It might be inferred, in either a receptive or a suspicious spirit, that the main title of John Sellars’ book suggests an intention to provide the companion-piece to Alexander Nehamas’ hugely popular Sather lectures, of the same name, on the figure of Socrates. Or again, an installation of the kind of programmatic research in ‘technologies of the self’ proposed, at the beginning of the 1980s, by Michel Foucault. In fact, Sellars makes no immodest claims to intellectual patronage; he does share, however, with Nehamas the intention of turning to philosophy’s classical heritage in order to widen and deepen contemporary perceptions of the discipline. As he summarises in the book’s opening and closing pages, the ‘technical conception of philosophy’ which he argues on behalf of Stoicism would not be simply an antiquarian relic, a naïf primitif, but the marrow of a counter-tradition taking in the humanisms of the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Sellars is the author of the entry on Neostoicism in the Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy), up to the works of Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze.

The Art of Living is, then, as much an apology – for the coherence of a certain conception of the ‘nature and function’ of the philosophical project – as it is an admirable contribution to the literature on classical Stoicism. This aim relieves it of some of the formal baggage of the history of ideas: it is not structured in continuous, longitudinal section; it does not attempt to coordinate the intellectual data with their social, cultural and institutional milieu; nor is it presented as an exhaustive doxography of the movement. However, the extent to which Sellars is able to adduce so many facets of
the Stoic philosophical program, in a monograph committed to the exposition of just one of them, becomes an indirect testimony to the strength of his claim for its centrality. The point made so forcefully here is that the lived enactment of Stoic principles was not ancillary to those principles; their whole validity was in informing this action, and they had to be appropriated – or, in the figure which Sellars traces to Epictetus, ‘digested’ – in order to perfect it. Because of this, *The Art of Living* is able to provide instructive – if necessarily compressed – accounts of the more relevant theoretical interests of the Stoic school: its epistemology (154-64), its cosmology and psychology (124-6), adding considerably to the breadth of the book and its usefulness as a survey.

In a significant but too brief section, Sellars presents the more explicit point that the well-known division of the Stoic curriculum into a physics, a logic and an ethics was “conceived as a division of *philosophical discourse*, not of *philosophy* itself … merely a question of different teaching methods” (79-81). The fact of multi-disciplinarity should at least be a pause in the case for a unified doctrinal enterprise: the rather rarefied distinction which Sellars adduces (even granted that it is only the self-understanding of the Stoics that is being elaborated here, it is not made entirely clear how philosophy ‘itself’ would differ from philosophical discourse) might have been problematised at greater length. It is only in a later section of the book that Sellars brings into relief his key claim that the relation between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ is reproduced within each of these curricular sub-units, rather than between them. The Epictetan Stoic, in other words, *practices* a logic, practices a physics; and does so, moreover, in a manner that is articulated in an *ascetics*, a regimen of logical and physical ‘exercises’ directed not at the rote-learning of concepts but at the transformation of behaviour. The sustained reconstruction of the *Enchiridion* in which Sellars illustrates these points (129-46) is both highly interesting in its own right, and the stuff of a much more satisfying response to the question of disciplinarity than had been presented earlier.

Only in one other section does Sellars undertake an equally frontal and comprehensive reading of a philosophical text – again, an illuminating analysis of Sextus Empiricus’ skeptical assault on the epistemology of an art of living, drawing on both the *Hypotyposes* and the *Adversus Mathematicos* (88-100). It is here, also, that the reader catches a glimpse of the tangled, eclectic ideological landscape of Hellenistic and later antiquity – in which the Stoics’ purposive application to the philosophical life may have been unique in degree and in elaboration, but not in kind. Sextus’ own indebtedness to this model does in fact square with Sellars’ stated focus on the Stoics, for having most thought through – and not simply lived out – the
meaning of “the relationship between philosophical discourse and one’s way of life” (10) which all the schools, in one way or another, assumed.

For the most part, though, The Art of Living is organised thematically, rather than by text or author. The book’s first half (βίος and τέχνη) contextualises the premium placed on action and biographical detail, as a constant of the professional environment for philosophers in the ancient world. The two major sections here document the consolidation of a ‘technical’ – rather than strictly theoretical – conception of philosophy, from its emergence in the teachings of Socrates to its uptake by the Stoics. A second part (λόγος and ἀσκησις) introduces the problem of correlating theory and practice within this conception, by setting out the interpretative controversy between Martha Nussbaum and Foucault over the character of ancient thought. Sellars’ response is to introduce, here as elsewhere in his work, a terminological precision that neutralises the apparent differences in their positions; the subsequent chapters devoted to Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius substantiate what Sellars means, in fact, by the ‘technical conception of philosophy’ – one neither exclusive of, nor structurally indifferent to, the cognitive rationality which, Nussbaum charges, is missing from Foucault’s picture.

The scholarly apparatus includes a Greek glossary as well as a complete index locorum, the latter of which indicates the amplitude and rigour of Sellars’ scholarship. And it is ultimately as a work of classical scholarship, and as an access to the empirical ground of 2nd century philosophy, that The Art of Living is most effective. As a ‘contribution to contemporary debate,’ it is so closely wedded to that empirical ground as to bring into play its own, sensible caveat against a notion of ‘return,’ and against the tragic scheme in which philosophy has been, from its origin, a ‘forgetting’ of that origin. Without seeking to lather up a manifesto from his material, Sellars’ limpid and direct text makes this an instructive and undemanding encounter with a historical other whose distance, and difference, is never understated.

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