

REGISTRY REPORT

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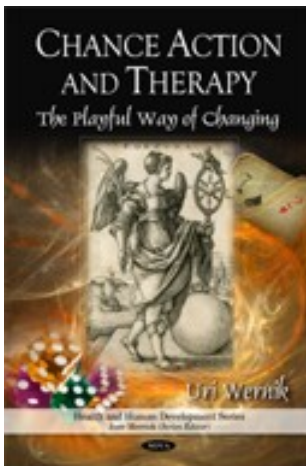


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Staff writers: Guillaume Andrieu, Chris Krause, and Julia Ohl / Editor: Erik Wiegardt

New Stoa News

Rohan is looking for a publisher. Rohan the Dublin rock/folk artist and the focus of our *Spotlight* feature this month has just finished writing a book entitled. *From Greeks To Geeks: Practical Stoicism in The 21st Century*. He describes it as “a kind of ‘self help’ (for want of a better term) book, that uses the practical aspects of Stoicism to help with stress, depression, relationship problems, bullying etc, while teaching the core Stoic beliefs. There are a few books out there dealing with the history and theory of Stoicism already, so my objective with this book was to make a fun, accessible and useful manual for integrating Stoicism into your life for your own peace and personal freedom. It’s very modern and up beat.”



Dr. Uri Wernik, New Stoa member, is a Clinical Psychologist with a most extraordinary and new form of therapy: chance. His idea of chance as therapy is in a book recently published, which he describes as follows:

“Throughout history, in times of economic or political uncertainty, people have called on Lady Luck for help. None of the 30,470 self-help books (Amazon.com results) deals with utilizing chance for solving problems in living. This book shows how to let chance and chance-inspired action work for us. Thus, the process of changing stops being a chore and becomes a playful experience.

- The book starts with the “paradox of change”: the difficulty of changing things that seem to depend on us (e.g. fulfill “new year resolutions,” maintain physical fitness, keep eating right or avoid procrastination). Understanding this paradox is half the way towards its solution.

- Most methods of therapy and self-help prescribe different variations on willpower, positive thinking and insight. This book raises questions about the

value and validity of explanations invented after the fact; it shows that “willpower” is nothing we can count on; and suggests that chance plays an important role in the creation of problems and that we should accordingly use it to solve them.

- The book consists of three kinds of interwoven chapters: Game chapters tell the story of women, men and couples using chance and luck (by means of dice and self-prepared playing cards) to solve a persistent difficulty. The problems dealt with include, among others, diet, smoking, couple relations and sexuality, shyness and inhibition, sex addictions, posture, panic and anxiety states, obsessions and compulsions. These chapters teach the reader to invent, play and modify her or his unique game.

- Chance chapters are our consciousness raising campaign. We examine and celebrate chance and luck from the perspectives of personal experience, literature, biology, psychology, economics and philosophy. Readers are turned into chance champions.

- Change chapters deal with the ‘paradox of change’ clarifying why change is so evasive, and why chance action and play are what the doctor ordered.”

To order Uri’s book, see: https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=11482

New Members

Alexander Alvarenga (1992-) is a Student in El Salvador. “My first encounter with Stoicism was in the StarWars saga. I was reading about the Jedi Code and how they controlled emotions, and in an essay I read that the Jedi Code was inspired by Stoicism, and this ridiculous or funny way is the way I met Stoicism. I started searching for it, and the more I learned about it the more I felt good and in control. Now I want to know more and share it.”

Sean Delpha (1990-) wrote from Syracuse, New York, “It started with a quote spray painted on a wall. ‘One original thought is worth a thousand quotations. --Diogenes.’ From there, I looked into the philosopher, and found out about Stoicism on Wikipedia, and from there I discovered Stoicism.”

Val Drake (1964-) is a Sculptor in Los Angeles, California. “My interest in Stoicism was sparked by F. Nietzsche's works. And now I'm a devoted pupil of the Stoic philosophy.”

Thad Edwards (1955-) is in Management in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. “Some time back I read *The Meditations* and found that it rang true with my viewpoint of the world. I am delighted to learn that there is a thriving community of like-minded folks, and that Stoicism is far from being a dead idea. I look forward to learning more.”

Marcin Fabjański (1969-) is a Writer in Poland. “I am a Doctor of Philosophy, so I had no chance to miss Stoic philosophers. But, I discovered Stoicism for myself only years after completing my PhD, thanks to Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. I wrote a book titled, *Street Stoicism*, on applying Stoic mental techniques to daily situations, to be published in Poland (and in Polish) in September 2010.”

Christopher Goulden (1973-) is a Manager of Finance in Halifax, Canada. “I only discovered the term Stoicism today on Wikipedia, and after reading the whole article I immediately said to myself, 'I am a Stoic!' I have been practicing these values for most of my life, but I have never been able to define it until now. I am an atheist, and I believe that there are fundamental laws of nature that govern our existence, and in a sense, form our fate much like a 'god' would except without consciousness. I haven't studied the history of Stoicism yet, but I know I share all the same fundamental values.”

Han Han (1943-) writes from Daphne, Alabama, USA, “Eckhart Tolls recently gave a talk on the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius on ETTV. I got the book and read it and found that it resonated with me greatly.”

Julia Hernandez (1964-) is a Health Information Analyst in Chicago. “I was introduced to Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* about two months ago by my husband. When my world view was faith based, I used to do a daily meditation, journal, and self examination, and since have been looking for a non-faith approach to improve my character. Much of what I've read in my little bit of time with Stoicism resonates with what I basically believe and how I want to improve myself.”

Alan Hynes (1975-) is a Retail Manager in Galway, Ireland. “I was drawn to Stoicism after a particularly difficult chapter in my life and found in it a philosophy of real inner joy. It has made me truly free and happy.”

John Kaupp (1978-) is a Student in Rochester, New York. “I discovered Stoic philosophy a few years ago just by browsing in a book store. I've come to a point where I can no longer ignore or neglect my practice in this beautiful and logical philosophy.”

Calan Kirkland (1993-) is a high school senior in San Antonio, Texas. “I have been interested in Ethics and Philosophy for years now. Knowing how diverse the subject can get, I was extremely surprised when I found a Philosophy that fit me almost perfectly: Stoicism. Nature, Reason, Fortitude, and Survival - I am most definitely a Stoic.”

Ronald Lazaro (1977-) is an Investment Manager in Sugar Land, Texas. “Stoicism grabbed me because it is a practical philosophy that has powerful tools for getting through life. I find the ethics compelling and a breath of fresh air in this world.”

Shanley Mccauley (1976-) is a Graphic Artist/Illustrator in Anchorage, Alaska, USA. “I came across the *Stoicism in 5 minutes* video on You Tube and became interested in Stoicism. I began listening to other lectures on the subject and I thought I would check out the Registry [New Stoa] to try to learn more.”

David Page (1987-) writes from the UK, “My introduction to Stoicism felt like a long one but perfectly natural. Always been introspective; I knew something was missing. I practice Transcendental Meditation, which was the first step, but I needed something intellectual, too. I'm not sure how I came across it, but I have. What I needed was this practice. This Way.”

David Pasquinelli (1984-) is a Game Programmer in Dallas, Texas.

Mackenzie Pearsall (1969-) is an English Teacher in Ontario, Canada. “I embraced Stoicism in earnest during my coursework to become a teacher of English as a second language. This was a demanding course, and as the class progressed I wondered if I was going to pass. I was very anxious.

“I turned to Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus for guidance. Reading the *Meditations* in the morning left me feeling deeply refreshed and self-aware. Other times I would ask myself how Epictetus might have advised me on how to maintain my composure. In the end I passed the course, feeling as though I had gone to two schools at the same time.”

Andrea Petrilli (1985-) resides in Adelaide, Australia.

Brendan Petroff (1977-) is a Computer Technician in Simi Valley, California. He wrote, “I am a writer, philosopher and initiate of several modern mystery schools. I am interested in Stoicism as a practical philosophy designed to help the individual attain a noble character and a fuller, richer life.”

Andrew Phillips (1986-) is a Computer Programmer/Student in Jamaica. “I discovered Stoic philosophy (a few days now) as a part of doing an ethical philosophy test, via the subsequent research that ensued. On reading about it on Wikipedia, and about Cato the Younger, I found that I could really relate to much of what defined the Stoic.”

Kirill Semenov (1991-) is a student in Corigliano Calabro, Italy. “I discovered Stoicism when I was 16 years old after reading the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.”

Lionel Taylor (1977-) is a High School History Teacher living in the US. “I have been interested in Stoicism since 1997 when I encountered an online copy of the *Meditations* and the Stoic Registry discussion group online. I found it a profound philosophy that I felt spoke to me directly. I have since applied the Stoic ideas and outlook to my life as a guide with varying degrees of success.”

Kit Vincent (1947-) is an Artist in Elizabethtown, Ontario, Canada. “I learned about this philosophy and practice recently while listening to a radio program on the CBC called 'Ideas'. I really liked what I heard and wanted to learn more. So, here I am, ready to learn even more.”

Jack Warr (1992-) is a Student in Bournemouth, UK. “I first discovered Stoicism last year (aged 16) whilst studying for my International Baccalaureate at sixth form college. Since then, I have been striving to live by the guidance of the Stoic philosophers - and my own, newly reoriented moral compass - to varying degrees of success from day to day (week to week, moment to moment, etc., etc.).”

Robert Williamson (1951-) lives in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. “I first became interested in Stoicism many years ago when I joined an Internet ancient Roman Republic reconstruction group called Nova Roma. Along with studying ancient Greco-Roman Paganism, I also studied ancient philosophy, and was greatly attracted to Stoicism and read *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, among other writings. Also loving nature and the outdoors, I feel in my heart that I am a Stoic. Thank you for building this online community for Stoics.”

Spotlight

on

Rohan of Dublin

interview by Guillaume Andrieu



Rohan

1986. Rohan is born in Murwillumbah, New South Wales, Australia. After living for periods in France and Holland, and going back and forth between Australia and his Irish ancestral home, he now lives in Dublin, Ireland.

As an accomplished musician, recording artist, and producer, Rohan has already released six albums of rock/folk music. He has also written a book on Stoicism based on pragmatic direct applications of Stoicism to everyday life. The title of his book is, *From Greeks To Geeks: Practical Stoicism in The 21st Century* (see “New Stoa News”).

Stoicism places a lot of emphasis on the use of reason, but the common belief is that artistic creation has to do with passion and feelings. How do you think your own experience deals with Stoicism and artistic creativity?

It is true that art, and particularly poetry, often uses the less reasonable and logical aspects of human nature as its subject matter, the loves, lusts, losses. The duty of the poet, according to Socrates, is to put into words the human experience, to use rhyme, simile, metaphor and hyperbole in an attempt to capture that moment, that feeling, the pathos, and the ecstasy, the whole range of human possibility. The clever poets sometimes take these observations and use them to make a philosophical point, not everyone will spot it, but it is there. In fact, since getting into Stoicism I have noticed hints of Stoic philosophy in Shakespeare, Blake, Joyce, Wilde and more. Whether they actively studied it themselves I know not, perhaps all wise artists simply come to the same conclusions, or maybe there is some truth that comes out in all good art that mirrors the Stoic beliefs.

I named my third and sixth albums “The Discourses” and “The Enchiridion” respectively; it’s not to say that they are specifically Stoic works, they are named that way more as an ode to Epictetus. With my own work I often find that there are Stoic messages and themes, with me I never say to myself “Okay, today I will write a sad/happy/love/political/stoic song”, my songs come of their own accord, are written in three minutes or less and are finished then and there. Often I don’t understand my own songs until years later when I see the lyrics reflected in my life at the time—it can be a little creepy! So I think art and Stoicism can be reconciled, but because of the nature of the medium of song it may not always be obvious, it may take a Stoic to spot the message.

Could you tell us a little bit about yourself, and your personal background?

I spent about half of my school years being home-schooled, and left high school at 16 to play music. I credit very little of my formal education to academia, learning more about the nature of people in school than the contents of the curriculum. Since leaving school, however, I have studied psychology, philosophy, history, and literature simply out of interest for the subjects. I suppose my main practical education would be the engineering, producing, mixing, mastering and playing of music, I’ve done a lot of this over the past 7 or so years and have become proficient at these disciplines.

I’m a fairly stable person, remaining just about the same most of the time, I don’t go up and down with moods the way I used to before Stoicism. I live a simple life with simple pleasures and I like it that way. I work hard

on my music, and I examine my inner world each day, questioning and arguing with irrational ideas and painful beliefs.

When did you first discover Stoicism?

When I was 19, I suffered a nervous breakdown due to a culmination of things going on in my life at the time, and during my recovery my father suggested to me that I check out the works of Epictetus and later Marcus Aurelius. It was just what I needed, a system of philosophy based on reason, logic and living according to nature. The idea that it is our opinions of the stimuli rather than the stimuli themselves that cause us to feel the way we feel made a lot of sense to me.

At the time I was very much beating myself up about things, taking on massive amounts of responsibility for things which were not in my power, so when Epictetus told me that I don't have to worry about how or why this happened, I just have to worry about how I react to it, it felt like an elephant had been lifted off my shoulders. Stoicism was given to me in a crisis, but I have taken it with me everywhere I've gone since then.

You said that your father introduced you to Stoicism. Can you tell us a little bit more about him?

My father is David Virgin, who was a significant contributor to the underground music scene of Sydney, Australia in the late 70's and 80's. He had multiple number 1 singles on the independent charts in Australia with his band Sekret Sekret, and was also a founding member of the 1979 industrial noise band SPK, which has become the stuff of legend, with many bands, including The Prodigy, citing SPK as a major influence. My father now resides in Dublin and continues to live and record as an independent artist.

Do you talk with him about Stoicism sometimes, or has it been a road you've taken on your own since then?

I think he would consider himself a Stoic; he continues to be interested in Stoicism, and it is often the subject of our conversations together, plus the odd Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius quote is dropped now and then when we talk. He will often pick up on things I've missed, or can see things from a different angle, so yes, my dad continues to be a big part of my Stoic journey.

So, you also consider yourself a Stoic?

I do. Though I am not always the model Stoic; I sometimes find myself swept up and freaked out during crises, but the Stoicism is always there to give me a tap on the shoulder and remind me of my responsibilities. I have read the *Enchiridion* and *The Discourses* multiple times. I often would read a little of *The Discourses* each morning upon waking. I am currently reading *Meditations* in the morning; it's a good way to start the day.

Stoicism embraces the fact that we are social animals. How do you frame Stoicism in the current world?

I think Stoicism has an important role to play in the world, especially for those who are in a state receptive to its teachings. I don't think Stoicism is something you can force on the "masses" like so many religious and political ideologies have done before. Most popular belief systems make a point to attack the amygdala, the survivalist reptilian brain, with threats to the person's safety, their reputation, their loved ones, their property. Once this is done, the belief system will offer the solution to these perceived threats in the form of some simple rituals to follow and a few small regular payments. It is very effective; in fact, almost the entire consumer economy is based on this simple equation.

Stoicism on the other hand does the exact opposite, it skips your amygdala to appeal to the neocortex, the logical, reasoning part of the brain, and also I believe to the heart and the human organism as a whole. Stoicism tells you straight up, when it comes down to it, that it's not ultimately up to you what happens to your personal safety, reputation, loved ones or property. What is up to you is how you react, how you perceive, and how well you keep your dignity under stress. There is no guilt or shame so there is no reason to continue learning unless the person is genuinely interested in the philosophy.

So on this basis I would argue that Stoicism will probably never set the world alight, never become a trendy popular "thing to do." We will not see Churches of Stoicism on our street corners (and if we do the teachings will have been corrupted beyond recognition). To me, though, this is not a bad thing. Stoicism will always be there for the person who is receptive to it, who finds it helpful and interesting. History has already been shaped by Stoicism with so many historical figures influenced by its teachings, and this will continue to be so. For me that is the future of Stoicism, a subtle force that is always there for anyone to find, to learn, and to enjoy.

I also think communities such as New Stoa are important in helping people to find Stoicism. They say you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink; well, the more horses you lead then naturally the more that will drink. Stoicism is, I believe, a personal journey, but it's great that we have a community to remind us that we're not alone, and that Stoicism is alive and well even after 2000 or so years, and will be so long after we are gone.

You talked earlier about the people who are not receptive to Stoicism's teachings. Is there no way to bring them to a state where they can benefit from our philosophy?

I'm not sure if you can bring someone into a receptive state, people seem to need to get there on their own. To me the best way would be to have someone doing talking tours to maybe older high school kids, 17/18 year olds, and perhaps colleges and anywhere else that it would be suitable. Rather than aiming towards the philosophy crowd, talk about it in a way that is useful to people's daily lives. Reducing stress, gaining real freedom and personal power through Stoic beliefs and techniques, this would be the way to do it. It worked for me. Then anyone who is at the right place in themselves at the time to benefit from the teachings will have found something very cool and beneficial. The basic idea is this: "Here's the bad news, you cannot control your circumstances; and here's the good news, your circumstances cannot control you. Work this one out and you will find happiness." With this message promoted as part of an entertaining and educational speaking tour, I think Stoicism could become a part of more people's lives.

To be honest, I've given this a lot of thought and am looking into such an idea at the moment, doing just such speaking tours myself. It would be nice if it took off, and people could benefit from the Stoic way.

You are currently working on a book of Stoic methods. In this work, you heavily quote Epictetus, explaining several key points, and illustrate them with direct applications.

My objective with this book, *Greeks to Geeks: Practical Stoicism in the 21st Century*, is to create a modern introduction to the practical use of Stoicism for people who would not normally consider studying philosophy. I tried my best to write in a style that is accessible and fun; it is designed to give people of all ages and backgrounds practical Stoic lessons and exercises to achieve real results in their life. From the feedback I have received so far from friends and family it seems that the book is achieving that goal.

Do you see Stoicism as a miracle solution, or are there situations where Stoicism can not be of any help?

I can think of some situations where Stoicism may not help, or its effectiveness is at least minimized. The one that immediately jumps to mind is with regard to the treatment of problems such as complex, or developmental post traumatic stress disorder. It is not so much that Stoicism makes it worse, or is damaging in any way, it's just that Stoicism is mostly a cognitive, logical practice using the reasoning, frontal parts of the brain. As we know, in times of crisis or physical danger the ancient reptile, survivalist part of the brain overrides the frontal, analytical part to ensure our safety. During this time it is quite impossible to practice Stoicism. When the danger is gone things then return to normal. The problem is that the person with PTSD, because of what is often a horrendous traumatic experience, and what came after that experience, can be dragged into this survival mode even when in a perfectly safe environment, often multiple times per day, or in the middle of the night, due to the phenomenon of "re-living". And trust me, all the good philosophy in the world is not going to help you while in the throes of one of these terrifying flashbacks or panic attacks.

I see your point, but then, when do you think Stoicism is most useful?

Stoicism works best after the fact, and before you begin something. It is great for preparing yourself for all eventualities and for re-framing events after they have happened, but Stoicism can come up short when in real physical danger or another type of crisis. Those who are dealing with PTSD, nervous disorders, or abusive circumstances should first seek counseling, psychotherapy or, for PTSD, Somatic Releasing Therapies.

I might add that it is best to learn Stoicism while in relative safety; once you are familiar with the teachings and techniques they will help you when you find yourself in difficult circumstances. Stoicism, like anything, is very hard to learn when dealing with difficulty. This topic is not something I **have** covered yet in *Greeks to Geeks* but it will appear in the final version along with recommended reading and therapies for such problems. I think this is an important point, as I have had first hand experience with the often devastating and debilitating effects of PTSD in family members.

Those are a very interesting projects, Rohan, and we will make sure to keep the community informed about your progress. Thank you for this interview.

Anyone interested in listening to Rohan's music may visit these websites:

- myspace.com/rohanforsale
- youtube.com/user/rohanmusic

Ancient Conundrum Revisited

It's amazing what one sees when looking over the shoulder of another Stoic. Our very own Guillaume Andrieu provided this impromptu look at the timeless question of why the chicken crossed the road. EW

Conundrum: Why did the chicken cross the road?

Epictetus: And what concern is it of yours what the chicken does or does not do? Crossing the road is in your power; the fact that the chicken crosses the road is not.

Marcus Aurelius: Remember how so many brilliant chickens have crossed the road in the past and are now long forgotten.

Seneca: My dear Lucilius, I understand how much interest you find in the question of why the chicken may have crossed the road. Many chickens that we know have crossed the road for several reasons, and I will expose them to you. In ancient times, we know that Xerxes' chickens crossed the road to try to invade Greece; some chickens in Nero's house were spotted crossing the road in order to fornicate. [... snipping 15 pages ...] But my own views on the topic may differ from that of our school. Be wary not to go too deep into theoretical questions, for what time have we left?

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