

The Redwood Stoa

MINUTES FROM JANUARY 15, 2016, SUNDAY

REDWOOD STOA GROUP MEETING

Met at Muddy's Coffee, Valencia St., San Francisco

10:30AM–1:00PM

Weather: Partly Sunny

Attendees: James, John, Katrina, Simon, Christina, Mark

This month's theme: *Rational by Nature*

Open discussion

- What is Reason? It's not as clear as we'd like
 - "To think coherently and logically; to draw inferences or conclusions from facts known or assumed."
 - The ancient Stoics thought that Nature herself was the model of reason
 - Chrysippus said, "Reason supervenes as the craftsman of impulse"
 - Incredible that we have Chrysippus' quote from so long ago!
 - Natural impulses, evolved from primitive states of our evolution, have remained in spite of (and ever-better managed by) our development of rationalization
- Gregarious species look out for their own well-being through looking out for the group!
- Impulses, like anxiety, vs. the rational brain
- Having civilized political conversations
 - The danger of insularity, keeping like-minded company only
 - Some people have angry reactions to unwanted change
 - Differences between political ideals and political reality
 - Sense of entitlement on both sides
- How do you have a harmonious society when society is heterogeneous?
 - Surprisingly similar conundrum to how things were 200+ years ago in America
 - Human nature and tribalism vs. globalization
 - The speed of change is hard for people to adjust to
- Young people can adapt more quickly, while older people can become resistant to change
 - How do you stay open to change?
 - Give new things an honest try, letting go of preconceived notions
- Is the current Democrat vs. Republican stage mostly debating humanism vs. institutionalism?
 - A recent article posited that Democrats think people are inherently good, while Republicans think people are inherently bad
- This election has shone a spotlight on many previously-unknown, passionate voters
 - And now we can do new rational things to change the world
 - Dynamic societies are able to grow more freely
 - Learning how to speak to and to listen to these passionate people will be important



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- Can we use a rational language to discuss truths? Are there basic facts or universals to free us from our various prejudices
- Can we or can we not trust our senses?
 - Even ancient Skeptics, like the Stoics, said that it's more useful to accept that a table is a table
- Valuing humanity over resources (cf: People are inherently good vs. bad)
 - Giving money to your neighbor to promote a free, healthy society
 - Donating to charity without having control over what others will do with that money
 - It is more rational to focus on the process rather than on the outcome that is not up to us
- Reason has something to do with cognition, logic, experimentation...
- Quantum mechanics, and the idea that there is no table, is not very useful to Stoics
 - Perceptions are adjustable, but perhaps only by previous perceptions
 - Epictetus said, "You are but an appearance, and not absolutely the thing you appear to be."
- The destructive and mad can be "rational" in their behavior
 - Variation in our sanity can create new art, ideas
 - These people can be useful a pressure valve and repository for group members' neuroses
 - Rationality is natural in this context
- Different individuals are aspects of the whole
 - That we are all related to other people, and to other living organisms, is an old Stoic notion
 - Each thing, in fulfilling its nature, contributes to the whole
 - People, by their nature, are made for some kind of cooperation
- The ancients felt rationality was inherent to everyone, differing in degree and outcome

Stoic practice

- Mark, as of February 6th, will have only taken cold showers, instead of hot ones, for three years!
 - It's an evolving journey.
- Christine was able to balance work, life, and the Stoic fellowship!

Reports and Announcements:

- Meeting location will continue to alternate between Berkeley, at Au Coquelet, and San Francisco, at Muddy's.
- James' final project for the Marcus Aurelius course was his 'Citium,' a notebook for Stoic practice.
 - The files will be made available, and Christine will look into printing more.
- The Stoic Fellowship — Globally Connected – Locally Engaged
 - There are currently 15 member groups after membership renewals.
 - Plans are underway to incorporate the Fellowship in Minnesota.
 - Check out the site! — <http://www.stoicfellowship.com/>
- John is working to publish the Toolbox.
- Proposal of an additional meeting in January or February!
 - Christine or John are open to hosting.



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- A potluck or dinner out with attending members would be nice to “kindle” our spirits in the wintertime, and inaugurate our New Year.
- Revisited proposals to bring more structured time to the group meetings:
 - Facebook group will be available for text discussion in between meetings: (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/redwoodstoa/>)
 - Wordpress is already available for more detailed discussion threads (see footer).
- A Marcus Aurelius study group in Fremont:
 - Saturday, Jan 21, at 7:00AM at a Denny’s (5280 Mowry Ave, Fremont, CA 94538)
 - (<https://www.meetup.com/Marcus-Aurelius-Meditations-discussion/>)

Group goals achieved:

- We met!
- We brought material for discussion!

Next Month’s Meeting:

- Next meeting will be in **Berkeley**, on **February 19th**
- Next month’s theme: **Judgment and Assent**

Join the Redwood Stoa! Now you can become an official member of the Redwood Stoa by adding your name through the following web form: <https://redwoodstoa.wordpress.com/join-the-redwood-stoa/>

It’s pleasant to do and will help the group effectively plan future events!

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MEETUP.COM/THE-REDWOOD-STOA/

