**What is Philosophy as a Way of Life?**

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*Abstract:*

Despite a recent surge of interest in philosophy as a way of life, it is not clear what it might mean for philosophy to guide one's life, or how a “philosophical” way of life might differ from a life guided by religion, tradition, or some other source. We argue against John Cooper that spiritual exercises figure crucially in the idea of philosophy as a way of life—not just in the ancient world but also today, at least if the idea is to be viable. In order to make the case we attempt to clarify the nature of spiritual exercises, and to explore a number of fundamental questions, such as “What role does reason have in helping us to live well?” Here we distinguish between the discerning and motivational powers of reason, and argue that both elements have limitations as guides to living well.

The idea of “philosophy as a way of life” has been gaining currency both among the general public and among professional philosophers. Among the public, the interest can be seen in the increasing popularity of events such as Stoic Week, and in a variety of bestselling books.[[1]](#footnote-1) Among professional philosophers, it can be seen in the surge of new grants, book series, and course offerings dedicated to the topic.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Although we are enthusiastic about many of these developments, we also believe more reflection is needed about the very idea of philosophy as a way of life. What does it mean for philosophy to guide one’s life, and how does a “philosophical” way of life differ from a life guided by religion, tradition, or some other source? Of particular relevance here is John Cooper’s recent critique of the work of Pierre Hadot. Hadot, more than anyone, is responsible for reintroducing the idea of “philosophy as way of life” into the Western discussion (see especially Hadot 1995a). But if Cooper is right, Hadot misrepresents the tradition in various ways and indeed proposes a model of philosophy as a way of life that seems, to Cooper, notably “unphilosophical,” because it depends less on reason and more on practices or “spiritual exercises” that have their primary home in religious traditions.

In this essay, we claim that spiritual exercises figure crucially in the idea of philosophy as a way of life—not just in the ancient world but also today, at least if the idea is to be viable. In order to make the case we will therefore need both to clarify the nature of spiritual exercises, and to explore a number of fundamental questions, such as “What role does reason have in helping us to live well?” To begin with, we should say more about what a “way of life” amounts to in the first place.

**I. Ways of Life**

In asking what a way of life amounts to, consider the way in which we often talk about the “American way of life” and contrast it with, say, the “Chinese way of life,” or the “British way of life,” or the “Ancient Greek way of life.” What is the basis for such distinctions? Our suggestion is that at the root of these distinctions is what we will call alternative visions of the good, and in particular alternative visions of what is more or less important in life, visions that are then embodied (imperfectly) in the practices of particular cultures and their implicit rankings of goods.

This may come out most clearly in cultures with well-defined and strictly enforced rankings of goods. The Spartan dictum, “With your shield or on it,” encapsulates the relative value of honor in comparison to injury or death, a value that the warrior is enjoined to live out. Many other ways of life, of course, do not give such an exalted place to courage in battle. Fleeing battle is not an option for the person grounded in Spartan culture, but might be for someone from a less honor focused culture.[[3]](#footnote-3) When we learn more about other cultures or ways of life, we thus often find ourselves thinking things like: *It’s only after I lived in Culture C for a few years that I realized how important X was to them*. Or: *It was only gradually that I realized that a concern for Y was really driving this practice*. It is those deeply seated and often deeply implicit value judgments, we suggest, that structure ways of life: judgments about which goods are more important than others, and, perhaps especially, about the goods that are of utmost importance. Particular rites or rituals or practices then often flow from, and try to embody, this vision of what is more or less important.

With this framework in mind, one simple model of what it would mean for philosophy to be a way of life would be for philosophy to be the vehicle that takes us from ignorance to knowledge about what is more or less important in life, just through rational reflection and argument. A strengthened version of the simple model would claim not only that philosophy is able to provide this knowledge, but that this knowledge, once achieved, always offers sufficient motivation for living well and for realizing these goods in our life.

Let us think of the first of these claims as bearing on the *discerning power of philosophy*: the view that philosophy (especially rational reflection and argument—notions we explore at more length below) is, on its own, able to arrive at or to correct value judgments about what is really good or bad, or really more or less important.[[4]](#footnote-4) Let us think of the second of these claims as a claim about the *motivational power of philosophy*: the view that these correct value judgments, once attained, are always able to motivate us to act in accord with those judgments. Cooper endorses something like this simple model.

In our view, both of these claims about the power of philosophy are mistaken; as we will argue below, philosophy, on its own, has neither the discerning power nor the motivational power that have been claimed for it. The ancient Greek and Roman philosophical schools, even those who thought that reason can both discern the good and provide motivation, recognized that practices and habits which are not exercises of reason make significant contributions to living well. Thus we should reject Cooper’s intellectualist model of philosophy as a way of life.

**II. Cooper’s Take**

If John Cooper is right, however, in making these arguments we will be standing against most of the philosophical greats of the ancient Greek and Roman world, including Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the classical Stoics, and many of the Platonists of late Antiquity, such as Plotinus (Cooper 2012b: 25; cf. Cooper 2012a: fn. 26). For all of these thinkers, Cooper claims,

[P]hilosophy was pursued as both the intellectual basis and guide and the psychologically motivating force for the best human life... for ancient philosophers, philosophy is itself the steersman or pilot of the best life. (Cooper 2012b: 28)

Cooper acknowledges that the philosophical landscape gradually shifted in the ancient world, and tools other than philosophy became important for later Roman Stoics such as Marcus Aurelius. But this was a secondary development, according to Cooper, and was largely absent from earlier Greek and Roman philosophy. Emphatically, Cooper holds that Pierre Hadot’s influential account of ancient philosophy is flawed because Hadot claims that “spiritual exercises” were pervasive among ancient philosophers, and central to their ways of life, in a way they never were. According to Cooper, for the philosophers just noted, to live a philosophical way of life was fundamentally to live a life led by reason alone—no spiritual exercises needed.

Although Cooper does not directly address the question, he also seems to hold that this way of thinking about philosophy as a way of life is still broadly defensible and viable today. For instance, Cooper “invites” his readers not just to think through but to “follow out, and to weigh for the constitution of one’s own life” (Cooper 2012a: 16), the various arguments offered by the schools of ancient Greece he will address later in his text. If Cooper took the project of living by reason alone to be a hopeless one, presumably he would not invite his readers to try it out. What’s more, the only alternative Cooper offers to a life led by reason alone is a religious or tradition-based way of life, and it seems clear from his writings on the topic that he does not have much time for these alternatives.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In the following sections we will nonetheless argue, first, that as a reading of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, Cooper’s claim does not seem right. That is, it does not seem right that the model of philosophy as a way of life in these periods was purely reason driven, and that spiritual exercises had no place. Second, that as a recommendation for how to live one’s life, suggesting that we sail by reason alone is not good advice. For one thing, even if reason alone could offer us a complete vision of the good, from a motivational point of view reason is often lamentably weak, relative to our other drives. For another, it is plausible that reason cannot provide a complete vision of the good in the first place.

**III. Contra Cooper**

Do the ancient philosophers agree that we reach the good life through reason alone? While Cooper claims that “self-exhortation, memorization, and recitation to oneself of bits of sacred text” could have “at most a secondary and very derivative function in the philosophical life” (Cooper 2012a: 22), his own discussion of Epicurean philosophy indicates otherwise. Epicureanism, one of the leading philosophical ways of life in the Hellenistic period, enjoins members to memorize Epicurus’s teachings and apply them as exhortations in their daily life. Epicurus himself made the major points of his teaching available to be memorized.[[6]](#footnote-6) Whenever they experienced suffering, Epicureans were encouraged to repeat one of Epicurus’s Principal Doctrines about pain: “Short if it’s severe; light if it’s long” (Cooper 2012a: 245). Cooper himself acknowledges that good Epicureans do not need a rational understanding of Epicurean teachings, they only need “a felt commitment, a feeling of conviction sufficient to fend off doubts or other disturbances to [their] pleasure” (Cooper 2012a: 274). The Epicureans think we should use all available psychological techniques to avoid pain and achieve pleasure: the degree to which these techniques are “rational” is unimportant. Thus, a therapeutic use of philosophy, supported with exercises of memory, exhortation, and repetition is at the core of a main Hellenistic school, well before the supposed corruption by religion that Cooper finds in the Imperial era.[[7]](#footnote-7)

What about Socrates himself and other lovers of divine reason? In many ways, Socrates is the best candidate for Cooper’s intellectualist understanding of philosophy as a way of life. Socrates seems to have thought that rational agents always do what they take to be best and also seems to have identified virtue with wisdom.[[8]](#footnote-8) As Cooper puts it, for Socrates, “[the comprehensive knowledge of value] is not only wisdom, but also true justice, temperance, courage, and piety as well.” (2012a: 55) Given this, it might seem that using our reason is sufficient for living well. However, while Socrates insists that true wisdom has paramount value, he also comes to think, based on his examinations of himself and others, that humans do not actually possess these excellences. Indeed, Cooper concedes that Socrates takes wisdom, a systematic and steadfast understanding of the good and its manifestations, to be unattainable for humans. (2012a: 46-7)

Cooper insists that this does little to undermine the value of human reason. For Socrates, “it is philosophy and only philosophy that both reveals and demonstrates the system of values from the knowledge of which [virtuous action follows].” (2012a: 57) On Cooper’s reading of Socrates, “even without knowledge, our philosophical reflections can lead us to a wide range of fully and well considered views…[and] a significant degree of confidence in our resulting moral judgments, as well as confidence in the rightness of our actions.” (2012a: 58) We think this interpretation is, at the least, misleading. To begin with, it presents philosophy, the human pursuit of wisdom, as if it were itself a standard instead of a deficient condition in need of the true divine standard of wisdom. While Socrates does have some confident moral judgments (e.g. committing injustice is more harmful than dying, *Ap.* 30d), he also treats his best use of reason as subject to correction. We see this in the way that Socrates insists on listening to the voice of his *daimon*—a private, inner, god-like voice—when making various decisions about what to do. Socrates was willing to go against what seemed best to his reason, when his *daimon* indicated that he should not go through with his action (*Ap.* 31d).[[9]](#footnote-9) This counts against the discerning power of human reason. Even if Socrates is convinced of reason’s motivational power, the insufficiency of our grasp on the truth means that we should be cautious in setting up human philosophy as a standard.

Cooper is right in claiming that many ancient philosophers hold that reason’s apprehension of the good can motivate action. But this is compatible with a vital role for non-rational exercises. Plato, while a committed follower of Socrates, is very aware of the limitations of reason. We see this in the *Phaedo’*s reflection on misology, the hatred and distrust of reason that comes from bitter experience of the ways in which human can misuse and twist reason and argument (89d-91c). Divine reason may be perfect, but the sorts of things passing as wisdom and philosophy on earth often harm more than they help. Plato is also highly attentive to the way in which non-rational aspects of human nature can prevent us from following reason. Alcibiades’ speech in the *Symposium* offers a vivid portrait of someone who concedes that Socrates is right and that he should start caring for his soul and changing his way of life, but, nevertheless, falls away and fails to develop in virtue whenever he leaves the side of Socrates (216b-c; 221e-222a).

Plato, Aristotle, and their followers are all concerned with various ways of ordering and controlling the non-rational desires of spirit and appetite. Consider theelaborate regimen of training the *Republic* (*Rep.*) sets out for the guardians in Plato’s beautiful city (*kallipolis*), including gymnastics and music. [[10]](#footnote-10) This is a response to the idea that the soul, houses not just reason, but also spirit (*thumos*) and appetite (*epithumia*). Both spirit and reason need education in music and physical training to function well:

Socrates: Then isn’t it appropriate for the rationally calculating element to rule, since it is really wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul; and for the spirited kind to obey it and be its ally?

Glaucon: Of course.

Socrates: Now, as we were saying, isn’t it a mixture of musical and physical training that makes these elements concordant, tightening and nurturing the first with fine words and learning, while relaxing, soothing, and making gentle the second by means of harmony and rhythm?

Glaucon: Yes, exactly. (441e-442a, trans. Reeve)

As a thought exercise, imagine a potential guardian who missed out on this regimen of physical and musical training. The implication of this passage seems to be that he or she would either not be able to learn the nature of the good *via* reason—because reason would in some way be vitiated or blocked—or that, even if he or she could learn the nature of the good, the other parts of the soul would not “listen” to reason because they would be in open rebellion.[[11]](#footnote-11) If music and gymnastics are really needed to “make [reason and spirit] concordant,” then the soul cannot achieve proper order just through its rational activities.[[12]](#footnote-12)

This would then be a strike against the motivational power of philosophy thesis. Using our reason well requires the proper preparatory exercises of both body and soul. The *Timaeus* insists on a balance between soul and body: [[13]](#footnote-13)

There is one deliverance (*sōtēria*) from both [madness and ignorance]: neither to exercise (*kinein*) the soul without exercising the body, nor the body without the soul, so that, aiding one another, they become equally balanced and sound (*hugiē*). Thus, the student of mathematics or some other discipline who works with exceeding care (*sphodra meletēn*) for his power of thought (*dianoiai*) must also provide exercise (*kinēsin*) for his body, by attending to physical training (*gumnastikēi*), while the one carefully molding his body must repay his soul with exercises (*kinēseis*), making use of music (*mousikēi*) and every pursuit of wisdom (*philosophiai*). (88b-c, Our translation)

Aristotle and the Stoics pick up on this, agreeing that the body and the non-rational aspects of our soul must be trained before reason can be activated and knowledge acquired.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Indeed, Aristotle is clear in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (e.g., NE 1095a4-6) that trying to pass along moral knowledge to those who have been poorly brought up is a useless exercise, precisely because their appetites do not listen to reason. Training one’s appetites appropriately—although Aristotle’s account of character formation is not as detailed as Plato’s, in *Politics* 8.5 Aristotle too stresses the importance of music—is therefore essential to living well. As he notes at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, “the soul of the student needs to have been prepared by habits for enjoying and hating finely, like ground that is to nourish seed.” (X 9, 1179b24-6, trans. Terence Irwin)

Finally, the Stoics, while portraying themselves as inheritors of Socrates’s intellectualism and his commitment to the unity of virtue and wisdom, offer a wide variety of techniques to cultivate virtue. While thinking that our actions always reflects our reason’s judgements, the Stoics take non-rational exercises such as meditation and exhortation to play a crucial role in resisting our tendency to assent to appearances without subjecting them to the proper rational examination, as we will discuss below in section 5.[[15]](#footnote-15) Thus practices other than argument play an important role in cultivating virtue even within an intellectualist framework.

Of course, none of these points will be news to Cooper, one of the greatest scholars of ancient philosophy of his generation. Instead, Cooper deals with them by selective framing and omission. For example, in the case of Aristotle, Cooper does not deny the importance of habituation, but instead focuses on the claim that “practical wisdom really does add a lot in extending and deepening the basis for decent and good living that mere training of the appetites and spirit provides for the morally decent person.” (2012a: 91) While Cooper is right about the configuring role Aristotle takes practical wisdom to play, presenting it as separate from or in contrast to the work of habituating spirit and appetite is misleading. The *NE* concludes by transitioning to political science precisely because Aristotle thinks good laws and mores are needed to allow for virtue. This is true even for mature adults: “it is not enough if [youths] get the correct upbringing and attention when they are young; rather, they must continue the same practices and be habituated to them when they become men (*andrōthentas*)” (X 9, 1180a1-4, trans. Irwin). Without the continuing formation of a well-ordered society, the prospects for achieving virtue are bleak.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Cooper also obscures the role spiritual exercises play by focusing on the case of perfect virtue. This allows him to gloss over earlier stages of development in which non-rational practices played a key role.[[17]](#footnote-17) In discussing the Stoics, Cooper claims that “any training needed for our tendencies to receive emotion-inducing impressions could be regarded as a minor matter.” (2012a: 166) While Cooper is right that such training is not a virtue separate from wisdom and does not form part of the sage’s excellent activity, it does not follow from that that dealing with our impressions and pre-rational feelings is no big deal. Much of Stoic moral philosophy is devoted to techniques for changing our perspective in order to avoid following our misleading impressions. Even if such practices are a ladder that may be discarded by the virtuous, most (or perhaps all) of us are not going to reach the height of virtue, so these improving steps are considerably more important than Cooper suggests. Framing the Stoic way of life only in terms of the hypothetical sage who perfectly exemplifies wisdom misleads us on what is important to the Stoics.

There is, then, across a number of philosophical schools in the Greco-Roman world a recognition that some additional training of the soul is necessary either for the soul and its various elements to be capable of listening to reason, or for achieving an adequate vision of the good in the first place. A wide variety of practices, from gymnastics to listening to the right music to disciplining one’s appetites and desires, are, as Plato says, for the sake of the soul (*Rep.* 411e-412a). Appealing to the Greek, suppose we think of these various practices, such as listening to the right music, or disciplining one’s appetites and desires in various ways, as *psuchē exercises*—that is, as *soul exercises*. Cooper fails to appreciate the role that such exercises played in the ancient world, but is it really that far of a stretch to think of these *psuche* or *soul* exercises as *spiritual* exercises? True, “spiritual” often brings with it connotations of “religious.” But it need not, just as the term “soul” often brings with it religious connotations, even though it need not. So understood, and contra Cooper, the very philosophers of the ancient world that he discusses recognize the importance of spiritual exercises. [[18]](#footnote-18)

**IV. Spiritual Exercises**

We suspect one reason why Cooper would disagree with this claim is because he would balk at the idea that spiritual exercises could be thought of this broadly. When Cooper denies that spiritual exercises had a significant role to play for ancient philosophers, he seems to be denying that spiritual exercises had a significant role to play for ancient philosophers *in the sense defined by Pierre Hadot*, who was in turn strongly influenced by Ignatius of Loyola’s account of spiritual exercises.[[19]](#footnote-19) Thus Cooper claims that,

[T]here is nothing at all ‘spiritual’ in Hadot’s sense of the term about them [i.e., the practices of ancient philosophers]. They have no affinity to St. Ignatius’s meditations on sin and on the passion of Christ. (Cooper 2012a: 402)

And again, with vigor:

No quasi-religious devotional practices, such as Hadot describes, had, or even could have had, anything essential to do with living a life of philosophy, given what philosophy itself, both in antiquity and, in fact, in its whole history, is: an exercise of reason. You cannot strengthen your rational grasp of truths, except quite incidentally, by any such external spiritual self-manipulations. That strength comes only through increased rational understanding. (Cooper 2012b: 40-41)

“Spiritual exercises” for Cooper thus apparently had and continue to have their primary and proper home in religious devotional practices, practices such as meditating on one’s sins or thinking about the life of Christ (cf. del Nido 2018: 14). According to Cooper, not only were such spiritual exercises not pervasive among ancient philosophers in the way Hadot suggests; in fact, they did not even come on the scene until the later Roman Stoics, who were by that time battling the spread of Christianity and seeking to rival its influence by adopting spiritual exercises of their own.

Since the question of spiritual exercises lies at the heart of the dispute between Cooper and Hadot, and since in our view it is crucial to understanding what is, given our psychologies are human beings, distinctive about the “philosophy as a way of life” approach in general, it is worth spending more time considering about what these exercises might be, and how they might complement (or fail to complement) the traditional roles that rational reflection and argument play in philosophy.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Given that Ignatius of Loyola’s name in often invoked in this debate, consider first what he says at the opening of his 16th Century manual on the topic, *Exercitia spiritualia* (*Spiritual Exercises*)*:*

For just as strolling, walking, and running are exercises for the body, so ‘spiritual exercises’ (*spirituale exercitium)* is the name given to every way of preparing and disposing one’s soul to rid itself of disordered attachments (*inordinatos affectus*). (*Annotationes* I, Ignatius 1919; trans. Munitiz and Endean in Ignatius 1996: 283)

Notice to begin with how broad this understanding is. Potentially, it would include far more than “devotional” acts like meditating on one’s sins or on the life of Christ. Rather, it would seem to include almost any activity focused on eliminating “disorder” in the soul, and thus on bringing the various elements of the soul into proper alignment. One could, in particular, quite easily imagine Ignatius supposing that Plato’s guidelines for how to train the guardians as constituting spiritual exercises in his sense.

Admittedly, Hadot’s own view of spiritual exercises is harder to characterize. At one point, later in life, he defined them as “voluntary, personal practices intended to bring about a transformation of the individual, a transformation of the self” (Hadot 2008: 87). Along similar lines, in an earlier essay he claimed that they “correspond to a transformation of our vision of the world, and to a metamorphosis of our personality…. By means of them, the individual raises himself up to the life of the objective Spirit; that is to say, he re-places himself with the perspective of the Whole” (Hadot 1995c: 82). For Hadot, spiritual exercises therefore seem primarily related to a transformation of vision. More exactly, to a transformation that will allow someone to see and judge things rightly, where seeing and judging rightly is associated with adopting the point of view of the universe as a whole and then acting based on this viewpoint.

Hadot’s language is too specific here: not all ancient philosophers thought that we needed to achieve a perspective on the whole to live well. Nevertheless, we can take a basic point away from this idea. Namely, we all come equipped with certain “default” judgments about what is more or less important in life, judgments often fueled by our passions, appetites, and cultural upbringing, and judgments that are often tied to anxieties about the future and regrets about the past. We can learn, however, to rise above or detach ourselves from these default concerns in order to adopt a more objective point of view. Among other things, we can learn to see and attend to what is actually more important in life, and learn to see and give less attention to (or, rather, be less concerned about) what is actually less important.

According to Hadot, the spiritual exercises that help us to achieve this perspective are manifold. On the one hand, and importantly, philosophical argument and reflection can help us attain this perspective. But, more than that, he suggests we need things like thought experiments, mental disciplines, and exercises of the imagination to help train our attention and assist our value judgments. The default value judgments that guide us are very powerful, after all, and need to be managed throughout our lives in ways that often go beyond philosophical argument and reflection.

**V. An Example, and Value Illusions**

To see how this dynamic might play out in the concrete, consider a simple example from one of Seneca’s letters to Lucilius, from the 1st Century CE. In order to better endure the unexpected hardships of life, Seneca recommends that Lucilius practice the following exercise:

Set aside a certain number of days during which you restrict yourself to a minimal amount of the cheapest food and to hard and rough clothing, and say to yourself: “Is this what I feared?” (Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* (*Ep.*)*,* 18.5-6, Our translation)

This sounds like interesting advice, but for our purposes the important question to ask is: Why exactly should a philosopher follow it? After all, Seneca thought there were compelling arguments demonstrating that things like wealth and physical comfort were inessential for happiness (e.g. *Ep.* 87). Why supplement these arguments with exercises and practices like this? More generally, why appeal to what some might think of as psychological tricks when reason seemed to have the matter sorted?

To these questions, we believe the Ignatian/Hadotian response would be that even if reason might have the proper measure of what is more or less important in life, most people are nonetheless subject to what we can think of as “value illusions.” Thus, in the heat of the moment the prospect of experiencing significant discomfort, or perhaps ongoing hunger, might *appear* to be an outcome to be avoided at all costs; or again, the prospect of attaining a certain pleasure might *appear* to be an outcome to be pursued above all us. These illusions, moreover, might be extraordinarily difficult to shake or dispel, and guide our conduct despite our better judgment.

Now, it might be thought that when value illusions take hold, running through the arguments again will provide the help we need. But, as Aristotle noted, on occasions like this reason might be motivationally inert: like a drunkard reciting verses of Empedocles, we might be only mouthing the arguments, not understanding and living by them (*NE* VII 3,1147b10-13). Or again, reason might not be able to speak even in a drunken way, because it has been bound and gagged in the corner of our psyches, silenced by our desire for comfort or pleasure, or by our fear of discomfort or pain. Even intellectualists such as the Stoics recognized that our pre-rational feelings tend to prompt us towards inappropriate and mistaken value judgments. Cooper himself notes that, for the Stoics, curing ourselves “requires a lot of further work on our tendencies to respond prerationally to things that happen to us in ways that our upbringing and the surrounding culture have led us to respond.” (2012a: 165) Seneca is proposing this exercise as a part of that work.

We might think of this as a “corrective” use of spiritual exercises—as when our recollection of being able to endure deprivations helps us to dispel the value illusion. But spiritual exercises can also plausibly serve a “preventative” function, so that the practice of deprivation inhibits the value illusions from arising in the first place. In this preventative sense, the role of spiritual exercises would be either to “bake in” the judgments at which reason has already arrived, or to help the arguments seem more forceful and compelling when they are first presented, and hence to get a deeper foothold in the soul. This is why Seneca recommends deep study, “it is necessary to linger and to digest” wise thinkers so that what we draw out from them will “hold firm in our minds.” (*Ep.* II. 2, our trans.) Spiritual exercises allow us to assimilate what we have already judged true and practice applying it in different ways and in different contexts, so that our grasp of practical truths becomes more firm and lasting, with the goal of making it second nature. In this way, spiritual exercises would help to ensure that the knowledge yielded by reason is not just superficial knowledge, but knowledge “in the bones.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

None of this is to suggest that adding spiritual exercises to one’s cognitive repertoire will ensure that one will not act badly. Human nature is evasive, and these exercises too can be “brought off the boil” (as Kierkegaard might say[[22]](#footnote-22)), so we do not even try to engage them. Value distortions and impulses can be so powerful, as in the case of deep-seated addictions, that no degree of piling up arguments or spiritual techniques can ensure that they will actually be used properly on a given occasion, or indeed used or brought to mind at all. The point is instead that facility with spiritual exercises offers one more way to battle value illusions when they occur. They do not guarantee success, but if Ignatius and Hadot are right they make it more likely.

The benefits of spiritual exercises also depend on the vision they promote. We agree with Cooper (2012b: 29-30), that Hadot often treats ancient philosophy as too unitary, consisting of interchangeable techniques that all help with self-care. But spiritual exercises can be bad precisely insofar as they are effective at baking in certain views. If we see our children as fragile but replaceable, like vases (à la Epictetus’ *Enchiridion* 3), is this helping us overcome value illusions or leading us astray? Does contrasting our state with the struggles and distresses of others (à la Lucretius, *De Rerum* II, 1-10) help us to recognize our good fortune or prevent us from appropriately developing empathy? A school’s exercises may be harmful for us if its value claims turn out to be wrong. Using spiritual exercises does not guarantee we will respond better to the actual values of things. Nevertheless, if Ignatius and Hadot are right they can make it more likely.

**VI. A Concern**

In the previous sections we have made a few different claims. First, that spiritual exercises can aptly be understood in a broad sense suggested by Ignatius of Loyola, so that they pick out practices and habits that are focused on ridding the soul of disordered attachments, or what we might call “value illusions.” These practices and habits might include the use of philosophical argument, but a signature feature of spiritual exercises is that they also go beyond philosophical argument. Second, when understood in this broad sense, spiritual exercises were seen as important not just by the later Stoics, but also by earlier philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, who recognized the role of proper training and habituation in priming the soul’s passions and appetites to listen to reason. Third and finally, we have not-so-subtly agreed with Ignatius and Hadot that as tools for living well spiritual exercises have a great deal to be said for them. Rational argument operating alone is not as powerful as some of its advocates might suggest.[[23]](#footnote-23) Although the aid of spiritual exercises does not guarantee that we will live well, they plausibly make that outcome more likely.

At this point, however, we can note a concern. Namely, if one thinks of spiritual exercises this broadly, so that practices that help to rid us of value illusions or disordered attachments might count, then why doesn’t the category quickly begin to seem *too* broad? Wouldn’t almost anything count as a spiritual exercise? Suppose it turns out that taking a serotonin inhibitor like Prozac helps to dispel value illusions, or to prevent them from occurring in the first place. Would taking Prozac count as a spiritual exercise? Or again, suppose getting a good night’s sleep has similar effects, or taking long walks, or watching romantic comedies on TV. Would all of these things count as spiritual exercises? Suddenly the category begins to look implausibly large.

There are, we think, three things to be said in reply. The first is to bite the bullet and to allow that the category might be rather large—larger than might initially have been thought, but not implausibly so. We mentioned taking Prozac, and the example might have seemed ridiculous because taking Prozac seems to involve little more than popping a pill. But recall that there are long and serious traditions according to which taking mind-altering substances played an important role in soulcraft (see, e.g., Pollan 2018), and it is not nonsense to suppose that these substances might have led people to greater insight about the world, or helped release them from the grip of not just value illusions in general but addictions in particular. So, the first response here is to be open-minded about the sorts of practices that might in fact lead us away from disordered attachments and value illusions.

A second response is to make a distinction between practices that are simply self-initiated vs. practices that are self-directed or self-guided. By self-initiated we mean something like: you make the decision to X, but then what happens after X is largely unguided or not up to you. Merely popping a pill would count as self-initiated in this sense, but not self-guided. So too with going to bed early in order to get extra sleep, and so on. By “self-guided” we mean more like: not just deciding to X, but guiding or being responsive to how X unfolds over time. Think of the difference between going for a long walk in an attentive way vs. going for a long walk in a distracted way. Or, more relevantly for our example, the difference between popping a pill like Prozac and (as the title of the book goes) “Listening to Prozac.” The latter might be a spiritual exercise because it is guided or responsive in some way. There may also be a spectrum here, where practices can be more or less guided by one’s vision of the good and responsive to it. Thus whether an exercise fosters one’s way of life may be a matter of degrees.

A final reply is that we can distinguish between spiritual exercises that are truth-directed and those that are not truth-directed. Only those exercises that are truth-directed would then count as exercises that work in tandem with reason, and hence only spiritual exercises taken in this stricter or narrower sense would be taken as part of the program. Suppose for the sake of argument that playing violent video games make it more likely that one will become violent in real life. In a broad sense, this would then count as a spiritual exercise because it would shape the way the various parts of the soul interact with one another—feeding our anger or impulsiveness, perhaps. But it would not be a spiritual exercise in the strict sense because it would be a non-truth directed spiritual exercise: it would prompt us to see things that aren’t there, or to fail to see things that *are* there. Put another way, the non-truth directed exercises promote value illusions, but the truth-directed exercises help promote value fidelity; they will help us to see and evaluate things as they really are.

It would then be the self-directed, truth-directed spiritual exercises that would count as particularly important to philosophy as a way of life. Whether things like taking long walks count as a spiritual exercise in this sense would therefore be an empirical question. Are the walks self-directed? Are they reliably truth-directed? If the answer to these questions is Yes, then we believe we should be open minded about what counts and what does not.

**VII. Discernment**

In the last few sections we have indicated how philosophy—construed as rational argument and reflection—can benefit from the addition of spiritual exercises, as understood by Ignatius of Loyola and Pierre Hadot. Although we do not suggest that these exercises are strictly necessary for living well, or that engaging in the exercises is sufficient for living well, we concur with the long tradition of claiming that they help the various parts of the soul listen to one another, and help our value judgments settle into the bones. This points to a limitation in the intellectualist version of philosophy as a way of life.

In this section we want to point to another limitation of the intellectualist version of philosophy as a way of life, as described by Cooper. Namely, that philosophy seems to lack the *discerning power* he ascribes to it. One way to draw out this limitation is by considering the contrast Cooper offers between a philosophical way of life and a tradition-based way of life, and in particular a religious way of life. If we are right, there is more to be said for tradition-based or religious ways of life than Cooper allows.

Cooper draws a strong contrast between a philosophical way of life and a religious way of life. Fundamentally, the philosophical way of life appeals only to reason as its guide while, for Cooper, religious ways of life bottom out in appeals to either revelation or to emotion. Although he mainly contrasts the philosophical and religious way of life, we think his deeper contrast is between a philosophical way of life and a tradition-based way of life more generally. The source of the tradition could be an allegedly special revelation from God. But it could also be something vaguer—like the authority of one’s ancestors, or just the way a community has always done things. Basing a way of life on revelation would then be a special case of basing a way of life on the testimonial authority of others.

For Cooper, drawing on what he takes to be the bulk of the ancient Greek and Roman tradition, a philosophical life is an exclusively reason-led life. While that sounds inspiring, and while to this point we have been taking for granted that the idea makes sense, it should also leave us asking: what exactly is reason, as understood by Cooper, and what might it mean to live an exclusively reason-led life? This, it turns out, is not so easy to say.

Here is one place Cooper tries to expand upon the idea of what a purely philosophical, reason-led life involves, and how it differs from a religious one:

One must take with utmost seriousness that what the ancient philosophers, following Socrates’s innovative lead, are proposing is that we live our lives through some set of argued through, rationally worked out, rationally grasped, and rationally defended, reasoned ideas about the world and one’s own place it in. (Cooper 2012a: 17)

He then contrasts this way of life with a religious way of life.

A philosophical way of life is therefore in fundamental ways quite a different thing from any religious way of life… These characteristics of a religious way of life—living on the basis of a sacred text or tradition, validation through an intense personal feeling—distinguish that way of life from the philosophical one. (Cooper 2012a: 18)

The contrast Cooper wants to draw is familiar enough: a reason-led life vs. a sacred-text or tradition-led life. But notice how difficult it is to say what exactly a reason-led life amounts to in these passages. For example, it is said to be one in which one’s “ideas about one’s world and one’s own place in it” are “argued through,” “rationally worked out,” “rationally defended,” and so on. But did Augustine not do that? Or Maimonides? Or Aquinas?

For the idea of a reason-led life to have real substance, it must therefore mean something different than, and more than, what we might call a “rationally considered” life. Instead, it must refer to something like a “fully rationally grounded life”—that is, a way of life that is reason-based through and through. In particular, it must mean not just that a philosophical life is one in which one considers or evaluates premises taken from elsewhere (scripture, tradition), but that the premises themselves are grounded in what Cooper at one point labels “rational insight” (Cooper 2012a: 9). This would apparently be a life in which reason, on its own, “sees” that certain premises relating to value claims are true, and then works out the inferential consequences of these rational seeings.

But, first, this view of what it means to live a philosophical life seems exceedingly strong. It is one thing to agree that rational insight can tell you what follows from what, or that two claims are incompatible, because they contradict one another. But it is another thing to say that rational insight can tell you which premises or starting points you should accept in the first place, or, when you spot a pair of contradictory claims, which one to reject (cf. Harman 1986). Second, the contrast to “relying solely on rational insight” is not “being irrational.” If we think of rationality in a broader sense, so that it involves something along the lines of “being truth-responsive,” then it would seem highly rational to follow cognitive powers other than, or in addition to, rational insight: for instance, our cognitive powers of perception and memory, and perhaps other truth-directed grounds besides (more on this in a moment).

To get a sense of how exceedingly strong the “rational insight only” criterion is for living a philosophical life, consider the following passages from Galen, the great second century physician and philosopher. Like Cooper, Galen attempted to characterize the genuinely philosophical way of life, and to distinguish it from others:

People admire this or that particular physician or philosopher without proper study of their subject and without a training in scientific demonstration, with the help of which they would be able to distinguish between true and false arguments; some do this because of their fathers, others because of their teachers, others because their friends were either empirics or dogmatics or methodics, or simply because a representative of a particular school was admired in their native city. The same applies to the philosophical schools; different people have for different reasons become Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, or Epicureans. (Galen, *De Ordine Libr. Suor.* 1)[[24]](#footnote-24)

Most people are unable to follow any demonstrative argument consecutively; hence they need parables, and benefit from them just as we now see the people called Christians drawing their faith from parables and miracles, and yet sometimes acting in the same way as those who practice philosophy.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Although Galen’s notion of “scientific demonstration” (epistēmonikē apodeixis)[[26]](#footnote-26) is not easy to summarize, if these demonstrations are to be guided solely by reason—in the sense of rational insight—then they need to be modeled on something like the geometrical proofs in Euclid’s *Elements*. The starting points would need to be somehow self-evident, and the conclusions would need to follow of necessity from those starting points, along the lines Aristotle lays out in *Posterior Analytics* I 2-6.

It is doubtful, however, that there is a way of life that meets this high standard. Spinoza, for one, made a valiant attempt, constructing a moral system—including a hierarchy of value judgments—that he took to meet the standards of Euclidean self-evidence, step by step. But few philosophers have found the various steps of Spinoza’s system as self-evident as he supposed. Similarly, suppose for the sake of argument we take *that all human beings are equal in dignity* as one of our moral starting points. Is it reason that tells us this, in the way that it might tell us that all bachelors are unmarried, or that 7+5=12? That, again, seems doubtful. Yet if Euclidean standards of self-evidence and demonstration are too high a standard for value judgments, where else might we turn? Is the only alternative to a rationally demonstrative way of life a purely irrational way of life, one guided by arbitrary choices and decisions?[[27]](#footnote-27)

To address this question, consider again the first passage from Galen just quoted. There he notes that even many Platonists, Stoics, etc. seem to have adopted their ways of life not as a result of scientific demonstration but rather based on feelings of admiration—especially, feelings of admiration for what we might call the “moral exemplars” that typified that way of life. But this should prompt us to ask: Why exactly would this be such a bad thing? Or even a second-rate thing, in contrast to a way of life based purely in rational insight?

Following thinkers such as Linda Zagzebski, suppose we take admiration to be an emotion, and one that like many other emotions can either fit or fail to fit its object: thus something we fear can in fact be, or fail to be, fearsome; something we pity can in fact be or fail to be pitiable; and so on (Zagzebski 2017: 32-33). On this model, our feelings of admiration, when functioning well, would track the real property of *being admirable* that some people possess. More exactly, and connecting to the idea of a way of life, when functioning well our emotion of admiration would be responsive to people who value the various goods in life appropriately (wealth, status, virtue, honor, etc.), and seem to live out those priorities in real life.

The emotion of admiration might thus be truth-responsive in the sense that it might track a real property in the world. Of course, the “might” is important here, because the emotion can go awry, and fail to track the actual property of being admirable, or moral excellence, in the world. But that is not just true of all of our emotions, but of all of cognitive faculties more broadly, including perception, memory, and introspection.

**VIII. The Philosophical Life**

Turning now to close, let us again take stock. In Sections III-IV we argued that spiritual exercises, as understood in the broad sense of Ignatius of Loyola and Pierre Hadot, were an important part of the ancient conception of philosophy as a way of life, and retain their usefulness today, as ways of anchoring value judgments in the soul and dispelling value illusions. In essence, we were therefore defending the value of taking philosophy as a full-fledged *way of life*—i.e., a way of life encompassing a rich panoply of training, exercises, argument, discussion, and so on—as opposed to just a more restricted vision of philosophy, where it is primarily an *academic discourse*. Cooper, in a sense, collapses this distinction, and argues that the academic discourse was the whole of the way of life—both for the ancients, and, arguably, as a viable model for people today. But this seems like an unpromising way of thinking about philosophy as a way of life, primarily because of the limited powers of reason, and we have suggested we should not follow Cooper’s lead on this score. We have also claimed that, where reason fails to guide us we often, and appropriately, look to examples of people we admire, and attempt to emulate their ways of life. This is in a way an appeal to an exemplar-based way of life or a tradition-based way of life, of which a religious-based way of life is often a special case.

However, we now we can ask: Would such tradition-based ways of life be *philosophical*, even if we allow that they might be rational? And if they are not “philosophical,” then why would we want them to be? In other words, what would be missing from a tradition-based way of life that is *not* philosophical? First, then, we will offer a proposal about what it might be for something to be philosophical in the first place.

We suggest that to think philosophically and by extension to live philosophically is always to be alive to the question: “But is it *true*?” That is, it is to be alive to, and responsive to, the considerations for and against one’s beliefs and the defeaters for one’s beliefs that might come one’s way.

To be *reasons-responsive* in this way is not the same as to be *reasons-grounded*. Our beliefs might be grounded in something other than “reason alone,” in other words, grounded in something other than rational or *a priori* insight. For instance, they might be grounded in perception, or memory, or introspection, or testimony, or the emotions of admiration or fear as described above. To be philosophical is not to deny the legitimacy of these sources as producers or sustainers of knowledge. But it is to be alive to challenges to these sources, or to the beliefs held on the basis of these sources.

Put another way, we suggest that a philosophical way of life is at least a questioning, critical, reflective way of life. This idea is memorably captured in William James’s claim that philosophy is “the habit of always seeing an alternative.” More fully, James suggests that:

Philosophic study means the habit of always seeing an alternative, of not taking the usual for granted, of making conventionalities fluid again, of imagining foreign states of mind. In a word, it means the possession of mental perspective. (James 1876 [1978]: 3)

A philosopher is therefore someone who typically becomes comfortable living in two worlds: in the world of his or her beliefs and commitments, and also in a world a step outside or above his or her beliefs and commitments, a perspective from which the strengths and limitations of his or her first-order beliefs become apparent, as well as the strengths and limitations of other possible approaches. We say “typically,” because this partial detachment might become the full-blown detachment of the sceptic, who leaves his or her first-order commitments entirely behind. Arguably, however, to be a philosopher is to be able to entertain questions about the fallibility of one’s views in a way that temporarily suspends one’s commitments to them.[[28]](#footnote-28)

This talk of attaining new perspectives or new habits of seeing accords with Hadot’s conception of philosophy as a way of life. In particular, it accords with his view that a philosophical way of life is not just one that *incorporates* spiritual exercises—exercises such as preparing in advance for hardship, say. Rather, a philosophical way of life is *itself* a spiritual exercise (Hadot 1995b: 126). If the goal of spiritual exercises is, as Ignatius of Loyola claims, to eliminate disordered attachments, then plausibly an important step in this process is one where we take a step back from the attachments that guide us by default or by habituation and thereby try to take their proper measure. Ideally, with its “distancing” character, philosophy instills a habit of mind that can allow us to do this. Naturally, it does not guarantee that we will do this, but it is one more tool in our toolkit that might help.

Of course, “being philosophical” is not all sunshine. Just as contemporary ethicists do not in general behave better than others, even though they might have thought longer and harder about the issue of how to behave (or live) well, so in general contemporary philosophers do not in general seem to live happier or better lives than others. In particular, they do not seem less prone to value illusions than others—often fearing and preferring some things inordinately, just like non-philosophers. Techniques of detachment can be used badly. Suppose we were brought up in a tradition-based way of life that was in fact correctly oriented to the most important things in life. Distancing ourselves from these traditional ways of life might lead us to de-couple from our commitments, either in a more purely skeptical way, or towards a way of life that is in fact less well oriented to the truth.

So why do it? To begin with, developing authenticity requires reflecting on the things that are offered to us as given—the “for granteds” of our upbringing and culture. Questioning is not incompatible with having commitments, or with the attitude of trust. But it is important for being mature, responsible agents in the world. One emphasis of teachers such as Socrates and Epictetus is the need for us to appropriate ethical judgements *for ourselves*: what do *I* think about the relative value of virtue and wealth? Developing character involves recognizing which commitments we have made our own, even if they are informed by our traditions and influences. Our second answer is that the philosophical way of life is the “childish” way of life, in the best sense of childish. It is said that the ancient Egyptians commonly complained that the Greeks were like children in always asking “Why?”[[29]](#footnote-29) Contemporary Western philosophers, remaining faithful to their Greek roots, are likewise often like children, in the sense not just of asking “Why?,” but of asking the signature question mentioned earlier, “But is it *true*?” Cultivated properly, a philosophical life is thus a childish life in the sense that it encourages us to see the world not as stale, but as new and full of wonder. If philosophers have a habit of not taking things for granted, then they might be more open to looking at the world with fresh eyes and exploring unexamined possibilities.

Thus in response to the question “Why a philosophical way of life?,” we suggest the following answer: Because it is important for authentic development; at the same time, it is important for becoming (or remaining) child-like, in the sense of being able to see the world afresh.

Of course, the philosophical way of life can be limited or corrupted in different ways. One might achieve distance with respect to some issues—perhaps just narrow, technical ones—but not others. Similarly, the child-like habit of asking “But is it true?” might keep the world fresh in the hands of some, but might promote a point-scoring mentality in others. We can acknowledge this and other frailties of a philosophical way of life, while still maintaining its great value.

**IX. Summary**

In this paper we earlier considered the question: Why does philosophy need spiritual exercises? More exactly, why does philosophy considered in John Cooper’s sense—namely, as something like “reason alone” or “rational insight and argument” alone—need spiritual exercises? And our answer was: because the motivational powers of reason are limited. Spiritual exercises do not guarantee, but they help reason to secure, a life lived in accord with one’s value judgments.

We also claimed that the discerning powers of reason are limited, and this opened the door to tradition-based ways of life, which might be reasons-responsive even if they are not fully reasons-grounded. But a purely tradition-based way of life, even if it offers a correct vision of the good, or what is more or less important in life, nonetheless benefits from an element of philosophy—of living philosophically—because of its relation to authenticity and a childlike wonder. A philosophical way of life is therefore of widespread value, even if the life of the professional philosopher is not for everyone.

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1. Resources related to contemporary Stoic events are collected at www.modernstoicism.com. In terms of popular books, see, e.g., Bakewell (2011; 2016), Puett and Gross-Loh (2017), and Wright (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, e.g., the Mellon Foundation’s 2018 grant entitled “Philosophy as a Way of Life” (www.philife.nd.edu) and the 2018 NEH Summer Institute entitled “Reviving Philosophy as a Way of Life.” In terms of book series, Oxford University Press is developing a new line of monographs, *Guides to the Good Life*, exploring philosophy as a way of life, and Princeton University Press has a new series, Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers, on the same theme. Recent courses on "Philosophy as a Way of Life" have also been offered at Deakin, Fordham, Notre Dame, Royal Holloway, the University of Toronto, Wesleyan, and Yale-NUS, among other schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Of course, most people live at the crossroads of several ways of life and there might be no neat divisions. Thus someone might be an American, of Chinese origin, and a Buddhist. Such a person would then need to try to work out how the different visions of the good embodied in these ways of life stand in relation to each other. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Still stronger claims would be that philosophy *alone* is able to arrive at this correct vision, or that it alone is able to arrive at the correct vision reliably or safely. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For one thing, he suggests that relying on non-reason-based way of life is not “reliable” (2012a: 38). For another, it seems to involve a lamentable lack of understanding on the part of the adherent (2012a: 18). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In his public *Letter to Herodotus*; for discussion see Cooper (2012a: 271-272); followers also venerated Epicurus as a savior, feasting him in the manner of a divinized hero (Plutarch *Lathē Biōsas* 1128-9; see Clay: 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cooper mostly ignores this problem for his account. He claims that the Epicureans were not part of the “main line” of Greek philosophy which saw reason as divine (2012a: 226), but goes on to acknowledge that the Epicureans and skeptics were the Stoics main rivals in the Hellenistic period (2012a: 305-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. We agree here with Cooper 2012a: 54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This fits nicely with the suggestion in the *Meno* that we are sometimes better off following political leaders who have temporarily been inspired by the gods than following what our limited human reason counsels (99b-100a). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. We are assuming, with most scholars (including Cooper 2012b: 30-31), that we can distinguish between Socratic dialogues, focused around issues and approaches associated with the historical character, and Platonic dialogues, where Plato is using Socrates and other characters to explore views of interest to himself. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Of course, this view is in some tension with the Socratic thesis that virtue equals knowledge, but the greater the tension, the more evidence we have that Plato thought important revisions were needed to Socrates’ intellectualist picture. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For further discussion of the relative role rational and non-rational elements play in the education of the various classes of citizen in the *kallipolis* see Kamtekar 2008, section 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Plato’s *Laws* show the influence this psychology has on education. Its educational program, as Kamtekar notes (2008: section 4),placesmore emphasis than the *Republic* on using choral dance to order the movements of the young in a way that seems designed to regulate the movements of the soul outlined in the *Timaeus*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. *Physics* VII 3, 247a8-b18. Stoic accounts of the development of reason also emphasize the relevance of the condition of one’s body and one’s perception. (Seneca *Ep.* 124.9-11). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For more on the role such techniques play for the Stoics see Sellars (2003: ch. 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Kamtekar for more discussion of the connection between Aristotle’s *NE* and his *Politics*, including how habituation works and the role of music in education (2014a: 376-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. [note omitted for anonymous review] [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For further critical engagements with Cooper’s distinction between religion and philosophy and with his suspicion of spiritual exercises see Kamtekar (2014b) and Sellars (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Cooper correctly notes that Hadot “got this term [“spiritual exercises”] from Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th Century Spanish founder of the Jesuit order.” (Cooper 2012b: 40). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. We acknowledge however that in one sense spiritual exercises are not necessarily essential to the way of life approach. One can imagine, for example, human beings whose appetites and passions are not normally disordered or inordinate, and hence who are more readily guided by reason. We do believe this is extremely rare, however, and that for the large majority of people spiritual exercises in fact will be essential, given their contingent psychologies. Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping us to clarify this point. For another very rich approach to the idea of spiritual exercises, see Rabow (1954). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. As Aristotle noted, knowledge can be seated in us in two ways—either in a way that it has “become part of us” (1147a23), or in a way that it has not become part of us, but is really living at the surface of our soul. Preventative spiritual exercises thus help to ensure that value illusions do not arise in the first place, because they help lend our value judgments special authority or weight. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See especially his *The Sickness Unto Death,* Part 2 (1849 [1941]). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Studies by Schwitzgebel and Rust (2014, 2016), characterizing the moral behavior of professional ethicists, offer more support for this idea. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. v. XIX, p. 50 Kühn edition, trans. Walzer 1949, 19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This is Walzer’s translation of a fragment preserved in Abu'l Fida', Universal Chronicle, book 3, chapter 3, (Abulfeda, *Historia anteislamica*, Leipzig, 1832), Walzer (1949: 15). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For more on Galen’s notion of scientific demonstration, see (Singer 2016: sec. 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. We should emphasize that the foundational axioms on this view are not irrational just because they are not arrived at via something like a priori insight. They are rational to the extent that they are truth-directed or truth-tracking. Linda Zagzebski's model, mentioned in a moment, offers one way this might occur. Thanks to the anonymous referee for helping us to clarify this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Descartes's approach at the outset of his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (2008) powerfully illustrates this idea. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See, e.g., *Timaeus* 22b and Ritchie (1923: 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)