

Stoic Pragmatism: Open Seminars Online
SEMINAR SEVEN: What is Education for Today?
Wednesday, September 10, 2025, 19.00-20.30, Berlin Time (CEST)

Zoom link HERE:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89072743928?pwd=Ue8TvrTLzremkxSlTrXFpVrBIWqRbD.1>

Programme of Seminar:

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 aims and forms of (self-)education stoic pragmatism discusses most frequently?
- 2 What is an obstacle-to-opportunity approach (hindrances must be turned into means)?
- 3 Why is important awareness of our potential and its limits?
- 5 What does this mean; education expands self-awareness from self (Socratic know yourself, humanistic *cultura*) → community → humanity, according to the widening concentric circles pattern.
- 5 What is the role of meliorist habits building (self-discipline, intrinsic motivation for learning)?

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

Stoic pragmatist stance (Lachs):

"Stoic pragmatists believe that intelligent effort can make life longer and better. At the same time, they acknowledge human limits and show themselves ready to surrender gracefully when all efforts at amelioration fail" (Lachs 2014a, 206).

Stoic pragmatist stance (Skowronski/Lachs):

"SP aims for a practical application of various forms of educational effort, short-term and long-standing, in the context of human development and personal self-fulfillment as a way a given individual can thrive in society, something that Aristotle, the Stoics, and other ancients called *eudaimonia*. This should be the principal goal of education, not merely professional training, since 'the function of education is to enable people to live longer and better lives' (Lachs 2014b, 426)" (Skowronski 2023, 11).

Classic Stoic stance (Epictetus) on education making us more free

"An uneducated person accuses others when he is doing badly; a partly educated person accuses himself, an educated person accuses neither someone else nor himself" (Epictetus, *Handbook*, 5).

Classic Stoic stance (Musonius Rufus, initiator of stoic feminism) on egalitarian learning

"Women as well as men ... have received from the gods the gift of reason, which we use in our dealings with one another and by which we judge whether a thing is good or bad, right or wrong" (Musonius Rufus, 39).

"Now as for courage, certainly it is to be expected that the educated woman will be more courageous than the uneducated, and one who has studied philosophy than one who has not; and she will not therefore submit to anything shameful because of fear of death or unwillingness to face hardship, and she will not be intimidated by anyone because he is of noble birth, or powerful, or wealthy, no, not even if he be the tyrant of her city" (Musonius Rufus, 43).

Modern stoicism stance (Pigliucci) on learning how the world really works

“The fundamental Stoic idea that to live a good life we have to learn about how the world actually works (as opposed to how we wish it would work), and that we must also learn how to reason correctly in order to best handle the world as it is” (Pigliucci 2017, 179).

Neo-Stoic stance (Nussbaum) on concentric circles education

Q: “Do you think Stoic techniques of learning to control our emotions should be taught in schools?”

A: The part of Stoic therapy I would like to focus on is the Socratic part, the commitment to self-examination, the relentless scrutiny of traditional values. That’s what I appropriate from the Stoics. The part that says ‘now we can use this to go into people’s emotional lives’...I’m not sure that’s appropriate in a university, it’s more appropriate for small children. The other thing I’d want to appropriate is the Stoic sense of the whole world as a series of concentric circles, and that we should become increasingly aware of the broader world to which we belong. That you really can teach in university curricula, you can talk about the world economy, about different world cultures, different world religions and so on. So that’s a very important thing we can borrow from Stoics” (Nussbaum 2012)

Proto-pragmatist stance (Emerson) – books as tools to be used

“Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire...The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul” (Emerson, *The American Scholar*, 4).

“Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding” (Emerson, *The American Scholar*, 3).

Pragmatist stance (Dewey) on obstacles/hindrances

“Hindrances must be turned into means” (Dewey 1917, 10)

Pragmatist stance (Dewey) on Humanism

“At all events, what Humanism means to me is an expansion, not a contradiction, of human life, an expansion in which nature and the science of nature are made the willing servants of human good” (Dewey 1984 [1930], 266).

Pragmatist stance (Dewey) on betterment/meliorism

Pragmatist idea of betterment/ meliorism says that "the specific conditions which exist at one moment, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good, in any event may be bettered" (Dewey 1988 [1920], 181-82)

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

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