

Stoic Pragmatism: Open Seminars Online
SEMINAR SIX: Why Has Cultural Pluralism (so often) Been a Challenge?
Wednesday, August 13, 2025, 19.00-20.30, Berlin Time (CEST)

Zoom link HERE:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88293106089?pwd=Uaef7fHbPCAPLu0XkgdcJ9SQUuIYMA.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 When did the term “cultural pluralism” (as philosophical stance) appear in pragmatism and what did it refer to? And how is it difference with a colloquial meaning of this term?
- 2 Can we talk about cultural pluralism in the context of stoic pragmatism?
- 3 Why cultural pluralism (in a colloquial meaning) is so challenging?
- 4 Any links with the Cynic/Stoic idea of cosmopolitanism?
- 5 What is the difference between cultural pluralism (philosophical stance) and such cultural policies as multiculturalism, the Melting Pot, globalization, DEI/EDI, and similar policies?

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

Definition of and conditions for cultural pluralism by German-American pragmatist, Horace Kallen:

A “Standpoint” saying that culture means a positive and “sympathetic recognition and understanding of differences” (Kallen 1998 [1924], 56).

“Cultural growth is founded upon Cultural Pluralism. Cultural Pluralism is possible only in a democratic society whose institutions encourage individuality in groups, in persons, in temperaments, whose program liberates these individualities and guides them into a fellowship of freedom and cooperation” (Kallen 1998 [1924], 43).

Kallen's teacher at Harvard, Santayana's related stance:

“Human virtues and human forms of society had various natural models, according to differences of nature or of circumstances. Virtue, like health, has different shades according to race, sex, age, and personal endowment. In each phase of life and art a different perfection may be approached” (Santayana 1995 [1951], 337).

Stoic cosmopolitanism (Marcus Aurelius)

“If thought is something we share, then so is reason—what makes us reasoning beings. If so, then the reason that tells us what to do and what not to do is also shared. And if so, we share a common law. And thus, are fellow citizens. And fellow citizens of something. And in that case, our state must be the world. What other entity could all of humanity belong to? And from it—from this state that we share—come thought and reason and law” (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* IV, 4)

Stoic (Hierocles) metaphor of concentric circles (widening circles of concern, *oikeiosis*)

“The first and closest circle is that which each person draws around his own mind, as the center: in this circle is enclosed the body and whatever is employed for the sake of the body. For this circle is the shortest and all but touches its own center. The second after this one, standing further away from the center and enclosing the first, is that within which our parents, siblings, wife, and children are

ranged. Third, after these, is that in which there are uncles and aunts, grandfathers and grandmothers, the children of one's siblings, and also cousins. After this comes the one that embraces all other relatives. Next upon this is the circle of the members of one's deme, then that of the members of one's tribe, next that of one's fellow citizens, and so, finally, that of those who border one's city and that of people of like ethnicity. The furthest out and largest one, which surrounds all the circles, is that of the entire race of human beings" (Hierocles 91)

Stoic pragmatist stance (Lachs/Skowroński on cosmopolitanism and widening circles of concern)

"The idea of *oikeiôsis* (most famously pronounced by Hierocles) says that my interests and social engagement should move outwards, from my individual self to my family, then, if possible, to my fellow citizens, and then finally to my fellow human beings. The metaphor of a stone thrown into the water and creating waves, smaller and smaller, yet spiraling out to the farther regions of the pond, illustrates the direction my energy should go out into public, social, and cultural life. Lachs makes this picture more social, pragmatist, normative, and even sees this 'expansion of ego-boundaries' as "an aim of civilization" (Lachs 1998, 35)" (Skowroński 2023, 20)

Stoic pragmatist stance (Lachs on cosmopolitanism and widening circles of concern)

We should "distinguish our obligations to those near and dear from duties to unknown multitudes around the globe. If I owe everything I can provide to everyone who can use it, I must not prefer meeting my children's needs to feeding the hungry in East Timor" (Lachs 2012, 105).

"The history of civilization coincides precisely with the gradual expansion of the boundaries of the self. We have learned to see first others close to us, then anonymous members of our group, eventually our enemies, and finally, in a halting way, the multitude of strangers that constitute humankind as somehow vitally involved in who we are. Only such extended ego-boundaries can explain why industrial nations offer helping hands when disaster strikes on the other side of the globe. We can see self-interest as the source of foreign aid, of peacekeeping missions, and of humanitarian help only if we think in terms of such an enlarged notion of self" (Lachs 1998, 33-34).

Santayana's stance on cosmopolitanism and widening circles of concern

"A psychological sense in which an individual may transcend himself. His thoughts will embrace all his familiar surroundings; and his habits being necessarily social, his passions will be social too. The scope of his affections may eventually extend over the whole world" (Santayana 1969, 196).

"The full grown human soul should respect all traditions and understand all passions;; at the same time it should possess and embody a particular culture, without unmanly relaxation or mystical neutrality" (Santayana 1986 [1944-1953], 464).

Related stance by M. Nussbaum: cosmopolitanism / concentric circles

"I argue that Cicero provides a promising way forward, which we can further develop. Just as we can defend the intrinsic and motivational importance of ties to family and friends without denying that we owe something to all our fellow citizens (which a just tax system would presumably arrange), it is possible to cultivate (through moral and civic education) a type of patriotism that is, on the one hand, compatible with strong familial, friendly, and personal love, and, on the other hand, builds ties of recognition and concern with people outside our national borders. This has often been done, and great Political leaders including Lincoln, Nehru, F.D.R., and Martin Luther King, Jr. have succeeded, at least for periods of time, in cultivating that type of mixed concern in their nations" (Nussbaum 2019, 13).

“In practical terms, we may give what is near to us a special degree of attention and concern. But we should always remember that these features of placement are incidental and that our most fundamental allegiance is to what is human. Special duties are just delegations from the general duty to humanity. The special measure of concern we give to our own is justified not by any intrinsic value of the local, but by the overall requirements of humanity. (The Stoics think that we usually promote the goals of humanity best by doing our duty where life has placed us—raising our own children, for example, rather than trying vainly to care for all the world’s children)” (Nussbaum 2019, 78).

Bibliography

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- Santayana 1969; see Lachs 1969.
- Skowroński, Krzysztof P. 2023. *A Meaningful Life amidst a Pluralism of Cultures and Values: John Lachs’s Stoic Pragmatism as a Philosophical and Cultural Project*. Leiden-Boston: Brill.
- See also:** stoic pragmatism bibliography <http://berlinphilosophyforum.org/stoic-pragmatism-bibliography-updated-may-2024/>
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