

Stoic Pragmatism: Open Seminars Online
SEMINAR EIGHT: Is APA's (American Psychological Association's) Criticism of
"Emotional Stoicism" Justified?

Wednesday, October 8, 2025, 19.00-20.30, Berlin Time (CEST)

Zoom link HERE:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82157324636?pwd=ZqH3eW4s2bdIT3jxM34xbZeavzzy1r.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 does APA 2005 version say about logic defeating/ controlling anger?
- 2 What does APA 2018 version say about the so-called "toxic masculinity," which includes self-reliance and emotional stoicism?
- 3 What are the colloquial definitions of stoicism (APA does not give them)?
- 4 A response to APA 2018? Redirecting negative emotions into our good.
- 5 Another response: what is wrong with being tougher, with self-reliance, and with intelligent action?

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

APA's "Controlling Anger Before it Controls You" (2005) – the first context

"Logic defeats anger, because anger, even when it's justified, can quickly become irrational. So use cold hard logic on yourself" (APA 2005).

- Stoic Pragmatist stance: dealing with anger overlaps with the stoic pragmatist way, and it is difficult to see a difference between these two sources of advice.

APA's "Controlling Anger Before it Controls You" (2005) – the second context (problem-solving)

"There is also a cultural belief that every problem has a solution, and it adds to our frustration to find out that this isn't always the case. The best attitude to bring to such a situation, then, is not to focus on finding the solution, but rather on how you handle and face the problem" (APA 2005).

- Stoic pragmatism IS sympathetic to APA's approach towards the problem of dealing with negative emotions.

APA's "Guidance for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men (2018)" – the first context:

"Emotional stoicism" is a part of "traditional masculinity," like "homophobia, not showing vulnerability, self-reliance, and competitiveness" are, and may deter males "from forming close relationships with male peers" (APA 2018, 11).

- Stoic pragmatism is NOT sympathetic to this approach.

APA's "Guidance for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men (2018)" – the second context:

it suggests that stoicism is a kind of pathology: "Psychologists also strive to reduce mental health stigma for men by acknowledging and challenging socialized messages related to men's mental health stigma (e.g., male stoicism, self-reliance)" (APA 2018, 19).

- Stoic pragmatism is NOT sympathetic to this approach. The humanistic, good-life-oriented and pro-social dimension of stoic pragmatism fortifies us in downplaying suggestions that (male) stoicism or self-reliance is something wrong,

Since no APA's definition of Stoicism or stoic, we get a rather conventional definition from American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

STOIC: "One who is seemingly indifferent to or unaffected by joy, grief, pleasure, or pain."

I follow McLynn "bastardised forms of 'stoicism'" (McLynn 2010 [2009] 540), present in popular language these days, rather than scientific analyses of this position (and doctrine) in its historical context.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English - definition of STOIC

"Someone who shows no feelings of dislike, worry, etc., and does not complain when something unpleasant happens to them."

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).

Classic Stoic stance (Epictetus) on emotion-free tenets that teach tranquillity

"Never say about anything, 'I have lost it,' but instead, 'I have given it back.' Did your child die? It was given back. Did your wife die? She was given back. 'My land was taken.' So this too was given back. 'But the person who took it was bad!' How does the way the giver asked for it back concern you? As long as he gives it, take care of it as something that is not your own, just as travelers treat an inn" (Epictetus, *Handbook*, 11)

My comment: we, contemporary people, need to take into consideration the level of medicine at that time and the actual helplessness of most people facing difficulties, which means that had to think of other ways of dealing with problems.

Modern stoicism on emotions (Pigliucci, Irvine)

"Little is more pragmatic than learning to manage anger, anxiety, and loneliness, three major plagues of modern life" (Pigliucci 2017, 172).

Stoicism is much more about "redirecting them for our own good" (Pigliucci 2017, 2) in order to "minimize the number of negative emotions" (Irvine 2019, 17), rather than to annihilate or uproot them so that our emotional lives become mutilated. In this way, it better accommodates us to face setbacks and losses.

Stoic pragmatism stance (Lachs) on intelligent action

"The most notable feature of pragmatists is their commitment to bring life under intelligent and effective human control" (Lachs 2012, 44).

Stoic pragmatism (Lachs) on enjoyable ends

"Positive meaning in life comes from our self-control in being able to convert obnoxious means into intrinsically enjoyable ends" (Lachs 1998, 46).

Stoic pragmatist stance (Skowroński):

“It is not that the stifling of our emotions is at stake, but rather a question of channeling them into a sphere where we can control them and thus avoid, for example, the anger and frustration when our actions fail or go awry. It is pragmatic for our individual economy of life to behave according to our evaluation about what is appropriate and what is not. It is befitting to want and desire according to a life strategy which, among many other things, recognizes, stoically, the difference between things we can control and those we cannot control and, accordingly, locates our emotions in the former rather than in the latter” (Skowroński 2023, 199).

Proto-pragmatist stance (American Transcendentalist: Emerson, Thoreau) on self-reliance:
“Discontent is the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will” (Emerson, *Self-reliance*, 16).

“When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months” (Thoreau, *Walden*, 6).

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

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