

REGISTRY REPORT

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Stoicism in the News



Marcus Aurelius

ANKARA, TURKEY — Archaeologists recently found parts of a marble statue of the Roman philosopher Marcus Aurelius (161-180), widely regarded as the last *good* emperor of Rome.

The head of the emperor, as seen on the left, along with his lower legs and right hand holding up a globe, was discovered in western Turkey by a team of Belgian and Turkish excavators. The original statue was nearly 15 feet high (about 4.5 meters).

His love of philosophy strengthened Marcus Aurelius for a 19-year reign of constant threat from plague, flood, famine, and warfare. He spent most of the last years of his life in combat with the Germanic tribes along the Austrian Danube, where he died at the age of 59.

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IN OTHER NEWS, the Stoic Council has created a Stoic Registry group on Facebook. Jonas Juul created it, and Tristan Cutler was made co-administrator. For those who are unfamiliar with Facebook, this is a whole new form of communication. Anyone who has been looking for a more active involvement with members of the Stoic community will want to join us.

Go to: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=74835485173>

You will have to sign up to be a member, but it costs nothing and is only as intrusive as you want it to be. If you have any questions about joining, contact either of the co-administrators, Jonas Juul or Tristan Cutler:

jonas.koshmar@gmail.com

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New Members

Tom Frazier (1964-) is a banker who lives near Little Rock, Arkansas, USA, and says he is just looking for a “practical, workable, rational philosophy in this crazy world.”

Gerard Klap (1963-) is a contemporary Stoic living in Haarlem, the Netherlands. He tries to practice an adapted version of Stoic philosophy.

Spotlight

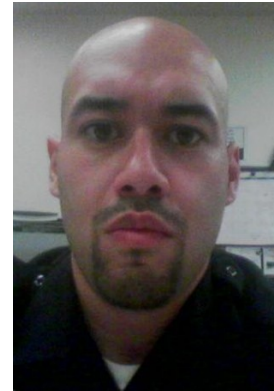
The Stoic Sheriff

by Jules Evans

“I grew up on the north side of Chicago in the early 80s,” says Jesse Caban, a 34-year-old law enforcement officer. “It was a pretty rough neighborhood.”

Rough indeed: the north side of Chicago in 1980 was where the People's Nation and the Folk Nation were formed, two broad alliances of infamous gangs such as the Latin Kings, the Vice-Lords and the Gangsta Disciples, whose collective numbers went into the tens of thousands.

Street gangs, we note in passing, are a product of the same phenomenon that gave rise to Stoicism—the breakup of the polis and the rise of the megapolis. When the polis expands and becomes a megapolis, it loses its religious and cultural coherence. People get lost between the cracks and search for security and group identity.



Sgt. Jesse Caban

Gangs and mafia take advantage of this and rise up as mini-polises, as nations within nations, taking over neighborhoods, policing them, even providing rudimentary social services to their members. Like the cults and gangs of ancient Rome, they give their members a sense of identity and belonging amid the alienation of the megapolis. But at a price.



Jesse says: “My local high school was gang-ridden. There were constant stabbings and shootings. I never joined a gang, so I was picked on a lot. I didn't fight, because it would bring more trouble. I learned to avoid trouble, to spot the gangs by their markings.”

Eventually, Jesse's mother took him out of public school and took out a loan to send him to Catholic private school. But the violence and stress of his early environment stayed with him in a volatile temper that he struggles with to this day. His family upbringing was also tempestuous—he was born out of wedlock to an alcoholic dad, a “terrible father” who disappeared for several years at a time.

He was raised by his adoptive grandparents who adopted his mother when she was a baby. “It was a very Catholic upbringing. I prayed every day.” But then, when he was 19, his biological grandmother died. The experience shook Jesse's faith: “When I got home, I asked hard questions. It was the scariest moment in my life, because I lost my belief system. Death didn't make any sense to me. I thought, 'If there is a God, why are there no miracles anymore? Why did Jesus only appear thousands of years ago?’

Why do the preachers have all the money? Jesus was a man, why should I worship him? I have just as much qualifications through my God-given reason.”

Meanwhile, Jesse left school and attended Columbia College's school of art in Chicago. After graduating, he briefly tried his hand at commercial art, but it didn't work out. Instead, he joined the Sheriff's Office in Cook County, Illinois. “I believe it was fated, because it happened really easily. I ended up being very good at it and got promoted.”

He was eventually put in charge of the lockup, which brought him face-to-face with many of the gangs and gang bangers he had spent his childhood trying to avoid. He could see close-up the street culture he had witnessed as a child. “In the street, it's about your pride, about whether you're getting respect. If you look at me the wrong way, you're disrespecting me. Then if I don't get violent and step up to you, I'm a wimp.”

This street code was still, to some extent, inside him. “I've had a bad temper all my life,” he says. He would lose his temper if a gang banger dissed him in lock-up, if one of his subordinates in the Sheriff's office was disrespectful, if someone cut him off on the road. That old law of the street, that if someone disrespects then you must step up to them or you're a wimp, was still in his head.

Then, when he turned 30, he came across Stoicism. His first encounter was via Seneca in a book on humanism given to him by his father. “His words stuck in my heart. He was ethical, upright, he did the right thing. And his ideas didn't insult my reason with some story I had to believe in.”

He developed his Stoic practice through the Stoic Foundation's correspondence course, run by Keith Seddon. He found it very useful, but “I wanted more one-on-one mentoring.” He received this through the Stoic training course of Captain Thomas Jarrett, now a major in the 602nd Area Supply Medical Company, and also a counsellor.

Jarrett became Jesse's mentor or *sensei*, teaching him Stoic principles through a study of the classic texts, such as Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* and Epictetus' *Discourses*, and also introducing him to Albert Ellis' Stoic-influenced Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT).

When something in his external environment triggered Jesse's temper, he would ring up Jarrett and argue it out with him over the phone until he could reach a rational take on the situation. When Jarrett was called up to serve in Iraq, Jesse carried on his practice on his own. “I try to read the texts regularly. If I have a spare 10 minutes during the day, I'll pick up and read Aurelius or Epictetus. I still take notes. And if something happens that triggers a negative emotion, I'll go home and 'have a rational talk with myself' [as REBT puts it] until I find some peace.”

Gradually, Jesse started to make some progress. “There was a situation where I was working in lock-up, and there was a gentleman in there. I'd taken pains to treat him with respect, to give him the benefit of the doubt as I try to do with everyone, like Stoic ethics teaches us to do. 'Our job is to do others good and to put up with them,' as Aurelius writes.”

“But when I was searching this man, I saw him trying to hide things that didn't belong to him. It really enraged me, that I had gone out of my way to give him the benefit of the doubt and yet he tried to do something so underhand to me. So I took two steps towards him, and then I stopped myself. And I remembered a passage I had read in Marcus Aurelius that morning:

When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly. They are like this because they can't tell good from evil. But I have seen the beauty of good, and the ugliness of evil, and have recognized that the wrongdoer has a nature related to my own—not of the same blood or birth, but the same mind, and possessing a share of the divine.

And I caught myself. I realized, 'This guy doesn't know any better. It's the culture he's raised in, or it's his false thinking. And the tragedy is he'll probably always be like this.' So I didn't rise to it. I let it go."

Jesse says: "It's about discipline, mental exercise, and being steadfast. You got to exercise your mind so you don't get involved in the great theatre of other people's dramas. Because once you do, once you become violent, you could lose your job, you could get sued, you could lose loved ones. It's much better to be rational, to stop and think."

But he admits it's not easy. "I find it difficult to this day. I'm still practicing. That's why I have a hard time with academic Stoics, someone who sees it just as an intellectual pursuit. I am not by nature a calm person, so I have to work really hard to be a Stoic."

He says: "People from the street are mentally trapped in a small box. Their logic is really off. Sometimes, when I was working in lockup, I'd talk to these guys and hear their philosophy. One guy said to me: 'You don't know what it is to be me. My life is hard, you don't have a hard life.' I replied: 'How do you know I don't have a hard life?' 'Because you're in uniform.' They're so alienated, it's like I'm not a human. I said: 'Before I'm a sheriff I'm a human being. We share a lot of the same emotions.' But he didn't want to hear that."

Sometimes, Jesse says, his own colleagues can be just as exasperating. But his Stoicism helps him here, too. He says: "Just this week, I overheard one of my deputies making jokes about me. We were fueling up the cop cars, and he gave me this grin, like I was a big idiot, and it made me very angry. I wanted to grab him by the neck. But instead, I went home at the end of the day, and I sat down and tried to think it through logically like REBT teaches. I thought about this guy, how he talks about his friends, and I thought 'this isn't to do with me, this is typical of this guy, this is how he always behaves.' And it actually worked."

In both cases, Jesse's anger seems to have come from taking a person's behavior as a personal insult—the man in lockup was being underhand *to me*, or the colleague was being insulting *to me*. He managed to attain a greater equanimity by not taking it so personally and by seeing that the person's actions towards him were determined by their own personality, their beliefs and mental habits. And it is entirely to be expected to come across such irrational and rude behavior—it is the Way Things Are.

So through Stoic practice, Jesse himself has managed, to some extent, to rise above the street code of honor and revenge that he grew up surrounded by and to reach a higher code. He says: "I've learned that no one can impede us or frustrate us. No one can hurt me or implement me in ugliness. What stands in the way becomes the Way."

He says: "For me, Stoicism is a way of life. It's my religion of reason. You're not being good for a goal. You're not being promised anything. You're doing good because it's the right thing to do." He admits it can be a lonely life: "There's no church or institution to screw it up. But on the other hand, I've never met another Stoic in person."

He has, though, gradually started to be more open about his Stoic beliefs, posting videos discussing them on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIVvOCUgxpw>) and starting to talk about Stoicism with his friends. “No one has really heard of it. I tell them it's like the West's version of Buddhism.”

His Stoic training has helped him find moral guidance in the absence of his father, and it helped him cope when his father died two years ago. “He wasn't a very good father to me. He died wealthy, and he didn't leave me anything. He left it all to my stepmother. I felt insulted. I was hurting. I lay in bed, struggling with the pain. I developed a drinking problem. It felt like the only friend I had were my Stoic books. If I didn't have those books and that training, I would have had nothing to pull me through.”

Jesse now has two sons of his own, “one biological son, an 18-month-old baby called Julius, and one nine-year-old son called Christopher that fate gave me when I started going out with his mother. Both sons need a role model. I have love for them, and I try to help them. I have Christopher read Epictetus. I'm slowly trying to instill Stoic ideas in him. I'm not popular with our friends, because I refused to baptize Julius. I said to his mother, 'I'm not particularly into that ritual.' I want to guide him in Stoic ethics.”

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Our New Associate Editor



Jules Evans

Jules Evans is a 31-year-old British journalist. He has been interested in Stoicism since he was a teenager, when he first came across Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, via an interest in Buddhism. He still can't understand why Buddhism has over a billion followers, while Stoicism has less than 1,000, and believes Stoicism is due for a revival.

In the last two years or so, he has begun writing about this Stoic revival. In particular, he has written about the relationship between Stoicism and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which is now the most widely accepted form of therapy in global psychology.

He says: “I've interviewed the two founders of CBT - Albert Ellis and Aaron T. Beck - and both of them have acknowledged the key influence of Stoicism on their thinking. Considering the large amount of scientific evidence now backing up the efficacy of CBT, this is a massive boost to the credibility and legitimacy of Stoicism's claims. This grounding of philosophical ideas in large amounts of empirical evidence is probably unique in the history of western philosophy.”

When not writing about philosophy and therapy, Jules also writes about international business and politics. He is the editor of *emeafinance*, a new magazine about emerging markets. He previously lived in Russia for around four years, which he covered for publications including *The Times*, *The New York Times*, and *Foreign Policy*. Before that, he studied English literature at Oxford University, where he graduated with first honours.

He is excited by the Stoic Registry's vision of a cyber-community of international Stoics and is proud to be associated with its work.

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