

REGISTRY REPORT

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



JUNE 2010: Issue # 32

New Stoa News

No news is good news, but I have a feeling this news break won't last long.

The New Stoa survey, *5 Questions*, that many of you answered last month produced some very interesting results. For the final tally go to the end of the issue immediately following the interview.

New Members

Bruce Baker (1957-) Biloxi, Mississippi, USA. "New to Stoic Philosophy. Have studied many paths, have a degree in Theology, but consider myself a Deist. Have always had strong Pantheist/Panentheist/Panendeist views. I have been reading Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic* and decided I wanted to learn more. If time permits and there is a opening I may enroll in the College classes soon."

Uday Batra (1990-) is a student in Jalandhar, India. "I am here to learn about stoicism." [\[Editor's note: Uday is our first member from India and the 300th person to join our community.\]](#)

Roger Bull (1949-), a Barrister in London, England, wrote, "Like most people, I began my acquaintance with Stoic thought through reading Marcus Aurelius. When I came to the words, 'Choose not to be harmed - and you won't feel harmed. Don't feel harmed - and you haven't been (Book 4:7 Hays trans.),' I dropped the book. I really connected with this absolutely empowering thought. It was only subsequently I found that this was a central Stoic thought (albeit expressed in MA's inimitable style). Seneca and Epictetus swiftly followed. I have been a Barrister (a trial lawyer) for 35 years and now specialise in Matrimonial finance. I'm also a trained Mediator."

Keith Burch (1992-) writes from Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA: "I enjoy philosophy."

Isabelle Cabrera (1977-) is an Architect in the Philippines. "I came across this Stoic idea while reading books. I felt that my thoughts are channeled to this direction, and I feel like I will discover more inevitably. I would like to engage myself and be part of this community."

David Dickerman (1963-) is in the medical field in Washington State, USA. He writes, "Grounded in biology, physics, and philosophy that is consistent with above. Immersed in nature, and carving my path."

Patricio Duarte (1943-) writes from Olney, Maryland, USA: "Trying to learn more and live better as a small (but central) member of our big system. Pantheist. Lives by Reason, not faith; Responsibility, not finger pointing; Action, not hope; Solidarity, not charity; Understanding, not believing; Exploring the unknown, not following defined paths; Deciding, not obeying."

Rafael Carvão (1982-) is a student in Évora, Portugal, who quotes Epictetus:

“Freedom is secured not by the fulfilling of one’s desires, but by the removal of desire. (iv.1.175) Where is the good? In the will. Where is the evil? In the will. Where is neither of them? In those things that are independent of the will. (ii.16.1) Man is disturbed not by things, but by the views he takes of them. (Ench. 5) If, therefore, any be unhappy, let him remember that he is unhappy by reason of himself alone. (iii.24.2) I am formed by nature for my own good: I am not formed for my own evil. (iii.24.83) Permit nothing to cleave to you that is not your own; nothing to grow to you that may give you agony when it is torn away. (iv.1.112)”

Nicholas Gentry (1978-) is a Teacher in the US. “I majored in philosophy, yet never studied Stoicism as such in school. I discovered Epictetus while living in Ghana as a Peace Corps volunteer.”

Johnathan Gould (1975-) is a Human Services Worker in Enfield, Canada. He wrote, “I am a (Western) Buddhist/Reform Taoist and have just recently discovered Stoicism and find it is comparable with my life stance and intend to investigate it further so that I might learn from its wisdom.”

Keren Hyler (1970-) of Salem, Oregon, quotes Marcus Aurelius: *You could leave life right now. Let that determine what you do and say and think.*

Francois Lefebvre (1960-) is in Finance in Montreal, Canada. He writes, “I am not seeking a truth. Simply a truer path. The honesty of your site, the simplicity of the concepts, the clarity of the arguments have attracted me. Most of all, the ethics of one’s improvement through personal choices, rather than knowledge, rings well with me. Don’t take me wrong, knowledge is critical to make better choices. But stoicism constantly comes back to the choices one makes, to the the fact that it is the one and only thing you can claim control over. No second chance in some future eternal life. No excuses because of some previous lives or past. Only the promise that it all depends on me. Thank you. Greetings, ‘stoici amici’.”

Mace Manire (1947-) writes from Soldotna, Alaska, “I have read about the Stoic philosopher and completely agree with their world view.”

Scott Mcnutt (1957-) is a Business Owner in Weatherford, Texas, who wrote, “Just another man attempting to live as well as possible.”

Kevin Metcalf (1967-) is an attorney in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA. “I am a single custodial father of two little girls and have spent over twenty years in law enforcement and the military. Stoic philosophy is the best way of thriving in the world.”

Jason Moore (1989-) Gardena, California. “Though I am only an undergraduate in college, and only 21 years of age, the discernment and reflection over Stoicism has lead me to direct myself to further continue the practice and analysis of the philosophy as a means to further guide my life in all aspects of my life.”

Walter Moss (1980-) is a graduate student in Rochester, New York. “I discovered the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius in a Church basement thrift shop when I was a teenager. I read it then, and have been a Stoic ever since.”

Michael Pan (1992-) writes from Waterloo, Canada, “When I discovered the writings of Marcus Aurelius through a high school history class, I was immediately drawn to the philosophy of Stoicism. The principles of self control, rational desires and living in accordance with nature just shouted, ‘This is me.’ I admit that I am not a perfect Stoic, and may never be. However, the wisdom of Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius will guide me throughout my life.”

John Sanderson (1966-) is a “collateral manager and philosophical car dealer” in Edinburgh, Scotland. He is “an ex-firefighter, ex-financial futures trader, ex-buddhist, and embarking on two new careers at once. Attempting to emulate a Stoic life stops me waking up in the middle of the night screaming. Live your life well my friends.”

Silvia Vicente (1972-) is a Financial Data Analyst in Lisboa, Portugal, who writes, “I am amazed to discover that there were people in the world that lived hundreds of years before me and were wise beyond the days

we live today. I started to read a book my boyfriend suggested I should read called, *A Guide to the Good Life*, by William B. Irvine. I am amazed how I understand, and how I agree, and how I find its content so similar to the way I conduct my own life. I want to learn more please :)"

Chris Visser (1957-) is an English teacher in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. "As a teacher I am in need of a centre, not that I see philosophy as a tranquilizer from the bookshelf, but something to fall back on for my peace of mind. Physical exercise helps out, but as always mind and body need to be balanced. Studying these old guys certainly adds a new dimension to my life, gives pleasure and meaning."

Rishpal Wadalia (1985-) is in the Merchant Navy in India. "I have been a Stoic all my life without knowing what Stoicism was. Then one day I stumbled upon its philosophy and I realised after 25 years of living my life and thinking that only I had these ideas, that the world had known them for centuries. There are others out there who believe what I do and have believed in the past. It is already a refined and honed philosophy. So, here I am to learn and know what I don't already. To be enlightened."

Kevin Wells (1989-) is a student in Durban, South Africa. "Seek not to live perfectly, but to perfectly live."

Spotlight

On

Ian Haigler of China

interview by Erik Wiegardt



Ian Haigler

I was born during the early 1960's, in a small town of the southeastern United States, and spent most of my adult life in Florida. I did undergraduate work in English and Religious Studies as well as graduate work in Medieval Literature and Critical Theory. My interests during graduate studies included Chaucer, sexual satire in medieval poetry and the uses of monstrosity in fiction. I've worked for about two years on archaeological sites, six years in human rights, six years in government, six years teaching literature and writing, and have now spent the past four years lecturing and editing at a university, just across the Yangtze from Shanghai, in China.

I currently live in an apartment located on a very narrow lane, just outside the medical campus, running between the remains of a temple and what is described as the oldest private museum in China. While in China I've taught various courses on English language, literature and the cultures of English-speaking countries to both undergraduate and graduate students. During the past year I have taught exclusively at the medical school, giving lectures on various language and cultural issues, and am serving as the English-language article editor at the university's scientific institute, the Laboratory of Neuroregeneration.

ERIK: Thank you, Ian. I know from personal experience that living in an Asian country can be very alienating. Before long, the isolation and culture shock is too much for many who try it. Do you have family there with you and have you had any difficulty adapting to life along the Yangtze?

IAN: I lived for a year in Taiwan just after undergraduate study, teaching English and studying Chinese, and ironically found that a more difficult adjustment. Perhaps it was an age-related thing. Life on the mainland demands a massive adjustment, but it seems somehow easier now that I'm older and, as you may also have

discovered during your travels, living in a completely alien environment can readily contribute to the cultivation of mental discipline.

I am divorced and have three children, two daughters and a son. My twenty-year-old son has lived with me in China for the past year, studying Chinese language and culture in the university at which I teach, with a handful of other foreign students. His older sister lived with me when I first came, but the culture shock was too much for her . . . she returned to the States after only six months.

Do you consider yourself to be a Stoic?

I definitely consider myself a Stoic, but it has taken a long time to arrive at this conclusion and I feel there remains much for me to learn. In general, it has always felt more intuitively valid than most world views. Textbook entries on Stoicism tend to be less informative and accurate than they might so, to the extent that Stoicism remains trapped in books and sometimes subject to dismissive references, it will have no future. Popular interest, generated by at least two movies during the past decade, will help little as such interest fades quickly. It will definitely require a living and evolving community for Stoicism to have a much-needed place in humanity's future (and a little more color).

I'm especially interested in your comment about Stoic community, because I am fully in agreement with your assessment. Is there anything you see that we could do to improve the community on the New Stoa website?

One hurdle in the renewal Stoicism is that English trashed-up the word "stoic," which to most speakers conjures an image of boring, unemotional and Spock-like, which shouldn't be the case. The New Stoa site is great, but natural colors and imagery would not only recall the importance of nature in Stoicism, but make it seem friendly. I saw Zen and Stoicism referenced the other day on a site about pantheism; that is a connection that might be explored as a talking point. Stoicism needs some basic talking points to attract interest because, as it stands now, the only people who find the New Stoa are those who already know about the philosophy.

Good point. Consciousness raising is very difficult when philosophy is competing with the professional purveyors of popular culture. Any ideas on how we can promote our own renewal.

I have practiced Buddhism (the philosophy/meditation kind) for many years and am very interested in continuing to explore the many similarities. I believe an exploration of Stoic meditative practices might contribute much in the way of Stoic renewal.

Interesting. The eBook, *Beyond Theory*, freely available in the College library, explores this very idea.

I'd like to wrap this up by returning to the subject of your current location. Do you ever mention your interest in Stoicism to your students, friends, or colleagues in China? Have you ever met another person there who even knows what Stoicism is?

It is commonly assumed in China that all Americans are Christians, and I am often asked by students, sometimes by others, about my religious beliefs. Some are disappointed, for no particular reason, when I respond that I'm not Christian, while others are intrigued. Although not always, this sometimes leads to conversations about my philosophical position. A few have encountered the word "stoic" as a vocabulary item, but are unfamiliar with it's historical or philosophical background. As there are at least a few basic similarities with Buddhism and some ancient Chinese thinkers, such as *logos* = *dao*, this can lead to interesting discussions.

I would think so. Perhaps you can add to these discussions by pointing out that Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier, claims to have read Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* 100 times. (See RR back issues #10 and #12.) They may be impressed that the Premier and you have a philosophical interest in common.

Thank you, Ian. Please stay in touch and let us know if you find another Stoic over there.

* * *

5 Questions

Here they are. Rather than attempt to translate what they mean, perhaps we should just be aware of the diversity of opinions in our community. Thank you for participating. This was a real "eye-opener" for me, and I'm guessing it will be for many of you as well.

1. Are you a Stoic?

Yes: 64 **No: 0** **Don't know: 9**

2. If so, are you a Stoic:

a. Theist: 15
b. Deist: 16
c. Agnostic: 21
d. Atheist: 18
other: 1

3. Do you agree with this statement: "The substance of God is Nature."***

Agree: 48 **Disagree: 7** **Don't know: 18**

*** The following is quoted from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. II, VII.146-8, where DL is writing on the philosophy and life of Zeno:

The deity, say they, is a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into him], taking providential care of the world and all that therein is, but he is not of human shape The substance of God is declared by Zeno to be the whole world and the heaven, as well as by Chrysippus in his first book of his work Of the Gods, and by Posidonius in his first book with the same title.

4. Facts: There is a Facebook group of Stoics with nearly 1200 members. The community of New Stoa has less than 300 members. The Facebook group is more interactive than New Stoa. In light of these facts, are there any reasons why New Stoa should continue to exist as an independent group?

Yes: 57 **No: 5** **Don't know: 11**

5. If the New Stoa website were redesigned to be as interactive as Facebook, would you be willing to financially support the cost of maintenance with an annual membership fee of \$25, US?

Yes: 32 **No: 16** **Don't know: 25**

* * * *

Aretē,

Erik