

REGISTRY REPORT

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Stoic community since May 2007

Stoicus communitas : Stoikos koinonia



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Erik Wiegardt, Editor

Jules Evans, Associate Editor

New Stoa News

Jeff Traylor (see RR Issues 14 & 15) reports that "...we now have *Epictetus Club* (EC) books in 254 prison libraries, about one-fourth of the US prison libraries. I recently heard from a prison psychologist who is working to get EC books donated to all inmates who are in EC prison groups, which could be thousands. She also made a video of her own EC group graduating in the prison, and the ceremony was then broadcast to all the living units in the prison. It included remarks from the warden, inmates reading their poetry about the program, and an inmate performing the Epictetus Rap from the front of the EC book....."

Erik Wiegardt's E-book, the condensed version of *The Path*, has been replaced on the New Stoa website with *The Stoic Handbook*, also an E-book freely available to all. After 13 years it was time for an update.

New Members

Elen Buzaré (1975-) of Lyons, France, wrote, "After a French law degree and a year of graduate study at Glasgow University, I am currently working for an insurance broker. No philosophical background, except that I discovered Stoicism through Marcus Aurelius when I was around 21 and strive to master and apply the fundamentals of this philosophy since then. I created the stoici amici forum on Yahoo."

Elias Chaccour (1989-) is a student specializing in pharmaceutical sciences at the University of Ottawa, Canada. "I have recently started reading about Stoicism and found it to answer a lot of the questions that I asked myself about life. I am really eager to learn more about Stoicism and how to implement it in my daily life, and how I can ameliorate myself and live a more happy and fulfilling life that is in harmony with nature."

William Coad (1990-) writes from Adelaide, Australia, "I believe Stoicism is the correct path to living life to the fullest, and I am strongly committed to studying it."

Wayde Jackson (1986-) is a retail clerk in Everett, Washington, USA, who said, "I studied philosophy since the age of sixteen and have been a follower of Stoicism for the past six years. Before finding Stoicism I was involved in various religious faiths trying to fill the void in my life. While searching on the Internet I came across Hellenistic philosophies and read about Stoicism. Stoicism made more sense to me than any religion did. Its doctrine became something that brought balance to my life, and I have followed its words ever since."

Leslie Johnson (1947-) lives in London, UK, where he is Director of the University of Greenwich Business School and a Professor of Cognitive Science. "From a practical point of view, I am interested in the development of Stoic notions as part of personal and professional development in business (there are linkages with Rational Behavioral Therapy here too). From a more theoretical point of view, I am interested in exploring what I see as quiet deep parallels between Stoicism and Japanese Aesthetics."

Chris Lipiarski (1979-) is from Melbourne, Australia, where he is currently completing a diploma in education. He said, "Through chance I discovered Stoicism last year and felt immediately drawn to Stoic principles. Currently I am working on furthering my Stoic knowledge and cementing my Stoic applications before eventually aiming to promote Stoicism in a way that is accessible and appealing to the common person. I look forward to participating in the community."

Trevor S. Luke, PhD (1969-) teaches Roman History at Florida State University. He is interested in Stoic opposition to Roman emperors and the living practice of Stoicism. He first encountered the modern, practical application of Stoic ideals to daily living in the works of Albert Ellis and Victor Frankl.

Michael MacDermott (1962-) is a Police Officer who lives and works in Central New Jersey, USA. "I've long been sympathetic to the Stoic philosophy and its world view, but I drifted away from its study and discipline for several years. My recent reading of *A Guide to the Good Life*, by William P. Irvine, has again sparked my interest in the Stoic philosophy, and I found the New Stoa website interesting and appealing."

Brendan Beau Sebastien Murray (1986-) lives in the Mt. Evelyn region near Melbourne, Australia, where he intends to study acting at Victoria University. "I have developed an interest in Stoicism after reading Marcus Aurelius and Seneca. This has helped me understand some irrational beliefs that I have had in the past and taught me how to ease emotions by having better judgment."

Edwin van Geelen (1965-) lives in De Meern, Netherlands, where he works as a photographer and software designer. He wrote, "My first love lay with Nietzsche, being the perfect antidote to Christianity, but I read more as I went along. Buddhism attracted me, although not enough to consider myself a Buddhist. Enter Stoicism, which to my mind is pretty close to Buddhism, only a bit more down to earth. Reading Marcus Aurelius made me realize that I've been a bit of a crypto-stoic for many years. That set me off searching the Internet for anything on Stoicism, which led me to New Stoa."

Christopher Walker (1982-) is a Programmer Analyst in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, who said, "I would like to become a Stoic in both thought and practice. I am attracted to Stoicism in terms of practicality basely as a human and also as a Christian."

Spotlight

on

The Best of, Part 2

➤2008➤

*The month of May celebrates the second anniversary of **Registry Report**, and what better way to celebrate than to take a quick look at some of the great photos and quotes that made this eNewsletter great last year.*

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William O. Stephens

Issue #7: MAY/JUN 08

[Excerpts] On the campus of Creighton University in the Philosophy Department of the College of Arts & Sciences, William O. Stephens, Ph.D., is professor of Philosophy and Classical & Near Eastern Studies. William was born in 1962 into a distinguished family of intellectuals. His father has a Ph.D. in psychology and taught at Purdue. His mother has a Ph.D. in psycholinguistics and retired as a Professor Emerita from Northern Illinois University. His older brother has a Ph.D. and works at the School of Government at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. And, Dr. Stephens has a half-siblings with a Ph.D. in chemistry.

As one might expect, William was an exceptional student. He received his B.A. in Philosophy from Earlham College (Quaker) in Richmond, Indiana, and Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania. He joined Creighton University as a full-time faculty member in 1990, promoting to Full Professor in 2005. Dr. Stephens is married to Susan T. Bart, a Fellow of the American College of Trust & Estate Counsel.



William O. Stephens

[Excerpts]

ERIK: *Do you believe, either in theory or practice, that one can make progress in the acquisition of virtue on the path of the Stoic?*

DR. STEPHENS: Emphatically yes, and in practice, is my answer. The discipline required to progress is considerable, but no less possible than what devotees of, for example, Eastern religions have achieved. As Epictetus says, however, you cannot expect to make progress as a Stoic ***and*** devote lots of time to collecting fine furniture and art work for your house, working to add to your wealth every month, and similar pursuits for externals.

ERIK: *You speak with enthusiasm about the progress one can make in following the path of the sage, but does such progress matter to us when, as Plutarch reports Chrysippus saying, one can drown as readily one cubit beneath the surface of the sea as he can 500 fathoms beneath it? Haven't Stoics always been taken to task for believing people were either sages, perfect in all ways, or slaves and fools who were downright mad? How do we overcome this absolutist notion?*

DR. STEPHENS: The harsh dichotomy of sage vs. fool does indeed characterize the early Stoics. But Epictetus emphasizes the progress that he and his students can make. Approaching virtue is within our grasp, and it is as urgent as anything in the world can be. Similarly, Seneca talks about the *bonus vir*, the “good man.” We can aspire to being good, to becoming better, without fooling ourselves into thinking that we necessary will—or even can—become sages. Epictetus says he ***wants*** to be Socrates, and he strives for Socrates’ wisdom and equanimity, his courage and

gratitude, even though he realizes he cannot ***be*** Socrates. Taking the steps along a long, arduous journey are each possible, one at a time, even when the destination seems impossibly distant. Progress is made one good deed at a time. One corrected mistake at a time. One successful day at a time. The rest will take care of itself.

ERIK: Thank you for that. I would like to turn to a subject you indicated is of great interest to you, vegetarianism. I've always been uncomfortable with the Stoic's rather Old Testament attitude towards the other animals, that they are greatly inferior to us and placed here at our disposal. But rather than focus on the kindness and other benefits of not eating them, I wonder if you would elaborate on your interest in "reconceiving the Stoic understanding on nonhuman animals." More specifically, under what circumstances do you believe it appropriate for us to "reconceive" any aspect of Stoicism?

DR. STEPHENS: In my view, the Stoics were simply wrong, dead wrong, that all nonhuman animals lack reason. Darwin, Jane Goodall and many other primatologists, scientists who study whales and dolphins, Donald R. Griffin, and other ethologists and biologists have more than amply shown that many, many different mammals, birds, and cetaceans have the ability to problem solve, select appropriate means to achieve their desired ends, adapt to circumstances, and find ways to overcome obstacles and threats to their survival. So there is no question that animals have minds. Insects perhaps have quite primitive minds (although honey bees are very impressive), but clearly there are degrees of reason in all sentient animals.

Now Epictetus accepts the orthodox Stoic view that all nonhuman animals lack reason and exist in a great chain of being for the use of human beings. This view is an ineliminable part of his view of divine providence. So there's no explaining away Epictetus' wrong-headed view of the capacities and intrinsic value of nonhuman animals. When I talk about "reconceiving the Stoic understanding on nonhuman animals," what I have in mind is demonstrating how Epictetus himself seems to be inconsistent in recognizing the intelligence of various Nanimals (my shorthand for "nonhuman animals"). There are dozens of examples of admirable, praiseworthy behavior displayed by Nanimals of different species in *The Discourses*. But since Epictetus holds up the example of certain Nanimal behaviors as worthy of his students' emulation, as he clearly does in a number of texts, then Epictetus seems to be ascribing a kind of excellence or virtue to those Nanimals that behave in those ways. Since he praises certain traits they have, he considers them to be good traits, and good traits are virtues of some kind or another. But if some Nanimals have some virtues, and virtue is the perfection of reason, as the Stoics all believe, then Epictetus ***should*** have inferred that some Nanimals have a kind of reason that is the same as, or virtually the same as, our own. In short, Epictetus was very insightful in admiring certain Nanimal behaviors, but he fell short of drawing the right lesson about animal rationality from those admirable behaviors.

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Lee Hughes

Issue #8: JUL/AUG 08



Lee Hughes

[Excerpts] I was born in Bury, England, in 1978. My family, is what would be called "working class" in the North of England where I'm from, all of them living in the Manchester area. The most obvious quirk about my family history is that my great-grandfather (on my father's side) was Japanese, who came over to England during the First World War. My mother's side of the family has Irish heritage.

I'm an only child (in fact, adopted). My education was fairly unexceptional, and I went to university in Birmingham, England, where I studied Criminology. While there, I went to study in Norway for a semester in my second year, and a year after graduating I went traveling around Europe for three months. The experience I had abroad brought me, indirectly to English teaching, initially as a good way of furthering my travels. Since then, I've been teaching for four-and-a-half years (with the occasional stopgap) and have worked in Istanbul for the last two-and-a-half years.

[Excerpts]

ERIK: I'd like to get a better image in the mind's eye of how you live in Istanbul. Do you live in the city, in a house, a

flat, with roommates, a wife, a partner?

LEE: I live in a flat I share with a group of other people (also teachers). In fact they're all British, which for me is something of an oddity as I'm not used to living with my compatriots. In the past I've shared with other teachers from, for example, the USA, Canada, the Caribbean, but haven't lived with British people for a few years. In a way, coming home to the flat sometimes can feel like coming home to a little British bubble!

ERIK: *Also, I guess the obvious question many are asking themselves right now is how you as a British citizen are treated by a so-called secular Muslim country that appears to be moving towards the conservative or fundamentalist world view.*

LEE: Oh, I could go on forever about Turkey's relationship to Islam! It's such a complex and twisted relationship. As a British citizen I have never had any problems with Turks because of my nationality. And I don't really think that Turkey is heading to fundamentalism. Any talk like this is very wide of the mark. Due to the history of the creation of the Turkish republic, Turkey could never be a 'real' Islamic state - mainly because the education system and the establishment is so geared towards the secular tradition. So, while the 'average' Turk is Muslim, he/she wouldn't be raised up to consider it in at all the same way as, say, someone from Saudi Arabia. Though of course there are exceptions to this rule. . . .

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The College of Stoic Philosophers

Special Issue #9: August 2008

On 05 Jul 08 the doors to the College of Stoic Philosophers were opened

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God and Dr. Haisch

Issue #10: SEP/OCT 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, has three children, and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.



Bernard Haisch

[Excerpts]

ERIK: *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 classical 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.

Orthodox 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: *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. . . .

Issue #11, October 2008, Jules Evans becomes Associate Editor and the *Registry Report* goes to a monthly format.

The Stoic Sheriff

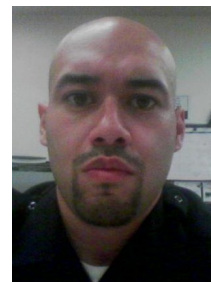
Issue #11: October 2008

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. . . .

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. . . .”

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The Stoic Revivalist

Interview by Jules Evans
Issue #13: December 2008

Anthony A. Long, 71-year-old professor of classics at Berkeley, is one of the most influential scholars in Hellenistic philosophy of modern times. He can claim a leading role in the revival of both academic and popular interest in Stoicism in the last 30 years. In a telephone interview, he discusses how the study of Stoicism has changed since he began working in the 1960s, how Brits and Americans differ in their attitude to Stoicism, and why writing about Epictetus in his latest book made him change his own relationship with Stoicism.



Anthony A. Long

[Excerpts] What was the state of Stoic studies when you began working on it in the 1960s?

I started working on Stoicism in the middle of the 1960s. I think my first article was published in 1967. At that time it was very weak indeed. My revered teacher, David Furley, who had done excellent work on Epicureanism, said it was the most neglected field in ancient philosophy. I was challenged by the idea that, instead of working off other people's articles, I'd be working directly on primary sources. It was virgin terrain, relatively speaking.

I received a lot of early positive feedback in England. In 1970, I held eight seminars at Oxford, which were quite well attended. Then I was invited to write *Hellenistic Philosophy* [published in 1974, since translated into seven languages], and it took off from there.

Why, when you began working, were Stoic studies in such a dire state?

At that time, the dominant philosophers were Plato and Aristotle. The Oxford philosophy course, for example, went straight from Aristotle to Descartes, with nothing in between. There were good reasons for this. If you're looking for the most exciting and intellectually challenging texts, that's Plato and Aristotle.

Also, we've lost most of the original works of Stoicism, so for any understanding of ancient Stoicism, you have to dig around in all kinds of arcane sources. Or you read the Roman Stoics – Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, Seneca. By the standards of the time, these authors were seen as very second rate intellectually, they were seen as rhetorical rather than analytical.

And there was something deeper at work as well – a British suspicion of therapy, a sense that 'we're British, we don't delve into such matters.'

But I thought Stoicism, particularly Marcus Aurelius, had been popular in the nineteenth century?

Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius had certainly been very popular in the late 17th and early 18th century, with philosophers like Butler, Shaftesbury and Adam Smith. Stoicism offered a kind of rational theistic alternative to Christianity. You could be a Stoic and bow politely at the Church.

In the UK, it declines after that. Epictetus was very popular up to the French Revolution, but he wasn't very prominent in the nineteenth century, when Plato and Aristotle were much more popular, partly as a result of the nineteenth century revival of the curriculum. But what happened in the UK was not necessarily what happened elsewhere. France is the one European country where Stoicism has always enjoyed a big standing. Epictetus and Seneca have always been widely read in France.

To the extent that there's a revival today, it's much more in the US [where Long became a naturalized citizen, having originally been born in the UK]. Stoicism has never really gone away in the US. If you look at the nineteenth century, you can see the influence of Stoicism in Emerson, Thoreau, Dreiser [whose final novel was titled *The Stoic*], right the way up to Tom Wolfe. . . .

Americans think they should take themselves seriously, that their lives should be taken seriously. It can be tedious. It's far from the British 'don't be daft' response to earnestness. That British response can be healthy, but it can also be insidiously cynical.

Do you think Stoicism does well in the US partly because of the self-help movement?

Absolutely. I recently did a piece on Seneca in which I referred to a woman's magazine called *Self*, which is mainly about having a nice butt and things like that, but the page I quoted was pure Stoicism. It said: 'Are you happy? Are you really happy? True happiness is more a state of mind than a set of circumstances.' You couldn't get a more pithy summary of Stoicism.

Of course, there's been a greater interest in Stoicism in academia as well over the last 20 years through people like Becker, Nussbaum, and myself. There's even a club of Stoics, they have their own web page and everything.

That's us! So are you a Stoic?

Before I wrote my book on Epictetus, I would say that I wasn't a Stoic. I was an academic writing about Stoicism. But when I was writing the book, I was living with him intensely, the book lived with me a lot, and I internalised it. It altered my mindset. Now, little phrases of it pop into my head. If I do find myself in a tricky situation, I say to myself, what would Epictetus do in this situation? I use one of his distancing techniques.

For example, if there is a situation of fear or desire, you can recognise that this isn't just a blind force, but a judgment. And you can say to yourself, 'Could I look at this situation a different way?'

When I've talked to some psychologists, they are often very sceptical, and say 'The trauma is too deep.' It may well be so. But it can be not such deep trauma, but something tractable.

So I find Epictetus very helpful. It provides solace during the difficult periods that we all experience. And of course, his gallows humour can be very effective.

And the Stoic outlook, far from being individualistic and isolated, is more in line with EM Forster – 'only connect.' It's very much a philosophy of interconnectedness. . . .

So would you describe yourself as a Stoic?

I would describe myself as a rather inconstant Stoic.

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Thank you for reading,

Erik & Jules