Matthew Sharpe and **Michael Ure**. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: History, Dimensions, Directions*. Bloomsbury Academic 2021. 407 pp. $95.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 978135012156); $30.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781350102149).

Matthew Sharpe and Micheal Ure have written a welcome volume on the idea and history of philosophy as a 'way of life' or, as they put it, 'PWL'. The book builds on the work of Pierre Hadot, a French historian of philosophy and the real discoverer of this phenomenon. It contains eleven chapters, not including the introduction and conclusion. I will first briefly say what PWL is and then summarize the overall outline of the three parts of the book, state my criticisms of it, before concluding with why on the whole it is an excellent piece of scholarship.

Pierre Hadot found that philosophy, far from being something studied in an institution, as it is today in the modern university, was in fact conceived in the ancient world as a way of life to be lived. It was something practiced with the goal of transforming the individual's view of the world and their entire way of being, with the use of what Hadot termed 'spiritual exercises.' Sharpe and Ure's book is an updated history of PWL for the 21st century. Like Hadot's aforementioned work, the first part of the book consists of the first five chapters, focuses on ancient philosophy with the first chapter on the figure of Socrates, and moves onto the Epicureans, Stoics, Platonists, and Pyrrhonist sceptics.

It is with Socrates that Sharpe and Ure judge that PWL really began and part I sets out many of the themes that form the basis of the rest of the book. Socrates lived his philosophy on the streets of Athens, stating that he knew nothing and questioning Athenians on their common-sense ethical ideas. According to Sharpe and Ure this questioning served as a Socratic spiritual exercise—'Socrates sought not to inculcate theoretical doctrine, but to convert their souls or psyche' (33). Socrates, someone who lived according to reason and had subdued his passions, became the idealized philosophical sage for the subsequent schools of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Socrates' philosophical way of life is compared by Sharpe and Ure to modern academic philosophy as it is practiced in universities, and between the two, they 'cannot overemphasize the contrast' (33). They encourage us to reflect on what our discipline actually is. Is it a purely academic subject, studied in universities, or is it something that we should actually practice and apply to our real lives? This question, along with the other two themes of spiritual exercises and the idea of the sage, is discussed throughout the book.

We see in the next four chapters, how the later philosophical schools continued Socrates' work, mainly in the form of spiritual exercises. Sharpe and Ure brilliantly show the sheer variety of spiritual exercises and how each school made use of them. We are told of such things as the remembrance, writing down, and meditation on key teachings of a school so that they became almost one with the practitioner and ready to apply in their own lives such as the Epicurean fourfold cure or *tetrapharmakos* of key teachings. There is the Stoic practice of *hypomnemata* where adherents were encouraged to write down teachings daily to memorize them. This was the basis for the famous *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. We read about the *tropoi* or 'modes' of the Pyrrhonist sceptics, memorized argument types that could be called upon in defence of their views, deemed essential to

a lived Pyrrhonian life. Lastly, there are the mystical meditations of Neoplatonist Plotinus seeking union with the transcendent *One* and of Boethius, who combined all of the previous teachings in his *Consolation of Philosophy* at the very end of antiquity. All schools used similar spiritual exercises and sought the same goal *atraxia* or *eudaimonia*—inner peace, contentment, and happiness achieved by taming their passions. Great figures and founders such as Epicurus, Epictetus, Plato, Plotinus, and others, were revered as sages who had achieved the final goal, like Socrates before them.

Part II of the book, chapters 5-8, shows how these schools of antiquity influenced and were reinterpreted by philosophers and thinkers over the subsequent centuries. Sharpe and Ure treat the reader to a number of interesting revelations throughout these chapters. We see how Christian philosophers, and monks in the first centuries of the Common Era saw Christianity as the true philosophical way of life, defending and practicing it alongside Pagan schools. There is the surprising fact that PWL continued past the medieval era, where it did not entirely disappear, into the renaissance, where it saw a revival among such thinkers as Petrarch and Montaigne. Early modern philosophers like René Descartes, and even the originators of the scientific method such as Francis Bacon, continued spiritual exercises, showing that the line between 'philosophy' and 'science' has not always been so clear-cut. Voltaire and Diderot in Enlightenment France, where tradition and authority were being radically challenged, continued to look to the ancient philosophers and their exercises to improve their own lives.

Part III comprising chapters 9-11 extends into the modern period. After an interlude detailing the 19th century conflict between PWL and university philosophy, we are treated to three chapters on Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Foucault, who, as Sharpe and Ure show conclusively, all tried to revive PWL in their own ways. Schopenhauer regarded the idea that we can master our passions as a 'Stoic illusion' (247) and believed that freedom from the suffering of life, caused by the will, will never be found. Schopenhauer revived philosophy not as a way *of* life, but a way *out of* life. The ideal Schopenhauerian sage, as Sharpe and Ure put it, 'denies the value, not just of his own particular life, but of the essence of all life: the will to life itself' (255). Nietzsche diagnosed the malaise of modern culture in the fact that it 'eliminates the incorporation of the truth into lived practice that is the hallmark of PWL' (269). He lamented, like Schopenhauer, that philosophy had become completely theoretical. Unlike Schopenhauer, however, he saw philosophy as a return to life and conceived the spiritual exercise of the eternal recurrence, the idea that one should fashion and live their life in such a way that one would be willing to have it repeated for eternity. He thought, as Sharpe and Ure suggest, that we should create ourselves as 'singular artworks worthy of eternity' (291). Finally, we have Foucault, who attempted to reinvent PWL and bring it into the mainstream. Like Hadot he sees ancient philosophy as a 'voluntary and deliberate form of self-cultivation' (295). The ancient Cynics were for him the ideal example of philosophical heroism in 'scandalously living the truth' (297). However, Foucault's idea of a spiritual exercise is the opposite of antiquity's in its view of the self. Whilst ancient schools sought to return the self to its true form, Foucault aims to create discontinuities within it so that it can constantly reinvent itself, with no final goal of *atraxia.* Sharpe and Ure say that to ancient philosophy, Foucault's ideas constitute a 'pathological dissolution of the subject' (311). Foucault's ideas are therefore an interesting case of a different PWL which,

whilst still acknowledging ancient influence, goes against it completely and seeks the goal of treating philosophy as a practical way to live.

The only criticisms of the book are based on what Sharpe and Ure did not include, and what I feel would have improved and broadened their work. Firstly, whilst the Cynic school of philosophy is mentioned throughout the book, the lack of a chapter dedicated to it surprised me. This school more than most, especially in the form of Diogenes of Sinope, who famously lived in a barrel in Athens, disregarding all social conventions, for me exemplified philosophy as a lived, physical way of life more than most others. I feel that there was a lot more to say about them in this regard. Secondly, the book lacks any chapters, or even a small section, on any Eastern philosophy at all. Many schools of Eastern thought, especially Buddhism, schools of Hinduism, Taoism and others, definitely saw themselves as ways of life with spiritual exercises aiming to achieve tranquility and inner peace. In fact, they align very well with Hellenistic schools. In the age of 'decolonizing' the curriculum, this was a disappointing, missed opportunity to show the diversity of Eastern philosophical ways of life, and how Eastern philosophy is just as complex and sophisticated as Western thought. It would be great if this could be addressed in a future work.

Overall, Sharpe and Ure have written a fantastic book and have made an important contribution to PWL as a sub-discipline. They acknowledge their debt to Hadot whilst building upon his work with their own scholarship in an outstanding way. The book works well for both the specialist and as an introduction for the beginner. It encourages a radical and welcome rethinking of what philosophy actually is and allows us to see it in a new and exciting way, not just as something to be studied, but as something to be lived.

Lee Clarke, Nottingham Trent University