Philosophy as a way of life in the world of Islam: Applying Hadot to the study of Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1635)

Sajjad H. Rizvi
University of Exeter
S.H.Rizvi@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract
The work of the late Pierre Hadot has transformed our understanding of the practice of philosophy, especially in the pre-modern world. This article interrogates how we approach the study of later Islamic philosophy, especially the thought of the Safavid sage Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1635), and considers whether the method proposed by Hadot is applicable to this intellectual tradition. While there is much to be gained from the application of a cognate hermeneutics of the text, I also suggest that we still do not know enough about the actual practice of philosophy, of philosophical communities in the Safavid period, to consider whether it constitutes a real intellectual and structural continuity with the late antique Neoplatonic past. Nevertheless, the paradigm of approaching philosophy as a way of life propounded by Hadot does seem to be the best way of making sense of philosophy in Safavid Iran.
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Embarking on my doctoral studies on the thought of the Iranian Safavid thinker Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1635), I found myself stumped with a basic question of methodology: how do I make sense of his thought which is so removed from the categories and approaches to philosophy of our own time, not least of the major trends within Anglo-American (post-)analytic philosophy? Reading the existing secondary literature did not help much; confusion was a basic state of response. What was Mullā Ṣadrā's thought and how can we gauge the nature of his contribution to Islamic intellectual history? How should we understand what he intended by the term *ḥikma(t)*, often rendered as philosophy? Should we even consider him to be merely a "philosopher"? Does our description of him as a philosopher diminish his role as a thinker, teacher and exegete? Are our tastes in Islamic philosophy condemned to following fashions in the wider history of philosophy? What did he understand by the concept of philosophy? And let us note that nowhere in his work does he describe himself primarily in terms that either render or approximate our concept of "philosopher".[1]

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1 Mullā Ṣadrā seems to prefer the term *ʿālim rabbānī* or *ʿārif rabbānī* or *ʿārif mutaʾallih* insofar as philosophy is a practice designed for inhabitation and training in methods

In fact, he is quite dismissive of the "philosopher" or a "pseudo-philosopher" who, for him, rehearses and repeats doctrines and positions from within Aristotelianism without either verifying them or being able to construct arguments for understanding the nature of either human reality or the cosmos; they are physicalists and sensory reductionists incapable of witnessing metaphysical realities.[2] His ideal person is a particular type of hieratic, a thinker and an actor whose ethical commitment is clear in his righteous conduct and whose metaphysical acumen is established through his ability to witness reality as it is – in short, one of *al-shuhadā' al-ṣāliḥīn*, a deeply Quranic term for the intellectual and spiritual elect.[3] So what is the nature and goal of intellectual inquiry and "philosophizing" for Mullā Ṣadrā?

The existing works (the nascent sub-field of Sadrian studies within the already rather limited field of the study of philosophy and the intellectual life in Islam) seemed to take me in two contrary directions.[4] On the one hand, the approach favoured by Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr considered Mullā Ṣadrā to be a "theosopher" engaged in a noetic exercise of higher synthesis in which thought was geared to making sense of ultimate reality by blending Avicennan rationalism with mystical insight drawn from Sufi traditions.[5] He was therefore more than a philosopher: to borrow a term from late Neoplatonism, he was a magus.[6] Those trained in philosophy departments,

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of reading the modes in which God discloses himself in reality and through which one attains a likeness to the divine (theosis, *tashabbuh bi-l-bāri'*); see Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *The Elixir of the Gnostics [Iksīr al-'ārif īn]*, ed. Sayyid Yaḥyā Yasribī, tr. William Chittick (Provo, UH: Brigham Young University Press, 2003), 3. The model for the *'ālim rabbānī* is the first Shii Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; see Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *al-Maẓāhir al-ilāhiyya fī asrār al-'ulūm al-kamālīya*, ed. M. Khāminihī (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 1999), 51. The term *'ārif rabbānī* approximates, and brings to mind, the "holy" or the "divine" man of late Neoplatonism; see Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 289–91; cf. Guy Stroumsa, "From Master of Wisdom to spiritual master in late Antiquity", in David Brakke et al. (eds), *Religion and the Self in Antiquity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 183–96.

2 Shīrāzī, *Elixir of the Gnostics*, 49, 54.

3 This term is extensively instanced in his work; see, for example, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *Īqāẓ al-nā'imīn*, ed. Muḥammad Khwānsārī (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 2007), 4–5.

4 For a quick shorthand on various approaches to the study of Mullā Ṣadrā, see Sajjad Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London: Routledge, 2009), 4–14; for a good survey of what constitutes philosophy in Iran today, see Muḥammad Legenhausen, "Introduction", *Topoi* 26, 2007, 167–75.

5 I shall not pursue my polemic against the use of the term theosophy here, but instead suggest my alternative to *ḥikma ilāhīya*: onto-theology. I recognize that this term is itself fraught with problems due to its usage by Heideggerians and I do not use it with the assumption of a fundamental division between philosophy and theology in Safavid intellectual history – for a discussion of the term, see Jeffrey Robbins, "The problem of ontotheology: complicating the divide between philosophy and theology", *The Heythrop Journal* 43/2, 2002, 139–51.

6 Cf. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

not least in the analytic tradition, are often puzzled by this approach because it does not tally with their concept of philosophy as a discursive training in modes of reasoning in thought and language.[7] Corbin famously explained his approach to ḥikmat as philosophy in the following terms:

> Le terme ḥikmat est l'équivalent du grec sophia: le terme ḥikmat ilâhîya est l'équivalent littéral du grec theosophia. La métaphysique est désignée en général comme traitant des ilâhîyât, les Divinalia. Le terme de 'ilm ilâhî (scientia divina) ne peut ni ne doit se traduire par celui de «théodicée». L'idée que les historiens musulmans se font des «sages grecs», c'est que la sagesse des ces derniers provenait, elle aussi, de la «Niche aux lumières de la prophétie». C'est pourquoi, si l'on se contente de transposer en Islam la question des rapports entre la philosophie et la religion, telle qu'elle est posée traditionellement en Occident, on pose la question en porte à faux, parce que l'on ne retient qu'une partie de la situation...
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> Là où la recherche philosophique (taḥqîq) fut «chez elle» en Islam, ce fut là où l'on réfléchit sur le fait fondamental de la prophétie et de la révélation prophétique, avec les problèmes et la situation herméneutiques que ce fait fondamental implique. La philosophie prend alors la forme d'une «philosophie prophétique».[8]

It is this emphasis on prophetic philosophy that leads Corbin to privilege the study of the esoteric, the Shii, the Neoplatonic, reaffirmed by his disciple Christian Jambet who asserts that philosophy in the Muslim world necessarily needed to be a meditation upon the sense of revelation and the reality of existence and the divine, failing which it could only be a historical moment in the transmission of Greek learning to the Latin West.[9] While there is much to ponder in Corbin's concept of prophetic philosophy and his re-orientation of the study of philosophy in Islam, it seems that this approach fails in two ways. First, it posits a phenomenological approach to the study of philosophy that deliberately condemns historicism and consequently lapses into an ahistorical

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7   Of course, analytic philosophy is a notoriously fissiparous and disharmonious tradition and cannot be reduced to post-Fregean philosophy of language (as Michael Dummett once famously tried to do). For an excellent discussion of the question, see Hans-Johann Glock, *What Is Analytic Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

8   Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 14.

9   Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, 22–38, 219–20; Christian Jambet, *L'acte d'être: La philosophie de la révélation chez Mollâ Sadrâ* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 10. This notion of prophetic philosophy or a philosophical-theological tradition bestowed by the gods is very much part of the late Neoplatonic reading of its history. For example, Proclus famously wrote:

> All of Greek theology is the child of Orphic mystagogy: Pythagoras was the first to receive initiation from Aglaophamos, Plato in turn received from the Pythagorean and Orphic doctrines perfect knowledge concerning the gods. (Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne*, ed. H. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1968–87), I.5, 25–6.

mode of inquiry.[10] Even a simple acquaintance with conventionalism as championed by Quentin Skinner would hold up the problem of deracinating the work of Mullā Ṣadrā from his context and the intellectual and linguistic conventions of his time.[11] Second, in its quest for tying philosophical inquiry to religious commitment, it fails to explain the wider intellectual context of the thinker and what he considers philosophizing as an activity and practice to be in his context and for his community. Further, in pursuit of the esoteric, one can easily lose grasp of the basic fact that thinkers like Mullā Ṣadrā claim to provide Aristotelian demonstrations for their mystical insights, and remain keen students of the history of their practice; it for this reason that his major oeuvre *The Transcendent Wisdom of the Four Journeys of the Intellect* (*al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya fī-l-asfār al-ʿaqlīya al-arbaʿa*) is a wonderful resource for a selective but extensive history of philosophical and mystical reasoning in the world of Islam.

On the other hand, we have what I would term "analytic Sadrianism" by analogy to the well-established analytic Thomism popular among Catholic philosophers especially in North America. This represents an increasingly influential school of Shii seminarians in Iran, enamoured with the Anglo-American analytic tradition, who want to make Mullā Ṣadrā a philosopher *tout court* who could and should be read alongside the greats and engaged in a dialogue with Descartes and Kant, and influenced by the study and translation of the works of these pivotal figures in the history of European philosophy.[12] Located in the hybrid seminary-university known as Mufid University and at centres such as the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute, its proponents read Mullā Ṣadrā divorced from his context – social, intellectual and theological – in much the same way that the analytic school treats Kant or seeks to engage in a dialogue with other religiously motivated analytic thinkers.[13] He becomes *the* systematic philosopher of Islam. Mullā Ṣadrā dominates this understanding of philosophy just as Aquinas does in other contexts and is often shaped into the

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10 Henry Corbin, *Philosophie iranienne et philosophie comparée* (Paris: Buchet, 1985), 22–34.

11 Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); cf. John G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Method and Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

12 For a good introduction to the translation of these works and the encounters with Kantian philosophy in particular, see Karīm Mujtahidī, *Āshnā ʾī-yi Īrāniyān ba falsafa-yi jadīd-i gharb* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i pazhūhishgāh-i farhang va andīsha-yi islāmī, 1995); Sulaymān Āgāhī, "Ḥikāyat-i vurūd-i falsafa-yi jadīd bih Īrān", *Nāma-yi Farhang* XIV/51, 2004, 78–81; Ali Paya and Malakeh Shahi, "The reception of Kant and his philosophy in Iran", *Journal of Shia Islamic Studies* III/1, 2010, 25–40.

13 One thinks of two important collections of essays – Muḥammad Legenhausen (ed.), *Substance and Attribute: Western and Islamic Traditions in Dialogue* (Publications of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society, New Series Volume 5, Frankfurt/New Brunswick: Ontos Verlag, 2007), and Muḥammad Legenahusen (ed.), *Special Issue of Topoi* volume 26, 2007. Important thinkers in this vein include Muḥammad Javād Lārijānī, whose five (short) volume introduction to analytic philosophy is a useful guide for students and who is the head of the Institute for Research in the Fundamental Sciences in Tehran, and Muḥammad Ḥasan Qārāmalikī who has written extensively on philosophical theology and political theory from his base in Qum.

thinker that one wishes to analyse in order to engage in comparative philosophy. This is partly with a view towards a philosophical triumphalism that vindicates one's religious views, philosophy as handmaiden to theology so to speak, a tendency eminently perceivable in the Shii seminary since the 1950s and disseminated through *Usūl-i falsafa va ravish-i ri'ālizm* (Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism) of the seminarian thinker and exegete Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981).[14] The use of Mullā Ṣadrā in pursuit of this new form of philosophical theology (*kalām-i jadīd*) is problematic if we wish to consider philosophical reasoning to be preliminary and constantly in need of revision, re-assessment, and re-articulation.

Alongside these two tendencies is a third, which emerged from the late 1990s as a shift in, but continuation of, aspects of Corbin's approach, namely a phenomenological Sadrianism in which Mullā Ṣadrā becomes a Husserl or Heidegger before his time, fundamentally deconstructing substance mode metaphysics and ushering in the phenomenological turn in Islamic thought. This approach has been facilitated by the work of the eminent Husserlian Anna-Theresa Tymieniecka in a number of comparative volumes dedicated to phenomenology and Islamic philosophy.[15] This phenomenological appropriation implies an interest in key areas of concern within phenomenology such as the nature of religion in this world, consciousness and intentionality and of course the very self-conscious act of philosophizing.

In this game of discovering the "real Mullā Ṣadrā" (or perhaps appropriating and reading him in the light of one's own experience and training, and one cannot entirely divorce oneself from vulnerability to this critique), reading his actual works seemed to extend this confusion: arguments would branch out from authoritative citations from the Quran, prophetic and imamic sayings and the logia of the ancients, especially the famous *Theologia Aristotelis*, that famed Neoplatonic Arabic paraphrase of sections of Plotinus' *Enneads* IV–VI, syllogistic formulations abound, precise and careful critique of his predecessors not least Avicenna (d. 1037), Suhrawardī (d. 1191), and Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) and yet all along there would be paeans to the beauty of mystical ecstasy and the desire to conjure divine providence and practise *ḥikma* with the exercises and supererogatory prayers and supplications that one expects in a spiritual tradition.

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14   On Ṭabāṭabā'ī and this text, see Hamid Algar, "'Allāma Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī: philosopher, exegete, Gnostic", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17/3, 2006, 326–51. On the process of the new philosophical theology (*kalām-i jadīd*), see ʿAlī Awjabī, *Kalām-i jadīd: mabānī va āmūza-hā* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Asāṭīr, 2008); Aḥad Farāmarz Qārāmalikī, *Ustād-i Muṭahharī va kalām-i jadīd* (Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh-i farhang va andīsha-yi islāmī, 2004); Muḥammad Jibrā'īlī, *Falsafa-yi dīn va kalām-i jadīd* (Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh-i farhang va andīsha-yi islāmī, 2007).

15   See the series edited by her entitled *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue* for Springer. E.g., Anna-Theresa Tymieniecka (ed.), *The Passions of the Soul in the Metamorphosis of Becoming* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), Tymieniecka (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology on the Perennial Issue of Microcosm and Macrocosm* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), and Tymieniecka (ed.), *Time and Temporality in Islamic Philosophy and Philosophy of Life* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008).

So how do we make sense of Mullā Ṣadrā? It was an act of serendipity that one day, sitting in the library at the classics faculty in Cambridge, I came across for the first time the work of Pierre Hadot; browsing in the Neoplatonism section, I found his work translated into English as *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.[16] It led me to rethink fundamentally what Mullā Ṣadrā was trying to do, based on the paradigm and prism of approaching his work as a Neoplatonic practice of *askesis*, of philosophy as a spiritual exercise and way of life.

Hadot's work seemed to put forward four critical insights for the study of ancient thought that may be grafted (or at least applied as a calque) onto the study of medieval thought and indeed Islamic thought. First, the history of philosophy develops in a series of leaps and contextual and felicitous mistranslations, misreadings and creative mistakes. What is important therefore is not to read Mullā Ṣadrā on Aristotle and compare it to the Aristotle that we know from the (often analyticizing) study of Aristotle in philosophy and classics departments, but the Aristotle that he read, received and creatively manipulated, a thoroughly Islamicized and Neoplatonized Aristotle with elements of Plotinus, Porphyry and even Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240), an Aristotle who spoke Arabic. It is this process that makes commentary literature such a creative force for the history of philosophy and impels us to read philosophy as the product of particular school traditions.[17] Thus philosophy takes place within a tradition. Reading the text is not therefore a simple dialogue across time but a practice rooted in a school tradition and the commentary culture associated with key texts and significantly with concomitant spiritual practices, paramount among which is meditation, as means to read the nature of reality and of God. In his inaugural lecture as professor at the Collège de France, Hadot said:

> Chaque école représentera donc une forme de vie, spécifiée par un idéal de sagesse. À chaque école correspondra ainsi une attitude intérieure fondamentale . . . Mais surtout, dans toutes les écoles, seront pratiqués des exercices destinés à assurer le progrès spirituel vers l'état idéal de la sagesse, des exercices de la raison qui seront pour l'âme, analogues à l'entraînement de l'athlète ou aux pratiques d'une cure médicale. . .
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> Il me semble en effet que, pour comprendre les œuvres des auteurs philosophiques de l'Antiquité, il faut tenir compte de toutes les conditions concrètes dans lesquelles ils écrivent, de toutes les contraintes qui pèsent sur eux: le cadre de l'école, la nature propre de la *philosophia*, les genres littéraires, les règles rhétoriques, les impératifs dogmatiques,

16   Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, tr. Michael Chase, ed. with an introduction by Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), a translation of Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Institut d'Études augustiniennes, 1993); I am using the French reprint of 2001 published by Albin Michel.

17   For one discussion of the importance of commentary culture in the world of Islam, see Robert Wisnovsky, "The nature and scope of Arabic philosophical commentary in post-classical (*c.* 1100–1900 AD) Islamic intellectual history: some preliminary observations", in Peter Adamson et al. (eds), *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries Vol 2* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2004), 149–91.

les modes traditionnels de raisonnement. On ne peut lire un auteur antique come on lirait un auteur contemporain … L'ouvrage antique est en effet produit dans des conditions tout à fait différentes de celles de l'ouvrage moderne.[18]

An important corollary of this point is that there is a difference between reading a contemporary philosophical text and one in the past.[19] The very practice of reading is distinct because of the privileging of the oral in the latter and the nature of the teaching imparted – and because the professional contexts of the two are quite distinct.[20]

Second, training in philosophizing is to inculcate practices of dialoguing. Philosophy is primarily an oral exercise and requires engagement: merely reading a written text will not allow one to understand the hermeneutical rules and methodology of the school which is unwritten in the treatises.[21] The written word is an *aide-mémoire* for the spoken word, the logocentrism inherent in the philosophical tradition and predicated on the idea of philosophy as revealed word, encoded in a sacred book, requiring a spiritual master to initiate and explicate.[22] Dialoguing basic to the Socratic method is a learned practice within a community, an externalization of the need to inculcate an examination of the self, an inner dialogue and attention to and care of the self – to know oneself, as the Delphic maxim has it, and as the famous saying *man ʿarafa nafsahu fa-qad ʿarafa rabbahu* articulates.[23] Of course, it is worth asking in what sense one can consider dialoguing to be a spiritual exercise. Hadot answers in the following manner:

D'abord, il conduit, discrètement, mais réellement, l'interlocuteur et le lecteur à la conversion. En effet, la dialogue n'est possible que si l'interlocuteur veut vraiment dialoguer, c'est-à-dire, s'il veut réellement trouver la vérité, s'il veut, du fond de son âme, le Bien, s'il accepte de se soumettre aux exigences rationnelles du Logos…

D'autre part … tout exercice dialectique, précisément parce qu'il est soumission aux exigences du Logos, exercice de la pensée pure, détourne l'âme du sensible et lui permet de se convertir vers le Bien. C'est un itinéraire de l'esprit vers le divine.[24]

18 Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), 270–74. Cf. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 59–61.
19 Pierre Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre: Entretiens avec Jeanne Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2010), 93–6.
20 Cf. John Dillon, "Philosophy as a profession in late antiquity", in Andrew Smith (ed.), *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Brown* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2005), 1–17.
21 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, 272.
22 Polymnia Athanassiadi, *La lutte pour orthodoxie dans le néoplatonisme tardif* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 2006), 31–70. Cf. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
23 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, 41. There is a wonderful philosophical and mystical commentary on this famous maxim by a contemporary sage-philosopher in Iran, Ḥasanzāda Āmulī, *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn fī sharḥ al-ʿuyūn* (third reprint, Qum: Bustān-i kitāb, 2009).
24 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, 47; cf. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 93.

Dialogue is thus a mode for the expression and emergence of the self, in dialogue with the teacher but also with the text itself, insofar as the reading of the text is designed to effect and activate switches in the soul that take it along the path of transformation through the mode of non-discursive pedagogy.[25] Discourse is thus taken in two rather different senses: the former is addressed to a disciple or the self and linked to an "existential context, a concrete praxis", while the latter is formal and has an intelligible content.[26] It is the former that amounts to a spiritual exercise. And significantly this spiritual exercise must be conducted within a tradition and within a community. As Hadot said in a recent interview, "la philosophie implique un certain mode de vie et une vie en communauté".[27] The question for historians and contemporary thinkers is whether the *madrasa* and the university constitute such communities.

Third, philosophizing requires spiritual exercises which are more than just intellectual and contemplative but entail a mode of living, a way of life. The exercise of philosophy is spiritual because it affects the totality of the life of the thinker. Philosophizing is therefore not just about pedagogy or learning how to learn, but also a training and guiding of the soul, or learning how to live and become. Theoretical knowledge is insufficient; it needed to be practised and implemented to become present to the mind and a "habitus of the soul".[28] Drawing upon the Stoic ideal of the philosophical life as an art of living, Hadot argues that spiritual exercise takes one beyond the acquisition of philosophy as theory:

> L'acte philosophique ne se situe pas seulement dans l'ordre de la connaissance, mais dans l'ordre du «soi» et de l'être: c'est un progrès qui nous fait plus être, qui nous rend meilleurs. C'est une conversion qui bouleverse toute la vie, qui change l'être de celui qui l'accomplit. Elle se fait passer d'un état de vie inauthentique, obscurci par l'inconscience, rongé par le souci, à un état de vie authentique, dans lequel l'homme atteint la conscience de soi, la vision exacte du monde, la paix, et la liberté intérieure.[29]

In this sense, philosophy is therapy for the soul, in which knowing is being and becoming – philosophy does not just cause one to know but it causes one to be in a particular way.[30] However, at the same time, it is insufficient to associate spiritual exercises with ethical living alone – after all, ethics is but one of the

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25   Cf. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3–23.

26   Hadot, "Présentation au Collège International de Philosophie", unpublished manuscript, p. 4, as cited in Davidson, "Introduction", in Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 26.

27   Pierre Hadot and Arnold Davidson, "Entretien", in Arnold Davidson and Frédéric Worms (eds), *Pierre Hadot, l'enseignement des antiques, l'enseignement des modernes* (Paris: Éditions rue d'Ulm, Presses de l'École normale supérieure, 2010), 21.

28   Davidson, "Introduction", to Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 23.

29   Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, 23; cf. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 83.

30   Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, 291; cf. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 265; Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: from Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

three parts of philosophy: the distinction between theory and practice applies to the physics and the metaphysics as well in ancient philosophy.[31]

Fourth, the cultivation of philosophy was designed to have an effect on the soul of the seeker so that he could not just think but orient himself in the world, with the goal of becoming a sage. At the heart of Hadot's thought is a particular anthropology of the ancient philosopher: humans need to understand and live in this world but also recognize the ability to make their world.[32] The sage of antiquity is a philosopher whose practice allows him to be embedded in this world. That rootedness makes him cosmic and hence provides the possibility of making and humanizing his world:

> Si la sagesse antique était si étroitement liée au monde, ce n'est pas parce qu'elle croyait le monde limité … ou rationnel … mais c'est parce qu'elle était précisément un effort pour voir les choses avec un regard nouveau, pour s'arracher au monde conventionnel de l'humain, trop humain et affronter la vision du monde en tant que monde.[33]

It is in this sense that the sage not only affects the world he inhabits and lives in but also is capable of creatively reconfiguring how we understand reality. He is more than just a modern scientist investigating phenomena. This notion of the sage as one who makes the world is a common Sufi trope related to the idea of the realized Sufi as the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*), in the image of God, who participates in the divine names and deploys divine attributes. Such a sage in the Islamic tradition thus becomes the face of God.[34]

But alongside these useful insights and the desire to address ancient thought as philosophy and not as something of antiquarian interest for the historian for the period, Hadot's own humility before the texts was appealing. It was, therefore, salutary to learn that my confusion was an echo of Hadot's perplexity in the face of the ancient philosophical texts that he encountered. As he says:

> Au début … le problème était pour moi d'expliquer les incohérences – apparentes – des philosophes. Il y avait l'énigme des dialogues de Platon, qui sont souvent aporétiques, peu cohérents les uns avec les autres … Finalement, j'en suis venu à penser que ces apparentes incohérences s'expliquaient par le fait que les philosophes antiques ne cherchaient pas avant tout à présenter une théorie systématique de la réalité, mais à apprendre à leurs disciples une méthode pour s'orienter aussi bien dans la pensée que dans la vie. Je ne dirais pas que la notion de système n'existait pas dans l'Antiquité. Le mot existait, mais il désignait non pas un édifice de pensées, mais une totalité organisée dont les parties dépendent les unes et les autres.[35]

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31 Davidson, "Introduction", to Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 24.
32 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, 343.
33 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, 355–6.
34 Cf. Henry Corbin, *Face de Dieu, face de l'homme: Herméneutique et soufisme* (Paris: Entrelacs, 2008).
35 Pierre Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), 148.

So now if we return to our "philosopher" Mullā Ṣadrā, we can consider how useful Hadot's approach may be in understanding him. For this purpose, I will focus on three themes: philosophy as a way of life and of discourse; philosophy as a spiritual exercise; and the problematic concept of philosophy as an act within a community. Hadot seems content to use the term philosophy to describe those practices that he considers to constitute the philosophical life; philosophy is the discipline that he defines. Mullā Ṣadrā similarly is quite critical of philosophy *qua falsafa* as an Aristotelian discipline of discourse, but champions his approach to reality through the oft-used synonym of *ḥikma*.[36] The very definitions that he offers of *ḥikma* are revealing in that they suggest that the pursuit of philosophy requires more than ratiocination, a heavy dose of intuition, even mystical experience, and an exegesis of the ways in which God discloses himself.

Consider two examples. The first is the definition in the *Four Journeys*, his major work:

Know that *ḥikma* is the perfecting of the human soul (*istikmāl al-nafs al-insānīya*) through cognition of the realities of existents as they truly are, and through judgements about their being, ascertained through demonstrations (*bi-l-barāhīn*), and not understood through conjecture or adherence to authority (*bi-l-ẓann wa-l-taqlīd*), to the measure of human capacity (*ḥasab al-ṭāqa al-basharīya*). One might say that it [philosophizing] ascribes to the world a rational order understood according to human capability so that one may attain a resemblance to the Creator (*al-tashabbuh bi-l-bāriʾ*).

The human emerges as a mixture of two: a spiritual form from the world of command [ʿālam al-amr, the intelligible world] and sensible matter from the world of creation [ʿālam al-khalq, the sensible world], and thus he possesses in his soul both attachment [to the body] and detachment [from it]. *Ḥikma* is sharpened through the honing of two faculties relating to two practices: one theoretical and abstract and the other practical, attached to creation . . .

The theoretical art . . . is the *ḥikma* sought by the lord of the messengers – peace be with him – when he sought in his supplication to his lord when he said: "O My Lord, show me things as they truly are" (*allāhummā arinā l-ashyāʾ kamā hiya*), and also [sought] by the intimate of God [Khalīl = Abraham] when he asked: "My lord bestow upon me judgement (*ḥukman*)" [Q. Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ v. 82]. Judgement is verifying the existence of things entailed by conceptions.[37]

This definition makes it clear that philosophizing is more than a ratiocinative discourse but is in fact closely associated with the practice of theosis (*taʾalluh*

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36   Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya fī-l-Asfār al-ʿaqlīya al-arbaʿa*, ed. R. Luṭfī et al. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-turāṯ al-ʿarabī, 1981), 9: 108

37   Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya fī-l-Asfār al-ʿaqlīya al-arbaʿa*, ed. Ġulām-Riżā Aʿvānī (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 2004), 1: 23–4.

in Arabic) central to Neoplatonic conceptions of philosophy as a practice that seeks to invoke the divine through magical practices to understand reality.[38] It also closely relates this practice to a prophetic inheritance and connects philosophizing to the Quranic notion of wisdom.

This theme is made more explicit in the second definition that derives from his exegesis on the Quran in which he collates an exegetical philosophy with a philosophical anthropology. He writes:

> Know that the human is the most noble of beings; he was at the beginning of his generation in the very limits of baseness and imperfection that arise out of the nature of the elements and components [that formed him] like all other species of animals, and his nature was in degrees of baseness in relation to other substances and entities, except that he had in his essence a faculty of progression to the very limit of perfection and progress to the lights of the transcendent Origin and the active Sustainer, stripped of evil and calamity, becoming one of the inhabitants of the world of light, bestowed with the bounty of the afterlife and with bliss; it does not behove divine providence to allow him (the human) to wallow in the grazing grounds of the passions like insects and worms …
>
> For it is known that everything has a perfection that is specific to it, for which it was created, and an act that completes it that is appropriate [to it]. The perfection of the human is through the perception of divine stations and partaking of divine intelligible knowledge by stripping away sensible material attachments and renouncing base worldly matters and being saved from the impulses of passion and freed from the bonds of carnal, concupiscent desires. All this is not made easy except through guidance and learning and disciplining and steadfastness (*bi-l-hidāya wa-l-taʿlīm wa-l-tahdhīb wa-l-taqwīm*) …
>
> It is incumbent upon one who wishes to traverse the way of the people of reality and certainty, after purifying his soul from the vicious character traits, to set aside the company of the deniers (of God) and the astray because there is a seal set upon their hearts and their audition and their sight yet they do not understand, and also (set aside) the company of the innovators who are astray because when the prophets came to them with clear proofs, they delighted in what knowledge they possessed and they embraced them but mocked them [the proofs of the prophets]. May God preserve you from the evil of these two groups and not place you among them even for an instant … We seek refuge from them in God … and in the light of the sound natural disposition (*al-fiṭra al-salīma*) in the contented heart.[39]

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38   The concept of *theosis* in Islamic thought still awaits a serious study. But for some preliminary discussion, see Jean Jolivet, "L'idée de la sagesse et sa fonction dans la philosophie des 4ᵉ et 5ᵉ siècles", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1, 1991, 31–65, and Hikmet Yaman, *Prophetic Niche in the Virtuous City: The Concept of Ḥikmah in Early Islamic Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

39   Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad Khājavī (Qum: Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1987), 1: 2–3.

Returning to the themes in Hadot's work, one finds philosophy as both theory and practice in Mullā Ṣadrā, practice as a way of discourse but also as a way of mystical experience and insight. The pedagogy of training souls requires spiritual masters, sages who can inculcate virtues and guide the initiate in the pursuit of the good.[40] Philosophy is thus a religious commitment that requires some divine grace for success and attachment to divine providence.[41]

But what about the spiritual practices? Dialogue in the Socratic method is a given of *madrasa* practice, in which is it often called the *mubāḥatha* or discoursing, during which students repeat, rehearse and critique arguments learnt in class – he makes it clear that the rehearsal of discourse and dialogue is critical to philosophizing.[42] In the narrower sense of quasi-theurgic practices or Sufi disciplining of the soul (through the spiritual exercise of *riyāḍa*), philosophy for Mullā Ṣadrā cannot forsake it. It is precisely these practices and the cultivation of a mystical method that marks out his philosophical method from Avicennism. In his commentary on the Chapter of the Event (*Sūrat al-wāqiʿa*), Mullā Ṣadrā writes:

> The perfection of the human lies … in disposition towards divine cognition, and transcendence above material *sensibilia*, and self-purification from the restraints of carnal and passionate appetites. This can only be acquired through guidance, teaching, discipline, and formation of righteous character.[43]

Spiritual practice and discourse that is conscious and self-reflective require a sage as guide and mentor. This further entails a clear idea of what a sage is. In the *Four Journeys*, Mullā Ṣadrā explains the qualities of a sage:

> The sage possesses the qualities of generosity, good humour, fine judgement, pronounced taste and experiences of spiritual insight.[44]

Such a sage is a Neoplatonic holy man, the hieratic engaged in theurgy. This leads us to the final issue to consider: the nature of the community in which philosophizing is practised and led by the sage as Hadot insisted. Unfortunately we have little in the way of direct accounts of the teaching and practice of philosophy even by Mullā Ṣadrā. The history of the practice of philosophy in Safavid Iran, and indeed in the world of Islam, has still to be written, a history that would be more sociologically attuned to practices of knowledge production, formation and dissemination. Mullā Ṣadrā is clear that there is a community, a *qawm*, which practises philosophy, a circle centred on texts and sages who define that practice. Even if one does not have much on the details of the community and, of course, any *madrasa* is a community by definition and we know

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40   Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*, 1: 18.
41   Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*, 1: 13.
42   Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*, 9: 108.
43   Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr sūrat al-wāqiʿa*, ed. M. Khwājavī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i mawlā, 1984), 132.
44   Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*, 6: 6.

that his *madrasa* in Shiraz (the Madrasa-yi Khān) where he taught was founded for the purposes primarily of teaching philosophy,[45] one knows that the community is bounded and closed to those not worthy of it. In the *Four Journeys*, he says:

> It is forbidden for most people to set out to acquire these complicated sciences and join the community because those worthy are rare and exceptional. Guidance to inquiry is an act of grace from God.[46]

By way of a conclusion, it is worth putting forward some reservations. Hadot's approach to the study of ancient philosophy can be a fruitful way of reading Mullā Ṣadrā. But one wonders about basic issues of commensurability. Hadot's own work stresses the need to pay careful attention to contexts of the practice of philosophy without reducing it to historicism. Safavid Iran may share values, ideas and even some contextual parallels to Late Antiquity but basic notions of competing communities of religious and philosophical commitment were not common in seventeenth-century Iran. This is not to argue that Late Antiquity was devoid of imperial fiats in areas of doctrine and philosophy and that heretication and objectification of heterodoxy were absent.[47] But the Shii context of Safavid Iran is a particularity distinguishing Mullā Ṣadrā from a Iamblichus. Even if they shared notions of dialogue, practices of discourse or mysticism, notions of the centrality of spiritual exercises, and even the notion that philosophizing requires not just a spiritual master as guide but also a community, does not necessarily mean that these concepts in different cultural contexts sufficiently overlap. They may just be homonymously understood. Mystical practices and theurgy in pagan Late Antique philosophy cannot be identical to Shii Sufism and spiritual practices through invoking God and supplicating through the intermediaries of his friends. Most importantly, I am not suggesting that one sets aside other approaches and adopts Hadot as a singular, totalizing hermeneutics for studying Safavid philosophical texts. Rather, I am proposing a more open approach to the text that is worth testing. Philosophical practice even within the study of Islamic thought perhaps needs more of an experimental turn, not a conversion from one absolute and closed reading of the text to another. This would be very much consonant with Mullā Ṣadrā's own distrust of closure and his condemnation of imitation and the mere mechanistic rehearsal of doctrine known as *taqlīd*.

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45 Sajjad Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī: His Life and Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27.
46 Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*, 3: 66.
47 Polymnia Athanassiadi, *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif: De Numénius et Plotin à Damascius* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2005), and Athanassiadi, *Vers la pensée unique: La montée de l'intolérance dans l'antiquité tardive* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010).