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From Atheists to Empiricists: Reinterpreting the Stoics in the German Enlightenment

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From the 1670s Stoic philosophy had been closely associated with atheism and the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. However, in 1771 the historian Christoph Meiners published a short essay on the concept of apatheia that revived interest in Stoic philosophy within the German lands. Over the following years, he and his colleague Dieterich Tiedemann developed a novel interpretation claiming that Stoicism closely prefigured the philosophy of John Locke and represented a source of valuable philosophical ideas. Immanuel Kant, his allies, and later Idealists such as Hegel adopted this empiricist interpretation, despite their otherwise deep philosophical disagreements with Meiners and Tiedemann. Tracing eighteenth-century German debates around Stoicism reveals how it came to be considered a form of empiricism. As well as contributing to recent scholarship on the reception of Stoicism, the article suggests a major point of intersection between currents of the Enlightenment usually only treated separately.

Between 1771 and 1782, the philosopher, historian, and (from 1785) race theorist Christoph Meiners (1747–1810) published a number of essays and chapters in praise of Stoic philosophy. In 1776 he described Stoicism as the “most coherent of all [the systems] that were invented by the Greeks.”¹ The Stoics had prioritized the role of experience in cognition and denied the existence of innate ideas, and the philosophy they established on those principles had given ancient Rome its “formation [*Ausbildung*], its best laws, the greatest heroes, patriots, statesmen, and emperors.”² Such claims represented a dramatic reversal of German perceptions of Stoicism. Since the 1670s German intellectuals had attacked the Stoics as a fanatical sect whose philosophy was inhumane, atheistic, and wholly incompatible with Christian teaching. In many accounts Stoicism was closely associated with the controversial philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632–77). Against such interpretations, Meiners posited that Stoicism was a vital source of useful ideas and, further, the modern thinker that the Stoics most resembled was John Locke (1632–1704). Stoicism’s role in Roman civilization was, he suggested, evidence of the salubrious moral impact of philosophical projects organized around experience and a view of

¹Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Apathie der Stoiker,” in Meiners, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1775–6), 2: 130–65, at 130–31.

²*Ibid.*, 133–4.

the mind as a *tabula rasa* (blank slate). Meiners appears to have hoped that the exemplary status of Stoic Rome would incline his German readers towards the work of Locke, and thus dislodge the philosophy of Christian Wolff (1679–1754) from its preeminent position in German academia.

And yet from the late 1780s Meiners turned against the Stoics. In a 1786 textbook on the history of philosophy he argued that, while it had been subjected to numerous unfair accusations, Stoicism nevertheless represented a decline in intellectual quality from the work of Aristotle and Theophrastus.³ Despite their subtleties, it was impossible to “free [the Stoics’] logic from the accusation of exaggerated and useless pedantries.”⁴ In 1800, following a controversy in which the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) was accused of atheism and ultimately lost his job—the *Atheismusstreit* (atheism dispute)—Meiners went further.⁵ Now Stoicism was “nothing more than a crude aggregate of ... opinions, and of dialectic, or eristic sophistries.”⁶ The moral demands of Stoicism were so stringent, so exaggerated, and so poorly expressed that they could be part of neither daily nor political life.⁷ The Stoics’ claims were, moreover, duplicitous, for they used “all the artifices whereby one raises arbitrary phrases to axioms of right and perfect reason.”⁸ Earlier in his career Meiners had positioned Stoic philosophy as a bulwark against vice and an impetus towards great cultural achievements. Now it was emblematic of degeneration.

Meiners’s reversal offers important insights into both the history of the reception of Stoic thought and the shifting intellectual battlegrounds of the German late Enlightenment. Meiners’s essays of the 1770s were the first early modern contributions to treat the Stoics’ experience-oriented epistemology as central to their philosophy. While modern scholars have tended to categorize the Stoics as empiricists, Meiners’s contributions on this subject have largely been forgotten. Indeed, due to their shared determinism and conflation of God with the universe, Stoicism had previously been primarily associated with Spinoza. This was despite the fact that Spinoza proposed a very different epistemology in which the mind is not a *tabula rasa*.⁹ The historicity of such classifications reflects their contingent nature as assertions advanced in relation to specific concerns and debates. It is also a salient reminder of the difficulties inherent to describing ancient thinkers in modern terms.

Christoph Meiners is best-known today for his avowedly pro-slavery race theory which divided humanity into superior Caucasian and inferior Mongolic races.¹⁰

³Christoph Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit*, 1st edn (Lemgo, 1786), 112.

⁴*Ibid.*, 113.

⁵On the *Atheismusstreit* see Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge, 2001), 368–424.

⁶Christoph Meiners, *Allgemeine kritische Geschichte der ältern und neuern Ethik oder Lebenswissenschaft*, 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1800–1), 1: 149.

⁷*Ibid.*, 175.

⁸*Ibid.*, 179.

⁹Andrea Sangiacomo, *Spinoza on Reason, Passions, and the Supreme Good* (Oxford, 2019), 111–48.

¹⁰Christoph Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1st edn (Lemgo, 1785), 16–80. On Meiners’s race theory see Sabine Vetter, *Wissenschaftlicher Reduktionismus und die Rassenlehre von Christoph Meiners* (Aachen, 1996).

However, reconstructing German debates about the Stoics is a reminder that his contemporary intellectual impact was much broader, and many of its aspects remain underexplored.¹¹ Indeed, his early work largely focused on the production of “useful” philosophy and the study of ancient history, with little to suggest his commitment to strict racial hierarchies from 1785 onwards.¹² Towards the end of this article I will suggest how Meiners’s opposition to the Critical Philosophy and commitment to racial hierarchies may have informed his changing interpretation of Stoic philosophy. More generally, the reception of Stoicism in the German Enlightenment remains underexplored. While there is a growing body of important work on Stoic thought in the early modern period, there has been little research on Stoicism in the German lands between the publication of the *Historia critica philosophiae* (Critical History of Philosophy) (1st edn 1742–4) by Johann Jakob Brucker (1696–1770) and the elaboration of Immanuel Kant’s Critical Philosophy in the 1780s. Invaluable work has been published detailing how particular authors wrote about or adopted Stoic ideas, but there has not been a systematic attempt to reconstruct the more general role of Stoicism in German intellectual life after 1744.¹³ Giovanni Bonacina’s groundbreaking *Filosofia ellenistica e cultura moderna* (Hellenistic Philosophy and Modern Culture) (1996) analyzes key debates around Stoicism, Epicureanism and Skepticism but, given the nature of the study, does not draw out all of their intellectual ramifications.¹⁴ The only monograph on Stoicism in the German Enlightenment is the 1940 doctoral dissertation of Katharina Franz. However, Franz takes it for granted that there was an agreed understanding of the content of Stoic philosophy and, accordingly, claims that the presence of ideas similar to Stoic doctrines constitutes sufficient evidence of direct Stoic influence.¹⁵ Rather than attempting to identify points of unacknowledged influence, the present article contributes to the understanding of Stoicism in early modern Europe by tracing overt discussions of the nature and content of Stoic philosophy. Tracing these debates reveals Stoicism’s significance both as a subject of historical and philosophical interest and as a concept to be deployed in the rhetorical formation of arguments within contemporary disputes.

¹¹On the influence of Meiners’s racial thought see Britta Rupp-Eisenreich, “Des choses occultes en histoire des sciences humaines: Le destin de la ‘science nouvelle’ de Christoph Meiners,” *L’Ethnographie* 90–91 (1983), 131–83; Bruce Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity* (New York, 2006), 73–89. On Meiners’s wider impact see Morgan Golf-French, “Bourgeois Modernity versus the Historical Aristocracy in Christoph Meiners’s Political Thought,” *Historical Journal* 62/4 (2019), 943–66.

¹²Meiners, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*; Christoph Meiners, *Versuch über die Religionsgeschichte der ältesten Völker, besonders der Egyptier* (Göttingen, 1775); Meiners, *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls der Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom*, 2 vols. (Lemgo, 1781–2).

¹³For example, Barbara Neymeyr, Jochen Schmidt, and Bernhard Zimmermann, eds., *Stoizismus in der europäischen Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Politik: Eine Kulturgeschichte von der Antike bis zur Moderne* (Berlin, 2008).

¹⁴Bonacina discusses Meiners’s 1776 essay, but not his earlier work, later reversal, or significance in debates around Locke, Wolff, empiricism, and rationalism. Giovanni Bonacina, *Filosofia ellenistica e cultura moderna: epicureismo, stoicismo e scetticismo da Bayle a Hegel* (Florence, 1996), 176–84.

¹⁵Katharina Franz, *Der Einfluß der stoischen Philosophie auf die Moralphilosophie der deutschen Aufklärung* (Giessen, 1940), 6–8.

Interpretations of Stoic philosophy were used by different writers for different purposes in response to major philosophical and historical debates across the eighteenth century. These ranged from concerns about atheism, to anxieties about the impact of certain intellectual currents on German culture and society, to Kant's efforts to legitimize the novelty of his Critical Philosophy. These redeployments represented the appropriation and reinterpretation of Stoicism within competing philosophical languages (in J. G. A. Pocock's sense of the term).¹⁶ Indeed, after about a century in which Germans almost exclusively read the Stoics as atheists or quasi-atheists, the final three decades of the eighteenth century saw a widening field of possible interpretations. The Stoics could still be read as atheists, but after Meiners's intervention they were more likely to be considered virtuous Lockean *avant la lettre*. Later, intellectuals of all stripes would debate the value of Stoicism and its relation to the philosophical projects of Kant and his successors.

One important feature of these debates was the cross-pollination of currents in the German Enlightenment that have traditionally been approached separately. Thus this article suggests some of the ways in which the innovative ideas about culture and history generated in this period were utilized in the disputes around the Critical Philosophy. While scholars have recognized the importance of both the eighteenth-century German "science of culture" and the impact of Kant's philosophy, comparatively little attention has been paid to the ways in which these two currents could intersect.¹⁷ Interest in Stoicism was one such point of intersection and, furthermore, indicates the transmission of ideas across intellectual battle lines. Even as the German intellectual landscape became increasingly polarized, commentaries on the Stoic tradition reveal intellectuals' willingness to read work across philosophical divisions and to incorporate their opponents' views into their own interpretations. Thus, although this article does not offer a detailed assessment of Kant's own relation to Stoic philosophy, it does reconstruct part of the intellectual context of that relationship, as well as how his most significant heirs adapted and responded to competing interpretations of the Stoic tradition.

Before turning to these debates, however, it is necessary to outline two concepts central to this article, namely empiricism and rationalism. Empiricism, according to William P. Alston "stresses the fundamental role of experience" and, as a "doctrine in epistemology, it holds that all knowledge is ultimately based on experience."¹⁸ Empiricism is particularly associated with the work of John Locke and others typically grouped under the heading of "the British empiricists."¹⁹ However, empiricism has sometimes been considered a characteristic feature of the Enlightenment itself, and distinctive empiricist currents have also been identified in both French and

¹⁶J. G. A. Pocock, "Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought," in Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History*, 2nd edn (Chicago, 1989), 3–41.

¹⁷Michael C. Carhart, *The Science of Culture in Enlightenment Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). See also Hans Erich Bödeker, Philippe Büttgen, and Michel Espagne, eds., *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in Göttingen um 1800* (Göttingen, 2008).

¹⁸William P. Alston, "Empiricism," in Edward Craig, ed., *The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd edn (London, 2005), 221.

¹⁹Stephen Priest, *The British Empiricists*, 2nd edn (London, 2007).

German philosophy.²⁰ Empiricism is often contrasted with rationalism, which, conversely, proposes “that reason ... plays a dominant role in our attempt to gain knowledge.”²¹ As with empiricism, there is a wide variety of rationalist philosophies. Few, if any, rationalists wholly deny the role of experiential phenomena in cognition, but they do assert that reason represents “a distinct faculty of knowledge” separate from experience.²² Rationalism has traditionally been associated with the notion of innate ideas—the claim that some concepts are inherent to the human mind—as articulated by René Descartes (1596–1650) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), as well as the view that some knowledge of the external world can be derived from the use of reason alone.

While there is some debate around how the terminology of empiricism and rationalism should be applied—and especially the need to avoid simplifying the ideas of past thinkers—most scholars agree that they are helpful concepts when used judiciously.²³ Since at least the thirteenth century European philosophers have recognized that experience and abstract reason offer two distinct approaches to knowledge.²⁴ Indeed, both Leibniz and Locke acknowledged that they sat on opposing sides of such a divide.²⁵ However, although the terms *empirici* (“empiricists”) and *rationales* (“rationalists”) appeared in the work of Francis Bacon, prior to the 1781 publication of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* they were almost exclusively used with reference to medical theories.²⁶ Kant’s use of these terms had a polemical purpose: after describing this divide, he claimed to have presented a form of rationalism that ultimately overcame all former philosophies by delineating the different remits of rational and empirical knowledge.²⁷ Thus Kant’s use of these concepts was not entirely original, but it did serve to popularize them, as well as to clarify and intensify existing debates within German philosophy. Competing epistemic doctrines were increasingly used to define both the entire outputs of particular thinkers and even long-term historical trends or “traditions.”²⁸ As the polarization of German thought following the Critical Philosophy is a key theme of this article, I have generally taken an emic approach to describing the epistemological positions of contemporary thinkers. Thus I have tended to categorize thinkers in terms of the philosophers they aligned themselves with—for example Lockean or Leibnizian—and

²⁰Ritchie Robertson, *The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness, 1680–1790* (London, 2020), 26–7; Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago, 2002); Brigitte Sassen, *Kant’s Early Critics: The Empiricist Critique of the Theoretical Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2000).

²¹Peter J. Markie, “Rationalism,” in Craig, *The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 882.

²²Ibid.

²³Alberto Vanzo, “Kant on Empiricism and Rationalism,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 30/1 (2013), 53–74, at 53–6.

²⁴Priest, *British Empiricists*, 8.

²⁵John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 48–65; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain* (1765), in Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, 8 series, 63 vols. to date (Berlin, 1923–), 6/6: 70.

²⁶Francis Bacon, *Novum organum* (1620), in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, ed. Graham Rees and Maria Wakely, vol. 11, part 2 (Oxford, 2004), 48–447, at 152; Antonia LoLordo, “Early Modern Critiques of Rationalist Psychology,” in Alan Nelson, ed., *A Companion to Rationalism* (Oxford, 2005), 119–35, at 119.

²⁷Vanzo, “Kant on Empiricism and Rationalism,” 63–7.

²⁸Ibid., 69–70.

only used “empiricist,” “rationalist,” et cetera when thinkers clearly positioned themselves in relation to these concepts.

This article is divided into three parts, followed by some concluding remarks. The first overviews ancient Stoic philosophy and outlines the reception of Stoicism in early modern Europe up to 1771. The second part examines the Lockean reinterpretation of Stoicism initiated by Christoph Meiners and further elaborated by his friend and colleague Dieterich Tiedemann (1748–1803). This interpretation is situated in relation to contemporary innovations in the study of the Classics and debates about the status of Christian Wolff’s philosophy. The third part shows how the disputes around Kant’s Critical Philosophy provoked further reinterpretations of the Stoics, this time regarding perceived relationships between Stoicism and Kant’s ethics. Crucially, moreover, the adoption of Kant’s empiricist/rationalist terminology by key proponents of the Critical Philosophy facilitated both a consolidation and a problematization of contemporary ideas about the Stoics. In the 1790s, Kantian historians adopted important features of the Meiners–Tiedemann interpretation of Stoicism, but they also employed Kant’s philosophy to argue that the relationship between Stoic epistemology and Stoic ethics is necessarily unsatisfactory. This reading informed key works on the history of philosophy, including the lectures of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), and has been echoed by many others since. Looking forward to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as returning to the later remarks of Meiners and Tiedemann, the concluding section considers the significance of these debates for both the history of Stoicism and the German Enlightenment more broadly.

Stoicism before 1771

The Stoic tradition was founded by Zeno of Citium (c.334–c.262 BCE) in Hellenistic Athens and named for the colonnade—the Stoa Poikile (“Painted Porch”)—around which he and his students would gather.²⁹ Zeno’s ideas were further developed by several followers, but most notably Cleanthes of Assos (c.330–c.230 BCE) and Chrysippus of Soli (c.279–c.206 BCE). However, only slight fragments of these early figures survive. Probably the most important source on the early Stoics is the *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laërtius (dates unknown), written in the third century CE using sources that are now lost. The earliest detailed accounts of Stoicism that survive appear in the work of Cicero (106–43 BCE), who, though not an adherent, was broadly sympathetic to Stoic ethics. Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), Epictetus (c.55–135 CE), and Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE) appear to be the only ancient Stoics for whom any complete writings survive. A number of other sources—both Christian and pagan, typically critical—survive from the Roman principate and late antiquity. These include Galen of Pergamon (129–c.200/216 CE), Sextus Empiricus (c.160–c.210 CE), and Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260/265–c.339/340 CE).³⁰

Writing the history of ancient Greek philosophy is necessarily difficult, but the near total absence of surviving Hellenistic sources poses particular challenges for

²⁹Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers with an English Translation*, ed. and trans. R. D. Hicks, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA, 1942), 114–17.

³⁰On surviving sources for ancient Stoicism see Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate* (Oxford, 2005), 10–20.

reconstructing early Stoic thought. As Christopher Brooke notes, Stoicism remained “an unbroken tradition in Athens until 529 CE,” and it continued to change across the eight centuries of its existence.³¹ With all of the caveats that this entails, it is still possible to identify a cluster of ideas that became central to Stoic philosophy. Perhaps most famous is the Stoic emphasis on reason and virtue—that it is reason rather than desire that should determine our actions. To live according to reason is to live both virtuously and in harmony with nature, and it is this harmony which yields true happiness.³² According to the Stoics, because nature encompasses the world, our moral commitments are not restricted to particular communities and so are cosmopolitan in nature.³³ Stoic accounts of freedom are complex, but they presented a highly deterministic theory of action.³⁴ At the very least they left little room for free agency as commonly understood and, as we will see, have frequently been considered fatalistic. Most troubling for many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers was the Stoic conviction that there can be no transcendent beings or realms. God was thus not a personal deity but rather the wholly immanent “governing principle of the cosmos.”³⁵ This necessarily precluded the Christian conception of God, the Christian heaven, miracles, and the possibility of individuated incorporeal essences like the Christian soul.

Although Cicero and Seneca were philosophical authorities for much of the Middle Ages, there was relatively little interest in Stoicism as a distinct tradition. However, the Renaissance saw a revival of interest in the Stoics qua Stoics, leading Stoic philosophy to play an increasingly central role in contemporary intellectual conflicts.³⁶ The Stoic emphasis on reason and moral perfectibility was typically pitched against the Augustinian emphasis on original sin.³⁷ Surrounded by war, religious division, and political crisis, however, many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thinkers were particularly attracted to Stoicism’s rigorous ethics and reasoning.³⁸ The most influential Neo-Stoic, Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), promoted Stoicism as an ethical resource that Christians could turn to during times of trouble.³⁹ The Stoics’ positions on fate, matter, and the nature of God were, where possible, reconciled with Christian doctrine.⁴⁰ Notably, Lipsius also sought to reconcile

³¹Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism in Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, 2012), xii.

³²John M. Cooper, “Eudaimonism, the Appeal to Nature, and ‘Moral Duty’ in Stoicism,” in Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting, eds., *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty* (Cambridge, 1996), 261–84.

³³Melissa Lane, *Greek and Roman Political Ideas* (London, 2014), 223–7.

³⁴See Susanne Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford, 1998).

³⁵Keimpe Algra, “Stoic Theology,” in Brad Inwood, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge, 2003), 153–78.

³⁶William J. Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought,” in Heiko Oberman and Thomas Brady, eds., *Itinerarium Italicum: The Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of Its European Transformations* (Leiden, 1975), 3–60, at 14–17.

³⁷Ibid. Christopher Brooke’s *Philosophic Pride* supports Bouwsma’s interpretation.

³⁸Jochen Schmidt, “Grundlagen, Kontinuität und geschichtlicher Wandel des Stoizismus,” in Neymeyr, Schmidt, and Zimmermann, *Stoizismus*, 3–134, at 70–73.

³⁹See especially Justus Lipsius, *Concerning Constancy*, ed. and trans. R. V. Young (Tempe, AZ, 2006).

⁴⁰Jan Papy, “Lipsius’ (Neo-)Stoicism: Constancy between Christian Faith and Stoic Virtue,” *Grotiana* 22/1 (2001), 47–71.

Stoicism with key Augustinian concepts.⁴¹ Thus he rejected Stoic materialism but reinterpreted Stoic fatalism in terms of Christian providence. Where reconciliation was impossible, biblical authority—or at least Lipsius’s interpretation of biblical authority—prevailed. Accordingly, Lipsius’s Neo-Stoicism emerged largely as a collection of moral maxims that could buttress Christian fortitude.

Seventeenth-century natural-law theorists, including both Grotius and Pufendorf, adopted (and adapted) the Stoic concept of *oikeiosis*—roughly translatable as “affinity”—in their accounts of human nature and natural law.⁴² However, Stoicism became increasingly controversial following the publication of Spinoza’s *Theological–Political Treatise* in January 1670. Although the *Treatise* did not explicitly claim that God and the natural world are coterminous, it was read by many as doing just this.⁴³ Indeed, it also denied the possibility of miracles and the divine authority of Scripture. Spinoza’s *Treatise* scandalized contemporaries, and by May the Leipzig professor of philosophy Jakob Thomasius (1622–84) had published a refutation.⁴⁴ In 1676 he further attacked Lipsius and the Christian Stoic tradition, arguing that Stoicism and Christianity are fundamentally incompatible. According to Thomasius, Lipsius had misapprehended the nature of Stoic thought. A close analysis, he claimed, revealed Stoicism’s essential fatalism and materialism.⁴⁵

Although Thomasius did not explicitly identify a relationship between Spinoza’s philosophy and the Stoics’, following the 1677 publication of the *Ethics* the two became increasingly associated.⁴⁶ Both were deterministic and denied the transcendent entities integral to Christian doctrine and, accordingly, comparisons with Stoicism became a common feature of Spinoza’s early reception.⁴⁷ Johann Franz Buddeus (1667–1729) and, initially, Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) interpreted Spinozism as a form of Stoicism, and both as forms of atheism. In Buddeus’s work the Stoic conflation of God with the world was sufficient to label them, like Spinoza, atheists: such a conflation necessarily denied God the freedom necessary to a true deity.⁴⁸ Bayle ultimately decided that the similarities with Spinozism were more apparent than real, but nevertheless criticized the Stoics for having sought to use philosophical reasoning beyond its proper remit and establish divine

⁴¹Ibid., 56, 66–9.

⁴²Peter Xavier Price, “Self-Love and Sociability: The ‘Rudiments of Commerce’ in the State of Nature,” *Global Intellectual History* 6/3 (2021), 267–301.

⁴³Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “The Metaphysics of the *Theological–Political Treatise*,” in Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal, eds., *Spinoza’s Theological–Political Treatise: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2010), 128–42.

⁴⁴Bartholomew Begley, “Naturalism and Its Political Dangers: Jakob Thomasius against Spinoza’s *Theological–Political Treatise*. A Study and the Translation of Thomasius’ Text,” *Seventeenth Century* 34/5 (2019), 649–70.

⁴⁵Jakob Thomasius, *Exercitatio de stoica mundi exustione* (Leipzig, 1676), 29–32.

⁴⁶On similarities between Spinoza’s ideas and Stoicism see Jon Miller, *Spinoza and the Stoics* (Cambridge, 2015). On the historical association see Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 127–48; Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford, 2006), 457–70.

⁴⁷Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 127–48.

⁴⁸Johann Franz Buddeus, *De Spinozismo ante Spinozam* (Magdeburg, 1701), 22–7; Buddeus, “Exercitatio historico-philosophica prima de Erroribus Stoicorum in philosophica morali,” in Buddeus, *Analecta historiae philosophicae* (Halle, 1706), 89–203.

knowledge of God and the cosmos.⁴⁹ This illegitimate extension of reason represented an assault on theological truths which, Bayle claimed, necessarily stood outside rational deduction. The inevitable conclusion of such reasoning was a conflation of God and the sensible world—a position clearly incompatible with Christianity.

Indeed, in the face of Spinoza's uncompromising philosophy—and no doubt informed by Lutheran anxieties—north German intellectuals placed increasing emphasis on the dangers of overzealously applying reason to religious claims. Even Leibniz, the chief proponent of the principle of sufficient reason—that all things must have a necessary cause—argued that some aspects of religion stand outside rational understanding: divine faith is one of a number of “primary truths ... which cannot be proved.”⁵⁰ Such truths relied on “*inexplicable reasons*” made known via “an experience of inner sentiment.”⁵¹ Commentators were particularly concerned about the implications of Stoic philosophy for free will. Thus in 1724 Christian Wolff vehemently rejected accusations that his theory of causality amounted to Stoic determinism. He argued that it was instead his critics who “lapse into a Stoic or Mohammedan [*Muhametanische*] fatalism.”⁵² Regardless of whether there are in fact parallels between Wolff's ideas and the Stoics' (or Spinoza's), his sharp rebuttal reflects Stoicism's increasingly controversial position.

The Stoic concept of *apatheia* was a similar source of ethical and theological controversy. *Apatheia*—the principle of acting without the interference of emotion or inclination—was interpreted as a form of pride, whereby fallen humans asserted the superiority of human reason over the sensation of spiritual experience.⁵³ In the 1730s the theologian Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1693–1755) argued accordingly that, in addition to the accusations outlined above, Stoic *apatheia* denied the emotional characteristics of God-given human nature and the sensible character of Christian faith, thereby undermining God's purpose for earthly existence.⁵⁴ *Apatheia* was thus harsh, rigid, and an affront to the (supposedly) spontaneous, emotional nature of Christian faith and agency.

These criticisms were consolidated and systematized in Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae*, which remained the standard work on the history of philosophy from its publication in 1742–4 through to the 1790s. Interestingly, Brucker acknowledged that the Stoics saw the mind as a *tabula rasa* whereby knowledge arises from sensory experience, but he considered this fact unimportant.⁵⁵ Although he ultimately favored Wolff, Brucker was sympathetic to Locke and, if he noticed any similarities

⁴⁹Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 2nd edn, vol. 1 (Rotterdam, 1702), 919–31; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 458, 462.

⁵⁰Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers, 1675–1676*, ed. and trans. G. H. R. Parkinson (New Haven, 1992), 56–7; Michael Losonsky, “Locke and Leibniz on Religious Faith,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20/4 (2012), 703–21.

⁵¹Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to Duchess Sophie of Hanover, Aug. 1690, in Leibniz, *Briefwechsel 1690–1691*, in Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, 1/6: 76, original emphasis.

⁵²Christian Wolff, *Anmerkungen über die vernünftige Bedanken von Gott, der Welt, und der Seele des Menschen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1724), 256, 260.

⁵³St Augustine formulated this argument, but it became increasingly common in the early eighteenth century. Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 6–8.

⁵⁴Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *Sitten-Lehre der Heiligen Schrift* (Helmstedt, 1735), 258–67.

⁵⁵[Johann] Jakob Brucker, *Erste Anfangsgründe der Philosophischen Geschichte* (Ulm, 1751), 121–5.

between Locke and the Stoics, he didn't comment on them, and nor did he think that they compromised Locke's philosophy.⁵⁶ Instead, the most salient characteristic of Stoicism was its materialism, through which it (unlike Locke) denied both free will and the transcendent entities necessary to Christianity.⁵⁷ This made it atheistic in practice. According to Brucker, it was these features (and not the theory of idea formation) that informed Stoic ethics. The denial of transcendent entities resulted in a failure to appreciate humanity's unique role in God's creation and thus the importance of certain nonrational qualities. This was the source of the uncompromising, inhumane principle of *apatheia*, which made Stoic ethics so unrealistic that they necessarily resulted in hypocrisy, fanaticism, or both. The defining characteristic of Stoicism was thus its materialism, and consequently its ethics were wholly irredeemable. Accordingly, if Stoicism resembled a modern philosophy, it was Spinozism. Stoic epistemology was basically irrelevant. Despite having been superseded, Locke remained respectable. The same was not true for the Neo-Stoics.

Not everyone agreed with Brucker's claim that no part of Stoic ethics could be salvaged. The Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) adopted key aspects of Stoic thought, suggesting that the Stoic concept of *prolepsis* (preconception) offered an adequate foundation for innatist (or, in Hutcheson's case, quasi-innatist) theories of ethics.⁵⁸ Jean Barbeyrac (1674–1744) took pains to distinguish the Stoics' "monstrous" doctrines on God and causality from their ethics, which are both "beautiful" and readily conformable to Christian dogma.⁵⁹ Montesquieu would also accept such a distinction.⁶⁰ Christopher Brooke has traced the ongoing positive engagement with Stoicism in francophone and anglophone Europe, persuasively arguing for the importance of Stoic ideas in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's later work.⁶¹ Most notoriously, Denis Diderot accepted the charge of Stoic materialism, but celebrated rather than condemned it.⁶²

However, within the German lands Brucker's account prevailed and the Stoics retained a poor reputation through to the 1770s. Brucker's *Historia* became the standard source for textbooks on the history of philosophy across Germany and these textbooks typically reproduced his interpretation of Stoicism.⁶³ Already in

⁵⁶Johann Jakob Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae: A mundi incunabulis ad nostrum uque aetatem deducta*, 5 vols. (Leipzig, 1742), 5: 609–11.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 1: 908–53.

⁵⁸Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2005), 112–16.

⁵⁹Jean Barbeyrac, "Préface du traducteur," in Samuel von Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens, ou système general des Principes les plus importants de la morale, de la jurisprudence, et de la politique*, trans. Jean Barbeyrac, vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1706), i–xcii, at lxxviii.

⁶⁰Charles Louis Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des loix* (1748), in Montesquieu, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Roger Caillois, vol. 2 (Paris, 1951), 721–2.

⁶¹Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 181–202.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 148.

⁶³Jean-Henry-Samuel Formey, *Histoire abrégée de la philosophie* (Amsterdam, 1760), 148–53; Franz Nikolaus Steinacher, *Grundriß der philosophischen Geschichte* (Würzburg, 1774), 159–74; Italo Francesco Baldo, "Textbooks after Brucker," in Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello, eds., *Models of the History of Philosophy*, English edn, vol. 3, *The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age*, trans. Hilary Siddons (Dordrecht, 2015), 475–513, at 477–82, 488–93.

1744, the famous *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* (Great Complete Universal-Lexicon of all Sciences and Arts) (1st edition 1731–54) drew on Brucker, claiming that Stoicism had “a useless word-blubber [*Wort-Gewäsche*] in its logic, a grandiose, excessive character to its morals, and a dangerous enthusiasm in its physics.”⁶⁴ “[O]ut of [Stoic] principles an indirect atheism [*Atheismus indirectus*] naturally follows,” and a valuable ethical system could not be built on such a foundation.⁶⁵ Four years later the popular periodical *Der Gesellige* (The Sociable) wrote of the Stoics’ “inhuman propositions, that wished to rob from humans [their] feeling, sensibility, and emotions.”⁶⁶ Another noted in 1751 that the Stoics were fatalists, “indisposed towards friendship, implacable, severe, strict, and uncommonly proud ... A world of stoics would have perished from lovelessness and severity.”⁶⁷ German literature was littered with anti-Stoic comments through to the early 1770s. Poets such as Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) and Johann Georg Jacobi (1740–1814) derided the Stoics as proud, vain, and joyless.⁶⁸ In 1758 the jurist Stephan Georg Wiesand (1736–1821) called Stoic morality “a destroyer of human nature,” while thirteen years later the aesthete Johann Gottfried Lindner (1729–76) described the Stoic as “without feeling ... without life” and thus artistically uninteresting.⁶⁹ Importantly, these examples did not claim to offer new insights into the nature of Stoicism, but instead restated earlier assessments. The question of how to interpret Stoic philosophy was supposedly already settled.

Rediscovering the Stoics

If the perception of Stoicism in this period was largely stable, new intellectual currents were reshaping German interpretations of ancient philosophy. Stoic atheism may have been particularly alarming, but thinkers like Mosheim and Brucker were also worried about the more general insinuation of pagan ideas into Christian teaching.⁷⁰ By developing more sophisticated understandings of pagan philosophy, they sought to strip away the accretion of later interpretations and uncover the original principles of Christianity. Their efforts encouraged a younger generation of philologists to develop novel methods for the interpretation of ancient texts and their meanings.

⁶⁴Anon., “Stoische Philosophie,” in Johann Heinrich Zedler and Carl Günther Ludovici, eds., *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon Aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, vol. 40, *Sti-Suim* (Leipzig and Halle, 1744), 306–46, at 307.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 327–8.

⁶⁶Anon., *Der Gesellige, eine moralische Wochenschrift* 2/77 (Halle, 1748), 627.

⁶⁷Anon., *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift* 1/34 (Halle, 1751), 306–7.

⁶⁸Dieter Martin, “Wielands Auseinandersetzung mit dem Stoizismus aus dem Geist skeptischer Aufklärung,” in Neymeyr, Schmidt, and Zimmermann, *Stoizismus*, 855–74; Johann Georg Jacobi, “Zerstreute Gedanken,” in Jacobi, *Saemtliche Werke*, vol. 4, *Versuche* (Halberstadt, 1774), 231–302, at 286.

⁶⁹Stephan Georg Wiesand, *Kurzer Entwurf einer Historie des Natur- und Völker-Rechts* (Leipzig, 1758), 21–2; Johann Gottfried Lindner, *Kurzer Inbegriff der Aesthetik, Redekunst und Dichtkunst*, vol. 1 (Königsberg and Leipzig, 1771), 191.

⁷⁰Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *De turbata per recentiores Platonicos Ecclesia* (Helmstedt, 1725); Mario Longo, “A ‘Critical’ History of Philosophy and the Early Enlightenment: Johann Jacob Brucker,” in Piaia and Santinello, *Models of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *From the Cartesian Age to Brucker*, trans. Hilary Siddons and Gwyneth Weston (Dordrecht, 2011), 477–577, at 503–7.

Not all of this younger generation were as concerned with such theological implications. This was exemplified in the work of thinkers at the University of Göttingen, which opened its doors in 1737. The university's administrators actively recruited innovative scholars in order to attract students from across the German lands. This included Mosheim, who was both professor and university chancellor from 1748 until his death in 1755. To facilitate their work professors were also afforded considerable intellectual freedom.⁷¹ Especially following the death of Mosheim, this created an environment uniquely conducive to the investigation of controversial subjects by otherwise politically moderate professors. As Falk Wunderlich has shown, by the 1770s several Göttingen scholars, including Meiners, espoused a form of materialism (albeit one sufficiently tailored to avoid obvious theological controversy).⁷² Another result was that Göttingen quickly established itself as a leading intellectual center for ancient philology and history.⁷³ Most famously, from the 1760s onwards Johann David Michaelis (1717–91) published a series of controversial studies suggesting that the Hebrew Bible reflected the specific contexts of the ancient Near East, and so had little relevance for modern lawmakers.⁷⁴

Around the same time, Michaelis's colleague Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812) pioneered new approaches to Greek and Roman history using art, literature, epigraphy, legal documents, numismatics, and more to reconstruct the worldviews of ancient cultures.⁷⁵ One of the century's most influential classicists, from 1763 until his death Heyne transformed the Göttingen Philological Seminar into a prominent organ for intellectual production on the ancient world.⁷⁶ Approximately three hundred students attended the seminar, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both August Wilhelm and Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel, Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and other luminaries of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought.

Meiners studied at Göttingen from 1767 to 1770, and as well as attending Heyne's seminar, he developed a close intellectual relationship with the philosopher Johann Georg Heinrich Feder (1740–1821). They would later collaborate in the dispute around Kant, but in the early 1770s they were key participants in efforts to produce "useful" philosophy with insights relevant to the daily lives of the reading public.⁷⁷ Later in the century Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823) would derisively lump these efforts together as *Popularphilosophie* ("popular philosophy").⁷⁸

⁷¹László Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenments: William Robertson in Germany, 1760–1795* (New York, 2014), 11–12.

⁷²Falk Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta," *Aufklärung* 24 (2012), 65–90.

⁷³Reinhard Lauer, ed., *Philologie in Göttingen: Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft an der Georgia Augusta im 18. und beginnenden 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2001); Luigi Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae: Göttingen 1770–1820* (Göttingen, 1995), 267–99.

⁷⁴Carhart, *The Science of Culture*, 44–52.

⁷⁵Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford, 2010), 69–78.

⁷⁶William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago, 2006), 172–8.

⁷⁷Christian Böhr, *Philosophie für die Welt: Die Popularphilosophie der deutschen Spätaufklärung im Zeitalter Kants* (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 2003), *passim*.

⁷⁸Johan van der Zande, "Goodbye to Aristotle: Christian Garve between Late and Neohumanism," in Udo Roth and Gideon Stiening, eds., *Christian Garve (1742–1798): Philosoph und Philologe der Aufklärung* (Berlin, 2021), 143–70, at 145–6.

While they were in fact intellectually heterogeneous, most were critical of the abstract, highly formalized Wolffian *Schulphilosophie* (“school philosophy”) that dominated German academia.⁷⁹ Although many nevertheless drew on Wolff’s ideas, Meiners and Feder were particularly interested in Locke’s philosophy, which had previously made little headway in the universities.

In 1771 Christoph Meiners published a short article defending Stoic *apatheia* in the prestigious local *Philologische Bibliothek* (Philological Library). “Ueber die Apathie der Stoiker” (On the apathy of the Stoics) bore the imprint of Meiners’s materialism, his studies with Heyne, and his broader commitment to useful philosophy.⁸⁰ Making extensive use of classical sources, Meiners argued that the Stoics’ predecessors had believed that each individual contains a multitude of “irrational souls” (*unvernünftigen Seelen*) from which the passions emanate.⁸¹ The “involuntary shocks” these caused impeded human autonomy.⁸² Meiners associated these souls with the modern concept of innate ideas, suggesting that both represent superstitious fantasies. By contrast, the Stoics described human nature as “unspoiled” (*unverderbt*) and thus argued that our misconduct results not from a multiplicity of conflicting souls, but from our own enthrallment to “entrancing impressions” (*hinreissenden Eindrücke*) and “careless obedience to external, unexamined principles.”⁸³ Meiners tied this to the Stoics’ claim that the mind is a blank slate and all knowledge arises from experience.⁸⁴

According to the Stoics, Meiners argued, the passions were not the product of irrational and uncontrollable “souls,” and so they held that humanity could exercise autonomy by choosing how to respond to sense impressions. The disciplining of such responses was, accordingly, the proper meaning of *apatheia*. *Apatheia* thus granted “the reasonable man absolute rule [*unumschränkter Herrschaft*] over the vast sphere of sensations, ideas, and perceptions when it came to the appraisal of the moral goodness of an object.”⁸⁵ Far from simply despising human feeling, then, the Stoics had a “high and noble” conception of humans as moral agents fully capable of using reason to resist and overcome harmful inclinations.⁸⁶ Meiners summarized that the Stoics wanted “man to learn to feel his own dignity, and make him master over himself and his ideas [*Vorstellungen*]”: *apatheia* was simply “the firmness of character” whereby humanity could rationally judge “the worth of things.”⁸⁷ This principle, Meiners argued, was fully consistent with Christian theology, for it was God who gave humans reason to evaluate phenomena and act accordingly.⁸⁸

⁷⁹Böhr, *Philosophie für die Welt*, 19–23, 49–51.

⁸⁰As noted by one of the reviewers of this article, there is a good chance the essay began as a project for Heyne’s seminar.

⁸¹Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Apathie der Stoiker,” *Philologische Bibliothek* 1/3 (Göttingen, 1771), 1–20, at 3–5.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 6–8.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 8–9.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 14–15.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 16

In this way, Meiners took an aspect of Stoic thought that had been unimportant to Brucker and made it central to his defense of Stoic ethics. If Brucker's Stoicism was defined by its materialist physics, Meiners's Stoicism was defined by its proto-Lockean epistemology. Furthermore, Meiners's reconstruction of Stoic thought suggested a set of ethical principles that could be established on this epistemological foundation. Meiners's essay was both a sympathetic reinterpretation of the Stoics and an intervention in favor of the Lockean philosophy he and Feder prized. Indeed, the next year Meiners published *Revision der Philosophie* (Revision of Philosophy), which further stressed the advantages of Locke's ideas and helped secure him a professorship at Göttingen.⁸⁹

As early as 1772 Meiners's essay on the Stoics appeared as a key reference point in the *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie* (Outline of a History of Philosophy) by the geographer, Wolffian philosopher, and gymnasium director Anton Friedrich Büsching (1724–93). Although Büsching's textbook has been described as an essentially unoriginal work in Brucker's shadow, his account of Stoicism departed sharply from that in the *Historia critica philosophiae*.⁹⁰ According to Büsching, although Stoic philosophy included many harmful principles, it had also granted, "with good reason, a strength to human nature"—a fact which "cannot be noted and praised enough."⁹¹ What Büsching had in mind was *apatheia*. Citing Meiners, and using some of Meiners's own words, he wrote ecstatically that Stoic apathy was "not numbness or insensitivity, but liberation from passions, from blind instincts, from the wild violence of a poisoned imagination, the mastery of sensual feelings and ideas, firmness of mental character [*Gemüthscharacters*], [and] the fully independent judgment of the value of things."⁹² Indeed, Büsching noted that the authentic Stoic principle of apathy "is very much appropriate to the Christian religion," even if their account of humanity was incompatible with the doctrine of original sin.⁹³ Büsching was not uncritical of Stoic philosophy, but his criticisms were more balanced than his predecessors'. Many Stoic ideas were unoriginal, but this was unsurprising as their aim had been to reconcile the competing schools of contemporary Athens; their language was difficult, but this too was an inevitable outcome of integrating such different ideas.⁹⁴ Certainly their abstruse dialectics obscured their weaker ideas, but they were not atheists as had so often been claimed.⁹⁵ Büsching noted their theory of impressions, but put far less emphasis on it than had Meiners.⁹⁶ Indeed, whereas Meiners was an opponent of Leibniz's philosophy, Büsching suggested parallels between Leibniz's ethics and the Stoics'.⁹⁷ Already, then, and despite Büsching's

⁸⁹Christoph Meiners, *Revision der Philosophie* (Göttingen, 1772), 23, 54, 153–4, 161, 174.

⁹⁰Baldo, "Textbooks after Brucker," 483–8.

⁹¹Anton Friedrich Büsching, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1772–4), 1: 283–4.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 317–18, 329.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 2: 523–4.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 1: 288–90.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 290–91, 313–14.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 309–10.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 2: 540–41. Meiners attacks Leibniz in "Betrachtungen über die Griechen, das Zeitalter des Plato, über den Timäus dieses Philosophen, und dessen Hypothese von der Weltseele," in Meiners, *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften*, 1: 1–60, at 53–6.

own debt to Meiners, favorable interpretations of Stoicism were coalescing around particular epistemological positions.

Four years later Meiners published a revised version of his article on the Stoics in a three-volume collection of essays. In terms of philosophical content, he rehearsed his earlier defense of *apatheia*, albeit including more emphatic statements regarding the Lockean character of Stoic philosophy, such as that “the Stoics left all souls naked ... without the slightest ... innate ideas.”⁹⁸ More significant was his emphasis on Stoicism’s salutary civilizational impact quoted at the beginning of this article. Stoicism represented a powerful defense of law and religion against both skepticism and the corruption of Hellenistic culture.⁹⁹ It shaped Rome’s early virtue, and even in the period of imperial corruption, whenever “now and then the voice of freedom let itself be heard, so it always sounded from a Stoic breast.”¹⁰⁰ Here, Stoicism was not just a system with philosophical merit, but one responsible for great civilizational achievements. This, then, went much further than both his earlier piece and Büsching’s by offering a confident, politicized defense of a public role for Stoic philosophy. The message was clear: the adoption of Stoic–Lockean ideas across German culture could yield magnificent achievements.

This affirmative empiricist reevaluation of Stoic philosophy reached its peak with the publication of Dieterich Tiedemann’s three-volume *System der stoischen Philosophie* (System of Stoic Philosophy) (1776). Meiners and Tiedemann had attended the same school as children and remained close friends throughout their lives.¹⁰¹ They also shared a library, making it implausible that they would not have discussed their simultaneous interest in Stoicism.¹⁰² In 1774 Meiners had invited Tiedemann to Göttingen, where he attended Heyne’s seminar. Heyne must have been impressed with the young scholar as he obtained him a position at the Collegium Carolinum in Kassel and wrote a glowing introduction to Tiedemann’s *System*.¹⁰³ Unlike Meiners’s more heated intervention, Tiedemann’s study was a cautious, source-critical reconstruction of Stoic thought. On the subject of determinism, he reconciled conflicting interpretations by acknowledging the contradictions in the original texts themselves.¹⁰⁴ Where he disagreed with earlier interpreters he was largely dispassionate.¹⁰⁵ Spinoza appears only once. Here Tiedemann argued that, despite their apparent similarities, while Spinoza conceived all individuals “as modifications, as characteristics of the single monstrous world-substance [*Welt-Substanz*],” the Stoics saw them as “members and parts of the great world-machine [*Welt-Maschine*].”¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸Meiners, “Ueber die Apathie der Stoiker,” in Meiners, *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften*, 139–40.

⁹⁹Ibid., 130–31.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Otto Liebmann, “Tiedemann, Dietrich,” in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 38 (1894), 276–7.

¹⁰²Anon., “Tiedemann (Dieterich),” in Ludwig Wachler, ed., *Friedrich Wilhelm Strieder’s Grundlage zu einer Hessischen Gelehrten- und Schriftsteller-Geschichte*, vol. 16 (Marburg, 1812), 185–6.

¹⁰³Christian Gottlob Heyne, [untitled introduction,] in Dieterich Tiedemann, *System der stoischen Philosophie*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1776), 1: xvi–xviii. Tiedemann’s first name is sometimes given as Dietrich. However, he used Dieterich on all of his major publications. All footnotes follow the spelling given on the work in question.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 2: 142.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 1: 15, 91–2, 62, 85, 2: 58, 128, 131, 189, 199, 246, 3: 291, 343.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 2: 82.

Nevertheless, Tiedemann was not impartial, and his commentary—including on the subject of *apatheia*—broadly aligned with Meiners's.¹⁰⁷ He reinterpreted Stoicism's controversial theology as a rational defense of theism against the undiluted atheism of Epicurus and others.¹⁰⁸ Even if he did not defend this theology, by positioning it as a vindication of some kind of deity against avowed atheists he suggested that Stoicism, understood contextually, was at least more palatable than its ancient competitors. More importantly, he lauded the Stoics for their commitment to "the improvement and happiness of mankind."¹⁰⁹ Tiedemann, like Meiners, was supportive of Locke's philosophy and, like Meiners, he stressed key parallels between Locke and the Stoics.¹¹⁰ The Stoics not only presented the mind as a *tabula rasa*, but also offered a sophisticated account of the formation of ideas that was "just one step" from Locke's own.¹¹¹ Tiedemann, like Meiners, heaped praise on Stoic ethics. Thus "the doctrine of duties is nowhere else so coherent and detailed as in the Stoic system."¹¹² Tiedemann remained a sympathetic historian rather than a committed Neo-Stoic, but he clearly admired Stoic philosophy.

Tiedemann's *System* confirmed the Stoics' position as a philosophical tradition worthy of serious intellectual consideration. Büsching's commentary, already cribbed from Meiners, was shorn of its Leibnizian identifications and quoted extensively in Johann Georg Walch's influential *Philosophisches Lexicon* (Philosophical Lexicon), but it was Tiedemann's work that received the most public attention.¹¹³ *System der stoischen Philosophie* was well received in two of the most influential eighteenth-century German periodicals, the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* (General German Library) published by Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811) and Christoph Martin Wieland's *Teutsche Merkur* (German Mercury).¹¹⁴ Writing in the prominent *Deutsches Museum* (German Museum), the pedagogue and theologian Friedrich Gedike (1754–1803) described Tiedemann's work as "full of classical erudition."¹¹⁵ Some reviews were more critical, but generally remained positive. After detailing a series of disagreements with the *System*, one reviewer concluded that it nevertheless deserved "the acclaim of the entire public."¹¹⁶ Contemporary readers recognized the significance of Tiedemann's sophisticated philological exposition and it quickly became the standard German-language account of Stoic

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 3: 191–217.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 2: 127, 167.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 1: 2.

¹¹⁰Anon. [Dieterich Tiedemann], *Versuch einer Erklärung des Ursprunges der Sprache* (Riga, 1772), 18–19, 27, 18, 36–7, 38–40, 52, 64, 138, 187–8.

¹¹¹Tiedemann, *System*, 1: 84–5, 90–91.

¹¹²Ibid., 3: 343–4.

¹¹³Johann Georg Walch and Justus Christian Hennings, *Philosophisches Lexicon*, 4th edn, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1775), 181.

¹¹⁴Anon. review in Friedrich Nicolai, ed., *Anhang zu dem fünf und zwanzigsten bis sechs und dreyßigsten Bande der allgemeinen deutschen Bibliothek*, 5th division (Berlin, 1778), 3046–51; anon. review in Christoph Martin Wieland, ed., *Der Teutsche Merkur* 1 (Weimar, 1777), 95.

¹¹⁵Friedrich Gedike, "Des Stoiker Cleanths Hymne, nebst Kommentar und zufälligem Rasonnement über stoische Theologie," in Christian Konrad Wilhelm von Dohm, and Heinrich Christian Boie, eds., *Deutsches Museum* 2 (Leipzig, 1778), 20–21.

¹¹⁶Anon. review in *Auserlesene Bibliothek der neuesten deutschen Litteratur*, vol. 12 (Lemgo, 1777), 360–83, at 383.

philosophy. As late as 1870, the American translator and philosopher George S. Morris (1840–89) described Tiedemann as the most important writer on Stoic philosophy.¹¹⁷

In the same year that Tiedemann's *System* appeared, the physician and philosopher Ernst Platner (1744–1818) published an essay in the *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* (New Library of the Humanities and Liberal Arts) acknowledging the revival of interest in Stoic philosophy.¹¹⁸ While he favored Leibniz, Wolff, and the theory of innate ideas, Platner accepted Meiners's and Tiedemann's Lockean interpretation of Stoic philosophy. Indeed, in the 1770s and 1780s his popular *Philosophische Aphorismen* (Philosophical Aphorisms) made extensive use of Meiners's and Tiedemann's work on the Stoics.¹¹⁹ While he disagreed with the content of Stoic philosophy, he clearly thought of both the Stoics and their latter-day admirers as respectable opponents. No longer philosophical pariahs, by the late 1770s Stoicism was generally considered a valid philosophical tradition whose most important ideas prefigured those of Locke.

Stoicism and debates about the Critical Philosophy

While they could become heated, the debates around Locke, Leibniz, and the Wolffian legacy were generally amicable compared with the disputes of the 1780s. From 1784 onwards, the German public sphere was dominated by the so-called *Pantheismusstreit* (Pantheism dispute) and the debate around the Critical Philosophy.¹²⁰ The former had been sparked by the claim made by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) that the leading German advocate of Enlightenment, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81), had been a Spinozist. Jacobi then went further, arguing that speculative philosophy necessarily tends towards pantheism and fatalism.¹²¹ His chief antagonist, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), denied these claims and attempted to defend both his friend Lessing and the value of speculative philosophy.¹²² While most German intellectuals were repulsed by Jacobi's position, there was little agreement about how it should be countered. Although it polarized contemporaries, it's noteworthy that there was

¹¹⁷Friedrich Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy, from Thales to the Present Time (1863–1866)*, trans. George S. Morris, vol. 1 (New York, 1871), 185. This comment does not appear in the German original and was presumably added by Morris.

¹¹⁸Anon. [Ernst Platner], "Versuch über die Einseitigkeit des stoischen und epikurischen Systems," in *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, 19/1 (1776), 5–30, at 5.

¹¹⁹Ernst Platner, *Philosophische Aphorismen, nebst einigen Anleitungen zur philosophischen Geschichte*, 1st edn, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1776–82), 1: 80, 213, 242, 248, 250, 311–12, 21, 359–60, 2: 10, 31–3, 164–6, 169–70, 275–6, 278–80, 412–14; Platner, *Philosophische Aphorismen*, 2nd edn, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1784), 32–3, 262, 304, 371–72, 413, 420–21, 434, 485.

¹²⁰The most comprehensive single-volume account of both debates remains Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA, 1987).

¹²¹Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, 1st edn (Wrocław, 1785), 170–73.

¹²²Moses Mendelssohn, *Morgenstunden, oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes* (Berlin, 1785), *passim*; Mendelssohn, *An die Freunde Lessings: Ein Anhang zu Herrn Jacobi Briefwechsel über die Lehre des Spinoza* (Berlin, 1786), *passim*.

very little reference to the Stoics in the dispute's major interventions, a fact emblematic of the ancient tradition's public rehabilitation.

The pantheism dispute overlapped with growing interest in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), which had received little scrutiny before 1784. Soon thereafter, however, German intellectuals became divided into supporters and opponents of Kant's project. Indeed, while Kant's critics also disagreed with one another on key philosophical questions, such disagreements became secondary next to the struggle around the Critical Philosophy.

In April 1785 Kant published the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in which he began to explicate the ethical theory he had been developing since the *First Critique*. Arguing that ethical duties are self-imposed by free individuals as willing rational agents, the *Groundwork* centered on the "categorical imperative"—the principle that rational agents should act only according to maxims that they will to become universal laws. Such imperatives were to be determined without reference to one's emotional situation or desires.¹²³ Given his emphasis on reason and the exclusion of inclination in the formulation of moral principles, there has been considerable scholarly debate around the relationship between Kantian and Stoic ethics.¹²⁴ Philosophers and historians have considered a variety of possible sources for whatever Stoic traces exist in Kant's ethics, but there has been remarkably little discussion of German debates around Stoicism in the decade preceding the Critical Philosophy.¹²⁵ Indeed, the argument of Kant's *Groundwork* resembles Meiners's own influential description of "the reasonable man[s] absolute rule over ... sensations, ideas, and perceptions" in "the appraisal of the moral goodness of an object." Just like Meiners's Stoics, the ethical Kantian doesn't claim to extinguish emotion, but simply to act without its interference. There do not appear to be any references to Meiners's, Büsching's, or Tiedemann's writings on Stoicism in Kant's work, at least prior to the *Groundwork*. He did, however, make use of Platner's *Aphorismen*—which itself replicated Meiners's and Tiedemann's interpretation of the Stoics—in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783).¹²⁶ By February 1784 he was also familiar with at least some of Meiners's other writings of the 1770s and he owned a copy of Meiners's *Historia doctrinae de vero deo* (History of Doctrine Concerning the True God) (1780), which rehearsed much of his earlier praise for the Stoics.¹²⁷ It remains unclear how familiar Kant was with the 1770s texts that had rehabilitated Stoicism—let alone whether they

¹²³Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), ed. and trans. Mary Gregor and Christine M. Korsgaard (Cambridge, 1998), 1–3.

¹²⁴Martha C. Nussbaum, "Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 5/1 (1997), 1–25; J. B. Schneewind, "Kantian and Stoic Ethics," in Schneewind, *Essays on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, 2009), 277–96; Ulrike Santozki, *Die Bedeutung antiker Theorien für die Genese und Systematik von Kants Philosophie* (Berlin, 2006), 162–96.

¹²⁵A notable exception is Bonacina, *Filosofia ellenistica, passim*.

¹²⁶Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2004; first published 1783), 100.

¹²⁷Immanuel Kant to Friedrich Victor Lebrecht Plessing, 3 Feb. 1784, and Immanuel Kant, *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß (Metaphysik, Zweiter Teil)*, in Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, 29 vols. (Berlin, 1900–2009), 10: 363–4, 18: 317.

influenced his own interpretation—but it seems highly unlikely that he was completely unaware of them.

Regardless of Kant's own familiarity with these debates, the *Groundwork* quickly became associated with Stoicism. In 1786 the Karlsruhe Gymnasium professor and Lockean philosopher Gottlob August Tittel (1739–1816) published *Ueber Herrn Kant's Moralreform* (On Mr Kant's Reform of Morals), one of the earliest sustained attacks on Kant's moral philosophy. Tittel directed his attack against Kant's concept of duty, arguing that humans are not abstract rational beings and so seeking to divorce decision making from inclination represented a failure to understand human nature.¹²⁸ By losing sight of human reality, such an effort necessarily collapsed into abstruse mysticism.¹²⁹ Tittel argued further that by basing moral duties on the self-legislation of principles to be willed as general laws, Kant's work implicitly relied on experience.¹³⁰ The moral imaginary of Kant's universalism was rooted in assumptions about the utility of actions undertaken consistently by all agents. Rather than a system of ethics based on pure reason, then, Kant had simply reformulated the principle of utility so as to become impracticably stringent. Tittel also compared Kant's ethics to the Stoics', emphasizing parallels in their unrealistic pursuit of moral purity. While he was evidently critical of both, the latter had at least sought to find a basis for human happiness through their uncompromising notion of virtue.¹³¹ Stoicism may have been guilty of "exaggeration and paradoxes," but—unlike Kant—they had at least proposed a harmony between moral obligation and human nature.¹³² Tittel's portrayal of Stoicism thus also marked a departure from the interpretations of Meiners and Tiedemann, reviving the older association of Stoicism with unreasonable ethical standards.

Around the same time Kant's most prominent ally expressed deep sympathy for the Stoics. From August 1786 to September 1787 Karl Leonhard Reinhold published the influential *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, which served as the primary entry point for those interested in the Critical Philosophy.¹³³ In the seventh and eighth letters Reinhold described the keen moral focus of Stoic thought, noting that although the Stoics considered sensibility "the source of all concepts," they "excluded sensible intuition from any distinctive cooperative role with the understanding in the cognition of truth."¹³⁴ Thus they precluded sensibility from the production of judgments of truth, including moral judgments.¹³⁵ The Stoics even understood sensibility as "a modification of the understanding," which itself formed the faculty of cognition.¹³⁶ In this sense Zeno and his followers "traced even the representations of sensibility back to the source of moral actions—to

¹²⁸Gottlob August Tittel, *Ueber Herrn Kant's Moralreform* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1786), 8–11.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 23.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 35–6.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 10–11, 23–4.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 40–41.

¹³³Karl Ameriks, "Introduction," in Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (1786–1787), ed. Karl Ameriks and trans. James Hebbeler (Cambridge, 2006), ix–xxxv, at ix.

¹³⁴Reinhold, *Letters*, 101–2.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 103.

reason.”¹³⁷ This reading constructed sensibility as both the origin of concepts and an emanation of “the thinking part of the soul.”¹³⁸ Reinhold’s summary of Stoic philosophy is written in the distinctive language and conceptual framework of the Critical Philosophy that had been unavailable to Meiners and Tiedemann in the 1770s. Redescribing Stoicism in this way, Reinhold did not wholly abandon the connection with Locke and indeed suggested that Locke’s epistemology represented a latter-day continuation of the Stoics’.¹³⁹ While he criticized the Stoics’ conflation of sensibility with the understanding, he also praised their subordination of sensible concerns to ethical reason as “correct.”¹⁴⁰ At this point Reinhold was still broadly committed to Kant’s interpretation of the Critical Philosophy, and so his designation of this principle as “correct” suggested an identification between certain dimensions of Kant’s ethics and the Stoics’. Despite the Stoics’ numerous faults, then, Reinhold affirmed the central principle of Stoical ethical agency as corresponding to an equally central principle in Kant’s ethics.

In the same years Kant continued to develop his philosophy in response to his opponents.¹⁴¹ In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1787), Kant responded to the association with Stoicism by presenting his own view of Stoic ethics.¹⁴² He lauded the Stoics for their indifference towards suffering and praised their deep moral impulses.¹⁴³ He also agreed with Tittel that his moral philosophy was even more rigorous than theirs. In a crucial table Kant presented a typology of the epistemic foundations of past ethical theories.¹⁴⁴ Here he grouped previous accounts of ethics according to whether they relied on subjective or objective conditions, and then again according to whether those conditions were deemed external or internal to the ethical agent. Internal subjectivists—such as Epicurus and Francis Hutcheson—based morality on feeling, whether pleasure (Epicurus) or moral sense (Hutcheson). External subjectivists argued that morality arises from external factors such as education (Montaigne) or “the civil constitution” (Mandeville). Subjectivists are considered “without exception empirical” and thus “obviously not at all qualified for the universal principle of morality.”¹⁴⁵ Since, according to Kant, ethics must aspire to universality in order to be philosophically meaningful, only those theories expounding objective bases for morality were worthy of serious consideration. External objectivists included Christian August Crusius (1715–75) “and other theological moralists,” who founded morality on the will of God. Finally, internal objectivists included the Stoics and Wolff, for whom ethics derived from a vaguely defined—rather than purely rational—principle of “perfection.”

¹³⁷Ibid., 110.

¹³⁸Ibid., 111.

¹³⁹Ibid., 102.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 116–18.

¹⁴¹Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 15–214.

¹⁴²Although dated 1788, the *Second Critique* appeared the previous December. Friedrich August Grunert to Immanuel Kant, Dec. 1787, in Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10: 506.

¹⁴³Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1787), ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, 2015), 51, 71, 90–91, 93–4, 102–3.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 36–7.

After outlining the various possible interpretations of human perfection, Kant claimed that both forms of objective condition, deriving from conditions that arise outside reason itself, are at their root “*material*” and thus fundamentally deficient when compared with his own “*formal practical principle of pure reason*” (his emphasis).¹⁴⁶ In particular, by conflating ethical behavior with happiness and harmony with nature the Stoics had overstepped “the bounds that practical pure reason sets to humanity” and confused two different aspects of human existence.¹⁴⁷ In other words, the Stoics’ conflation of reason, morality, and happiness undermined the otherwise admirable rigorous ethical impulses of Stoic philosophy itself. The expectation of happiness would necessarily distort the true content of the moral law. The Stoics (and Wolff) are therefore ultimately ethical empiricists, even as their objective internal “determining grounds in the principle of morality” came closer than the subjectivists’ to his own, supposedly purely rational, ethics.

This analysis was, in Kant’s mind, the final blow against his empiricist and *Popularphilosoph* (popular philosopher) opponents. Aligning the Stoics with Wolff rebuked both anti-Stoic Wolffians like Brucker and anti-Wolffian proponents of Stoic ethics like Meiners and Tiedemann. Kant’s admirers quickly adopted this interpretation of Stoicism as in some ways admirable, but ultimately confused. By the end of 1788 Johann Gottfried Kiesewetter (1766–1819) had published *Ueber den ersten Grundsatz der Moralphilosophie* (On the First Principle of Moral Philosophy), in which he paraphrased the argument of the *Second Critique* and situated the Stoics alongside Wolff as having tried but ultimately failed to produce a rational basis for ethics—a project that could only be completed through the Critical Philosophy.¹⁴⁸ Notably, in the 1790 edition of his *Letters*, Reinhold added a short passage affirming the *Second Critique*’s position on Stoicism.¹⁴⁹

In the 1790s some authors sought to revise this reading, typically by suggesting greater similarities between the Critical Philosophers and the Stoics. Anton Greß (dates unknown) argued that there were more parallels with Stoicism than either Kant or Reinhold had been willing to concede, while Christian Friedrich von Ammon (1766–1850) positioned Christian ethics against those of Kant, which he considered merely a branch of Stoic thought.¹⁵⁰ By contrast, Karl Friedrich Ernst Ludwig (1773–1846) gave a sympathetic reading that proposed similarities between the ideas of Fichte and the Stoics, while claiming that they were neither atheists nor fatalists.¹⁵¹ Such readings don’t seem to have gained much traction, however, and Kant’s interpretation of the relationship between his ideas and the Stoics’ ultimately prevailed. The first major Kantian historian (then professor at Göttingen) Johann Gottlieb Buhle (1763–1821) offered a summary of Stoic philosophy based on

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 71.

¹⁴⁸Johann Gottfried Kiesewetter, *Ueber den ersten Grundsatz der Moralphilosophie*, 1st edn, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1788), 37–8, 64, 88–91.

¹⁴⁹Reinhold, *Letters*, 163.

¹⁵⁰Christian Friedrich von Ammon, *Vindicatur morum doctrinae arbitrium liberum, reiecta libertate Stoica ethicae Kantianae* (Göttingen, 1799).

¹⁵¹Anton Greß, *De Stoicorum supremo ethices principio Commentatio* (Würzburg, 1797), 1–17; Carl Friedrich Ernst Ludwig, *Frey müthige Gedanken über Fichte’s Appellation gegen die Anklage des Atheismus und deren Veranlassung* (Gotha, 1799), 79.

Tiedemann's *System*. Like other Kantians, Buhle was broadly sympathetic to the Stoics, but saw Stoic philosophy as having failed due to its empiricist character.¹⁵² While Buhle cited Tiedemann's work as the best historical reconstruction of Stoic philosophy, he stated that the *Second Critique* contained the most convincing judgment of it.¹⁵³

This interpretation was both reformulated and consolidated in the work of the most prominent and influential Kantian historian, Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1761–1819). His *Geschichte der Philosophie* (History of Philosophy) aimed to rewrite the history of philosophy according to the principles of Kantian reason itself.¹⁵⁴ It had a tremendous impact on nineteenth-century accounts. Tennemann also made use of Tiedemann and Meiners in emphasizing the proto-Lockean character of Stoic epistemology. He noted further the Stoics' emphasis that humanity should "strive after nothing but what is wholly concordant with [both] divine and its own reason."¹⁵⁵ However, here Stoic ethical reasoning was redescribed in a distinctly Kantian idiom. In particular, Tennemann adopted the terminology of legislation to describe normative ethical claims. Accordingly, the Stoic "recognized reason as the only legislator in humans [*Gesetzgebende in dem Menschen*]."¹⁵⁶

Tennemann also reframed the problems raised in the *Second Critique*. Kant had described Stoic ethical philosophy as ultimately empiricist on the basis of its derivation from a principle of perfection to be found in nature (rather than pure reason). By contrast, Tennemann stressed the incongruity between (pseudo-)rationalist Stoic ethics and empiricist Stoic epistemology. The latter had, in the Stoics, resulted in a determinism that could not account for the freedom truly necessary to a self-legislating ethical agent. Epistemological empiricism thus undermined the Stoics' impulses towards ethical rationalism. This argument shifted the point of criticism slightly from that found in Kant's *Second Critique*. For both Kant and Tennemann the Stoics were insufficiently rationalist, but for Tennemann this was rephrased in terms of the supposedly inherent contradiction between Stoic ethics and Stoic logic (and, as a consequence, physics). Consequently, a legislative ethical principle was incompatible with the Stoics' empiricist epistemology, which effectively rendered the whole of Stoic thought incoherent. Indeed, similar contradictions were omnipresent in the history of philosophy prior to Kant's solution of the problem via his systematic integration of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics into a coherent whole.¹⁵⁷

This interpretation of Stoic thought—as a disjointed philosophy confounded by its own empiricist commitments—retained its potency in post-Kantian Idealism. According to Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the Stoics, as empiricists, conflated "absolute being and real existence," collapsing phenomena and noumena into one another so

¹⁵²Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Göttingen, 1796), 453.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 472.

¹⁵⁴Giuseppe Micheli, "Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1761–1819)," in Piaia and Santinello, *The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age*, 838–926, at 842–56.

¹⁵⁵Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 4 (Leipzig, 1803), 155.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*

that “we are not to become like God, we actually are God.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, as a result of its empiricist foundations, Stoicism “cannot account for the possibility of consciousness” and is necessarily atheistic. By contrast, Fichte claimed that his own form of transcendental idealism distinguishes between absolute being and real existence, with the former “merely ... a basis, in order to explain the latter,” thus preserving his epistemic–ontological conclusions from atheism.¹⁵⁹ This passage was added to the 1802 edition of his *Wissenschaftslehre* (Science of Knowledge), published shortly after the dispute in which he was accused of atheism and lost his professorship at Jena.¹⁶⁰ The 1802 comments served to distance himself from atheism and to suggest that his empiricist critics—who constituted a large contingent of his opponents—were themselves atheists. Nevertheless, Fichte had also revived the much older claim that Stoicism was a form of atheism. Like Wolff’s comments on the Stoics’ “Mohammedan fatalism,” this charge was largely defensive, seeking to justify his own controversial philosophy against accusations that it posed a public danger.

Far more influential than Fichte’s account, however, was Hegel’s. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel reaffirmed the Kantian claim of an apparent contradiction between the Stoics’ rationalist–ethical aspirations and their self-imposed empiricist–epistemological constraints.¹⁶¹ Apart from a lone reference to Brucker, Tennemann is Hegel’s only modern source in the chapter on the Stoics. In this iteration, of course, Hegel measured the Stoics not against the Critical Philosophy but against his own Absolute Idealism. Thus the Stoics’ ethical/epistemic disjuncture left them unable to explain the complex relationship between subject and object that Hegel deemed necessary for human cognition.¹⁶² The Kantian critique of Stoicism had been absorbed and repurposed by one of nineteenth-century Europe’s most influential philosophers.

Conclusions

Empiricism remained an important force in German philosophy into the early nineteenth century but, with the growing institutional power of the Idealists, the view that Kant had vanquished Meiners, Tiedemann, *et al.* in the 1780s ultimately triumphed.¹⁶³ As the nineteenth century wore on, moreover, new philosophical, religious, and political concerns displaced those of the Enlightenment. By the turn of the twentieth century, previously controversial religious views such as deism, pantheism, and even atheism had become increasingly acceptable (at least within intellectual circles). As religious mores changed and the debates of the

¹⁵⁸Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge* (1794–1804), ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), 245.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre*, 2nd edn (Tübingen, 1802), 265; cf. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (Leipzig, 1794).

¹⁶¹G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1837), trans. Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane and Frances H. Simson, ed. Frederick C. Beiser, vol. 2 (Lincoln, NE, 1995), 249–54. On Hegel’s interpretation of Stoicism see Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge, 1996), 64–7, 80–81, 110–11, 147–50.

¹⁶²Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 257–8.

¹⁶³Wunderlich, “Empirismus und Materialismus,” 85–7.

eighteenth century receded into the past, Stoic philosophy lost its particular salience as a source of controversy.

Nevertheless, the late eighteenth-century debates do seem to have left a mark on the history of philosophy. When nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians wrote about Stoicism, they typically continued to describe it as a (usually unsatisfactory) form of empiricism.¹⁶⁴ While Bertrand Russell cautiously acknowledged that the Stoics “allowed certain ideas and principles ... established by *consensus gentium*” he nevertheless emphasized that their epistemology was “in the main empirical.”¹⁶⁵ Ernst Bloch and Hans Blumenberg agreed, as does the historian of empiricism Stephen Priest.¹⁶⁶ This has, of course, not been the only interpretation of Stoicism available. Adolf Friedrich Bonhöffer (1859–1919) offered a sophisticated analysis of Stoic philosophy in terms of the interplay of empiricist and rationalist elements.¹⁶⁷ More recently, Henry Dyson, John Sellars, and others have further complicated our understanding of Stoic epistemology.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the empiricist interpretation has been both the most prevalent and the most influential.

As I hope to have shown, however, this interpretation has its own history with roots in the philosophical debates of the late Holy Roman Empire. Tracing this history throws into relief the ways that contemporary debates about philosophy, religion, and politics shaped early modern interpretations of ancient philosophy, just as those interpretations shaped other debates in turn. Lipsius had promoted Stoic ethics as complementary to Christian virtue. In the wake of Spinoza’s philosophy, however, Stoicism became defined by its apparent materialism and the Stoics became seen as purveyors of a peculiarly inhumane atheism. In 1770s Göttingen Christoph Meiners and Dieterich Tiedemann revived interest in Stoicism—this time stressing the importance of its proto-Lockean epistemology—in a bid to dethrone Wolffian philosophy. Following the publication of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant’s ethical rigor quickly became associated with Stoic philosophy. However, the emphasis on an empiricist/rationalist distinction in the *Second Critique* was used both to differentiate his own thought from the Stoics’ and to project an incoherence onto Stoic philosophy that had not previously been apparent.¹⁶⁹ This supposed incoherence was adopted first by Kant’s early acolytes, and then by Tennemann and Hegel in some of the nineteenth century’s most

¹⁶⁴Joseph-Marie Degérando, *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1804), 173, 177–81; Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy*, 163, 191; Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy with Special Reference to the Formation and Development of Its Problems and Conceptions* (1892), trans. James H. Tufts (New York, 1895), 207.

¹⁶⁵Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York, 1945), 258.

¹⁶⁶Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity* (1961), trans. Dennis J. Schmidt (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 14–15; Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966), trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 258–9; Priest, *British Empiricists*, 17.

¹⁶⁷Adolf Bonhöffer, *Epictet und die Stoa: Untersuchungen zur stoischen Philosophie* (Stuttgart, 1890), 167–8, 187–203, 213–18, 227–8.

¹⁶⁸Dyson, *Early Stoa*, 145–51; John Sellars, *Stoicism* (London, 2006), 55–79.

¹⁶⁹Although a full discussion stands outside the remit of this article, as the concept of sociability in natural-law theories is associated with both empiricism and Stoic *oikeiosis*, the debate traced here might also bear on Kant’s critique of previous accounts of this concept. Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford, 2001), 12–14; Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 37–58.

widely read works on the history of philosophy. Each of these competing interpretations was situated within particular—often strikingly different—debates about the nature and limits of human reason.

There is, then, some irony in Christoph Meiners's later denunciation of Stoicism. In 1800 and 1801 Meiners published a two-volume *Allgemeine kritische Geschichte der ältern und neuern Ethik* (General Critical History of Ancient and Modern Ethics). The *Geschichte der Ethik* appeared in the immediate aftermath of the dispute around Fichte's alleged atheism, and was explicitly directed against Kant, Fichte, and "Kantian ethics" more broadly.¹⁷⁰ Despite having played a key role in its philosophical rehabilitation, Meiners here derided Stoicism as crude, dogmatic, and exaggerated. The Stoics used dangerous abstractions to "unite the most blatant contradictions into an ostensibly harmonious system."¹⁷¹ Making no mention of his work of the 1770s, he accused the Stoics of controverting "nature and experience, human common sense, and sound reason."¹⁷² By provoking a zealous commitment to abstract and intangible notions of reason, Stoic ethics were both intellectually unconvincing and dangerous. At several points he associated this kind of philosophy with revolutionary unrest.¹⁷³ Tellingly, moreover, Meiners's anti-Stoic polemic closely paralleled his comments on the ethics of the Critical Philosophy, which he had opposed since the 1780s.¹⁷⁴ Meiners appears to have abandoned his earlier, Lockean interpretation of the Stoics and instead joined the chorus of writers drawing parallels between Kantian and Stoic ethics. His attacks intensified after the *Atheismusstreit*, which had appeared to confirm the radical implications of Kantian philosophy.

Notably, Meiners's rejection of the Critical Philosophy and his turn against the Stoics also coincided with his promotion of an essentialist, deeply hierarchical theory of racial difference from 1785 onwards.¹⁷⁵ In his writings on race Meiners divided humanity into Caucasian and Mongolic "lineages" (*Hauptstämme*), with each further subdivided into a number of racial groups. The Caucasian line encompassed "Slavic" races (including, among others, Slavs, Jews, Arabs, higher-caste South Asians, and the Habesha peoples) and "Celtic" races (most Western and Northern Europeans). The Mongolic lineage encompassed all other peoples, including Finns, East Asians, most South Asians, almost all black Africans, and all indigenous Americans. According to Meiners, races are inherently unequal in terms of beauty, physical ability, intellect, and moral inclination. He positioned Celtic races at the top of this hierarchy, Slavic races in the middle, and Mongolic races at the bottom. On the basis of these inequalities, Meiners claimed that Celtic races have the right to rule and, in some cases, even enslave inferior peoples. Prima facie at least, the cosmopolitan principles of Kantian ethics appear incompatible with Meiners's commitment to racial

¹⁷⁰Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, 2: iii–iv.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 1: 179.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Ibid., iv–vi, 5.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 2: *passim*; Christoph Meiners, *Grundriß der Seelen-Lehre* (Lemgo, 1786), unpaginated preface.

¹⁷⁵Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 16–80; Christoph Meiners, "Ueber die Natur der Afrikanischen Neger," *Göttingisches Historisches Magazin* 6 (1790), 385–456.

inequality.¹⁷⁶ Meiners himself continually identified Kantian ethics with a dangerous egalitarianism.¹⁷⁷ While his most polemical work against Kant and the Stoics only appeared later, Meiners's first sustained critiques of their ideas appeared in 1786, one year after his first treatise on race.¹⁷⁸ Although he did not explicitly connect these themes in writing, opposition to Kantian philosophy and support for inequality were the two most prominent and consistent features of his thought from 1786 until his death. Meiners's rejection of both Stoicism and the Critical Philosophy in the 1780s shouldn't only be considered in relation to his racism, but there is almost certainly some connection between these aspects of his work.

By contrast, Tiedemann—who remained Meiners's close friend and ally throughout this period—doesn't seem to have renounced his earlier appreciation of Stoicism. His comments did become more muted, however. During the 1790s he published a six-volume history of “speculative philosophy.”¹⁷⁹ Here he remained sympathetic to the Stoics, writing of their “powerful reasonings” (*mächtigen Gründen*) and “eagerness for virtue,” but giving little indication of how Stoic philosophy might relate to contemporary debates.¹⁸⁰ Tiedemann had little to say here about the Stoics' possible prefiguring of either Locke or Kant. Notably, in his major writings against the Critical Philosophy he barely referenced the Stoics at all.¹⁸¹

Tracing the reception of Stoicism also reveals the complex relationship between two currents typically treated separately in studies of the German Enlightenment. The innovative historical methods and cultural theories developed by eighteenth-century German scholars have received increasing attention over recent decades. Christoph Meiners, Dieterich Tiedemann, and their mentor Christian Gottlob Heyne were among the most prominent expositors of these ideas. Similarly, the elaboration of the Critical Philosophy and then its intellectual successors has been recognized as an era-defining development in the history of European ideas, often dominating discussions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philosophy. While there has been little scholarship concerning how these two currents overlapped, the case of Stoicism is a salient reminder that they assuredly did.

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¹⁷⁶Kant's views on race and their relation to his ethical and political ideas are much debated, but (despite his well-known racist comments regarding nonwhite peoples) the *Groundwork's* claim that all human beings should be treated as ends-in-themselves is usually read as precluding slavery and racial domination.

¹⁷⁷Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, *passim*.

¹⁷⁸Meiners, *Grundriß der Seelen-Lehre*; Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit*.

¹⁷⁹Dieterich Tiedemann, *Geist der Spekulativen Philosophie*, 6 vols. (Marburg, 1791–7).

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 2: 431.

¹⁸¹Dieterich Tiedemann, *Theätet, oder über das menschliche Wissen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1794); Tiedemann, *Idealistische Briefe* (Marburg, 1798); Tiedemann, *Handbuch der Psychologie*, ed. Ludwig Wachler (Leipzig, 1804).

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