Stoic Pragmatism: Open Seminars Online
SEMINAR FOUR: Do We Need Self-Knowledge? For What?
Wednesday, June 11, 2025, 19.00-20.30, Berlin Time (CEST)
Zoom link HERE:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89399920212?pwd=d7bnctNhFr6rLN1ZAk33m0M8ExTGmJ.1

<u>Programme of Seminar Two:</u>
I Chris Skowronski's talk
II Open discussion about the talk
III Questions and Comments about other topics, if there are any

Questions and Issues to be discussed
1 What exactly is self-knowledge? How much is it individual and how much social?
2 Does self-knowledge refer to our natural potential predispositions, talents and their developments?
3 Is self-knowledge a result of a discovery or is a process of inquiry, of self-creation, and self-improvement?
5 Is there any difference between self-knowledge and subjective opinion about oneself?
6 Why self-knowledge is NOT enough, and knowledge, expertise/ skills / practical knowledge/ know-how, experience must complement self-knowledge in given social contexts?

A short presentation of some published claims or stances related to these questions and issues (see full bibliography below).

Classic Stoic interpretation of Socratic 'know yourself':
"the secure cognition (or a set of cognitions) of one's own human nature as part of the nature of the whole" (Brouwer 36).

Pragmatism's Stance (Wm James):
"a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down,—not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all" (James, 291)

Stoic pragmatism's stance (Lachs):
"better thinking makes for better life" (Lachs 2014, 290)
"'Act in accordance with nature,' where by 'nature' is meant the nature of the agent. Hence the first and ultimate commandment of morality becomes the Socratic dictum: "Know yourself" (Lachs 1967, 340).

Neopragmatism's stance (Rorty)
"In his [F. Nietzsche's]view, in achieving this sort of self-knowledge we are not coming to know a truth which was out there (or in here) all the time. Rather, he saw self-knowledge as self-creation. The process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's causes home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language - that is, of thinking up some new metaphors" (Rorty 1989, 27)

Stoic pragmatism's stance (Skowroński)
"The assumptions implicit here are that the agent is an individual that has or wants to have a modicum of self-knowledge and a basic recognition of the factual, not imaginary, mechanisms of the

surrounding social and cultural life, and does care about such things as a meaningful life”
(Skowroński 104)

“Stoic pragmatism wants to include the self-knowledge, life experience, and wisdom transmitted from our cultures’ historical heritages and blend them with the sciences and exacting expertise. And this can be done with the conviction that all of these ways of knowing the world count in fashioning a context of the good life. Stoic pragmatism does not share with science-oriented philosophies something that could be called over-intellectualization, or the assumption on the part of intellectuals that life can best be described, and exclusively understood by, rationally justified criteria” (Skowroński 70).

“thanks to free access to technological tools (the Internet), we can know more about so many important things that concern education, health, job opportunities, not to mention the ways of strengthening our natural talents. Obviously, the ignorant and perverse use of these tools can end up in addiction and a detrimental impact on us and our families. Since, however, these are tools, they need, as all tools, sound practical training for us to understand them (an adequate expertise), and how to operate them to achieve goals we have in mind. It is an important element of appropriate actions to know how to operate such tools and act accordingly” (Skowroński, 97).

Modern Stoicism’s stance (Pigliucci):
 “one of the crucial things for people affected by depression is to constantly monitor themselves and their mental condition. If there is anything that Stoicism trains people to do it is to monitor their own reactions and reflect critically on how they perceive and interpret the world” (Pigliucci, 147)

A related stance: Lydia Amir’s idea of the role of humour in self-knowledge
“Self-referential humor facilitates self-knowledge by creating the distance necessary to observe one’s self with the calmness that characterizes aesthetic contemplation. By suspending blind emotions, silencing shame and disgust, and incapacitating rash action, a safe inward environment is created where hidden aspects of the self are encouraged to emerge under the impartiality of the humorous gaze.
        Self-knowledge is a mode of reflection that involves judgment and whose aim is to make our character less fortuitous and more deliberate. This is the same process as that of increasing control, for what moves our character in the desired direction is that we control it so as to approximate more closely our conception of a good life” (Amir 131).

A related stance: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy/CBT (example of a specific practical method)
“Cognitive restructuring is a method of identifying ineffective patterns of thinking, untrue assumptions, or negative beliefs and learning new, more helpful ways of thinking about difficult situations. Cognitive restructuring for lack of confidence targets the inner critic: assumptions about lack of ability or about others’ judgment. Core beliefs are identified, and new, more effective beliefs are adopted. CBT helps people consider more helpful, realistic ways of thinking about things by recognizing unhelpful thinking that distorts reality” (CBT Los Angles 2020)

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See also: stoic pragmatism bibliography http://berlinphilosophyforum.org/stoic-pragmatism-bibliography-updated-may-2024/

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