

REGISTRY REPORT

Published by and for New Stoa, the
Stoic community, since May 2007
Stoicus communitas : Stoikos koinonia



May 2010: Issue # 31

New Stoa News

It was incredible! A great tradition has been born. The First Annual Marcus Aurelius Conference in San Diego on 24, 25, & 26 April was the first time the world has seen so many Stoics in one room in many centuries. If you missed it this year we will be doing it again next year at the same time in Greece!

The presenters began with **Tomasz Mazur**, Ph.D., philosophy lecturer in Warsaw, who flew above Iceland's volcanic ash and spoke of "Three ways in Contemporary Stoicism." **Jules Evans**, London-based journalist also barely made it in to describe "The Map of Modern Stoicism—Where are We Today?" **John B. Brown**, MD, of Idaho, USA, compared ancient with contemporary Stoic cosmology in "Stoicism and Physics." Major **Thomas Jarrett**, US Army, spoke of the work he has done stateside and in two Iraq tours with "Warrior Resilience Training." And Finally, **Erik Wiegardt**, New Stoa Director, spoke about "Stoicism in 15 Seconds."

On the Emperor's birthday, we all met in a park by the sea, sang "Happy Birthday Marcus," ate carrot cake and cheese cake, and talked about all of you who were not here :) We also talked about our future as a community and future Marcus Aurelius Conferences. Don't miss it next year: mark your calendar and start saving up. Spouses and children invited. It's really going to be a big deal, I guarantee it!

Photos of the San Diego conference taken by **Amielle Moyer** can be found here (copy and paste URL):
http://www.kodakgallery.com/gallery/creativeapps/slideShow/Main.jsp?token=572347480212%3A1618504850&sourceId=533754321803&cm_mmc=eMail-_-Share-_-Photos-_-Sharee

A Philosophical Tour. **Andrew Kenworthy** recently visited our family birthplace, Athens, and came back with excellent photos to share, including what's left of the Stoa Poikile, where Zeno introduced the world to our philosophy. These are not your usual traveler photos; Andrew really did his homework. Check these out!

<http://picasaweb.google.com/ReloadHKUSP/PhilosophicalTour?authkey=Gv1sRgCLWQntbLj6PD8wE&feat=email#>

We don't clutter up our websites or this eMagazine with advertisement. We don't ask for tuition from our college students. And yet we still pay for our domain names, our service providers, and the URL set up and monthly fees for a professional webmaster. All of us who make this possible work hard—for free! That's the way it's been since we began 14 years ago this month, since the 8th of MAY, 1996.

Instead of advertising, from time to time, not often, we are going to remind you that without your support all of these costs are coming out of someone's pocket. I'll let you figure out who that someone is. Help us be the best that we can be. Go to the New Stoa website, hit that donate button, and send whatever seems fair. Thank you.

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New Members

Christopher Boatwright (1983-) writes from Lugoff, South Carolina, USA, “I am highly attracted to Stoicism, but I cannot yet consider myself a Stoic. For one, I hesitate to label myself when I've yet to be convinced that any one creed or philosophy has a monopoly on truth. Second, I've never met anyone else with this same attraction- no one to appreciate it with me or to drive me on. Through engaging the New Stoa community I hope to cultivate my philosophical leanings and discover if I am suited for the Stoic life. I long for the calm and virtue Stoicism promises, and I must discover if it can deliver.”

Dale Bertram (1993-) wrote, “I have been a Stoic for a while. I was first enlightened by the philosophy by accident. At a bookstore, I was looking at philosophy with my brother who is a Machiavellian scholar. As I did that, I found Marcus Aurelius' Meditations and bought the book. Then I read it and started to read more Stoic works, thinking that it is a great philosophy and that it is right for me.”

Kenny Buckenmeyer (1979-) is a Security Supervisor in Concord, North Carolina, USA. “I have been interested in Stoic beliefs some time, and am eager to learn more.”

Victor Buonsanto (1980-) is a Health & Safety Officer in Reading, UK. “‘Live according to Nature’...the Stoic maxim. But what is the Nature of Man? Man is a creature of reason. Man is a social animal. So be reasonable; be sociable.”

Corbett Burns (1959-) lives in Wayne, Maine, USA. He wrote, “.....Passions - Questioning Reality, Seeking & testing & learning from purported wisdom. Seeking to know, understand, & share knowledge.”

Russell Chaney (1985-) is in the U.S. Army, Loganville, Georgia. He wrote, “Been practicing stoicism for years and didn't even know it existed.”

Keith Chirsan (1954-) is a Certified Computer Technician in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. “Newly interested and fascinated in Stoicism. I can see where it will hopefully be useful in breaking some pesty unwanted habits.”

Kyle Funk (1983-) is a student in Provo, Utah, who wrote, “In light of recent trials and challenges in my life, I discovered Stoicism through a book I inherited from my recently deceased grandfather, who I found out was a Stoic. I hope to learn more about this philosophical system and how it will better benefit my life.”

Thomas Jarrett (1961-), Army Major and Licensed Clinical Social Worker who designed Stoic Resilience & Warrior Resilience & Thriving(WRT) resiliency programs, currently operating in Iraq. Trained as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) Doctoral Fellow and Supervisor. Currently train Soldiers and families in military-grade Stoic principles combined with Warrior Ethos and Army Leadership, serving twice in Iraq. Arrived at Stoic principles through Special Forces Background and belief in character strength and virtues, as described in Positive Psychology.

Jak Knight (1990-) is a Practical Nurse in Cobourg, Ontario, Canada. “Man is disturbed not by things, but by the views he takes of them.” - Epictetus

Lawrence Lowndes (1959-) “I stumbled upon the writings of Marcus Aurelius and the words spoke to me in a very direct way. What I heard makes sense to me, and feels right. I wonder how I never came across this before.”

Dr. Steven Ozrovitz (1966-), a physician from Roanoke, Virginia, wrote, “The Stoics are the greatest! This is key: in ancient Greece arose such an enormous body of the best thinkers—the best of everything that we have today comes from these remarkable people, the ancient Greek philosophers! They were and still are the best Psychologist/psychiatrists the world has ever seen! I would have loved to live in Ancient Greece with these noble Stoic philosophers. What a life that would have been! AMAZING!!!!”

Lera Marco (1986-) is a student in Treviso, Italy, who wrote, “I study philosophy at the University of Padova, and I had my Bachelor Degree in 2008. The thesis title was: 'The relationship between Pneuma and body. Elements for a comparison between Chrisippus and the *corpus hippocraticum*.' I've studied the ancient Stoicism and the Roman Stoicism for a while, and I'm still reading about that now.”

Mina Marko-da costa (1986-) is a law student in London, UK, who wrote, “I am an individual who embraces life with a balanced amount of reason and emotions. I like laughter, but I don't like to cry; I like acting, but I don't like dramas. Nevertheless, I value knowledge gained through living life to its fullest.”

Kevin McCoy (1978-) writes from Louisville, Kentucky, USA, “I have unwittingly been a Stoic since I was 18 years old. Once I feel more comfortable in the community I may expand on this personal statement.”

Dino Motta (1968-) works at an Employee computer company in Geneva, Switzerland. He wrote, “I discovered Stoicism some years ago, and I have been really astonished that all that I read was really what I thought about life in all domains (without knowing it). I read mostly Seneca, and I understood that I belonged to them. (English is not my mother tongue.) I was glad to find this site and hope to improve my knowledges on Stoicism. It changed my life for the better.”

Evan Richardson (1991-) is a student of Philosophy at Truman State University, Kansas City, USA.

Edison So (1972-) lives in Manila, Philippines, where he is “a lifelong practitioner of Stoicism.”

David Vincent (1966-) a Digital Imaging Technician from Durham, North Carolina, wrote, “Finding Truth & Beauty everywhere since 1966. Glad to be a member of this august body.”

Bill Wahl (1964-) is a Psychologist in England who writes, “Stoicism strikes me as such a clear-minded and helpful way to live life. There are so many odd-ball philosophies about that it seems a shame Stoicism is not more popular.”

Richard Weber (1987-) “Just a man. Connecticut, USA, resident. Interests are in medicine, music, philosophy, linguistics, and beer.”

David Wilkins (1979-) writes from London, England, “I became interested in the works of the Romans from an early age, and as I started making YouTube videos I started reading Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*. This inspired me to further research. Epictetus is less familiar to me, but as for histories I enjoyed Tacitus's works and have read them all. I have also read much of Seneca and Suetonius's works of history.”

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Spotlight

on

Russell McNeil of Canada

interview by Erik Wiegardt

It is only fitting that the Registry Report issue celebrating Marcus Aurelius's birthday also focus the Spotlight on New Stoa's own Russell McNeil. It is his work on Marcus that inspired this interview. For those who are concerned about the cost of yet another book that should be in everyone's library of Stoic essentials, Dr. McNeil's, The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius: Selections Annotated and Explained, is available as of this writing at Amazon USA for under \$15. The “Introduction” alone is worth that, and more.

Russell McNeil, PhD, was born in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada, and is a Research Associate at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, British Columbia, where he also teaches fitness and strength training and yoga and competes as an amateur natural body builder.

He was educated as a physicist and has taught both Physics and Liberal Studies at universities in Canada and the US (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) for over 20 years. A Lidar (laser radar) application he helped pioneer in 1972 as a PhD student at York University, has been tweaked and fine-tuned into the modern day technology on board NASA's Phoenix Mars Lander, which successfully completed its mission on the Martian surface in 2009. He has also worked as a television producer and writer in Canada and for PBS in the US where he produced the 1978 documentary, "Nevada Fallout: The Hot Years," examining the impacts of atmospheric nuclear weapons testing on the residents of Nevada and Utah.



Russell McNeil

Russell discovered Stoicism during his teaching years at Vancouver Island University. Intrigued by the Stoic roots in Physics, he became interested in the philosophy's possible contemporary relevance. Particularly fascinating was the assertion that the study of Physics (Nature) and its laws could lead to an understanding of the rules of engagement for living. In simple terms there seemed to be an equivalence between the laws of physics and morality. Living rightly and happily involves living in harmony with the universe. Of course following the Laws of Nature involves far more than obeying the law of gravity. Nevertheless, Stoicism was a philosophy that provided a direction in life that required nothing more (and nothing less) than the discovery of those laws (through critical thinking and empirical research) and a careful application and understanding of those laws in human terms.

His book, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius: Selections Annotated and Explained*, offers a radical and contemporary interpretation of Stoicism through the lens of modern science. This book is designed as a practical handbook on Stoicism. The material is structured to show the reader what Stoic meditation involves, and how to reason like a Stoic. The three-step method of Stoicism is further used to show how we can address personal, political, and environmental challenges of the 21st century. Practical challenges in the book include the applications of Stoicism to war, climate change, mental health (anxiety and depression), anger management, aging, illness, death, and addiction (sexual, drug and alcohol). Detailed explanations of the Meditations not included in the book are being added to his extensive Great Books blog - Logos (since 1995).

It is clear from reading your book that you consider yourself to be a Stoic.

I consider myself a Stoic. But like most human beings the Stoic areas of indifference (love of pleasure, fear of pain, material desires, fame and power) are not easy to dismiss. But the key to Stoicism is attitude, or "opinion" as Marcus Aurelius asserts. Shifting our mental focus from desire to indifference is possible. We can decide to live according to nature, and to say "yes" to the universe, and to say "yes" to life. In so doing we will experience release and serenity, and thereby fully participate actively and politically (the personal is political) in the human project. The serenity of Stoicism is the only real power human beings really have over their lives. Fortunately this is a limitless power - one that allows each of us to engage in life's meaning, to experience real joy, and to bring happiness and relief to the suffering of others.

I am very interested in your examination of classical physics of the Stoics as it pertains to the present. I'm sure many of our readers will be also.

Stoicism is built on the foundation of Stoic Physics and Marcus alludes to this frequently, if obliquely. But Stoicism is also rooted in critical thinking. As physics changes so too will our understanding of the Nature that Stoics maintain we ought to live according to. It seems clear to me that the Stoics understood - at least intuitively - the laws of thermodynamics that energy is conserved and that everything changes (entropy). The Stoics did not have any appreciation of modern quantum physics - an appreciation that would clearly modify

any conclusions the ancients might infer about fate and destiny. That does not invalidate Stoicism but would - as far as I read it - present a clear basis for a New Stoicism which should be less deterministic. I do examine these ideas in the book.

I'm very glad to hear about the relationship between quantum physics and the Stoic fate/determinism issue, something that I believe is troublesome to many. I know there is always a risk in using sound bites, but could you expand a little about how determinism becomes less iron-clad with the new awareness in quantum physics. Just last weekend I had a discussion about this very matter, which ended in an impasse, a stalemate if you will, where neither of us was happy with the outcome.

I am including below my comments on the question of Stoic "Fate and Destiny" reproduced on p. 34 in Chapter 1, "The Promise of Stoicism." These are reflections on the implications of modern physics on the ancient Stoic paradigm. Bear in mind that Stoic principles are rooted in "Reason" and that Reason is rooted in the Law of Nature. When our understanding of the Law of Nature is based on incomplete understandings (as was the case for the ancients) then the principles we draw from Nature will themselves be incomplete or partial. The discoveries of modern physics do not invalidate Stoicism - they rather amplify Stoicism because our understanding of nature is more nuanced today.

If the ancient views of the Stoics around Fate and Determinism seem dated today, it is only so because the ancient physics on which those views rested have been superceded. We still have fate and determinism. We are born, and we die, and along the way we change - the ancient stoics were right about these things, and the new physics does not interfere with these fundamental truths about nature. The old physics serves those facts as well today as it did when Marcus wrote his *Meditations*. But the possible paths we may follow between birth and death are far more richly nuanced in the modern world - and they have multiplied as have the various ways in which changes can occur - because our physics now allows this.

The challenge for the New Stoic (as it was for the Old Stoic) is to unpack what "living according to nature" means. But today we live in a non-deterministic world. The morality we infer from modern physics is no less virtuous than in the ancient world. We still must be good to be happy. As Stoics we need to be very careful not to fall into a doctrinaire trap. There is nothing dogmatic about Stoicism; it is not based on sacred text; or revelation. It never was. We must think as critically and carefully about what we say today as the ancient Stoic sages did. And what we say and conclude can never be final. We must study nature, discover its laws, and determine the moral lessons that we can only derive from the Law. Then we must act.

From the book, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius: Selections Annotated and Explained*, p.34

The discoveries of modern physics in the twentieth century have shaken the notions of causality that lay at the foundation of the early Stoic worldview about fate and destiny. The fact that physical events at the subatomic level proceed in indeterminate ways would likely come as a shock to Marcus Aurelius. The ancient Stoic believed that all events in the future will be the consequences of an unbroken chain of antecedent events. We now know this is not possible. Quantum mechanics demonstrates that the outcomes of future physical events can only be expressed as probabilities. In other words, the world does not evolve fatefully along a predetermined path.

Still, even in modern physics, future events do not necessarily come as a complete surprise. The probabilities of quantum mechanics do tell us something about the way nature behaves. Stoics were not fond of proclaiming dogmatic truths about nature, beyond enunciating fundamental principles. The mandate of the Stoic was simple: our duty is to live according to nature and its laws, whatever they may be. Our duty then, as now, is to discover those laws.

Well said. Thank you, Dr. McNeil. It is indeed an honor to have you with us and to have had this opportunity to introduce our readers to the value of your perspective.

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Aretē,

Erik