

REGISTRY REPORT

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New Stoa News

The Community grows, so does the *Registry Report*!

We're glad to announce that, as our community continues to grow month after month, we're shifting to a new format for the *Registry Report*, which will allow more interaction between all the members of the community. This issue is the last one to be brought to you as a PDF file, and starting in March, the New Stoa will count another extension to its website, which will be opened to serve as a central repository for all the issues to come. You will be notified next month by email with the address of the new RR.

New Members

Brian Apple (1972-) is Regional VP of Mortgage Banking for a loan company in Phoenix, Arizona, USA. "...discovered it [Stoicism] reading the *4-Hour Body*."

John Dodson (1950-) is a Cleaner in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. "Read *A Guide to the Good Life: the ancient art of Stoic joy*, by William Irvine; liked it; read his previous book *Desire; why we want what we want*, and here I am. Some 40 years ago, while in Edinburgh, Scotland, I read, underlined and kept the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. And, then, a few years back Tom Wolfe made one of lead characters a Stoic in *A Man in Full*."

Eleazar Eusebio (1971-) is an Assistant Professor of Psychology in Chicago, Illinois, USA. "Perhaps on a whim, but certainly fueled by curiosity and investigation, I likely found Stoicism when it found me in my early teens. Having first read works by Aurelius and Epictetus, I've since discovered even more connections with the Stoics in the amazing and multi-dimensional ways their wisdom reflects life and one's ability to find true nature. As a student and now professor, I've continually focused on the freedoms and realities Stoicism has offered my modern life. A true gift, I appreciate the timelessness, wisdom, and relevancy of Stoicism and celebrate how individuals choose to live their lives."

Michael Kalish (1960-) is in the Legal profession in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Joshua Kinman (1986-) is a Student in Zebulon, Georgia, USA.

Dustin Landers (1988-) is a Student in Boone, North Carolina, USA.

Josh Revell (1991-) is a Student in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.

Edward Smith (1959-) is a Steelworker in St Louis, Missouri, USA.

Graham Sutherland (1959-) is a Lawman & Officer/Survival Instructor in Carrollton, Georgia, USA. “My assimilation, at a very young age, and exercise of Stoic philosophy is responsible for my being alive today. And it is the real SECRET to a life well-lived. *Nunquam paratus.*”

John Wickenden (1948-) is an Entrepreneur in Chiangmai, Thailand. “I am of the opinion that whilst Buddhism is a wonderful path of knowledge it's core is beyond the proletariat who would be much better served by a handful of easily grasped, meaningful, and intensely useful maxims from the Stoa.”

Spotlight

on Scott PLUMMER

Scott was born in England, in the early sixties. Now married since 10 years, and happy owner of two small dogs (themselves very happy since Scott rescued them from being put to eternal sleep), he went through several different phases in his life before becoming a Community Support Worker in Canada.

Scott, would you tell us about your life?

I was born on the wrong side of the street, and understood fairly young that I wouldn't like school. My belief was justified a few years later when in a morning assembly we were told "Don't get any big ideas, there's a factory at the end of the road". It was after that day that I gave up on the state school system and started to "go missing". I was aware I was learning more on my own than in school but had not come across the term "autodidact". Being an autodidact explains why immediately following school - which I left without any qualifications - I was accepted to study music on the basis of talent alone.

So I moved to London to live. I was there during the eighties. Although my initial interest in guitar had been triggered by the folk roots music of America, I developed a wide interest in music and found myself capable of playing Piano, Lute, and Classic Guitar. I gave various concerts and was played on the radio waves.

I was actively involved in a modern Buddhist organisation in London. Later, I would live near a Buddhist temple in the Thai tradition and was a regular visitor to the meditation classes and retreats.

After graduating I studied electric guitar for a year. After this I started teaching music/guitar and found myself in demand. It is a lucrative business so it captivated me for several years before boredom set in and I decided to study law.

That must have been quite a shift!

I loved the intellectual demands of law study. After my music degree I (mostly) worked privately as most musicians do. After my law degree I worked initially as a legal assistant (or "lawyer" as called in North America). Primarily I worked doing tribunals - I really enjoyed this work but disliked the mentality of those I worked with; each day would leave me feeling drained... Marcus Aurelius comes to mind here: don't worry about being dead, just think of all the people you won't have to put up with anymore...

I started articles (the necessary final 18 months of work/study necessary to qualify as a "solicitor") in Birmingham (GB) but at the same time met my present wife. As she wasn't about to leave Canada I decided to emigrate.

At first, I returned to guitar and music, but had to move pretty soon again to another part of Canada. There, I was asked to fill in for a few hours to work with an autistic person. Within three months I was his full-time worker and love the work. It requires an endless amount of patience, but I have learned a lot (both about autism and myself), and enjoy the working environment more than I could ever have thought possible. So now I work as a "Community Support Worker" (I am the sole worker) for individual on the autism spectrum disorder who is on a government funded program.

Are you still connected to Buddhism ?

I do not have any connections with any Buddhist organisation now. I found it hard to "accept", *prima facie*, the philosophy. I also now question the supposed benefits of the meditation systems themselves.

Following on from Buddhism I encountered non-duality. I do still engage in meditation but it is not a "forced" kind of thought stopping silence - I simply read select quotes which bring me to the quiet space within. I now find myself doing the same with Stoicism and am amazed I had not come across this wisdom sooner.

Tell us what brought you to Stoicism then.

A few years ago I bought "The Art of Living" by Sharon Lebell (& Epictetus). I found a lot of value in the book but at the time was very busy with other projects. "Life happened" and the book ended up on the bookshelf (forgotten about as is usually the case). Just recently I was browsing the net and the New Stoa came up.

Do you feel that Stoicism relates to your work ?

I've read that Seneca said, "It is folly to think that it is the amount of money and not the state of mind that matters". In England I had been involved in law and music both of which had been lucrative monetarily for me. However, when I moved to a remote part of Canada the same financial opportunities were not available. Initially I resisted this fact, becoming depressed and angry. When I started this work I didn't enjoy it and the pay was nowhere near what I was used to. After 3 years I *love it* and wish I'd come across Seneca's advice a lot sooner.

Do you feel Stoic techniques can be more useful for the social worker or for the people you help ?

That would probably depend on the circumstances. In my experience I believe the benefit has been for both of us, and is as a result of focusing on things in the clients life over which he can have control, as opposed to those things that tax him and lead to burn out.

The person I work with previously had a string of workers who had been trying to get him to do things beyond his capability. By focusing on goals that were achievable he gets to feel like a success, not a failure, and is less stressed out on a daily basis - a win situation for all involved.

What especially in Stoicism resonates in you ?

Within the accepted western perspective of mind (the psychological method) there is a line of thought that says we ought to own our anger, pain, sorrow, whatever - and further, go on to give expression to it, or use it to spur change. From the reading I've done on Stoicism though it seems that whilst there are many similarities with some forms of Western psychology, there is an emphasis on immediacy that modern psychology often lacks. This nips over-indulgence in the bud. As I said before, I suffered depression and anger on coming to Canada, so this is of

interest to me - the idea that there is (was) a way to bring that suffering to an end quickly - way quicker than the years of counseling that are generally considered necessary (I say this tongue in cheek as my wife is a Counselor). The fact that Stoicism offers a form of “eudaemonistic” ethics along with the absence of negative mind states (tranquility) resonates as it brings suffering to an end.

Could you share with us a few things about which you'd like to progress ?

For me the most pressing issue is to reign my desires in - to start wanting what I have instead of constantly wanting new things. What could be more important than tranquility of mind? Yet I often stop and find myself distracted throughout the day with ‘things’ of no import.

What do you see as the future of Stoicism in the world?

From what I have read, the capacity of Stoicism as being relevant to the world of the 21st Century is to a degree that far exceeds many philosophies that have come and gone; it seems to me there is a reason for this (pun intended). I think the future for the philosophy is viable. However, it also seems to me that it needs to have greater exposure so that it can be made accessible to ordinary people to be used by those that will. The biggest danger is that it spends another two thousand years in the hallowed halls of academia hidden from the ordinary populace, whilst being used simply as a tool for intellectual debate and philosophizing. The future of Stoicism as a philosophy applicable to daily living is what interests and excites me. The future depends on the people involved now.

I really agree on your last sentence. How do you think our community can improve to make Stoicism more visible ?

Fundamentally, in our society, the bottom line is ‘marketing’, and for this there are limitless possibilities. In the early 80s I was involved with a modern Buddhist group in London. At that time their organization was 15 years old. They had already bought several mansions as monastic homes, from which they ran retreats and correspondence courses. They set up several satellite centers where they taught meditation, yoga, and held various other courses. These centers doubled up as sources of revenue by operating a health food shop, bookshop, and restaurant. This organization is still going strong today. Being based in London gave them access to people, and in return the people had a place to go that aligned with their desires and ideals.

Having ‘a place to go’ is important as it fosters community, and it is through community that a philosophy becomes a viable entity with a future. Without the degree of dedication of those involved none of the above would have happened. This dedication is ‘walking the talk’, and even though I found myself at odds with their philosophy/world-view I still respect their commitment. This, I think, is the degree of dedication required for Stoicism to be a ‘way of life’ again. Without it, I’m not sure a couple of thousand of people spread out about the globe will make much difference to anything.

Thanks a lot Scott for sharing these thoughts with us!

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