

REGISTRY REPORT

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Stoicus communitas : Stoikos koinonia



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New Stoa News

For the 25th Issue of the *Registry Report*

. . . and in keeping with this season of thanks and generosity, a new page has been added to New Stoa. Six *free* eBooks are now available to the Stoic Community—and to all who happen by. These eBooks are gift wrapped with colorful covers and can be found quite easily at this address: <http://www.newstoa.com/ebooks.php>

Our webmaster said, “When you announce this new page you should also remind people to refresh/reload their browser to see the change on the New Stoa map.”

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First Annual Marcus Aurelius Conference, April 24-26, 2010

At last, the Stoic community is taking a quantum leap from cyberspace into the real world here on planet Earth. To celebrate Marcus Aurelius's birthday (April 26), a conference of Stoics, that's you and me, will take place in San Diego, California, on April 24-26, 2010. That's only five months from now, so mark your calendar and come together with us. More details will follow as they evolve. Watch this space.



Erik at the beach

New Members

Michael G. Argenbright (1952-) is a financial advisor in Orlando, Florida. He states that, "As a young person I had a deep need to understand my emotions and to control them if possible." Of Stoicism, he writes, "Being an avid reader and searcher, I happened upon Stoicism through my life and recently reread some articles and would like to be able to pursue the ideas and teachings through my personal and business life."

Glenn Crolly (1958-) is a Project Manager from Midland, Ontario, Canada. He states that he was recently directed toward Stoicism as a method of psychotherapy and would like to “tap all resources possible.”

Michael Goetjen (1990-) is a student in Williamsburg, Virginia. He states, "The Truth is not 'out there' but 'in here,' and I've made it my philosophical goal to uncover it. I've come to the decision that Stoicism is a part of that Truth that is very important. In fact, it's a foundation on which much else can be built. I would like to join the New Stoa, because I would like to connect with those who are also interested in uncovering the Truth and who also subscribe to the Stoic idea."

Sharyn Hall (1977-) is a Community Development Worker in Melbourne, Australia. She states, "I have been aligning surprisingly closely with Stoicism for a number of years now and would love to learn more about it. I enjoy discovering the reality that the more I learn, the little I realize I actually know – and this in turn fuels my passion for learning as much as I possibly can. I look forward to meeting other seekers and lovers of life, nature, virtue and truth."

John Knighton (1955-), a Records Clerk in San Leandro, California, states, "I have no academic philosophy credentials, and precious little *arete*, but I find that Stoicism makes more sense for me than any other approach to living in this Earthly madhouse. That it can lend itself not only to the canny and tough but even to fools is a wonderful recommendation indeed."

Mark Seyfried (1960-) is a Police Detective in Salem, Oregon. He is also a former Naval Officer and has a B.A. in Economics from the University of California, Davis. He writes, "I was introduced to Stoicism by the writings of Admiral Stockdale, the book *A Man in Full*, and followed up by reading Epictetus. Stoic philosophy helps me to become a better man and to deal with life on a much more useful basis. I appreciate the incredible work members have done in creating and contributing to this community."

Maksim Sokolov (1978-) was a Mathematician in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, who now lives in Toronto, Canada. He writes, "I found the Cybercity on the Internet and would like to join, as people who belong to it are close in thinking to what I am.... Only reasoning mind can develop resistance to various blows of Nature by trying to keep its equanimity under any condition. And this is why I admire Stoic philosophy as the most perspective philosophy of wisdom and happiness."

Spotlight

on

The Fourth Founder

a special *Registry Report* 25th Issue essay
by Erik Wiegardt, Editor

Two things in this life have taught me humility: the Pacific Ocean and the Stoic community. The Pacific Ocean, because, well, it's like God—it answers to no one but itself. The Stoic community, because, well, it's a lot like the Pacific Ocean. No one tells it what to do; it's a force unto itself. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

I'm also humbled by the Three Founders of the Stoa. Each was great in his own way, much different from the other, and they are called 'Founders', because without them how could we exist today? Did the world create the man or did the man change the world? (There is a Stoic theoretical answer to this conundrum, but that's beside the point.)

What this essay purports to do is quickly review the Three Founders, just a paragraph or two for each, and touch on their place in our evolution. Then, we will search together for a Fourth Founder. Surely there must be one after 2000 long years.

The First Founder. What possesses a man to create a new philosophy? After Zeno studied for so many years with the leading philosophers of his day – Crates the Cynic, Polemo at the Academy, the logicians of Megara – did he wake up one morning and say to himself? “Hmm, these guys don't quite get it. I'll start my own school.”

And I wonder what he thought of the name of his school, the one the world finally settled on, the Stoics? I certainly like our name – 2300 years later. Did he ever have twinges of regret that the name 'Zenonians' didn't stick? Well, not if he was a *real* Stoic.

The Second Founder. We all know why Chrysippus became the Second Founder of the Stoa. After the brutal attacks led by Arcesilaus, the head of the Academy, it was widely regarded at the time that, as Diogenes Laertius said, “But for Chrysippus there had been no Stoa.” We were fortunate to have this “most important thinker in the history of the school,” as Professor Brad Inwood calls him.

The next Academy scholarch continued these philosophical challenges. I've always appreciated the humor of Carneades who said, “But for Chrysippus there had been no Carneades.” Of course, we also know that Chrysippus was an intellectual giant who could rise to the challenge of two successive heads of the Academy. For these gifts from the Second Founder we can be thankful.

The Third Founder. In the rigid hierarchy of the Roman classes our Third Founder, Musonius Rufus, was amply gifted in mind as well as in material fact. He was born into the Equestrian Order – the bottom of the aristocracy behind the Senators, but he was clearly at the top of the middle class. His students included the slave Epictetus as a young man, as well as a considerable following of students and admirers unparalleled in the Roman world. Some called him a Stoic sage, others a Roman Socrates. But like Socrates before him, and Epictetus after, he wrote nothing, and the few lecture notes and secondary references we have make it difficult to truly appreciate his high reputation.

We do know that Musonius placed great value on the family of the philosopher. He confirmed our earliest beliefs about the equality of men and women. And, unlike many who become exclusively focused on the life of the mind, he emphasized marriage and child-rearing as not only compatible with philosophy but instructive in the practice of virtue—beginning at home.

Searching for the Fourth Founder: from Justus Lipsius to Lawrence Becker

Now we come to possible candidates for the Fourth Founder. A legitimate claim to this honor may go to a number of important philosophers spanning more than 400 years. Chronologically, the beginning of the queue would, in my opinion, have to start with Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), the classical Renaissance scholar and father of Neo-stoicism. Lipsius was greatly admired by Montaigne, who could have been a contender but for his conversion to Pyrrhonian Skepticism later in life.

So great was Lipsius' influence among the scholars of his day that what we now refer to as the Neostoic philosophical movement of the late 16th and early 17th centuries can be directly traced to his work, *De Constantia*. In short, Lipsius attempted to make Stoic ethics compatible with Christianity. It was a valiant effort taken up by a number of subsequent scholars, but ultimately doomed to failure. Not long after the flower of Neostoicism began to bloom, influential Christian scholars such as Blaise Pascal (1632-1662) and Nicolas Malebranch (1638-1715) crushed it by attacking Stoics for their arrogance in believing the individual had control over his or her own happiness. In addition, they wondered, how could a man ever know anything but misery in this world of Satan and sin? Happiness, according to these Christian writers, could only be known in heaven.

Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) picked up the torch at this point, accepting Stoic beliefs that Christian scholars found blasphemous. These Stoic principles included such ideas as a Nature God, materialism, and determinism. Spinoza was a pantheist, and his god of Nature, his detractors invariably pointed out, was no *real* god at all. According to John Sellars in *Stoicism* (California, 2006), of all the philosophers from antiquity to modern times, Spinoza was the one philosopher in closest agreement with our school. But does that make him a Founder? Perhaps not.

There were many others who joined the debate over the value and place of our philosophy in history. You will recognize most of these names, such as Hobbes, Leibniz, Descartes, Brucker, Shaftsbury, Rousseau, Hegel, Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, Jean Paul-Sartre, and Foucault. Some tried to destroy us, some carried the torch a little further, and some just plagiarized our ideas. Most importantly, Stoicism was kept very much alive in the minds, if not in the hearts, of the intelligentsia from the Renaissance to the present day.

So, what about today? Let me quote directly from Sellars again (pp. 153-4): "More recent English-speaking philosophers working in the field of ethics have benefited from the increase of scholarly work on ancient Stoicism....One striking example of this is Lawrence Becker's bold attempt to resurrect a Stoical ethical tradition, imagining what Stoic ethics might look like today if it had persisted as a continuous philosophical tradition...."

Lawrence Becker! One of our own, a member of the Stoic community, New Stoa, Fellow of the College of Stoic Philosophers, and an inspiration to us all. Is Lawrence Becker our Fourth Founder? He could be. He certainly has the intellectual insight and credentials, and history may identify his place in our evolution in just this way.

And Another Possibility

However, I would like to present another possibility. Could it be that the Fourth Founder of the Stoa is not a person, but is another kind of force entirely, a group of persons, a community of individuals. Collectively, we are stronger than any one individual no matter how great their intellectual stature—and, we live longer. Now, it's true, the words of Stoic philosophers from antiquity still inspire us today, but unless we the people, the elite as well as those of us who are more common, form a union of brothers and sisters united in the establishment of Stoic friends all over the world, unless we can come together as one community, we will forever be scattered and alone. That's what we were 14 years ago before New Stoa was founded. Before we came together we were the stuff of arguments in academia. Nothing more.

It is for the Stoic community—professors, plumbers, soldiers, businessmen, clerks, and cops alike—it is for all of us here today, reading these words, all of you in this community, that I propose we may have found the true Fourth Founder of our beloved Stoa. We are the whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Only we can redirect the focus of philosophy back to its original meaning and purpose: philosophy as a way of life. We are doing this, now. We are proving that such a thing is possible. We are living examples of *real* philosophers, those who study then practice what they have learned. We *can* live in agreement with Nature, just as every Stoic philosopher tried so valiantly to do 2000 years ago.

I'm so thankful that you and the Pacific Ocean are here.

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Thank you for reading, and Best Wishes for the Holidays,

Erik & Jules