

Stoicism Notes

Conor Redington

[1-4]

Contents

1 Stoicism

Notes on Art of Living and general books around Stoicism

Below, paraphrased from 'Art of Living'

What's attractive to me about Stoicism is the application of philosophy to life. First of all, the notion that we have a soul, that we want to be pure, or that we pursue virtue and try and justify why is worth questioning. Is it social conditioning that this is the case? If so, it's some general social conditioning over vast timescales which is essentially the same thing as 'inherently human' or even an 'objective truth'.

Seller's describes the aim of his book 'The Art of Living' as exploring "the possibility of a conception of philosophy in which philosophical ideas are primarily expressed in behaviour, a conception in which understanding is developed not for its own sake but rather in order to transform one's way of life, a conception of philosophy that would make biography not merely incidentally relevant but rather of central importance to philosophy".

Philosophy does not promise to secure anything external for man, otherwise it would be admitting something that lies beyond its proper subject matter. For just as wood is the material of the carpenter, bronze that of the statuary, so each individual's own life is the material of the art of living.

- Epictetus

Seller's describes this as seeing philosophy as an activity directed towards transforming one's way of life " $\beta\iota\sigma$ ". As opposed to the

This link between an art changing someone's behaviour links the early stoics to Socrates of the Apology and the early Platonic dialogues where philosophy is seen as an art. An art concerned with "transforming someone's behaviour".

- A common objection is that looking at philosophy in this way makes it no different to a religious way of life. That it downplays the role of $\lambda\gamma\sigma$ (logos: "reason" or "plan").

"what distinguishes a philosophical way of life from these religious ways of life is the fact that it is grounded upon, and expresses a desire for, a rational understanding as opposed to, say, mystical insight or unquestioned faith in a system of beliefs."

Sellers says this is what makes this concept of living *philosophical*.

- While other philosophers might see this rationality as constitutive of philosophy, the constitutive thing in perceiving life this way is one's $\beta\iota\sigma$ ". The rational mind is taken for granted.

constitutive: having the power to establish or give organized existence to something.