader both with respect to what is said and the way in which it is said. Understanding a work of antiquity requires placing it in the group from which it emanates, in the tradition of its dogmas, its literary genre, and requires understanding its goals. One must attempt to distinguish what the author was required to say, what he could or could not say, and, above all, what he meant to say. For the ancient author's art consists in his skillfully using, in order to arrive at his goals, all of the constraints that weigh upon him as well as the models furnished by the tradition. Most of the time, furthermore, he uses not only ideas, images, and patterns of argument in this way but also texts or at least preexisting formulas. From plagiarism pure and simple to quotation or paraphrase, this practice includes—and this is the most characteristic example—the literal use of formulas or words employed by the earlier tradition to which the author often gives a new meaning adapted to what he wants to say. This is the way that Philo, a Jew, uses Platonic formulas to comment on the Bible, or Ambrose, a Christian, translates Philo's text to present Christian doctrines, the way that Plotinus uses words and whole sentences from Plato to convey his experience. What matters first of all is the prestige of the ancient and traditional formula, and not the exact meaning it originally had. The idea itself holds less interest than the prefabricated elements in which the writer believes he recognizes his own thought, elements that take on an unexpected meaning and purpose when they are integrated into a literary whole. This sometimes brilliant reuse of prefabricated elements gives an impression of "bricolage," to take up a word currently in fashion, not only among anthropologists but among biologists. Thought evolves by incorporating prefabricated and preexisting elements, which are given new meaning as they become integrated into a rational system. It is difficult to say what is most extraordinary about this process of integration: contingency, chance, irrationality, the very absurdity resulting from the elements used, or, on the contrary, the strange power of reason to integrate and systematize these disparate elements and to give them a new meaning.

An extremely significant example of this conferring of a new meaning can be seen in the final lines of Edmund Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. Summing up his own theory, Husserl writes, "The Delphic oracle γνῶθι σεαυτόν [know thyself] has acquired a new meaning. . . . One must first lose the world by the ἐποχή [for Husserl, the 'phenomenological bracketing' of the world], in order to regain it in a universal self-consciousness. *Noli foras ire*, says saint Augustine, *in te redi*, *in inter-*

iore homine habitat veritas." This sentence of Augustine's, "Do not lose your way from without, return to yourself, it is in the inner man that truth dwells," offers Husserl a convenient formula for expressing and summarizing his own conception of consciousness. It is true that Husserl gives this sentence a new meaning. Augustine's "inner man" becomes the "transcendental ego" for Husserl, a knowing subject who regains the world in "a universal self-consciousness." Augustine never could have conceived of his "inner man" in these terms. And nonetheless one understands why Husserl was tempted to use this formula. For Augustine's sentence admirably summarizes the whole spirit of Greco-Roman philosophy that prepares the way for both Descartes's *Meditations* and Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. And by the same procedure of taking up such a formula again, we ourselves can apply to ancient philosophy what Husserl says of his own philosophy: the Delphic oracle, "Know thyself," has acquired a new meaning. For all the philosophy of which we have spoken also gives a new meaning to the Delphic oracle "Know thyself" has acquired a new meaning. For all the philosophy of which we have spoken also gives a new meaning to the Reason in the human self and who opposes his moral consciousness, which depends on him alone, to the rest of the universe. This new meaning appeared even more clearly among the Neoplatonists, who identify what they call the true self with the founding intellect of the world and even with the transcendent Unity that founds all thought and all reality. In Hellenistic and Roman thought this movement, of which Husserl speaks, is thus already outlined, according to which one loses the world in order to find it again in universal self-consciousness. Thus Husserl consciously and explicitly presents himself as the heir to the tradition of "Know thyself" that runs from Socrates to Augustine to Descartes. But that is not all. This example, borrowed from Husserl, better enables us to understand concretely how these conferrals of new meaning can be realized in antiquity as well. Indeed, the expression *in interiore homine habitat veritas*, as my friend and colleague Goulven Madec has pointed out to me, is an allusion to a group of words borrowed from chapter 3, verses 16 and 17, of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, from an ancient Latin version, to be exact, in which the text appears as *in interiore homine Christum habitare*. But these words are merely a purely material conjunction that exists only in this Latin version and do not correspond to the contents of Paul's thought, for they belong to two different clauses of the sentence. On the one hand, Paul wishes for *Christ to dwell in the heart* of his disciples through faith, and, on the other hand, in the preceding clause, he wishes for God to allow his disciples *to be strengthened* by the divine Spirit *in the inner man*, *in interiorem hominem*, as the Vulgate has it. So the earlier Latin version, by combining *in interiore homine* and *Christum habitare*, was either a mistranslation or was miscopied. The Augustinian formula, *in interiore*

homine habitat veritas, is thus created from a group of words that do not represent a unified meaning in Saint Paul's text; but taken in itself, this group of words has a meaning for Augustine, and he explains it in the context of *De vera religione* where he uses it: the inner man, that is, the human spirit, discovers that what permits him to think and reason is the Truth, that is, divine Reason—that is, for Augustine, Christ, who dwells in, who is present within, the human spirit. In this way the formula takes on a Platonic meaning. We see how, from Saint Paul to Husserl, by way of Augustine, a group of words whose unity was originally only purely material, or which was a misunderstanding of the Latin translator, was given a new meaning by Augustine, and then by Husserl, thus taking its place in the vast tradition of the deepening of the idea of self-consciousness.

This example borrowed from Husserl allows us to touch on the importance of what in Western thought is called the *topos*. Literary theories use the term to refer to the formulas, images, and metaphors that forcibly impose themselves on the writer and the thinker in such a way that the use of these prefabricated models seems indispensable to them in order to be able to express their own thoughts.

Our Western thought has been nourished in this way and still lives off a relatively limited number of formulas and metaphors borrowed from the various traditions of which it is the result. For example, there are maxims that encourage a certain inner attitude such as "Know thyself"; those which have long guided our view of nature: "Nature makes no leaps," "Nature delights in diversity." There are metaphors such as "The force of truth," "The world as a book" (which is perhaps extended in the conception of the genetic code as a text). There are biblical formulas such as "I am who I am," which have profoundly marked the idea of God. The point I strongly wish to emphasize here is the following: These prefabricated models, of which I have just given some examples, were known during the Renaissance and in the modern world in the very form that they had in the Hellenistic and Roman tradition, and they were originally understood during the Renaissance and in the modern world with the very meaning these models of thought had during the Greco-Roman period, especially at the end of antiquity. So these models continue to explain many aspects of our contemporary thought and even the very significance, sometimes unexpected, that we find in antiquity. For example, the classical prejudice, which has done so much damage to the study of late Greek and Latin literatures, is an invention of the Greco-Roman period, which created the model of a canon of classical authors as a reaction against mannerism and the baroque, which, at that time, were called "Asianism." But if the classical prejudice already existed during the Hellenistic and especially imperial eras, this is precisely because the distance we feel with respect to classical Greece also appeared at that time. It is precisely this Hellenistic spirit, this distance, in some ways

modern, through which, for example, the traditional myths become the objects of scholarship or of philosophical and moral interpretations. It is through Hellenistic and Roman thought, particularly of late antiquity, that the Renaissance will perceive Greek tradition. This fact will be of decisive importance for the birth of modern European thought and art. In another respect contemporary hermeneutic theories that, proclaiming the autonomy of the written text, have constructed a veritable tower of Babel of interpretations where all meanings become possible, come straight out of the practices of ancient exegesis, about which I spoke earlier. Another example: for our late colleague Roland Barthes, "many features of our literature, of our teaching, of our institutions of language . . . would be elucidated and understood differently if we fully knew . . . the rhetorical code that gave its language to our culture." This is completely true, and we could add that this knowledge would perhaps enable us to be conscious of the fact that in their methods and modes of expression our human sciences often operate in a way completely analogous to the models of ancient rhetoric.

Our history of Hellenistic and Roman thought should therefore not only analyze the movement of thought in philosophical works, but it should also be a historical topics that will study the evolution of the meaning of the *topoi*, the models of which we have spoken, and the role they have played in the formation of Western thought. This historical topics should work hard at discerning the original meanings of the formulas and models and the different significances that successive reinterpretations have given them.

At first, this historical topics will take for its object of study those works that were founding models and the literary genres that they created. Euclid's *Elements*, for example, served as a model for Proclus's *Elements of Theology* but also for Spinoza's *Ethics*. Plato's *Timaeus*, itself inspired by pre-Socratic cosmic poems, served as a model for Lucretius's *De natura rerum*, and the eighteenth century, in turn, will dream of a new cosmic poem that would exhibit the latest discoveries of science. Augustine's *Confessions*, as it was misinterpreted, moreover, inspired an enormous literature up to Rousseau and the romantics.

This topics could also be a topics of aphorisms: for example, of the maxims about nature that dominated the scientific imagination until the nineteenth century. This year [at the Collège de France], we will study in this way the aphorism of Heraclitus that is usually phrased as "Nature loves to hide herself," although this is certainly not the original meaning of the three Greek words so translated. We will examine the significance this formula takes on throughout antiquity and later on, as a function of the evolution of the idea of Nature, the very interpretation proposed by Martin Heidegger.

Above all, this historical topics will be a topics about the themes of meditations, of which we spoke a few minutes ago, which have dominated and still dominate our Western thought. Plato, for example, had

defined philosophy as an exercise for death, understood as the separation of the soul from the body. For Epicurus this exercise for death takes on a new meaning; it becomes the consciousness of the finitude of existence that gives an infinite value to each instant: "Persuade yourself that every new day that dawns will be your last one. And then you will receive each unhoped for hour with gratitude." In the perspective of Stoicism, the exercise for death takes on a different character; it invites immediate conversion and makes inner freedom possible: "Let death be before your eyes each day and you will not have any base thoughts or excessive desires." A mosaic at the Roman National Museum is inspired, perhaps ironically, by this meditation, as it depicts a skeleton with a scythe accompanied by the inscription, *Gnothi seauton*, "Know thyself." Be that as it may, Christianity will make abundant use of this theme of meditation. There it can be treated in a manner close to Stoicism, as in this monk's reflection: "Since the beginning of our conversation, we have come closer to death. Let us be vigilant while we still have the time." But it changes radically when it is combined with the properly Christian theme of participation in Christ's death. Leaving aside all of the rich Western literary tradition, so well illustrated by Montaigne's chapter, "That to philosophize is to learn to die," we can go straight to Heidegger in order to rediscover this fundamental philosophical exercise in his definition of the authenticity of existence as a lucid anticipation of death.

Linked to the meditation upon death, the theme of the value of the present instant plays a fundamental role in all the philosophical schools. In short it is a consciousness of inner freedom. It can be summarized in a formula of this kind: You need only yourself in order immediately to find inner peace by ceasing to worry about the past and the future. You can be happy right now, or you will never be happy. Stoicism will insist on the effort needed to pay attention to oneself, the joyous acceptance of the present moment imposed on us by fate. The Epicurean will conceive of this liberation from cares about the past and the future as a relaxation, a pure joy of existing; "While we are speaking, jealous time has flown; seize today without placing your trust in tomorrow." This is Horace's famous *laetus in praesens*, this "enjoyment of the pure present," to use André Chastel's fine expression about Marsilio Ficino who had taken this very formula of Horace's for his motto. Here again the history of this theme in Western thought is fascinating. I cannot resist the pleasure of evoking the dialogue between Faust and Helena, the climax of part two of Goethe's *Faust*: "Nun schaut der Geist nicht vorwärts, nicht zurück,/ Die Gegenwart allein ist unser Glück" ["And so the spirit looks neither ahead nor behind. The present alone is our joy . . . Do not think about your destiny. Being here is a duty, even though it only be an instant"].

I have come to the end of this inaugural address, which means that I have just completed what in antiquity was called an *epideixis*, a set speech. It is in a direct line with those that professors in the time of Libanius, for example, had to give in order to recruit an audience while at the same time trying to demonstrate the incomparable worth of their speciality and to display their eloquence. It would be interesting to investigate the historic paths by which this ancient practice was transmitted to the first professors at the Collège de France. In any case, at this very moment, we are in the process of fully living a Greco-Roman tradition. Philo of Alexandria said of these set speeches that the lecturer “brought into broad daylight the fruit of long efforts pursued in private, as painters and sculptors seek, in realizing their works, the applause of the public.” And he opposed this behavior to the true philosophical instruction in which the teacher adapts his speech to the state of his listeners and brings them the cures they need in order to be healed.

The concern with individual destiny and spiritual progress, the intransigent assertion of moral requirements, the call for meditation, the invitation to seek this inner peace that all the schools, even those of the skeptics, propose as the aim of philosophy, the feeling for the seriousness and grandeur of existence—this seems to me to be what has never been surpassed in ancient philosophy and what always remains alive. Perhaps some people will see in these attitudes an escape or evasion that is incompatible with the consciousness we should have of human suffering and misery, and they will think that the philosopher thereby shows himself to be irremediably foreign to the world. I would answer simply by quoting this beautiful text by Georges Friedmann, from 1942, which offers a glimpse of the possibility of reconciling the concern for justice and spiritual effort; it could have been written by a Stoic of antiquity:

Take flight each day! At least for a moment, however brief, as long as it is intense. Every day a “spiritual exercise,” alone or in the company of a man who also wishes to better himself. . . . Leave ordinary time behind. Make an effort to rid yourself of your own passions. . . . Become eternal by surpassing yourself. This inner effort is necessary, this ambition, just. Many are those who are entirely absorbed in militant politics, in the preparation for the social revolution. Rare, very rare, are those who, in order to prepare for the revolution, wish to become worthy of it.³

3. Georges Friedmann, *La Puissance et la sagesse* (Paris, 1970), p. 359.