

Registry Report

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stoicus communitas

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Published and edited by
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

If you change your e-mail address contact cyberstoic@aol.com to continue getting your newsletter. The following information has come to the attention of the "Registry Report."

- WILLIAM O. STEPHENS, member of the Stoic Registry and Professor of Philosophy and of Classical & Near Eastern Studies at Creighton University, Nebraska, USA, has recently published *STOIC ETHICS Epictetus and Happiness as Freedom* (Continuum, 2007). An excerpt from the publisher's promotional literature states: "In this unique book, William O. Stephens explores the moral philosophy of Epictetus, a former Roman slave and dynamic Stoic teacher whose teachings are the most compelling defense of ancient Stoicism that exists. Epictetus' philosophy dramatically captures the spirit of Stoicism by examining and remedying our greatest human disappointments, such as the death of a loved one. Stephens shows how, for Epictetus, happiness results from focusing our concern on what is up to us while not worrying about what is beyond our control. He concludes that the strength of Epictetus' thought lies in his conception of happiness as freedom from fear, worry, grief, and dependence upon luck."



ARCHIVE ACTIVITY

If you change your e-mail address and/or life status contact cyberstoic@aol.com to keep your Stoic Registry Archive entry current. The following people have been entered into the Archives since our last newsletter.

- **TRISTAN CUTLER** (1981-). Tristan lives in Nottingham, England. He said, “I have always had an interest in philosophy and religion and was of the opinion that all had failings, contradictions, or expected a Herculean leap of faith. I adopted a humanist philosophy for many years, but felt disillusioned. Then one day, I was playing the video game, “Rome Total War,” which highlighted a period in history where the Greeks founded the philosophy of Stoicism. Being naturally curious, I had to Wikipedia it. I was flabbergasted! Many of their values I shared, and the more I read on the more I was impressed and intrigued. I am still very new to this philosophy and wish to study more and to talk to other Stoics.”
- **JONAS JUUL** (1982-) lives in Odense, Denmark, and studies Philosophy at Southern Danish University. He said, “I have been a supporter of Stoicism and have lived with the Stoic guidelines for many years. My main Stoic inspiration is Seneca, especially ‘De Brevitate Vitae,’ and the thoughts of living in accordance with nature are the Stoic thoughts which inspire me the most.”
- **JONATHON NAGEL** (1983-) is an US Army Sergeant, Military Police, stationed in Iraq. His home is Indianapolis, Indiana. He said, “I hold a BA in Philosophy and do consider myself a Stoic. I have dedicated myself to living the philosophical life and found the Stoic school of thought to be the choice for me.” Jonathon indicated he looked forward to communicating with other Stoics online.
- **NIKKI OWENS** (1978-). Ms Owens said, “I am a full-time mother and homemaker living in Boise, Idaho. I was born and raised in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It seems my whole life I’ve been a seeker, looking for the spiritual and philosophical system that resonates as truth with me. I have found myself to be inherently Stoic in my beliefs and outlook on life, and currently combine the Stoic philosophy with the spiritual practice of Numenism, a kind of Roman Shinto. I’d be happy to communicate with anyone who wishes to discuss these and related topics.”



SPOTLIGHT

On a Contemporary Stoic

James Robert (Rob) Falla was born in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada on the 22nd of September, 1972. He moved around a lot in his early years as his father often changed jobs from being a bricky, a roughneck, a heavy vehicle mechanic, a truck driver, et cetera. His earliest Canadian ancestors arrived in that country from opposite sides of the planet. One grandfather came from England, where he was “part of a social engineering program in the UK to rid the country of orphans.” Another emigrated from Japan to the US, where “he was treated worse than a dog,” before finally relocating to Canada.

After attending about twenty primary schools, he settled into a more stable educational program at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario, where he studied Business Administration and Accounting . He also studied Philosophy and Chinese. In 1999, Rob moved to the UK with his German (ex)wife, which allowed him to migrate to the UK under the European Union rules that grant the right of free movement to European citizens and their families. He is currently employed as a Technical Author in the mobile phone software industry in Cambridge, UK. As a Canadian, Rob is able to both vote in and stand for election in the UK. (The Queen is the head of

state in both countries.) Taking advantage of this right, Rob stood for council in 2002, which he barely lost by only 49 votes. He is currently contemplating another stand.

Aside from his ex-wife, Rob has two daughters who live with their mother. He currently lives with his English girlfriend and her daughter. When he is not working or standing for council, he enjoys country walks, learning new languages, talking politics, economics, and philosophy with his friends, and being with his children. He also said, "I work only to allow me to do these things. I work to live. You could also say that I have a paying job as a hobby to support the more important work in my life. It amounts to the same thing either way....I define myself by all the things in my life, including my job, but it has its place, and I refuse to give it more head space than its due."

The Interview

Erik: Regarding your great grandfathers, the ones you spoke of who first emigrated to Canada, would you mind giving us a brief introduction to their lives?

Rob: On my mother's side, her father migrated to Canada from Scotland in the 1940s. Her mother was born into an already long-established family. Her mother's father's father (my great, great grandfather - it's getting confusing) was born in Japan. He migrated to California in the late nineteenth century and on to Canada in the early twentieth. His father was a daimyo, something like a mayor of nineteenth century Japan, connected at court and wealthy. But, he was the second son, and according to their tradition he had little chance of making much of a life for himself there. His father encouraged him to travel to America, "the land of opportunity." He arrived with plenty of money and looked for work.

The only job he was able to get was at a bakery, which was the beginning of his career as a highly regarded chef in Canada. In the bakery, he was only able to work in the evenings, because the customers took offense at his presence when the shop was open. Aside from the baker's family, most people were openly hostile towards him. Eventually he decided to move East, to Ontario, where, according to his friends and acquaintances, the people were much more accepting of a Japanese migrant, especially one as skilled as he was by that time. He still had most of the money his father had given him, plus the money he was able to save from his job, so he was well positioned to start life in Canada. Aside from him the rest of that side of the family is a mixture of English and Irish.

Erik: Is there any physical evidence of your Japanese ancestry? I mean, do you look Japanese at all?

Rob: I think he is a step grandparent - physical evidence would suggest as much. Actually, I have a bit of the look of a Spaniard. Regardless of that possibility, I am proud that he is a member of my family, as he not only stood up to but prospered against great odds.

On my father's side, his father's father (my great grandfather) migrated to Canada from

Guernsey between the first and second world wars. My father's mother's family were long established in Canada (I am not sure how long) and are a mixture of English and Welsh. Since the inhabitants of Guernsey were mainly ethnic Spanish, having been granted the island as reward for helping William conquer the British Isles and the fact that my family name is so common in Spain, I believe there is a strong Spanish mix in there too.

Erik: The great grandfather sent to Canada as a social experiment with orphans: do you know about how old he was, and was this the same social engineering group that sent petty and not-so-petty criminals to Australia?

Rob: As far as I can tell he was in his early teens. No, this was another social experiment to get rid of the orphans by sending them to Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. There are details on the web. They were often sent to "join" families, often working as virtual slaves on farms and in factories. Not as interesting as a criminal sent into exile, but an interesting story still.

Erik: I want to follow up on the council election. For the benefit of those not familiar with English elections, perhaps you could elaborate. What is the council?

Rob: The council is a local level of government, similar to City Hall, or a Regional Municipality in the US and Canada, run by elected officials and full-time professional officers. If there is a political majority, the largest party runs the council. If there is no overall political control of the council, the officers run the show. Obviously it is better to have the elected officials run the council with the officers responsible for providing guidance and support.

Erik: Is this the Cambridge city council; what are the terms of office; is it a full-time paid position; and, generally, what does the council do?

Rob: No, I live in a village outside the boundaries of the city council. It is South Cambridgeshire District Council. Once elected, you are a councilor for a term of two, three or four years, depending on the election schedule. It is a part-time, voluntary position, but you are paid a small monthly allowance to cover reasonable time. If you hold an executive position like mayor, leader of council, or deputy leader, it becomes a full time paid position. District and City councils provide services like garbage collection, development and planning, housing and some social services.

Erik: Thank you for that excellent overview. Now, on to a more delicate subject if you don't mind. How would you like me to treat the ex-wife issue? Should I leave her out entirely, or are you comfortable enough with the situation to keep it in if needed?

Rob: I am not worried about mentioning the ex. These things happen. Maybe I will even take the time to draft a response to Musonius Rufus position on marriage. Musonius Rufus aside, there are no major Stoic concerns regarding divorce. Musonius' position is that philosophy should be practiced within marriage, and that it only works when the couple have a shared interest in philosophy. There is no intrinsic good in maintaining a marriage or any other friendship if it becomes a constant strain. It is better to move on. I do not accept Musonius position on marriage, and what's more I have not seen any Stoic doctrines that would support his position. It is not enough to say that Socrates was married.

Erik: Good. Was there any particular moment when you knew you were a Stoic?

Rob: I was raised Christian, sampled various denominations before deciding it was not for me, and started the long search. A girl I met in college introduced me to Buddhism, which I spent many evenings reading about and trying to practice. Eventually I decided two things: nothing can ever make me accept reincarnation, and Buddhism is an Eastern philosophy. I decided all religions are philosophy taken to the masses. And, pretty much on my own at that stage I began

sifting through the dusty halls of western philosophy. During this time, I continued to practice certain aspects of Buddhism, thinking that it is better than nothing.

One day, a friend from Germany came to visit and told me about the handbook of Epictetus he had recently found on the Gutenberg project. I read it with growing interest, constantly having the 'aha' feeling. I searched the web for references and read and bought books and read and looked for living Stoics. It took me about a month or two to stop calling myself a Buddhist and about a year to feel confident enough to identify myself as a Stoic.

I have started giving talks on Stoicism in the Cambridge area. We have a weekly philosophers' dinner, meaning that we meet for dinner on a Wednesday and discuss some philosophical issue. Thankfully, Stoicism is a rich enough philosophy that it can withstand debate and nothing is off the agenda, not even the word of Zeno. I expect that I shall continue to identify myself as a Stoic for the rest of my days.

Erik: If you could influence the course of human destiny, what would be the ideal place of Stoic thought and community in the world? For example, do you think it would compete with or replace religions?

Rob: Current trends see most major religions becoming marginalized. This is proper as they are too full of irrational mysticism to be taken seriously by sophisticated and rational people who prefer the concept "free thinking people" to "right thinking people". There is one major religion that is currently growing that is a cause for concern, because the adherents to that religion seem, overwhelmingly, to prefer dictating the "right thinking people" line. I don't think we are likely to see a new practicing Stoic world leader. The best we as Stoics can do is practice behaving in a Stoic manner at all times and always be prepared to suspend judgement when lacking cataleptic knowledge.

Erik: Thank you, Rob, for giving us a chance to know you better.

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THE PORCH

The following book review was prepared by Rob Falla. All opinions and recommendations are his alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of this e-newsletter. Editor.

The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics, edited by Brad Inwood. Cambridge University Press, 2003. Available at amazon.com.uk, Hardcover, for 17.09 pounds. Currently unavailable new from amazon.com.us, but available through them from external sources, used from \$43.12.

Level: Everyone

Strengths: Provides an apparently complete overview of the three pillars of stoicism, Ethics, logic and physics. Discusses the historical development of Stoic doctrines, showing that rather than being handed down from Zeno as a rigid set of doctrines they were debated throughout and

beyond Zeno's life and continued to be debated and refined as long as Stoicism was a living philosophy.

Weaknesses: As this book was written by so many contributors, and necessarily so, the differences in writing styles can be a bit jarring at times. That is not a weakness so much as an annoyance that you can easily overcome. More annoying is that there is no standard referencing system throughout the book.

How does it compare to other general works? I have not read other printed general works so am not able to make a comparison. I have, however, read what I could find on the Internet and so can say that this book is much more useful for anyone wanting to either learn more about Stoicism in general or about some specific stoic. Where it does not delve into a topic as deeply as you may want it usually provides references to other sources.

Summary: Starting with the history of Stoicism, examining Stoic doctrinal development and teaching, looking at Stoic influence on western culture and science, this book apparently does it all. It is filled with new (to me) and interesting information about the founding of the school and Zeno's own philosophical education and development. It was not a big surprise, for example, that Zeno's family were wealthy merchants, but what was surprising was that Zeno seemed to go through a period of philosophical wandering, starting with Plato, thanks to his father, and progressing through more contemporary (in his day) philosophies such as cynicism. This was interesting in that it helped to frame the conditions under which Stoicism developed and helps to explain why, for example, Zeno rejects certain of Socrates teachings while accepting others.

I am not going to go on and on about the details of the book. If you are reading this, you are already at least partially interested in what Stoicism means from some perspective. That is enough. Most of what you will find in independent reading and research will be about Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and a smattering of others. Primarily you will know that Stoicism is about ethics. You may also get that it is about impressions and kinds of knowledge. There is much more to Stoicism, and the fastest and easiest way to get a much more complete picture is to beg, borrow or steal a copy of this book today and get reading.

If you are interested in figuring out how Stoicism relates to modern life, and how Stoicism can help you navigate through life, you need to read this book, twice. Buy it today if you do not already own a copy.

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Thank you for reading.

Stoicus Communitas,

Erik