

REGISTRY REPORT

a bimonthly eNewsletter
for the Stoic community

Stoicus communitas: Stoikos koinonia



THE NEWS

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THE PORCH

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Stoicism in the News

This news is brought to you by Jules Evans, British journalist and member of the Stoic community, who says that according to Bloomberg, the global financial news provider, there's an increasing appreciation of ancient spirituality in China. Last month, the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* made it to the top ten of non-fiction best sellers. Marcus came in at #7. Who came in first place? You guessed it, Confucius. We're waiting breathlessly for the tidal wave of Chinese Stoics.

People

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:

Jeremy Lyman Adams (1972-) A practicing Stoic living near Portland, Oregon.

Leo Angelo B. Cedeno (1985-). "I am in the Navy. I am glad to find a place of people who practice Stoicism. I think this is a great thing, and I am happy to join you guys. My spiritual father is Epictetus. I first stumbled onto him through *Enchiridion* on November 2007 when I was in San Antonio, Texas. The first time I read the beginning of *Enchiridion*, it felt to me that I had found something great, something important that cultivates and empowers you that I had been searching for all this time. I have been practicing Stoicism ever since."

Thomas S. Daley (1960-) is a retired US Marine who lives in Dallas, Texas, and works as a Vice President for DMS, Inc. He said, "...excited to find a forum/outlet/source for discussion/education about Stoicism."

Kevin W. Hatch (1987-) is a counselor living in Cedar City, Utah, who said, "I have identified myself as a Stoic for the past year and a half now. Growing up in Utah, I was raised under beliefs [Mormon] that I do not believe any more. I went on a large internal journey about what I really believed, and I have found the Stoic virtues to be what I value."

Timo Koivusalo (1958-) Former US Army Ranger, student, merchant & trader, consultant, hopeless idealist and eternal admirer of life. World citizen known also by his nick name Ranger Hobo, Timo roams around the world and calls home where he lays his head. His motto is "Say what you mean, and mean what you say."

Clayton Talbert, Sr., (1943-) is a resident of Ontario, Canada, a trained mediator, and a retired trade unionist who was the plant chairperson where he was employed for 20 years as a journeyman tool & die maker. Mr Talbert said, "I was one of the founding members of the National Black Coalition of Canada-Windsor Chapter in 1980. I became the Membership Chairman and Secretary and sat on several standing committees. This Chapter became the local organization which broke away from the National body and became known as the Windsor Black Coalition. I was the President for well over ten years. I also was president of the Windsor Urban Alliance, an umbrella organization which assisted individuals and groups who found themselves disadvantaged and falling through the cracks of our societies' safety-nets. I remain until today the president of this organization."

Spotlight on God and Dr. Haisch

It may come as a surprise to some members of the Stoic community that most classical Stoics believed in God. It was a rather fluid concept, but very much developed nonetheless. The second head of the Greek school, Cleanthes, of all the early Stoics appeared most interested in the divine, dividing natural philosophy into two parts, physics and theology, with theology regarded as of central importance to the philosophical system as a whole. According to Diogenes Laertius in Lives of Eminent Philosophers, the Stoic God is "an immortal living being, rational, perfect, and thinking in happiness, unreceptive of anything bad and provident with regard to the cosmos and the things therein. But he is not of human form. He is the [creator] of the whole and as it were the father of all things, both in general and insofar as the parts of him is concerned which pervades all things, and which is called by many names, corresponding to its powers (DL VII 147)."

Thus, it was with considerable interest and surprise that I read the recent work of the astrophysicist Bernard Haisch, Ph.D., The God Theory (Weiser Books 2006), and discovered that much of what he said reminded me of the Stoic God. What was even more surprising is that Haisch appeared to only be aware of the common dictionary definition of Stoics, disparaging those who live by the Stoic view of life no less than four times. I decided that wasn't right, and something had to be done about it. So, I wrote to Dr. Haisch, and he wrote back. He thanked me for my praise of his work and asked if I would be interested in writing a review of his book for Amazon.com. I agreed to write the review if he would agree to an interview for the Registry Report. We set a date, and the interview following this brief profile is excerpted from our telephone conversation of 28 JUL 08.

Dr. Haisch is an astrophysicist, author of over 130 scientific publications, and was a scientific editor of the *Astrophysical Journal* for ten years. After earning his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Haisch did postdoctoral research at the Joint Institute for Laboratory Astrophysics, University of Colorado, US, and the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. His professional positions include Staff Scientist at the Lockheed Martin Solar and Astrophysics Laboratory; Deputy Director of the Center for Extreme Ultraviolet Astrophysics at the University of California, Berkeley; and Visiting Scientist at the Max-Planck-Institute in Garching, Germany. He was also Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, The European Astronomical Society, and a member of the American Astronomical Society. Dr. Haisch is married, with three children, and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.



Bernard Haisch

The Interview

ERIK: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk with you. Before we begin, I should probably explain that I know a little about the physics of ancient philosophy, mostly Stoic physics, but very little about the physics of contemporary science. So, I guess I'll be representing the least informed members of the Stoic community.

DR. HAISCH: That's OK, I'm a friendly guy.

ERIK: Great! If you don't mind I'd like to start by comparing the similarities between your God in *The God Theory* and the Stoic God of Stoic theology. I'm not sure what you know about Stoic theology. May I give you a brief outline?

DR. HAISCH: That would be a good idea.

ERIK: Well, first of all, the God of Stoic theology is the governing principle of the cosmos, an all-encompassing divine reason, a unified whole. It is a pantheistic God, but also providential, which actually makes us panentheists. So, the cosmos is the substance of a corporeal God, an active principle without a particular form until it interacts with the passive principle, gross matter, creating and defining the cosmos and its parts. This makes the cosmos a polarity where opposites are united.

Stoics believe that everything real is corporeal and that the cosmos is a living biological organism whose functions are controlled by a force transcending mechanical functions. Vitalism. The Stoic God permeates matter and by so doing gives it shape and form. Stoics really have no metaphysics in the Aristotelian sense, because our God encompasses everything—including the so-called supernatural.

It seems to me that everything I said except the part about the Stoic God being corporeal is the same or similar to your God in *The God Theory* where you contend that God is all thought, and the physical reality we see and feel is illusion. You refer to your God as an infinite intelligence and consciousness. I did have a question about that. Is that one concept or two? Do you see a difference between infinite intelligence and consciousness? I mean does it make sense for an infinite intelligence to NOT have consciousness?

DR. HAISCH: I don't see how that could be possible. I mean, consciousness is the basis of everything, therefore what could intelligence be other than an act of consciousness?

ERIK: Good question. I believe Stoics could also accept numerous comments you made about human intelligence being the same as God's intelligence or consciousness that has deliberately fragmented itself. We also agree that everything in the universe is defined by a polarity – light/dark, hot/cold, male/female – and that this kind of polarity, or dynamic continuum, is the very basis of creation. So we're really not that far apart in most ways.

I was very impressed by your analogy comparing the formlessness of water to the formlessness of God. Water can be changed into the shape of a snowflake or an igloo or an ice sculpture just as a formless God can become the transient structures of our familiar world.

DR. HAISCH: Oh yeah, yeah. I'd forgotten about that.

ERIK: That was a very useful analogy, certainly something we could agree with, the formlessness part

that actually creates the form that we see, the body of the universe as the physical manifestation of God. But, let me get back to the formlessness of water creating snowflakes and igloos. Our God is also formless, except that instead of water as our universal element for us it is fire—a kind of rarefied fire, invisible, a creating and sustaining fire, except during *ekpyrosis*, but I don't want to get into that.

We get much of our cosmology from the Greek mystical philosopher Heraclitus who lived 2500 years ago, so his fire may be more like light as described in physics today, perhaps the sea of quantum light you mention. Of course the original Stoics didn't know anything about quantum light sustaining all physical existence, and, frankly, I don't either. I'm still a little fuzzy on that. What's the difference between regular light as bundles of photons and this sea of quantum light?

DR. HAISCH: This is kind of a delicate issue in physics, because here's how it comes about. In quantum physics you have something called the Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which, among other things, says you can't take the last bit of energy away from something. Now if you have something that oscillates back and forth like a miniature pendulum or a grandfather clock, in the real world that always comes to rest because of friction.

But, a quantum oscillator can't ever come to rest, because the quantum laws will exert a continuous fluctuation no matter what. There's a built in uncertainty and a minimum amount of energy that you can never take away. If you apply that rationale to life, then you include that every possible beam of light, every possible frequency of light in every possible direction, every one of the polarization states, but never mind what that means, as a minimum energy, a minimum amount of energy associated with light itself.

That leads to vast, huge, an embarrassingly huge amount of light energy that's every place in the universe that we simply don't see. It's far greater than the light coming from the sun. It's clearly embarrassingly tremendous. So, it's usually assumed that, well, okay, if quantum physics predicts that this exists, yet it can't be really real, a somehow virtual sea of light, and that's where the interpretation gets kind of fuzzy. So, there's no doubt that there's a zero point field, which I call a quantum sea of light, a *thing*, whether that is real or sort of virtually real is the issue in physics.

Now, I don't mean to imply that that is God in its ultimate form. I think that God, the ultimate God, the God of Brahman, the *Ein-Sof* of Kabbalah, that God not only has no form it has no substance. God isn't something we can imagine, because it's an intelligence, a consciousness that exists beyond space, beyond time, beyond matter, and that I characterize as being simultaneously greater than infinity and less than zero. No thing, no thing at all, just being made manifest in the physical world, in the guise somehow of a quantum sea of energy. But I don't mean to associate that with God in his essence, whatever that is.

ERIK: I'm concerned about, well, frankly, the infinite regress argument. It's always a problem, I suppose, when you get to talking about God from any perspective. In *The God Theory*, you said that “The argument for a material God creating a material universe can only take you in circles. After all, if God made matter...then who made that?” Then, a few pages later you say, “Thought is energy in its purest form—not just metaphorically, but literally. The universe first existed as a pure divine thought.”

If thought is energy in its purest form, then you're saying it can be energy, but yet it's not corporeal, it's not a thing, and it's not a substance?

DR. HAISCH: That's right. I think what we regard as substance is very illusory. If it's Maya [the Hindu

God of creation in everything], then I think the whole thing, everything, is a thought or a collection of thoughts of a being that has no material existence, no time existence, no existence in space. He kind of dreamed up all these things because he had the potential to do so, then made him look real enough to the beings that live in the universe, to you and me.

But ultimately, the universe is not a physical thing at all, it's just a thought, a thought of an incorporeal being that I think that you have to just assume that this being just is. There's no prior cause to it, because if you do, then you get back to the infinite regress, it's just a being that lives outside of space, outside of time, that just is. And somehow through his thoughts creates cosmoses.

ERIK: So, then there's no way to know how such a thought-being came into being, or how thought of this kind is really something that we can even conceive of other than, as you say, a God theory?

DR. HAISCH: That's fine. If it came out of something, then what it came out of in a sense is more important, more primordial. So, I think you have to accept that this being just is without cause, and is its own cause.

I think we just have to accept it as being the cause of everything. And then we try to understand as best we can how it can lead to a physical universe, why it might lead to one, what would be the purpose behind it. I think I elucidated that the purpose behind it is to change from potentiality to experience.

ERIK: Right. I was surprised by the way you described the creation of our universe, because it was such a reverse of how we always think about creation as an accretion of things, as a building up, but in your theory it's more subtraction than addition. You discussed how white light, which is all the colors, is reduced to one of its colors when something is taken away—creation by subtraction instead of addition.

DR. HAISCH: Exactly. And really if you accept this eternal being as just is, then there is nothing else, literally nothing else. Everything we think is something else has to be part of this being, because there is nothing else. The being cannot make anything else; he – and when I say he, I mean he, she, it, whatever -- can dream something up, but I don't think he can create another being like himself. I don't think he can do anything but imagine worlds into seeming existence, but even that is just his own ideas.

ERIK: You're basically saying that our physical universe is really not material in the sense we believe that it is. That it is all essentially God, so you don't need to have something immaterial impinging on material to create form?

DR. HAISCH: Exactly. What I'm saying is that I think the material world really is a collection of thoughts. It appears real enough to us, because we ourselves are creatures of thoughts. And, so we assume there is this fundamental thing called matter and energy, but I don't think it exists at all. I think it all just comes down to conscious thought.

ERIK: Hmm. OK. If I may, I'd like to shift gears a bit and say something about the Stoic motto: live according to nature.

The Stoic motto is a very important part of our belief structure. It's more than a nice, catchy phrase. The reason I'm so interested in your book is because for us, without physics, as a foundation for our ethical theories and practices, Stoics only have a handy set of beliefs about virtue as the highest good and exhortations that the only thing in our power is the choices we make in the development of a noble

character.

This is all well and good, and many Stoics have lived and died with mainly ethical philosophy to live by. BUT, the Stoic motto is to live according to nature, and we believe that it is the nature that created us that shows the way to our greatest happiness and well-being. That is, we look to nature as the way to find our highest good and well-being.

Our ethical philosophy was built on natural philosophy, Stoic physics and theology, and if these are outdated and irrelevant, then what does that say of our community? If Stoic physics can't adapt and evolve with the evolution of scientific knowledge, then perhaps we are little more than a hardy band of like-minded eccentrics, living anachronisms, if you will, dressing up in philosophical togas.

DR. HAISCH: Maybe you do run that risk. Because, if you take it literally to live according to nature I guess a reduction materialist could say that nature is atoms and molecules and the four forces, and that's all you are. And that's going to be a reduction of your argument to something I'm sure you don't want.

ERIK: No, we don't. Now, I'm sure there are atheists and reductionists within the Stoic community, but I personally am skeptical of all close-minded certainty, and that's why I'm so interested in your book. I'm convinced that classical Stoic physics is not reductionist. It is, in fact, a bridge between the reductionists and the religious fundamentalists, just as you say of the God theory in your book. By tradition, at least, we're much closer to your God theory than we are to the reductionist argument.

Our materialism, if you will, doesn't reduce reality to its material parts. We don't reduce existence *down* to the furniture of the cosmos, the tables and trees, just the opposite. Our materialism *expands* corporeal existence to include the invisible *and* the so-called supernatural. For a Stoic there's really no such thing as the supernatural, because everything operates in the physical world, seen or unseen, and it's all part of natural philosophy, and it's all part of our God.

You said that when the mystic says the cosmos is the body of God that sort of statement would be like waving a red flag in front of a bull for a reductionist.

DR. HAISCH: Yeah, yeah.

ERIK: But that's a perfectly normal and common statement to be found in the literature of Stoic physics.

DR. HAISCH: My only disagreement to that, and I'm not sure it's a disagreement at all, is that the universe is a *part* of the infinite intelligence. So, it's the body of God but not the totality of it by any means.

ERIK: And that's where you leave us behind. Part of the limitation of living 2300 years ago is that you don't have the kind of access to information that we have today. For example, our belief is that the cosmos is surrounded by a void. There is no void within the cosmos; it's seamless as one whole and a unity, but there's a void outside the cosmos to allow it to expand and contract. As a result, the Stoic God is limited to the periphery of the cosmos. Stoics back in those days were not considering multiple universes, theoretically or otherwise.

DR. HAISCH: Sure.

ERIK: So, basically the cosmos, our universe, was their understanding and their limitation of God.

DR. HAISCH: There's a book by the Dalai Lama that makes the point that there is a lot of Buddhist physics that is all outdated. It's pretty silly stuff, some of it. He said that. But his philosophy is that anything that modern experience and experiments discover about the physical has got to supersede their ideas, and just because Buddhism has some cosmology that they bring along with it 2000 years later doesn't mean you should accept that. If it's outdated, just as your Stoic physics is, it needs to be brought up to date. So, you just throw out the old ideas if it's superseded by something better.

ERIK: Well, I think that is something we need to consider, because as I mentioned our natural philosophy is the foundation of our ethical philosophy, and if we can't keep our physics up to date then our ethics is just a kind of amputated limb that has no basis in fact, or if not in fact, then in at least a solid theory.

If you don't have any projects that are too pressing you could certainly give us a great benefit by doing some research on Stoic physics and bringing that up to date for us. Do you have any other projects?

DR. HAISCH: Let me first of all say that you could use my book in the Stoic community as a basis for trying to update Stoic physics because you can select things from my book that look like they're relevant in that regard in whatever way you want.

ERIK: Good. I would like to do that. It could be very helpful. As I mentioned in my email to you, I have your book on the supplemental reading list at the College, because I think it is that valuable, and the similarity between your ideas and ours is so close that it could be encouraging and exciting for someone to see that this was the way Stoic physics was and could be today.

DR. HAISCH: You asked about another project, and I do have another book that has been accepted by another agent that goes into greater detail, especially quantum physics, less personal detail and more metaphysical and scientific detail. I hope to have that out in a year or so. I have a good agent shopping around.

It would be nice for me to get a grant somewhere to be able to sit down and compare Stoic physics with modern physics side by side and make some recommendation. It would be nice if there were any Stoic philanthropists or benefactors

ERIK: It would be really great if you could. I wish that were available. We haven't got our 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization status yet, so we're still in our infancy as a community. But we're working on it.

DR. HAISCH: Terrific!

* * * *

Later, thinking out loud . . .

I'm not entirely happy with this interview. We didn't get into providence or teleology at all, and I'm no closer to believing that God is incorporeal than I was. Dr. Haisch says on page 113, "...thought is energy in its purest form—not just metaphorically, but literally." If thought is energy, is it really no

thing, incorporeal? Stoics also believed that God is thought, but that thought was corporeal. "The divine mind or thought pervades every part of the world, just like the soul in us (DL VII 138)."

Is thought corporeal? The Stoic definition of what is corporeal is a body that extends in three dimensions and can act or be acted upon. Their proof that thought is a body was the example of an embarrassing thought producing a flush on one's cheeks. Hmm. More work needed here.

Frankly, I don't believe Stoic physics is all that outdated, and certainly not as outdated as Buddhist physics, especially the Tibetan Buddhist physics of the Dalai Lama and their sadistic and silly hells. The only real substantive difference I could find in The God Theory and in Stoic theology is the question of corporeality. Both positions are only theories, of course, but we do have brute fact on our side.

I'm still not comfortable with the infinite regress argument. I don't see the difference between the original creation of an incorporeal or a corporeal thought-God. Regardless of it's nature, what created it? And what created that and that and that? Maybe we're both guilty of the infinite regress fallacy.

I guess we shouldn't expect to answer all the God questions in one afternoon, or in one Registry Report. We need a good sequel.

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If you're interested, you can read my review of *The God Theory* at Amazon.com. Click on reviews, then click on 4 stars.

NOTE: this is the last month I will be the interviewer for awhile. Beginning next month, we are changing from a bimonthly to a monthly newsletter, and Jules Evans, a very talented British journalist, has agreed to be the interviewer and Associate Editor of the *Registry Report*. I'm sure you will be as pleased as I am at our great fortune.

Thank you for reading,

Erik