

# The Redwood Stoa

## MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 19, 2017, SUNDAY

REDWOOD STOA GROUP MEETING

Met at Café Au Coquelet, University Avenue, Berkeley

10:30AM–12:15PM

Weather: Overcast

**Attendees:** James, David, Seamus, Simon, John, Katrina, Mark, Monza, Emmanuel

**This month's theme:** *Judgment and Assent*

### Open discussion

- Assent is the acknowledgement, the confirmation
- First is the proposition of what's going on, and the initial judgment (like "this is terrible")
  - Maybe the person who cut you off while driving was just cut off themselves
- Fundamental attribution error: attributes bad behavior of others to their identities but our own bad behavior to our external circumstances
  - A cognitive bias
  - Also seems to apply to inanimate objects
- We work through our initial reaction, our first movement, through Stoic practice
- Similar to the Alexander technique of movement/dance, to think through the right way to move, in order to move more effectively, and practice those skills
  - From two months ago: "1. Neutral perception; 2. Involuntary value judgment (called "the first movement"); 3. Taking the time to weigh the perception and the reaction to it, using rationalization; 4. Assent or rejection of the judgment"
  - #3 involves the sacred pause
- An 'indifferent' is anything not ourselves
- Suicide in the philosophers
  - Marcus Aurelius: "It is your duty to stay alive as long as you can do some good"
  - Many forced into it, or forced to choose it over living a life as a slave without virtue
- Discussion on taking cold showers and other physical practices that are difficult but with health/spiritual benefits
- Stoicism is criticized as a passive philosophy, but it is really about accepting reality and realizing what you can change in the present
- The practice of meditation, focusing on the disciplines of action, desire, and assent (cf. 'Stoicism and the Art of Happiness', by Donald Robertson)
  - There are different forms of meditation, including Buddhist, that can be helpful to Stoic practice
  - Becoming ego-less, as in Buddhism, is important in complete rationalization during the sacred pause
  - Meditating on the worst-case scenario, to prepare for the bad feelings
- Is emotion controllable?
  - Through training Stoics believed yes



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- But emotions are our first line of defense and can be useful when present
- Emotion vs. rationalization; forebrain vs. rest of your brain
  - Difficult to define emotions, feelings, mood, subconscious, habit, passion, intuition, and other concepts that modern science has developed beyond what the ancient's understood
  - 'Thinking Fast and Slow', by Daniel Kahneman
  - Might be easier to focus on conscious emotions and conscious rationalization
- The heuristics of your brain are faulty
  - Especially evident with the ad industry
- Going beyond the habits of the brain
  - Making sure to judge if the habits in place are appropriate
  - Realizing that this is how biologically we function, and becoming our own watchdogs/programmers
  - Thinking about the world with wonder, like a child who has never seen things before
- Stoicism in Silicon Valley
  - The ability to handle "failing fast"
  - Rewarding mistakes and valuing creative troubleshooting
- Free will vs. contra-causal free will
  - Free will to do what you want that exists in a deterministic world vs. a religious free will completely removed from causal circumstances
- Determining what is Good through internalizing what you believe is Good

## Stoic practice

- Mark began this year to stop drinking alcohol to see if he could
  - The urge to practice Stoicism is increasing, with every success in disciplined exercise of willpower
  - An addiction to experience a daily habit of discipline
  - A pivotal moment?
- David realizes there are many scenarios in which he can practice Stoicism
  - General situations when he sees others negatively impacted

## Reports and Announcements:

- Meeting location will continue to alternate between Berkeley, at Au Coquelet, and San Francisco, at Muddy's.
- The Stoic Fellowship — Globally Connected – Locally Engaged
  - Check out the site! — <http://www.stoicfellowship.com/>
- John is continuing to work on and to publish the Toolbox.
- Christine had a social dinner yesterday!
- Revisited proposals to bring more structured time to the group meetings:
  - Facebook group is now available for texting/message discussion in between meetings: (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/redwoodstoa/>)



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- Wordpress is already available for more detailed discussion threads (see footer).
- Seamus has re-begun his course from the college of stoic philosophy, and one of the authors (Long) of one of the texts is a professor of Berkeley.
  - There is interest in having a meeting involving him somehow!

## **Group goals achieved:**

- We met!

## **Next Month's Meeting:**

- Next meeting will be in **San Francisco**, on **March 19th**
- Next month's theme: **Desire and Aversion**

**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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