

**Contemplating the Revolution:  
Ethics, Culture, and History in German Political  
Thought, 1789-1815**

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I, Morgan Golf-French, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## *Abstract*

This thesis examines the important roles played by a range of historical works in German political debates during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. It uses texts across a range of genres and focuses on questions around the nature of ethics, culture, political communities, race, progress, and Enlightenment. Engaging with current controversies concerning these themes in the German Enlightenment, this thesis indicates crucial nuances in the relationships between continuity and innovation in contemporary historiography. In addition, it offers significant new understandings of the work of four leading intellectuals: August Ludwig Schlözer (1735-1809), Christoph Meiners (1747-1810), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827), and Charles de Villers (1765-1815).

The first chapter analyzes conceptions of the historical role of philosophical thought, and especially the disputes surrounding the works of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers responded to these debates by emphasizing the politicized nature of different approaches to metaphysics and its history. The second chapter examines ideas about natural law, cultural difference, and the concept of 'race'. As well as reappraising the ideas and intellectual relationships of key thinkers on these subjects, this chapter demonstrates that, contrary to previous claims, notions of cultural difference were often closely linked to theories of natural law. The third chapter considers accounts of the emergence of European modernity. It demonstrates how German thinkers responded to the circumstances of Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe by significantly revising earlier variations of 'the Enlightened narrative'.

Examining these debates reveals the significance of ideas about history, ethics, and culture in German political thought during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. By indicating the different ways that these notions could be conceptualized and politicized, this thesis offers new insights into both the diverse meanings of Enlightenment during a period of European crisis, and the major transformations in contemporary German thought.

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## *Impact Statement*

This thesis represents a significant contribution to scholarship on the European Enlightenment, a key term that continues to inspire public debate. Focusing on the work of four important – but under-researched – thinkers active during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, this thesis examines many of the most important and controversial concepts of the Enlightenment in their original contexts. As well as 'Enlightenment' itself, these include culture, ethics, human nature, European modernity, and race. The present-day forms of these ideas have continuing relevance in both academia and beyond.

As this thesis shows, these concepts were hotly contested in the Enlightenment. Authors debated not just what these terms referred to, but also how they should be studied and what their social and political implications were. The multiplicity of different approaches to these problems reflects the diversity of contemporary thought and the need for caution when making claims about the legacy of the Enlightenment. Crucially, the distance between how contemporaries conceived these ideas and how they are conceived today reflects the problematic nature of projecting present-day concerns on to earlier periods and movements.

By focusing on historical works across a range of genres, this thesis also reveals the prominence of history-writing in German political thought in this period. It stresses the diverse ways that

history could be harnessed in response to pressing political concerns, such as debates about slavery or the nature of Europe. Indeed, this thesis indicates how innovative methods for the study of the past were often closely tied to profound political concerns.

While examining a period of European crisis and upheaval, this thesis also emphasizes continuity: the novel approaches of the German late Enlightenment continued to utilize and adapt older ideas and methods. This has important implications for how we think about the transformations of Enlightenment thought, and yields a nuanced interpretation of contemporary intellectual innovation.

The European Enlightenment remains a controversial notion both inside and outside academia. This thesis aims to contribute to on-going scholarly debates on the historiography of the Enlightenment, as well as offering insights into the emergence and transformation of crucial concepts with relevance to broader public discourse.

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## Introduction

This thesis examines ideas about ethics, culture, and history in German political thought during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period (1789-1815). It demonstrates that historical works were a major way by which German intellectuals intervened in contemporary political controversies.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on four prominent thinkers connected with the University of Göttingen, I analyze the articulation of political thought across a range of scholarly works including textbooks, handbooks, and other genres not usually associated with political debates. This thesis also discusses the ways that such works interacted with better-known texts. By emphasizing such writings, this thesis considers the relationships between a range of political concerns and the development of innovative historiographical ideas in the German late Enlightenment.

The works discussed in the following chapters also highlight significant continuities in contemporary German thought. The first chapter builds on T. J. Hochstrasser's work on the use of 'histories of morality' as a 'genre' in political thought.<sup>2</sup> However, whereas Hochstrasser argues that this genre was eclipsed between the rise of the Critical Philosophy and the account of the history of philosophy developed by G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), I show that leading thinkers continued to write such works throughout this period. Similarly, whereas Michael Carhart has argued that eighteenth-century accounts of culture represented a break with natural law theory, the second chapter demonstrates that German intellectuals elaborated models of natural law that accommodated novel ideas

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<sup>1</sup> This approach builds on the work of J. G. A. Pocock in particular, as discussed later in this introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Hochstrasser, T. J., *Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2004), 187-219.

about culture.<sup>3</sup> The third chapter examines German variations of what J. G. A. Pocock has described as 'the Enlightened narrative' – the historiographical 'norm' by which authors explained the emergence of European modernity – between 1789 and 1815.<sup>4</sup> While the texts examined in this chapter continued to use many core features of this narrative, they ultimately departed from it in order to account for the crises of contemporary Europe. Taken together, these examples suggest a new interpretation of historiographical innovation in the German late Enlightenment. Rather than breaking with earlier genres and norms, such works gradually transformed and adapted older ideas to respond to new intellectual and political contexts.

The four protagonists at the centre of this thesis were associated with the University and Göttingen, and were recognized as leading thinkers by their contemporaries. Many of their ideas about culture, history, and politics remained influential long after their deaths. These protagonists are August Ludwig (von) Schlözer (1735-1809, ennobled 1804), Christoph Meiners (1747-1810), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827), and Charles de Villers (1765-1815). As well as the broader arguments outlined above, this thesis re-examines their intellectual output. These protagonists were chosen to demonstrate the prominent position historical texts (broadly conceived) had in contemporary German discourse, as well as to indicate the varied, nuanced, and often controversial, ways that such ideas were applied. Indeed, despite their shared interests and commitment to the notion of Enlightenment, they often used arguments that rested on distinct – often mutually exclusive – methodological, epistemological, and ethical foundations. By approaching these figures comparatively, this thesis offers significant new insights into their separate bodies of work and brings to light

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<sup>3</sup> Carhart, Michael C., *The Science of Culture in Enlightenment Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 16-23.

<sup>4</sup> Pocock, J. G. A., *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 2: *Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 2001), 1-5.

important intellectual relationships and divisions in contemporary German thought.

The following section introduces the protagonists of this thesis, indicating their historical significance and how I hope to have contributed to the existing scholarship on each. The subsequent section discusses Göttingen as a crucial intellectual and socio-political context for their work. The section that follows indicates the key methodological and conceptual principles used in this thesis, while the final section outlines the overall structure of the thesis.

## **0.1. Protagonists**

### 0.1.1. August Ludwig (von) Schlözer (1735-1809)

During his lifetime, August Ludwig (von) Schlözer was one of the Holy Roman Empire's leading thinkers, and his biographer Martin Espenhorst has noted a continued interest in Schlözer's work since his death.<sup>5</sup> Born to a family of pastors in Gaggstatt in the Franconian county of Hohenlohe-Kirchberg, Schlözer studied first at Wittenberg and then Göttingen.<sup>6</sup> In 1755 he moved to Sweden to work as a tutor before studying under the philologist Johann Ihre (1707-1780) at Uppsala. He then worked as a merchant's secretary in Stockholm before travelling to Russia in 1761, where he embarked on groundbreaking research into Slavic history and philology. Following a series of controversies around Russian etymologies, Schlözer's

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<sup>5</sup> Peters, Martin, *Altes Reich und Europa: Der Historiker, Statistiker und Publizist August Ludwig (v.) Schlözer (1735-1809)* (Münster, 2003), 17. This author changed his name to 'Martin Espenhorst' in 2011. Consistent with other recent scholarship on Schlözer, I refer to him as 'Espenhorst' in the main body of the text, while citing works published under his previous name as 'Peters' in footnotes and the bibliography. See Duchhardt, Heinz & Espenhorst, Martin (eds.), *August Ludwig (von) Schlözer in Europa* (Göttingen, 2012), passim.

<sup>6</sup> Gaggstatt is now part of Kirchberg an der Jagst in Baden-Württemberg.

friendships in St. Petersburg soured, and in 1767 he returned to Göttingen.<sup>7</sup> He began teaching at the University the same year and became *professor ordinarius* in 1769.

Schlözer published a number of major historical works before the 1774 launch of his periodical *Briefwechsel, meist historischen und politischen Inhalts*.<sup>8</sup> The *Briefwechsel* ran until 1782, when it was relaunched as *Stats-Anzeigen*.<sup>9</sup> Schlözer's political journals were read across the Holy Roman Empire. Hans Erich Bödeker has described Schlözer as 'without any doubt the most influential journalist of the German Enlightenment'.<sup>10</sup> Fritz Valjavec and Hans-Ulrich Wehler both argued that *Stats-Anzeigen* played a central role in the formation of German 'public opinion'.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Nicklas has suggested that the pressure brought to bear by *Stats-Anzeigen* both influenced government policies and succeeded in preventing the unfair

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Schlözer derived the title 'boyar' from 'baran' ('mutton'), and the word for prince – 'knyaz' – from the German word 'Knecht' (servant, labourer, or vassal). Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 69.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte, aus den neuesten und besten Nordischen Schriftstellern und nach eigenen Untersuchungen beschrieben, und als eine Geographische und Historische Einleitung zur richtigern Kenntniß aller Skandinavischen, Finnischen, Slavischen, Lettischen, und Sibirischen Völker, besonders in alten und mittleren Zeiten* (Halle, 1771); Schlözer, August Ludwig, *August Ludwig Schölzers Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie*, 2 Vols. (1st edn. Göttingen, 1772-1773).

<sup>9</sup> Spellings of German words are retained as they appear in the editions used. This includes Schlözer's idiosyncratic conventions, some of which were unusual by contemporary standards. The most notable example is *Staat*, which Schlözer spelled as *Stat*.

<sup>10</sup> Bödeker, Hans Erich, 'Journals and Public Opinion: The Politicization of the German Enlightenment in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', in Hellmuth, Eckhart (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), 431.

<sup>11</sup> Valjavec, Fritz, *Die Entstehung der politischen Strömungen in Deutschland, 1770-1815* (2nd edn. Kronberg, 1978), 99-100; Wehler, Hans-Ulrich, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Vol. 1: *Vom Feudalismus des Alten Reiches bis zur defensiven Modernisierung der Reformära, 1700-1815* (Munich, 1987), 311. See also Heeren, Arnold Hermann Ludwig, *Biographische und Litterarische Denkschriften* (Göttingen, 1823), 498-514.



treatment of individuals in various legal cases.<sup>12</sup> Schlözer's correspondence – much of it on behalf of these journals – stretched from Baltimore to Jakarta and included leading political figures, two Tsars, and a wide range of intellectuals.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout this period Schlözer continued to publish books on subjects including American geography, Lithuanian history, and constitutional theory.<sup>14</sup> His work in the latter field played an important role in the emergence of politics as a systematic, modern academic discipline.<sup>15</sup> Following the closure of *Stats-Anzeigen* in 1794, Schlözer turned his energies towards source-critical historical research and produced a series of major works over the following fifteen years.<sup>16</sup> Both Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) read Schlözer's historical writings.<sup>17</sup> His intellectual reputation rests primarily with his work on the history and languages of the Slavic peoples, and he was one of the foremost

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<sup>12</sup> Nicklas, Thomas, 'Publizität als Machtfaktor: Schlözer und die Pressekampagnen der Spätaufklärung', in Duchhardt & Espenhorst (eds.), *Schlözer in Europa*, 161.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Henkel estimates Schlözer wrote 5000-6000 letters during his lifetime. 3000 of these survive, although many only as entries in his 'Briefkopierbücher' held at the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen (signatures: MF Cod. Ms. A. L. Schlözer 3, 4 & 3, 5). These were written in a unique shorthand that is notoriously difficult to decipher. Henkel, Thomas, 'Schlözers Korrespondenz – eine Strukturanalyse', in Duchhardt & Espenhorst (eds.), *Schlözer in Europa*, 248-251, 256-7, 261.

<sup>14</sup> Schlözer, August Ludwig (ed. & trans.), *Neue Erdbeschreibung von ganz Amerika*, 4 Vols. (Bern, 1777); Schlözer, August Ludwig & Gebhardi, Ludewig Albrecht, *Geschichte von Littauen, Kurland und Liefland* (Halle, 1785); Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Allgemeines StatsRecht und StatsVerfassungslere* (Göttingen, 1793).

<sup>15</sup> Scattola, Merio, 'August Ludwig Schlözer und die Staatswissenschaften des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Duchhardt & Espenhorst (eds.), *Schlözer in Europa*, 87-110; Krahnke, Holger, *Reformtheorien zwischen Revolution und Restauration: Die gesamte Politik an der Universität Göttingen im ersten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a. M., 1999), 23-27.

<sup>16</sup> Schlözer decided to stop publishing *Stats-Anzeigen* after it faced provisional censorship. Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 394-399.

<sup>17</sup> Zedelmaier, Helmut, 'August Ludwig Schlözer und die Vorgeschichte', in Duchhardt & Espenhorst (eds.), *Schlözer in Europa*, 185.

figures to introduce Russian culture and history to German readers.<sup>18</sup> Reinhard Lauer describes Schlözer as the first 'scientifically-working [*wissenschaftliche arbeitende*] Slavacist', whose *magnum opus* was a critical edition and translation of the Old Slavonic *Primary Chronicle*.<sup>19</sup> Schlözer played a crucial role in the University of Göttingen's close relationship with Russia, and was ennobled by Tsar Alexander I (1777-1825, r. 1801-1825) in 1804.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Schlözer's polemical, often highly politicized style and argumentation made him a controversial figure throughout his life.<sup>21</sup>

This thesis contextualizes Schlözer's work alongside that of Eichhorn, Meiners, and Villers, shedding new light on his thinking about the value of philosophy and its history, his thinking about race and cultural difference, and his conceptions of 'Europe' and Enlightened modernity. In addition, Espenhorst has described Schlözer's emphasis on 'connection [*Zusammenhang*]', via the concepts of 'unity [*Einheit*]' and '*Verbindungen*', in his historical and political thought.<sup>22</sup> Analyzing the ways in which individuals and communities are bound together represents one of the most

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<sup>18</sup> Lauer, Reinhard, 'Schlözer und die Slawen', in Duchhardt & Espenhorst (eds.), *Schlözer in Europa*, 29, 38; Lauer, Reinhard, 'Schlözer und die Grundlegung slavistischer Methodologie', in *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, Vol. 30 (1985), 641.

<sup>19</sup> Lauer, 'Schlözer und die Slawen', 23, 40; Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Nestor: Russische Annalen in ihrer Slavonischen GrundSprache verglichen, übersetzt, und erklärt*, 5 Vols. (Göttingen, 1802-1809). On the *Primary Chronicle*, see Cross, Samuel Hazzard & Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Olgerd P. (eds. & trans.), *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), 3-50; Tolochko, Oleksiy, 'On "Nestor the Chronicler"', in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1/4 (2007), 31-59. Note: 'Nestor' appears on the cover of *Russische Annalen* in Cyrillic.

<sup>20</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 424-428.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 32-33, 156-158.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-14. Although translating *Einheit* as 'unity' is unproblematic, *Verbindung* and its plural, *Verbindungen*, are more difficult to render into English. When used by Schlözer and Eichhorn, they signify the various means by which individuals, groups, and other objects of knowledge are bound together. Eichhorn also makes use of *Verbindung* in a way similar to the English term 'union' or 'unity', but without the implication that such a union is the product of intentional organization. Given these nuances, this thesis leaves *Verbindung* and *Verbindungen* untranslated.

consistent features of his work. I show that Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, who was one of Schlözer's chief intellectual heirs, shared this emphasis.<sup>23</sup> To both thinkers, these concepts represented essential elements in a people's happiness, durability, and prosperity, and are further linked to the emergence and maintenance of Enlightened ideas and behaviours. However, Schlözer and Eichhorn diverge in how they understood and applied these concepts. Schlözer approached them primarily in terms of the direct exchange of information and technology, while Eichhorn's usage suggests a broader, harmonious correspondence between the cultural, social, and political conditions of a given group. This reveals a new dimension of the intellectual relationship between these thinkers, as well as highlighting the distinctive ways that such concepts were utilized.

#### 0.1.2. Christoph Meiners (1747-1810)

Like Schlözer, Christoph Meiners was one of the Holy Roman Empire's most prominent intellectuals. The son of the postmaster of Warstade (near Bremen), he studied law at Göttingen before publishing an influential manifesto against 'esoteric philosophy' in 1772.<sup>24</sup> Esoteric philosophy was the abstruse, pedantic, and often useless mode of philosophical reasoning that he claimed dominated German ideas.<sup>25</sup> The positive reception of this work enabled Meiners to begin teaching at Göttingen the same year, and in 1775 he was made *professor ordinarius*.<sup>26</sup> Over the next thirty-five years he published on subjects ranging from animal magnetism to travel

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>24</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Revision der Philosophie* (Göttingen, 1772), 91.

<sup>25</sup> Meiners seems to have had in mind the practitioners of 'Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy'.

<sup>26</sup> Prantl, Carl von, 'Meiners, Christoph', in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Vol. 21 (Leipzig, 1885), 224-226.

writing.<sup>27</sup> He joined various learned societies, played a central role in recruiting professors for Russian universities, became privy counsellor to the Hanoverian court, and served as university prorektor from 1806 to 1808.<sup>28</sup> Throughout his career – and especially during his interventions in the debate over Kant's Critical Philosophy – Meiners emphasized the importance of empiricist ideas. Falk Wunderlich has described Meiners as 'probably the most influential materialist on an institutional level' during the last decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the thematic breadth of his writings, Meiners became – and indeed remains – best known for his thinking about race. His deeply hierarchical and essentialist view of human difference was controversial and achieved notoriety during his lifetime. As discussed in the second chapter, Meiners faced censure from leading contemporaries including Kant, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), and the naturalist, travel writer, and revolutionary Georg Forster (1754-1794), as well as colleagues like the physicist and satirist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799) and the physiologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840).<sup>30</sup> Critics

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<sup>27</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Kleinere Länder- und Reisebeschreibungen*, 3 Vols. (Berlin, 1791-1801); Meiners, Christoph, *Ueber den thierischen Magnetismus* (Lemgo, 1788).

<sup>28</sup> Klemme, Heiner F., & Kuehn, Manfred (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers* (London, 2016), 511. Meiners' correspondence regarding his work for Russian universities is held at the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek as 'Correspondenz, betr. die Vocationen verschiedener Gelehrten an verschiedenen Universitäten. 1803-1809' (Sig. MF Cod. Ms. Meiners 41).

<sup>29</sup> Wunderlich, Falk, 'Materialism in late Enlightenment Germany: a neglected tradition reconsidered', in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (2016), 942.

<sup>30</sup> Dougherty, Frank, 'Christoph Meiners und Johann Friedrich Blumenbach im Streit um den Begriff der Menschenrasse', in Mann, Gunter & Dumont, Franz (eds.), *Die Natur des Menschen: Probleme der Physischen Anthropologie und Rassenkunde (1750-1850)* (Stuttgart, 1990), 89-111; Zammito, John, 'Policing Polygeneticism in Germany, 1775 (Kames,) Kant, and Blumenbach', in Eigen, Sara & Larrimore, Mark (eds.), *The German*

attacked both Meiners' methodology and his crass, dehumanizing attitudes towards supposedly inferior racial groups. His ideas were even satirized in a novel by the popular author August Lafontaine (1758-1831), in which a misguided nobleman causes chaos and discord by attempting to segregate his villagers according to their racial status, before being set right by the intervention of an African former slave.<sup>31</sup>

Despite such criticisms, Meiners' work appears to have had a major impact. Lafontaine's novel itself indicates how much Meiners' work had penetrated German discourse: Meiners' views must have been prevalent to the extent that Lafontaine could expect readers to get the joke. Meiners' chief work on race during his lifetime, the *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1785), was reprinted in 1786 and appeared in a second, expanded edition in 1793.<sup>32</sup> His later publications dealing with racial difference similarly indicate considerable contemporary demand for his ideas even though, as discussed later in this thesis, few writers appear to have adopted his ideas wholesale.

Although pioneering work by Britta Rupp-Eisenreich, Friedrich Lotter, and Sabine Vetter sparked more recent scholarly interest in Meiners, National Socialist anthropologists had previously 'rediscovered' him as a possible precursor to their own work.<sup>33</sup> In

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*Invention of Race* (Albany, NY, 2006), 35-54; Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 252-76.

<sup>31</sup> Lafontaine, August, *Leben und Thaten des Freiherrn Quinctius Heymeran von Flaming*, 4 Vols. (Berlin, 1795-6).

<sup>32</sup> The 1786 version may have been a pirate edition. Araújo, André de Melo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen: Eine Studie über das spätaufklärerische universalhistorische Denken, 1756-1815* (Bielefeld, 2012), 112.

<sup>33</sup> Lotter, Friedrich, 'Christoph Meiners und die Lehre von der unterschiedlichen Wertigkeit der Menschenrassen', in Boockmann, Hartmut & Wellenreuther, Hermann (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft in Göttingen: Eine Vorlesungsreihe* (Göttingen, 1987), 30-75; Vetter, Sabine, *Wissenschaftlicher Reduktionismus und die Rassentheorie von Christoph Meiners: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der verlorenen Metaphysik in der Anthropologie* (Aachen, 1996);

1938 the sociologist Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann (1904-1988) claimed that Meiners' racial ideas appeared 'completely modern'.<sup>34</sup> Two years later, Egon Freiherr von Eickstedt (1892-1965) – whose racial typology may have influenced the Nuremberg Laws – called Meiners the 'founder of racial doctrine [*Rassenlehre*]' and argued that his work had been a key source for the most prominent racial theorist of the late nineteenth century, Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882).<sup>35</sup> In 1943, the Nazi historian Hermann Blome (dates unknown) also lauded Meiners' racial thought.<sup>36</sup> It remains unclear whether Meiners' ideas did in fact impact Gobineau, but his work on race is known to have influenced the French Société des observateurs de l'homme (1799-1804) and the early 'scientific racist' Julien-Joseph Virey (1775-1846).<sup>37</sup> Several scholars have indicated the importance of his ideas in the development of ethnology as a discipline, and it has recently been argued that Meiners was responsible for the exclusion of non-European thinkers from university courses and books on the history of philosophy.<sup>38</sup> In *The History of White People* (2010), Nell

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Rupp-Eisenreich, Britta, 'Des choses occultes en histoire des sciences humaines: le destin de la "science nouvelle" de Christoph Meiners', in *L'Ethnographie*, Nos. 90-91 (1983), 131-183; Rupp-Eisenreich, Britta, 'Christoph Meiners et Joseph-Marie de Gérando: un chapitre du comparatisme anthropologique', in Droixhe, D. & Goissiaux, Pol-P (eds.), *L'Homme des lumières et la découverte de l'autre* (Brussels, 1985), 21-47.

<sup>34</sup> Mühlmann, Wilhelm, *Methodik der Völkerkunde* (Stuttgart, 1938), 28-39.

<sup>35</sup> Eickstedt, Egon Freiherr von, *Die Forschung am Menschen*, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1940), 286-8; Fuchs, Brigitte, "Rasse", "Volk", *Geschlecht: anthropologische Diskurse in Österreich, 1850-1960* (Frankfurt, 2003), 297.

<sup>36</sup> Blome, Hermann, *Der Rassengedanke in der deutschen Romantik und seine Grundlagen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1943), 34-49. Gobineau appears to have mentioned Meiners only once, and he does not describe Meiners as a direct source. Gobineau, Arthur de. *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1853), 179.

<sup>37</sup> Rupp-Eisenreich, 'Des choses occultes', 131-183; Rupp-Eisenreich, 'Meiners et de Gérando', 21-47. On the Société des observateurs de l'homme, see Chappey, Jean-Luc, *La Société des observateurs de l'homme (1799-1804): Des anthropologues au temps de Bonaparte* (Paris, 2002), 11-29, 272-276.

<sup>38</sup> Garber, Jörn, 'Selbstreferenz und Objektivität: Organisationsmodelle von Menschheits- und Weltgeschichte in der deutschen Spätaufklärung' in Bödeker, Hans Erich et al. (eds.), *Wissenschaft als kulturelle Praxis, 1750-1900* (Göttingen, 1999), 137-186; Vermeulen, Han F., 'Göttingen und die

Irvin Painter argues that Meiners' race theory was adopted by Charles de Villers and, via Villers, Germaine de Staël (1766-1817), who then popularized Meiners' ideas in Europe and North America.<sup>39</sup> The second chapter closely examines Meiners' racial thought and its reception, suggesting the need to substantially revise this narrative. Both the first and second chapters show that Villers and Meiners were intellectual antagonists, and that there is no evidence that Villers substantially adopted Meiners' racial hierarchy.

Meiners' influence was not limited to his views on race, however. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger has described his pioneering use of 'sex as historiographical category', and he is usually considered a prominent figure in eighteenth-century German *Popularphilosophie*.<sup>40</sup> Meiners' *Geschichte des weiblichen Geschlechts* and his intellectual history of Greece were translated into English and French, respectively.<sup>41</sup> His work appears to have impacted the political

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Völkerkunde: Ethnologie und Ethnographie in der deutschen Aufklärung, 1710-1815', in Bödeker, Hans Erich et al. (eds.), *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in Göttingen um 1800* (Göttingen, 2008), 199-230; Carhart, Michael C., 'Polynesia and Polygenism: the Scientific use of Travel Literature in the Early 19th Century', in *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2009), 58-86. On Meiners' exclusion of non-Europeans from the history of philosophy see Park, Peter K. J., *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780-1830* (Albany, NY, 2013), xi.

<sup>39</sup> Painter, Nell Irvin, *The History of White People* (New York, NY, 2010), 90-101.

<sup>40</sup> Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara, 'Väter der Frauengeschichte? Das Geschlecht als historiographische Kategorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert', in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 262, No. 1 (1996), 39-71. Note that 'popular' in *Popularphilosophie* refers to the educated public, rather than popular culture in the modern sense. Böhr, Christoph, *Philosophie für die Welt: Die Popularphilosophie der deutschen Spätaufklärung im Zeitalter Kants* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2003), 20-22, 35; Zande, Johan van der, 'Popular Philosophy and the History of Mankind in Eighteenth-Century Germany', in *Storia della storiografia*, Vol. 22 (1992), 37-56; Beiser, Frederick C., *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 165-192.

<sup>41</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *History of the Female Sex*, trans. Frederic Shoberl, 4 Vols. (London, 1808); Meiners, Christoph, *Histoire de l'origine, des progrès et de la décadence des sciences dans la Grèce*, trans. Jean-Charles Laveaux, 5 Vols. (Paris, 1799).

thought of the statesman Baron vom Stein (1757-1831), and Jan Rachold has argued that Meiners influenced Adam Weishaupt (1748-1830), the philosopher and founder of the Bavarian Illuminati.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Meiners was a key figure in the German reception of British thought: he was an early reviewer and critic of the philosopher Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) and the historian William Robertson (1721-1793), among others, and translated the philosophical writings of James Beattie (1735-1803).<sup>43</sup> The importance of British philosophy in Meiners' ethical writings will be discussed in the following chapter.

Despite growing interest in his work, relatively little scholarship has examined Meiners' political and ethical thought beyond his writings on race.<sup>44</sup> The first and third chapters thus

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<sup>42</sup> Godsey, William D. (Jr), *Nobles and Nation in Central Europe: Free Imperial Knights in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 2009), 224; Rachold, Jan, *Die aufklärerische Vernunft im Spannungsfeld zwischen rationalistisch-metaphysischer und politisch-sozialer Deutung: Eine Studie zur Philosophie der deutschen Aufklärung* (Frankfurt a. M., 1999), 257-262.

<sup>43</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *James Beattie's, Professor der Moral und Logik in Aberdeen, neue philosophische Versuche*, 2 Vols. (Leipzig, 1779-1780); Kuehn, Manfred, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800: A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy* (Kingston, Ontario, 1987), 70-85; Oz-Salzberger, Fania, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1995), 176-177, 229-256; Kontler, László, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenments: William Robertson in Germany, 1760-1795* (New York, NY, 2014), 94.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Gierl, Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, Michael Carhart, and Jonathan M. Hess have discussed key political implications of his views on race and gender. Gierl, Martin, 'Christoph Meiners, Geschichte der Menschheit und Göttinger Universalgeschichte: Rasse und Nation als Politisierung der deutschen Aufklärung', in Bödeker et al (eds.), *Wissenschaft vom Menschen*, 419-433; Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Väter der Frauengeschichte?', 39-71; Hess, Jonathan M., 'Jewish Emancipation and the Politics of Race', in Eigen & Larrimore (eds.), *German Invention of Race*, 203-212; Carhart, Michael C., 'Anthropology and Statistik in the *Göttingisches Historisches Magazin* (1787-1794)', in Grafton, Anthony T. & Salmon, J. H. M. (eds.), *Historians and Ideologues: Essays in Honour of Donald R. Kelley* (Rochester, NY, 2001), 327-349. Hans-Erich Bödeker and Martin Espenhorst have also written on Meiners' political thought. Bödeker, Hans Erich, 'Einleitung', in Meiners, Christoph, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit der Stände unter den vornehmsten europäischen Völkern* (Hildesheim, 2013), v-xlix; Peters, Martin, 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Rezeption Rousseaus in den deutschen



address Meiners' thinking about ethics and European history. Indeed, some of the works discussed in these chapters appear to have been at least as influential as his writings on race. As well as indicating crucial aspects of his relationships with contemporary intellectuals, they suggest the need to revise the perception that much of Meiners' political thought was particularly conservative or reactionary.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the works examined across all three chapters demonstrate that morality – and especially the moral norms of cultural groups – played a central role in Meiners' understanding of historical change.<sup>46</sup>

### 0.1.3. Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827)

Johann Gottfried Eichhorn was born in Dörrenzimmern, close to Schlözer's hometown in Franconia. He studied at Göttingen from 1770 to 1774 and taught at Jena from 1775 until 1788 before returning to Göttingen as *professor ordinarius*. He remained in Göttingen until his death in 1827. His biographer, Giuseppe d'Alessandro, has described Eichhorn's intellectual contributions as 'epoch-making'.<sup>47</sup> His detailed historical and linguistic analyses of the Bible built on the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, the Orientalist and Biblical scholar Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791), the theologian Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791), and the classical philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812). Such works

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Historiographien. Das Beispiel der Göttinger Professoren August Ludwig (von) Schlözer und Christoph Meiners', in Jaumann, Herbert (ed.), *Rousseau in Deutschland: Neue Beiträge zur Erforschung seiner Rezeption* (Berlin, 1995), 267-289.

<sup>45</sup> Finsen, Hans Carl, *Das Werden der deutschen Staatsbürgers: Studien zur bürgerlichen Ideologie unter dem Absolutismus in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. und zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Copenhagen, 1983), 92-5; Vetter, *Wissenschaftlicher Reduktionismus*, 163-5; Zantop, Susanne, 'The Beautiful, the Ugly, and the German: Race, Gender and Nationality in Eighteenth-Century Anthropological Discourse', in Herminghouse, Patricia & Mueller, Magda (eds.), *Gender and Germanness: Cultural Productions of Nation* (New York, NY, 1997), 23, 30-33; Painter, *History of White People*, 87-9, 100.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Vetter, *Wissenschaftlicher Reduktionismus*, 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> D'Alessandro, Giuseppe, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato: Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827) e il suo tempo* (Naples, 2000), 2.

approached the Bible as a collection of historical documents reflecting the specific circumstances of its authors.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Eichhorn appears to have coined the term 'higher criticism'.<sup>49</sup> His writings played a pivotal role in the development of Biblical criticism and historiography, and laid important groundwork for the theological ideas of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874).<sup>50</sup> Even Eichhorn's critics, such as the philosopher Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), recognized his significance.<sup>51</sup> Eichhorn was one of Europe's leading historical thinkers and, alongside Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Germany's pre-eminent Biblical scholar in the years between the death of Herder and the rise of Hegelianism.

Nevertheless, Eichhorn has been the subject of remarkably little scholarship. The title of d'Alessandro's biography of Eichhorn is, tellingly, 'The Forgotten Enlightenment [*L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*],' and even major works on historiography and Biblical scholarship have often dealt with his ideas largely in passing.<sup>52</sup> In addition, with

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<sup>48</sup> Parente, Fausto, 'La Urgeschichte di J. G. Eichhorn e l'applicazione del concetto di "mito" al Vecchio Testamento', in *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di lettere e Filosofia, Serie III*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1986), 535-567; d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 75-114.

<sup>49</sup> Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, Vol. 1 (2nd edn. Leipzig, 1787), vi.

<sup>50</sup> Marino, Luigi, *Praeceptores Germaniae: Göttingen 1770-1820* (Göttingen, 1995), 4, 293-294.

<sup>51</sup> Triomphe, Robert, *Joseph de Maistre: Étude sur la vie et sur la doctrine d'un matérialiste Mystique* (Geneva, 1968), 560.

<sup>52</sup> D'Alessandro has also published d'Alessandro, Giuseppe, 'Homo historicus: Eichhorns Konzeptualisierung der "Wissenschaft vom Menschen"', in Bödeker et al. (eds.), *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen*, 435-453; d'Alessandro, Giuseppe, 'J. G. Eichhorn: dialettica dell'illuminismo e nascita del mondo moderno', in *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, Vol. 19 (1993), 75-95; d'Alessandro, Giuseppe, 'Teoria e prassi della storiografia in J. G. Eichhorn', in *Archivio di storia della cultura*, Vol. 7 (1994), 203-221. The only other book-length work on Eichhorn deals exclusively with his Biblical exegesis: Sehmsdorf, Eberhard, *Die Prophetenauslegung bei J. G. Eichhorn* (Göttingen, 1971). Luigi Marino has also published an article on Eichhorn's Biblical thought: Marino, Luigi, 'Der "Geist der Auslegung". Aspekte der Göttinger Hermeneutik (am Beispiel Eichhorns)', in *Aufklärung*, Vol. 8 (1994), 71-89. Key works that only briefly

the exception of d'Alessandro, scholars have almost exclusively focused on Eichhorn's writings on the Bible and the ancient Near East. While the importance of these works should not be diminished, this has led to a relative neglect of his large body of 'secular' writings.<sup>53</sup> These efforts were intellectually innovative, and led Donald R. Kelley to describe Eichhorn as a 'polymath'.<sup>54</sup> Initially motivated by an apparent decrease in public demand for Orientalist scholarship, these works were among his most successful, and continued to be cited into the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> His multivolume *Geschichte der drey letzten Jahrhunderte* (1803-1804) was published in three editions during his lifetime, and his *Weltgeschichte* in four.<sup>56</sup> His *Litterärsgeschichte* (1799) sold out and

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discuss Eichhorn include Reill, Peter Hanns, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, 1975), 228, 254, 257; Sheehan, Jonathan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 90, 114, 173-174, 199; Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen*, 181-187; Fulda, Daniel, *Wissenschaft aus Kunst: die Entstehung der modernen deutschen Geschichtsschreibung, 1760-1860* (Berlin, 1996), 50-51, 180, 317.

<sup>53</sup> I refer to Eichhorn's non-theological writings as 'secular histories', as they are not primarily concerned with theological or religious questions. While these works do inevitably deal with a range of religious subjects, their primary concern is to narrate and explain historical events rather than analyze religious problems.

<sup>54</sup> Kelley, Donald R., *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* (New haven, CT, 2003), 67. On these works see d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 177-355.

<sup>55</sup> In 1799 Eichhorn wrote that during 'wartimes' his 'Oriental enterprise [*orientalische Unternehmung*]' was less favourable to the public than 'historical' works. Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, 'Brief an F. T. Rinck, 10.08.1799', Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen (signature: 2 Cod. Ms. philos. 182). These 'secular' works are cited in: Bernhardt, Gottfried, *Grundriss der Römischen Litteratur* (5th ed. Brunswick, 1872), 116, 159; Ticknor, George, *History of Spanish Literature*, Vol. 3 (London, 1849), 338; Schmidt, E. A., *Grundriß der Weltgeschichte für Gymnasien, höhere Lehranstalten und zum Selbstunterricht*, Vol. 1 (7th edn. Dortmund, 1855), 5, 34; Farinelli, Artur, 'Deutschlands und Spaniens litterarische Beziehungen', in *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte*, Vol. 8 (Weimar, 1895), 354-355.

<sup>56</sup> Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, *Geschichte der drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, 6 Vols. (1st edn. Göttingen, 1803-1804; 2nd edn. Göttingen, 1806; 3rd edn. Hanover, 1817-1818); Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, *Weltgeschichte*, 5 Vols. (1st edn. Göttingen, 1799; 2nd edn. Göttingen, 1804; 3rd edn. Göttingen, 1817; 4th edn. Reutlingen, 1818-1820). All future references to *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte* are to the first edition. *Geschichte der alten Welt* was first

was later expanded to two volumes for a second edition.<sup>57</sup> Finally, his work provided much of the historical material for Charles de Villers' extremely successful *Essai sur la Réformation de Luther* (1st edn. 1804).<sup>58</sup>

Previous scholarship has rarely explored the political dimensions of Eichhorn's work.<sup>59</sup> In this thesis I examine how his writings reflected and responded to a range of debates and assumptions during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. As well as reconstructing important aspects of his intellectual relationships with Schlözer, Meiners, and Villers, I argue that rather than being marginal concerns, such political arguments were in fact integral to his historical thought. Whereas d'Alessandro's work presents Eichhorn as a consummate historical relativist, this thesis shows that he made a range of political arguments grounded in claims about the inherent, ahistorical superiority or inferiority of different values, ideas, and groups.

#### 0.1.4. Charles de Villers (1765-1815)

Charles de Villers was born in Boulay in Lorraine. His early work *De la liberté* (1791) criticized the French Revolution's increasingly radical commitment to freedom and, despite its commercial success,

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published in 1799, and in 1804 was republished as the first part of *Weltgeschichte*. Four succeeding volumes appeared under the subheading *Geschichte der neuen Welt*. Citations of *Weltgeschichte* specify the edition used.

<sup>57</sup> Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, *Litterärgeschichte*, 2 Vols. (2nd edn. Göttingen, 1812-1814).

<sup>58</sup> Villers, Charles de, *Essai sur l'esprit et l'influence de la Réformation de Luther* (2nd edn. Paris, 1804), vii-viii.

<sup>59</sup> One work recognizing this is an article by Martin Espenhorst, which analyzes some of Eichhorn's responses to contemporary politics. Peters, Martin, 'Revolution and Gleichgewicht: Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827) und seine politische Position 1797-1804', in Donnert, Erich (ed.), *Europa in der Frühen Neuzeit: Festschrift für Günter Mühlpfordt*, Vol. 6: *Mittel-, Nord- und Osteuropa* (Cologne, 2002), 787-798.

angered many revolutionaries.<sup>60</sup> In 1792 Villers briefly joined the counter-revolutionary army of Louis Joseph de Bourbon-Condé (1736-1818) before fleeing to Germany.<sup>61</sup> While visiting Göttingen in 1794, Villers met August Ludwig Schlözer and developed a close friendship with his daughter Dorothea (1770-1825).<sup>62</sup> He enrolled at the University in 1796 but, for financial reasons, left the following year with the intention of living with his brother in St. Petersburg. He only reached Lübeck, however, where he began living with Dorothea and her husband, Lübeck's mayor Mattheus Rodde (1754-1825).<sup>63</sup>

In Lübeck, Villers befriended leading intellectuals in the German Baltic region, including the philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819), the poet and translator Johann Heinrich Voß (1751-1826), and the poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803). Between 1797 and 1800 he also worked with the journalist Jean Louis Amable de Baudus (1761-1822) on the *émigré* periodical *Le Spectateur du Nord* (1797-1802).<sup>64</sup> Around this time Villers began engaging closely with the work of Kant. The following year he became a member of the Göttingen Royal Society of Sciences and published a French-language introduction to the *Critical Philosophy*.<sup>65</sup> While Villers was not the first thinker to introduce French readers to Kant's ideas, he was one of the most important.<sup>66</sup> With the notable

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<sup>60</sup> Villers, Charles de, *De la liberté: son tableau et sa définition* (n.p., 1791).

<sup>61</sup> Bernard, Monique, 'Charles de Villers et l'Allemagne. Contribution à l'étude du Prérromantisme européen'. (Thesis: Montpellier, 1976; published online 2014: HAL ID tel-00981985), 36-50; Wittmer, Louis, *Charles de Villers: Un intermédiaire entre la France et l'Allemagne et un précurseur de Mme de Staël* (Geneva, 1908), 12-14.

<sup>62</sup> Kern, Bärbel & Kern, Horst, *Madame Doctorin Schlözer: Ein Frauenleben in den Widersprüchen der Aufklärung* (2nd edn. Munich, 1990), 151.

<sup>63</sup> Wittmer, *Charles de Villers*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-66.

<sup>65</sup> Villers, Charles de, *Philosophie de Kant, ou principes fondamentaux de la philosophie transcendente* (Metz, 1801).

<sup>66</sup> Ferrari, Jean, 'L'Œuvre de Kant en France dans les dernières années du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Les Études philosophiques*, No. 4: *Kant* (1981), 399-411; Delon, Michel, 'Clivages idéologiques et antagonismes nationaux à l'époque de la Révolution et de l'Empire: le cas de Charles de Villers', in Lüsebrink,

exceptions of Germaine de Staël and Charles Vanderbourg (1765-1827), the *Philosophie de Kant* failed to convince most French readers of the virtues of the Critical Philosophy.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, it remains a crucial publication for understanding Villers' career and interventions in both French and German debates.

Villers' intellectual fortunes soon changed. In 1803 he won the Institut de France essay competition on the question 'What has been the influence of Luther's Reformation on the political situation of the different states of Europe, and on the progress of Enlightenment?'<sup>68</sup> As discussed in the second and third chapters, Villers' *Essai sur la Réformation de Luther* (1st edn. 1804) affirmed the positive role of the Reformation in the course of European history and became his most successful work. Two editions appeared in 1804, a third in 1808, and a stereotype of the third edition in 1809. At least two more editions appeared between Villers' death and 1851. Translations also followed. It appeared in English twice during Villers' lifetime, and again in 1833. Three German translations were published between 1805 and 1808, with a fourth in 1818. The *Essai* was also translated into Dutch, Danish, and Swedish.<sup>69</sup> On 14 September 1804 Villers was elected corresponding member of the Institut de France, and the University of Göttingen awarded him an honorary doctorate the

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Hans-Jürgen & Riesz, János (eds.), *Feindbild und Faszination: Vermittlerfiguren und Wahrnehmungsprozesse in den deutsch-französischen Kulturbeziehungen (1789-1983)* (Frankfurt a. M., 1984), 25-38.

<sup>67</sup> Azouvi, François & Bourel, Dominique, *De Königsberg à Paris: la réception de Kant en France (1788-1804)* (Paris, 1991), 113-208; Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', 135-149; Staël, *Correspondance générale*, Vol. 4:2, 422-423.

<sup>68</sup> Villers, Charles de, *Essai sur l'esprit et l'influence de la Réformation de Luther* (1st edn. Paris, 1804), iii.

<sup>69</sup> For full details of the various editions and translations of the *Essai*, as well as an analysis of its impact, see Kessler, Martin, 'Reformationstheorien um 1800: Charles de Villers und die Preisaufgabe des französischen Nationalinstitutes', in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Vol. 112, No. 3 (2015), 300-336.

following year.<sup>70</sup> The third edition was even presented to Napoleon and received positively.<sup>71</sup>

Villers' *Essai* antagonized French and German Catholics but won him adulation from Protestants and had a lasting impact on Protestant thought. Martin Kessler has shown not only that Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) had read Villers' *Essai* prior to writing his *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834), but that the books have far more similarities than had previously been recognized.<sup>72</sup> Equally, Hegel was aware of Villers' work and appears to have adopted – whether directly or indirectly – key aspects of Villers' narrative and argumentative preoccupations.<sup>73</sup> The *Essai* was a central work in German Protestant historiography during the first half of the nineteenth century and retained an important place in such works until at least the 1880 *Handbuch der neuesten Kirchengeschichte* of Friedrich Wilhelm Franz Nippold (1838-1918).<sup>74</sup>

Following the *Essai*, Villers wrote on a range of subjects, including several influential studies of French and German literature and customs.<sup>75</sup> Such works argued that contemporary French norms were frivolous, superficial, and amoral, while those of Germany were serious, contemplative, and ethical. The impact of these ideas made

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<sup>70</sup> Ulrich, Oskar, *Charles de Villers. Sein Leben und seine Schriften* (Leipzig, 1899), 26.

<sup>71</sup> Wittmer, *Charles de Villers*, 252-3.

<sup>72</sup> Kessler, 'Reformationstheorien', 330-331. The possibility of Villers' influence on Heine and Hegel has also been proposed by Ruth Ann Crowley. Crowley, Ruth Ann, *Charles de Villers: Mediator and Comparatist* (Bern, 1978), 121-2, 162-3.

<sup>73</sup> Kessler, 'Reformationstheorien', 332.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 327-334; Nippold, Friedrich Wilhelm Franz, *Handbuch der neuesten Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. 1: *Einleitung in die Kirchengeschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Elberfeld, 1880), 382-383.

<sup>75</sup> The best known of his literary studies is the so-called 'Érotique Comparée', republished in 1927 with an extensive introduction and notes as Villers, Charles de, *L'Érotique Comparée" de Charles de Villers, 1806*, ed. Edmond Egli (Paris, 1927).

him an important figure in the positive re-evaluation of the ancient Germanic tribes during the early nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup>

Lübeck experienced major financial burdens throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. In November 1806 Prussian and French troops entered the city, leading to considerable looting and violence.<sup>77</sup> Villers appealed to Napoleon for assistance in a pamphlet that was quickly read across Europe and appeared in three editions by 1808. Napoleon refused to help the city and ultimately annexed it to France, but Villers' efforts secured his position as the leading Francophone writer on Germany and advocate of German ideas and interests.<sup>78</sup> Monique Bernard has convincingly demonstrated his pre-eminence in contemporary intellectual life.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps most notably, Goethe expressed the hope that Villers would translate his work on colours, *Zur Farbenlehre* (1810), into French, and even described Villers as Europe's 'Janus Bifrons'.<sup>80</sup>

Although he stayed in Lübeck until 1811, Villers maintained a close relationship with Göttingen. As well as receiving an honorary doctorate from the university, he corresponded with professors including Eichhorn, Schlözer, and the prominent historian Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren (1760-1842).<sup>81</sup> In 1808 the diplomat Karl Friedrich Reinhard (1761-1837) described Villers as having earned

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<sup>76</sup> Thom, Martin, *Republics, Nations, and Tribes* (London, 1995), 198-200, 218-219. As discussed in the third chapter, Villers himself was critical of the Germanic tribes.

<sup>77</sup> Hoffmann, Max, *Geschichte der Freien und Hansestadt Lübeck*, Vol. 2 (Lübeck, 1892), 129-151; Bödeker, H., *Geschichte der freien und Hansestadt Lübeck* (Lübeck, 1898), 35.

<sup>78</sup> Villers, Charles de, *Lettre à Madame la comtesse Fanny de Beauharnais contenant un récit des événements qui se sont passés à Lubeck dans la journée du Jeudi 6 Novembre 1806, et les suivantes* (1st & 2nd edns. Amsterdam, 1807; 3rd edn. Amsterdam, 1808).

<sup>79</sup> Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', passim.

<sup>80</sup> Villers, Charles de, 'Villers an Goethe', ed. Julius Wahle, in *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, Vol. 20 (1899), 118.

<sup>81</sup> See Hamburg Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Autographensammlung: Villers' *Nachlass*: Box 12: 583-584; Box 13: 140-170; Box 17: 8.



'the title of citizen' of the city, and in 1811 he accepted a professorship teaching literature.<sup>82</sup> Despite his popularity and reputation as an advocate of German interests, as well as letters of support from de Staël, Baron vom Stein, and Alexander I of Russia, he lost his job following the 1813 Wars of Liberation.<sup>83</sup> Villers' health declined rapidly, and he died in February 1815.

Since the late nineteenth century a considerable body of scholarship on Villers has emerged, including several book-length studies.<sup>84</sup> However, despite his claim that he wrote for both French and German audiences, scholarship has predominantly tended to consider Villers' work in terms of transmitting German ideas into French contexts, rather than as a participant in German debates themselves.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, scholarship on Villers has often discussed him chiefly in terms of his impact on Madame de Staël (and occasionally Benjamin Constant (1767-1830)).<sup>86</sup> Recent work by Michael Printy and Martin Kessler has, however, shown his significance for contemporary German thought.<sup>87</sup> By approaching Villers' work primarily in terms of his German interlocutors – and

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<sup>82</sup> Reinhard, Karl Friedrich, 'Karl Friedrich Reinhard à Charles de Villers, 31 Décembre 1808', in Isler, M. (ed.), *Briefe von Benj. Constant - Görres - Goethe - Jac. Grimm - Guizot - F. H. Jacobi - Jean Paul - Klopstock - Schelling - Mad. de Staël - J. H. Voss und vielen Anderen. Auswahl aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlasse [sic] des Ch. de Villers* (2nd edn. Hamburg, 1883), 353; Wittmer, *Charles de Villers*, 395-458.

<sup>83</sup> Wittmer, *Charles de Villers*, 441-444.

<sup>84</sup> Scholarly interest in Villers began with Bippin, Wilhelm von, 'Charles von Villers und seine deutschen Bestrebungen', in *Preußische Jahrbücher*, Vol. 27 (1871), 288-307. The book-length studies are Wittmer, *Charles de Villers*; Bernard, 'Charles de Villers'; Crowley, *Charles de Villers*.

<sup>85</sup> Villers, Charles de, 'Les lettres de Charles de Villers à Jean de Muller', Egli, Edmond (ed.), in *Revue de littérature comparée*, Vol. 2 (1922), 451-2.

<sup>86</sup> For example, Jainchill, Andrew, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY, 2008), 267-275; Mildner, Susanne, *L'Amour à la Werther: Liebeskonzeptionen bei Goethe, Villers, de Staël und Stendhal* (Göttingen, 2012).

<sup>87</sup> Kessler, 'Reformationstheorien um 1800', 300-336; Printy, Michael, 'Protestantism and Progress in the Year XII: Charles Villers's *Essay on the Spirit and influence of Luther's Reformation* (1804)', in *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2012), 303-329.

especially Schlözer, Meiners, and Eichhorn – this thesis reconstructs major intellectual relationships and sheds new light on his thought and its importance in the German lands.

## **0.2. Göttingen and its University**

Schlözer, Meiners, and Eichhorn all taught at the University of Göttingen from before the outbreak of the Revolution. As mentioned above, Villers maintained a close relationship with the university before taking up a professorship in 1811. Göttingen was renowned for its innovative scholarly output and was recognized as a major centre in the German Enlightenment. Several of the works discussed in this thesis – including Meiners' infamous *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* – were based on lecture courses taught at the university. Equally, Schlözer's apparently quixotic hope – discussed in the third chapter – that his critical edition of the *Primary Chronicle* would encourage Tsar Alexander I to declare war on Napoleon appears more comprehensible in the context of Göttingen's close relationship with the Russian Empire.<sup>88</sup> The city and its university are thus crucial contexts for understanding these and other works discussed in this thesis. This section briefly outlines Göttingen's academic, political, and social circumstances prior to and during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, indicating key dimensions of its intellectual culture and socio-political circumstances.

### 0.2.1. The Georgia Augusta University

The Georgia Augusta University was founded at Göttingen in the Electorate of Hanover – officially the Electorate of Brunswick-Lüneburg – in 1734. The foundation of the university was, in Rudolf

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<sup>88</sup> Glitsch, Silke, 'Von der Leine an die Newa und zurück. Wege und Beziehungen zwischen Göttingen und St. Petersburg im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert', in *Göttinger Jahrbuch*, Vol. 52 (2004), 117-128.

Vierhaus's words, 'a prestige project': the Electorate had been ruled under a personal union with Great Britain since 1714 but, despite its growing power within the Holy Roman Empire, it lacked its own university.<sup>89</sup> The decision to establish the university in Göttingen was primarily financial as the city's buildings, as well as its legal and political structures, could readily accommodate such an institution.<sup>90</sup>

Thanks in large part to the efforts of the minister Gerlach Adolph von Münchhausen (1688-1770), the university was established according to self-consciously modern principles and oriented towards the production of innovative research.<sup>91</sup> Considerable resources were spent hiring prominent scholars and the university was soon recognized as an important intellectual centre.<sup>92</sup> As well as Schlözer, Meiners, and Eichhorn, it hosted many of eighteenth-century Germany's leading thinkers, including Johann David Michaelis, the jurist and political theorist Gottlieb Achenwall (1719-1772), the legal historian Johann Stephan Pütter (1725-1807), the historian Johann Christoph Gatterer (1727-1799), and Christian Gottlob Heyne. The university was also known for its research on Britain and Russia, and maintained personal (and sometimes institutional) ties with both countries, as well as France.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, due in no small part to Schlözer's efforts over the previous decades, the university was held in particularly high esteem in Russia, and it attracted many Russian students. Göttingen's particular importance

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<sup>89</sup> Vierhaus, Rudolf, 'Göttingen vom Ende des Dreißigjährigen Krieges bis zur Zeit der Französischen Revolution und Napoleons', in Böhme, Ernst & Vierhaus, Rudolf (eds.), *Göttingen: Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2: *Vom Dreißigjährigen Krieg bis zum Anschluss an Preußen – Der Wiederaufstieg als Universitätsstadt (1648-1866)* (Göttingen, 2002), 28-29.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.; Hunger, Ulrich, 'Die Georgia Augusta als hannoversche Landesuniversität. Von ihrer Gründung bis zum Ende des Königreichs', in Böhme & Vierhaus (eds.), *Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2, 141-143.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Hunger, 'Die Georgia Augusta als hannoversche Landesuniversität', 139-183.

<sup>93</sup> Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 16-24.

for the development of contemporary historical and ethnological ideas will be discussed in the following section.

Professors at Göttingen enjoyed a degree of freedom from censorship that was unprecedented in the German Enlightenment, while historians of education have emphasized the university's importance in the development of modern research-oriented practices and institutions.<sup>94</sup> The Georgia Augusta began awarding PhDs by the 1770s, at a time when few universities recognized the concept of a 'doctor of philosophy', and in 1787 it became the first German university to award a PhD to a woman – none other than Dorothea Schlözer.<sup>95</sup> Even more unusually, it awarded doctorates for the presentation of original research rather than the disputation of a text (often written by someone other than the candidate).<sup>96</sup> At the same time, Christian Gottlob Heyne pioneered the seminar format as a space to discuss new research.<sup>97</sup> In the decades up to 1815 Göttingen was among the first universities to designate professorships for fields such as classical philology, mineralogy, and art history, making it a leading site for the definition and delineation of modern academic disciplines.<sup>98</sup>

The first volume of the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* – from 1802 the *Göttingischen Gelehrten Anzeigen* – appeared in 1739.<sup>99</sup> Dedicated to reviewing books from across Europe and

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<sup>94</sup> Anderson, R. D., *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914* (Oxford, 2004), 24-25, 52-53; Clark, William, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago, IL, 2006), passim.; Howard, Thomas Albert, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford, 2006), 35-38, 45-7, 79-84, 107-121; Baumgarten, Marita, *Professoren und Universitäten im 19. Jahrhundert: zur Sozialgeschichte deutscher Geistes- und Naturwissenschaftler* (Göttingen, 1997), 24, 38, 61.

<sup>95</sup> Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 102, 194.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 142, 159.

<sup>98</sup> Baumgarten, *Professoren und Universitäten*, 61, 69, 70, 277.

<sup>99</sup> Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 40-47. The periodical continues to be published.

beyond, the *Göttingische Anzeigen* became the most important scholarly periodical in eighteenth-century Germany. In 1751 King George II founded Göttingen's Royal Society of Sciences, which quickly established itself as one of the most prestigious learned societies in Europe.<sup>100</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, Göttingen is recognized as having played a crucial role in the emergence of the university library as a central part of academic life.<sup>101</sup> Prior to the nineteenth century, most university libraries – if they existed at all – were under-used, haphazardly organized, and poorly stocked.<sup>102</sup> Many European libraries were primarily collections of rare or unusual items brought together with few, if any, organising principles. By contrast, the administrators at Göttingen prioritized the acquisition of new books, which were then organized according to a revolutionary cataloguing system developed by Heyne.<sup>103</sup> In 1787 Johann Stephan Pütter estimated that the library contained around 120,000 books, a figure which rose to 200,000 by 1800.<sup>104</sup> At the dawn of the nineteenth century only two German libraries – the royal libraries in Vienna and Dresden – exceeded Göttingen in sheer quantity of books. Bernhard Fabian has described the University's collection as Europe's first research library.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, access to these resources played a significant role in the production of scholarly works. Perhaps most

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>101</sup> Fabian, Bernhard, 'Göttingen als Forschungsbibliothek im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Plädoyer für eine neue Bibliotheksgeschichte', in Raabe, Paul (ed.), *Öffentliche und private Bibliotheken im 17. und im 18. Jahrhundert* (Bremen, 1977), 209-239.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 297-335.

<sup>103</sup> Fabian, 'Göttingen als Forschungsbibliothek', 209-239.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.; Streich, Gerhard, 'Die Büchersammlungen Göttinger Professoren im 18. Jahrhundert', in Raabe (ed.), *Öffentliche und private Bibliotheken*, 251; Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 317.

<sup>105</sup> Fabian, 'Göttingen als Forschungsbibliothek', 209-239.

notably, Christoph Meiners' work on race relied on access to the library's unparalleled collection of travel literature.<sup>106</sup>

Each of these factors ensured that Göttingen was Germany's premier university prior to the foundation of the University of Berlin in 1810.<sup>107</sup> The university's alumni included leading statesmen and intellectuals such as Baron vom Stein, Karl August von Hardenburg (1750-1822), August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel (1767-1845 and 1772-1829), and Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt (1767-1835 and 1769-1859).<sup>108</sup> The Georgia Augusta was also notable for its exceptionally high proportion – 10-15 per cent – of noble students throughout the period.<sup>109</sup> Student numbers did experience a gradual downward trend from about 1780, although they generally remained between 600 and 700.<sup>110</sup> To put these numbers in perspective, at the beginning of the nineteenth century Göttingen had the second highest number of students in the German lands, falling short of Halle by about 100. These numbers were well above competitors at Leipzig, Würzburg, and Jena (c. 400 each), as well as Ingolstadt and Königsberg (c. 300). Half of German universities at this time had fewer than 100 students. Fluctuations between 1807 and 1813 did see the lowest levels since the university opened, while (as at other universities) the Wars of Liberation saw a considerable decrease as students volunteered to fight.<sup>111</sup> Even considering these factors, however, Göttingen remained an exceptionally successful institution,

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<sup>106</sup> Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 228.

<sup>107</sup> Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 7. Göttingen has remained one of Germany's most important educational institutions.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>109</sup> Saada, Anne, 'Die Universität Göttingen Traditionen und innovationen gelehrter Praktiken', in Bödeker et al. (eds.), *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen*, 38.

<sup>110</sup> Maercker, Dietrich von, 'Die Zahlen der Studierenden an der Georg-August-Universität in Göttingen von 1734/1737 bis 1978', in *Göttinger Jahrbuch*, Vol. 27 (1979), 141-158.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

and was widely recognized as a major location for Enlightened thought.

### 0.2.2. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Period

Lacking any significant strategic value, Göttingen was for the most part only indirectly affected by the French Revolutionary Wars, for instance through censorship and the Imperial ban on student societies.<sup>112</sup> While these clearly impacted life at the university, neither academic output nor the hiring of professors appears to have slowed. Professors were generally committed to gradual progress and critical of radical political currents. They typically adhered to what may be seen as the 'moderate' view of the French Revolution: early sympathy and support, followed by rejection as the demands and actions of the revolutionaries became increasingly radical.<sup>113</sup> The city saw little in the way of unrest, and even those authors most sympathetic to the early Revolution did not propose similar action in the German lands.

Military events only directly intruded on life in Göttingen in 1803.<sup>114</sup> With the renewal of hostilities between France and England at the beginning of the War of the Third Coalition, Napoleon invaded the Electorate of Hanover. The militarily vulnerable territory

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<sup>112</sup> There was some controversy in 1793 when several people associated with Göttingen were involved in the short-lived 'Mainz Republic'. Most notably, Georg Forster was friends with several professors, a member of the Royal Society of Sciences, and a frequent contributor to the *Göttingische Anzeigen*. The daughters of Christian Gottlob Heyne and Johann David Michaelis were involved, as well as several lesser-known academics and children of academics. While the events drew some criticism to the university, the long-term impact was minor. With the exception of Forster (who died in January 1794), all of those involved were rehabilitated. Hunger, 'Die Georgia Augusta als hannoversche Landesuniversität', 185-186.

<sup>113</sup> Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 385-396.

<sup>114</sup> Vierhaus, Rudolf, 'Göttingen und die Französische Revolution', in *Göttinger Jahrbuch*, Vol. 37 (1989), 152-153.

surrendered immediately and was occupied without violence.<sup>115</sup> French occupiers began extracting war contributions and quartering troops across the Electorate, although Göttingen was exempt from these requirements thanks to the efforts of university prorector Ernst Brandes (1758-1810).<sup>116</sup> Censorship was even partially relaxed during the French occupation, and the university's declining student intake briefly reversed.<sup>117</sup> French troops briefly entered the city only in August 1805.<sup>118</sup> Few in Göttingen – and none of the protagonists of this thesis – appear to have either anticipated or desired the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, although the public response to Francis II's abdication was generally muted.<sup>119</sup> Following Prussia's defeat as part of the Fourth Coalition in October 1806, Napoleon demanded that Prussia occupy Hanover and ensure its compliance with the Continental Blockade.<sup>120</sup> Under Prussian rule Göttingen was spared from neither the quartering of troops nor their marching through the city. Fortunately for the city's inhabitants, Prussian occupation lasted only until December 1807, when Napoleon created the Kingdom of Westphalia from various Prussian, Hanoverian and other German territories.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Vierhaus, Rudolf, 'Göttingen im Zeitalter Napoleons', in *Göttinger Jahrbuch*, Vol. 27 (1979), 177-188.

<sup>116</sup> Hunger, 'Die Georgia Augusta als hannoversche Landesuniversität', 187.

<sup>117</sup> Vierhaus, 'Göttingen im Zeitalter Napoleons', 177-178.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Burgdorf, Wolfgang, *Ein Weltbild verliert seine Welt: Der Untergang des Alten Reiches und die Generation 1806* (Munich, 2009), 162. Neither Meiners nor Villers appear to have significantly discussed the end of the Holy Roman Empire in print. Eichhorn's 1817 history of the early years of the nineteenth century passes over the events without significant comment. Johann Gottfried, *Neunzehntes Jahrhundert: zur Ergänzung der beyden ersten Ausgaben seiner Geschichte der drey letzten Jahrhunderte* (Hannover, 1817), 85-87. On the Holy Roman Empire in Schlözer's thought, see Burgdorf, Wolfgang, 'August Ludwig Schlözers Vorstellung von der Verfassung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation', in Duchhardt & Espenhorst (eds.), *Schlözer in Europa*, 111-129.

<sup>120</sup> Vierhaus, 'Göttingen bis zur Französischen Revolution und Napoleons', 39.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.



Napoleon's youngest brother, Jérôme (1784-1860), ruled the Kingdom from Kassel – about 50 kilometres from Göttingen – until he was ousted in 1813. The legacy, successes, and failures of the short-lived state remain contested.<sup>122</sup> Under the Kingdom of Westphalia, the former Hanoverian territories saw vast political, administrative, financial, and legal changes, including the imposition of both the Napoleonic Code and massive war indemnities. Göttingen was not exempt. The university saw the end of many of its corporate privileges and was integrated into the Kingdom's legal and financial frameworks. The most significant policies to impact life at the university were the end of its independent academic jurisdiction [*akademische Gerichtsbarkeit*], freedom from censorship, and taxation privileges.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, Rudolf Vierhaus has argued that, in practice, the constitution of the university remained largely unchanged.<sup>124</sup> The period was mostly one of stability for the institution. Jérôme visited the city several times, state holidays were duly celebrated, and unrest was rare. Teaching, the hiring of new staff, academic output, and the gradual expansion of the library continued without significant interruption.<sup>125</sup> The period between 1789 and 1815 saw sixteen German universities close, including three of the six institutions in Kingdom of Westphalia.<sup>126</sup> However,

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<sup>122</sup> On the Kingdom's legacy, see in particular Bethan, Anika, *Napoleons Königreich Westphalen: Lokale, deutsche und europäische Erinnerungen* (Paderborn, 2012).

<sup>123</sup> Vierhaus, 'Göttingen bis zur Französischen Revolution und Napoleons', 39-41.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Lampe, Jörg H., 'Politische Entwicklung in Göttingen vom Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Vormärz', in Böhme & Vierhaus (eds.), *Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2, 45-46, 48-52.

<sup>126</sup> The universities that closed were Paderborn, Rinteln, and Helmstedt, which all had poor academic reputations at the time. As well as Göttingen, Halle and Marburg remained open. Vierhaus, 'Göttingen bis zur Französischen Revolution und Napoleons', 39-40; Hunger, 'Die Georgia Augusta als hannoversche Landesuniversität', 187-192; Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 1; Connolly, Owen, *Napoleon's Satellite Kingdoms* (New York, NY, 1965), 207-209.

the prestige associated with Göttingen ensured support from Jérôme, and the university remained open throughout his reign.

The protagonists of this thesis responded in diverse ways to Napoleonic rule. Schlözer, as discussed in the third chapter, appears to have been an early and consistent opponent of Napoleon. Following France's annexation of the German Baltic coast in 1811, Eichhorn wrote to a friend complaining of Napoleon's 'machinations' and 'fanaticism against the North-Germans [*Fanatismus gegen die Norddeutschen*]'.<sup>127</sup> In 1817 Eichhorn published an account of the period that portrayed Napoleon as paranoid, cruel, despotic, and exploitative.<sup>128</sup> Villers appears to have broadly supported the Emperor until the Battle of Lübeck in November 1806, when he became disillusioned with Napoleonic rule. One of Villers' last publications was a satirical attack on Napoleon co-written with the historian and political theorist Friedrich Saalfeld (1785-1834).<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, he remained on good terms with Jérôme throughout the period.<sup>130</sup> I have found no comments from Meiners about Napoleon. This is not surprising: unlike Schlözer, very little of Meiners' private correspondence survives, while – unlike Eichhorn and Villers – he did not outlive Napoleonic censorship.

Göttingen's broader population, however, expressed both scepticism regarding the regime's claims and hopes for modernization.<sup>131</sup> Early reforms – such as legal equality – were well received, and Jérôme's administration faced little opposition from

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<sup>127</sup> Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, 'Eichhorn an Unbekannt, Göttingen 23.03.1811', Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig Sondersammlungen (signature: Slg. Nebauer/W/De-H/W146).

<sup>128</sup> Eichhorn, *Neunzehntes Jahrhundert*, 3-9.

<sup>129</sup> [Villers, Charles de & Saalfeld, Friedrich], *Hundert und etliche Fanfaronaden des Corsikanischen Abentheurers Napoleon Buona-Parte, Ex-Kaisers der Franzosen* (Leipzig, 1814).

<sup>130</sup> Wittmer, *Charles de Villers*, 429-430.

<sup>131</sup> Lampe, 'Politische Entwicklung in Göttingen', 50-54.

within the city.<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, sentiment eventually hardened against the government. This was exacerbated by both the financial burdens of the Napoleonic Empire and the fact that only one of the 104 Göttingers sent on the 1812 Russian campaign returned.<sup>133</sup> The Russian defeat was met with posters criticizing Napoleon and increased levels of desertion.<sup>134</sup> On 30 September 1813 Cossacks entered Kassel, and the Kingdom of Westphalia was dissolved the following day. Three days later the Cossacks left and Jérôme briefly returned before fleeing again after the Battle of Leipzig (16-19 October). On 31 October the Swedish Crown Prince Carl John (1763-1844, r. 1818-1844) entered Göttingen with 8000 troops and confirmed the return of Hanoverian rule.<sup>135</sup> The end of the Kingdom of Westphalia was widely celebrated and many students (but few citizens) volunteered to fight in the Wars of Liberation.<sup>136</sup>

### 0.2.3. Demography and Economics

In the 1790s Göttingen had a population of around 9000, which fluctuated between stagnation and slight decline throughout the period.<sup>137</sup> The reception of wounded soldiers, military conscription, and the instances of troops moving through the city all contributed to rising mortality and outbreaks of disease, just as war and occupation impacted immigration patterns. Despite the university's importance,

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. Only 100 of Jérôme's army of 26,000 soldiers sent to Russia returned.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 48-52.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 53-56. Carl John was formerly Napoleon's general Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Sachse, Wieland, 'Bevölkerungs- und Sozialgeschichte der Stadt Göttingen vom Dreißigjährigen Krieg bis zum Beginn der preußischen Zeit', in Böhme & Vierhaus (eds.), *Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2, 224-230.

its staff made up just 3 to 5 per cent of the city's population.<sup>138</sup> Most inhabitants were artisans and traders. Moreover, the university itself was marked by stark inequalities. Well-paid, prominent professors like Michaelis and Schlözer were a minority, and most lecturers experienced economic difficulties.<sup>139</sup> In 1812, for example, 32 out of 74 lecturers (teaching 130 of 209 courses) were unsalaried *Privatdozenten* who relied exclusively on course fees from students and faced considerable hardship.<sup>140</sup> For these and most other inhabitants, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw increasing inequality and poverty as the cost of basic goods – including food, rent, and fuel – rose faster than incomes.<sup>141</sup> These long-term trends were only exacerbated by the burdens of Napoleonic rule.<sup>142</sup> Over 60 per cent of residents rented, and housing was a major demographic problem with high population densities and routine conflicts of interest between landlords and politicians.<sup>143</sup> In short, Göttingen was far from the scholarly idyll it was sometimes portrayed as.<sup>144</sup>

Most residents were Lutherans, with a significant Calvinist minority and, from 1746, increasing toleration for the public worship

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 239-242; Gerhard, Hans Jürgen, 'Grundzüge der Verfassung, Verwaltung und Wirtschaft der Stadt Göttingen 1650-1866', in Böhme & Vierhaus (eds.), *Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2, 329-330.

<sup>139</sup> Tütken, Johannes, 'Göttinger Privatdozenten im Sommersemester 1812', in *Göttinger Jahrbuch*, Vol. 54 (2006), 36, 38. For a detailed account of *Privatdozenten* between 1734 and 1831, see Tütken, Johannes, *Privatdozenten im Schatten der Georgia Augusta: Zur älteren Privatdozentur (1734 bis 1831)*, 2 Vols. (Göttingen, 2005).

<sup>140</sup> Tütken, Johannes, 'Göttinger Privatdozenten im Sommersemester 1812', 34, 37.

<sup>141</sup> Gerhard, 'Verfassung, Verwaltung und Wirtschaft', 338-339.

<sup>142</sup> Vierhaus, 'Göttingen bis zur Französischen Revolution und Napoleons', 51.

<sup>143</sup> Wedemeyer-Kolwe, Bernd, 'Göttinger Wohnkultur im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert', in Böhme & Vierhaus (eds.), *Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2, 455-458.

<sup>144</sup> For example, Meiners, Christoph, *Geschichte der Entstehung und Entwicklung der hohen Schulen unsers Erdtheils*, Vol. 4 (Göttingen, 1805), 140-142; Michaelis, Johann David, *Lebensbeschreibung von ihm selbst abgefaßt*, ed. Johann Matthäus Hassencamp (Leipzig, 1793), 44-49.

of Catholics.<sup>145</sup> Typical of contemporary Germany, however, Göttingen's small number of Jews – usually around 100, including a handful of students – experienced discrimination and occasional expulsions.<sup>146</sup> In a 1791 letter to Adam Friedrich Groß zu Trockau (1758-1840) Meiners wrote that Jewish 'extortions' had outraged the 'whole university'.<sup>147</sup> As discussed in the second chapter, Schlözer, Meiners, and Eichhorn each expressed antipathy towards Jews, and most of the city's Jewish inhabitants were expelled in 1796.<sup>148</sup> The brief period of religious equality under the Kingdom of Westphalia resulted in an influx of eight Jewish families, so that fourteen families – comprising 86 people – were present at the Kingdom's fall.<sup>149</sup> With the Hanoverian restoration, however, all of the newcomers were expelled. Göttingen's religious politics were typical of most German states at this time: broad tolerance for different Christian denominations alongside hostility towards Jews.

#### 0.2.4. Continuities

These facts are important for understanding the complex social and economic reality of Göttingen during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. Nevertheless, martial law, quartering, and other violent interventions in the city's daily life were rare. By contrast, France had occupied Göttingen for five years during the Seven Years'

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<sup>145</sup> Hammann, Konrad, 'Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Göttingen (ca. 1650-1866)', in Böhme & Vierhaus (eds.), *Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2, 540, 554-556; Wehking, Sabine, 'Die Entwicklung der katholischen Gemeinde in Göttingen 1746-1866', in Böhme & Vierhaus (eds.), *Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2, 597.

<sup>146</sup> Sabelleck, Rainer, 'Juden in Göttingen (1648-1866)', in Böhme & Vierhaus (eds.), *Geschichte einer Universitätsstadt*, Vol. 2, 638, 641-650, 653.

<sup>147</sup> Meiners, Christoph, 'Brief an Friedrich Groß von Trockau, 06.03.1791', Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen (signature: 2 Cod. Ms. philos. 182: C. Meiners).

<sup>148</sup> Sabelleck, 'Juden in Göttingen', 649-650.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 653-654.

War, when the city was made to quarter 7500 soldiers.<sup>150</sup> Göttingen's population decreased by about one third, and there were cases of pillaging, kidnapping, demolition, and mass graves, alongside influxes of wounded soldiers carrying contagious diseases. On leaving the city in July 1762, the occupying troops slashed citizens' grain sacks – an act of profound cruelty for a population already suffering.<sup>151</sup> The Napoleonic period certainly exacerbated inequalities, while the Prussian occupation brought hardship and the return of Hanoverian rule meant an end to religious equality. Nevertheless, such conditions were considerably less severe than in many other areas of Germany. Göttingen's experience was marked by relative continuity. Indeed, the continuities of staff, teaching, and publishing make its professors particularly suitable subjects for charting the use and development of innovative ideas across the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period.

### **0.3. Methods and Concepts**

#### 0.3.1. Methodological Principles

This thesis is principally a work of contextualist intellectual history. It seeks to understand the ways that political arguments were articulated and utilized in relation to particular social, political, cultural, and intellectual contexts. As such, the four protagonists are considered not merely in relation to each other, but also within the broader circumstances of Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe, and especially the German lands.

In thinking about the texts and contexts of this period, this thesis adopts Hans Erich Bödeker's argument that historians

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<sup>150</sup> Füssel, Marian, "Die besten Feinde, welche man nur haben kann"? Göttingen unter französischer Besatzung im Siebenjährigen Krieg,' in *Göttinger Jahrbuch*, Vol. 60 (2012), 138-140, 147-154.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

investigating eighteenth-century German thought should seek to better understand writings outside the traditional canon of 'great works'.<sup>152</sup> Bödeker argues that such writings, including textbooks, handbooks, and compendia, were prevalent features of German intellectual culture.<sup>153</sup> Thus, historians should pay greater attention to these texts in order to better reconstruct contemporary discursive landscapes. While focusing on Francophone contexts, Robert Darnton has similarly called attention to the cultural (and economic) importance of such works for understanding the eighteenth century.<sup>154</sup> This thesis examines texts across a range of genres, many of which have received little attention as works of political thought. This includes handbooks, textbooks, encyclopedic works, and other genres oriented towards specialist readers or primarily intended for use as reference works. Nevertheless, they were often successful in attracting broader public audiences.<sup>155</sup> Other texts examined in the following chapters were, by contrast, written with wider readerships in mind, and/or with the expectation that they would be read from start to finish. Rather than attempting to draw a clear line between these formats, one theme of this thesis is the way that such different works, often directed towards different audiences, engaged with each other.

Historical knowledge was recognized as an integral part of the identity of educated Germans, and historical publications accounted for about 10 per cent of all German books published during the eighteenth century.<sup>156</sup> This was a considerable market share and

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<sup>152</sup> Bödeker, Hans Erich, 'Von der "Magd der Theologie" zur "Leitwissenschaft": Vorüberlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert*, Vol. 14 (1990), 19.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>154</sup> Darnton, Robert, *A Literary Tour de France* (Oxford, 2018), 291-299.

<sup>155</sup> Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 259-260.

<sup>156</sup> Bödeker, Hans Erich et al., 'Einleitung', in idem. (eds.), *Aufklärung und Geschichte: Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1992), 13.

reflected the broad public demand for such works. While it is unclear what percentage of these publications were intended for academic or reference use, late Enlightenment German historical writing – contrasted with that of France and Britain – generally tended towards the analysis or collation of specialist knowledge rather than literary readability.<sup>157</sup> Thus, the analysis of such works offers important insights into contemporary intellectual culture. Most of the works discussed in this thesis appear to have been widely read, but few have been subject to analysis as political writings. Crucially, the persistence of key themes, ideas, and arguments across such different works suggests their prominence in contemporary German intellectual life.

The strategy of reading historical accounts as political thought owes much to J. G. A. Pocock's emphasis on the importance of 'historiography as a political phenomenon'.<sup>158</sup> This is most explicit in the third chapter, which engages with the concept of 'the Enlightened narrative', but the impact of Pocock's ideas can be seen throughout this thesis. The writing of history, Pocock argues, involves the articulation of narratives that (at least in modern historiography) rely on comprehending 'circumstances whose being and operations could be understood'.<sup>159</sup> As political societies are marked by conflicting claims, there are necessarily conflicting positions regarding how, why, and even which events and phenomena happened in the past.<sup>160</sup> Such conflicts are then refracted through the perspectives and efforts of individual historians, thereby resulting in a plurality of explanatory historical narratives.<sup>161</sup> The construction of

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<sup>157</sup> Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenments*, 35-36; O'Brien, Karen, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997), 4-7.

<sup>158</sup> Pocock, J. G. A., 'The Politics of Historiography', in idem., *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge, 2009), 259.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 258, 261.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 264-266.



these narratives thus becomes a political act even if particular accounts lack overtly prescriptive content. Such historical accounts serve to order and assess (and often legitimize or delegitimize) the politically relevant causes and characteristics of a given moment. As well as approaching more direct, explicitly politicized utterances in the texts under discussion, this thesis emphasizes the political implications of broader narratives, themes, and patterns.

This thesis also analyzes the distinct rhetorical and argumentative structures utilized within texts that Pocock describes as 'languages', or 'idioms'.<sup>162</sup> Such languages represent the argumentative, terminological, and stylistic frameworks within which political thought can be seen to operate.<sup>163</sup> They are composed of particular, often specialist, vocabularies and distinctive argumentative norms, processes, and assumptions.<sup>164</sup> Thus, languages form 'individually recognizable patterns and styles' that both contain and convey 'modes, linguistic and political, of assumption, implication, and ambiguity'.<sup>165</sup> Crucially, such languages are not discrete ecosystems: they are rather multivalent, often overlapping, and frequently subject to transformation. Thinkers operate within them, but they also operate across and against them.

This approach yields distinct advantages for approaching late Enlightenment German political thought. The period saw both the continuation and further proliferation of such languages in response to both major intellectual innovations and rapid political changes. The 1770s saw the emergence of an unstable, even ambiguous, language around 'culture' (described below), while the elaboration of

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<sup>162</sup> Pocock, J. G. A., 'Languages and their implications: the Transformation of the Study of Political Thought', in idem., *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1971), 3-41.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 21-23.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 26.

the Critical Philosophy in the 1780s transformed the terms in which philosophy could be discussed. If one can write of a language particular to the transcendental philosophers, then this language interacted with and served to sharpen the languages of its competitors. At the same time, the older political-philosophical language of natural law continued to be used and, as shown in the second chapter, adapted to the needs of novel concepts and arguments.<sup>166</sup> Within this framework, race occupied an ambiguous position, appearing within, and sometimes joining together, seemingly very different idioms like physiology and culture. The various expressions of these ideas were also frequently subsumed within a broader language of Enlightenment.

Rather than simply identifying particular languages, this thesis aims to reconstruct the specific arguments used by its protagonists and the political debates they engaged with. This reveals a series of debates in which participants appropriated different, often overlapping, languages. In articulating their solutions to contemporary disputes, the protagonists of this thesis alternatively rejected, adopted, and transformed the various languages to which they had access. They thus also conveyed judgments regarding the value and implications of distinctive, linguistic modes of reasoning. For example, Meiners constructed a version of natural law compatible with his thinking about the relationships between culture and hereditary difference. By contrast, Schlözer rejected key languages of metaphysical and ethical reasoning, seeing them as frivolous distractions from pressing political problems. Such interventions operated on a number of levels, often seeking to delineate the proper limits of a given area of debate or mode of argumentation. It is often in the utilization of older political

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<sup>166</sup> On natural law, or 'natural jurisprudence', as a language see Pocock, J. G. A., *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), 38, 104-108.

languages alongside newer ones that both continuity and change become discernable. These thinkers did not wholly transcend the vocabularies, modes of reasoning, and rhetoric associated with moral history, natural law, and the Enlightened narrative. Their work therefore demonstrates considerable continuities with each of these facets of contemporary thought. However, in their concurrent utilization of innovative ideas and arguments, they ultimately reformulated and transformed these older political languages.

Finally, a significant aim of this thesis is to comprehend the historical meanings and transformation of particular concepts. The most prevalent of these is the notion of Enlightenment, although I also examine distinct conceptualizations of ethics, human difference, and European modernity. Consequently, this thesis makes use of certain ideas associated with the study of 'conceptual history [*Begriffsgeschichte*]' pioneered by Reinhart Koselleck, Otto Brunner, and their colleagues.<sup>167</sup> However, it also builds on Dan Edelstein's problematization of certain traditional *Begriffsgeschichte* methods: when discussing contemporary uses of terms like Enlightenment, it is important to pay close attention to the sometimes-drastic differences in the employment of such words.<sup>168</sup> Historians must be alert to the connotations and implications of such terms and expressions within broader 'terminological constellations'.<sup>169</sup> By utilizing methods from both *Begriffsgeschichte* and Anglophone intellectual history, I hope to reconstruct both these concepts and their roles as means of intervening in political debates. As indicated by Melvin Richter, much is to be gained through the utilization of ideas across the

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<sup>167</sup> On *Begriffsgeschichte*, see in particular Koselleck, Reinhart *Begriffsgeschichten* (Frankfurt a. M., 2006), 9-103; Brunner, Otto et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: historisches Lexikon zur politischen-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 6 Vols. (Stuttgart, 1972-1997).

<sup>168</sup> Edelstein, Dan, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago, IL, 2010), 14-15.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

methodological traditions of both *Begriffsgeschichte* and the so-called Cambridge School.<sup>170</sup>

While these are the core methodological principles of this thesis, several concepts require further attention. Both the contemporary circumstances of the German lands and the principal themes of this thesis necessitate more specific considerations regarding crucial, frequently contested, concepts. This section does not aim to resolve the various debates around these ideas, but rather to establish the conceptual and methodological frameworks employed in the following chapters.

### 0.3.2. Enlightenment (and Romanticism)

The concept, limits, and defining features of 'Enlightenment' – or *Aufklärung* – remain subject to considerable controversy. More sociological approaches, most notably those of Ernest Manheim (1900-2002) and Jürgen Habermas, have emphasized the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere [*bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*] characterized by reasoned discourse between autonomous participants.<sup>171</sup> Whereas earlier scholars suggested that the German public sphere emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century, Ursula Goldenbaum has convincingly argued that it emerged a century earlier.<sup>172</sup> Conceptualizing the Enlightenment in terms of the public sphere has proved to be influential, and this thesis makes some use of such ideas

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<sup>170</sup> Richter, Melvin, *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford, 1995), 124-142.

<sup>171</sup> Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. & ed. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA, 1989); Manheim, Ernest, *Aufklärung und öffentliche Meinung* (Stuttgart, 1979). See also Habermas, Jürgen, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 2 Vols. (Frankfurt a. M., 1981).

<sup>172</sup> Goldenbaum, Ursula, 'Die öffentliche Debatte in der deutschen Aufklärung 1697-1796. Einleitung', in idem. (ed.), *Appell an das Publikum: Die öffentliche Debatte in der deutschen Aufklärung, 1687-1796*, 2 Vols. (Berlin, 2004), 18-118. This work uses continuous pagination across both volumes.

in considering its protagonists' self-conscious engagements with their audiences and contemporary notions of public discourse. Equally, the emphasis placed on concepts, practices, and technologies of mediation in Clifford Siskin and William Warner's edited volume *This is Enlightenment* are particularly salient when approaching the ways in which contemporary thinkers understood both the means and goals of communicating information.<sup>173</sup> Martin Gierl has compellingly emphasized the role of novel modes of organizing and communicating ideas in the Enlightenment, especially via scientific [*wissenschaftlich*] institutions like those at Göttingen.<sup>174</sup>

While each of these approaches are valuable, this thesis is primarily concerned with the intellectual content of Enlightenment thought, rather than the norms and means by which such ideas were organized and exchanged. Although such debates have roots in the period itself, identifying a coherent body of principles or ideas that bind the various, often antagonistic, currents of Enlightenment thought has been the subject of on-going controversy.<sup>175</sup> These debates are complicated by political concerns and, in particular, theories of twentieth-century liberalism and totalitarianism. In 1932 Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) described Enlightenment rationalism and cosmopolitanism as an alternative to aggressive nationalism.<sup>176</sup> By

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<sup>173</sup> Siskin, Clifford & Warner, William, 'This is Enlightenment: an invitation in the form of an argument', in idem. (eds.), *This Is Enlightenment* (Chicago, IL, 2010), 1-36.

<sup>174</sup> Gierl, Martin, 'Commentarii und Commentationes – Wissenschaft erhandeln im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Aufklärung*, Vol. 26 (2014), 31-65; Gierl, Martin, 'De la croyance religieuse à la croyance scientifique', in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Vol. 123 (1998), 86-94; Gierl, Martin, *Geschichte als präzisierte Wissenschaft: Johann Christoph Gatterer und die Historiographie des 18. Jahrhunderts im ganzen Umfang* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2012), 5-43.

<sup>175</sup> In particular the debate instigated by Johann Friedrich Zöllner in 1783 which provoked Kant's famous response. See Schmidt, James (ed.), *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley, CA, 2013).

<sup>176</sup> Cassirer, Ernst, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, ed. Birgit Recki (Hamburg, 2003).

contrast, twelve years later Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) argued that Nazism was itself a product of the Enlightenment's rationalist-liberal impulses.<sup>177</sup> In his influential 1973 essay on the so-called Counter-Enlightenment, Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) proposed the concurrent existence of a rational, universalist Enlightenment and a vitalist, particularist Counter-Enlightenment.<sup>178</sup> In this and other works, Berlin suggested that certain Counter-Enlightenment figures – most notably Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) and Johann Gottfried Herder – prefigured his own position of value pluralism, while others – most notably Joseph de Maistre – laid the intellectual foundations for modern totalitarianism.<sup>179</sup> The influence of Berlin's concept has waned in recent years as scholars have challenged earlier distinctions between Enlightenment universalism and Counter-Enlightenment particularism, while Robert E. Norton has demonstrated the various ways in which Berlin misrepresented his subjects.<sup>180</sup> Consequently, few historians now see direct relationships between certain eighteenth-century ideas and twentieth-century totalitarianism.

Nevertheless, the nature of the Enlightenment, and especially its (possible) relationship to modern liberal-democratic political

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<sup>177</sup> Horkheimer, Max & Adorno, Theodor W., *Dialektik der Aufklärung: philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt a. M., 2010).

<sup>178</sup> Berlin, Isaiah, 'The Counter-Enlightenment', in idem., *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York, NY, 1980), 1-25.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 13-14, 23-24; Berlin, Isaiah, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (London, 2000), 19-20; Berlin, Isaiah, 'Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism', in idem., *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (2nd edn. Princeton, NJ, 2013), 129-130, 161-162.

<sup>180</sup> Carhart's *Science of Culture* and Reill's *The Rise of Historicism* have both emphasized the role of particularism in Enlightenment thought. Norton, Robert E., 'The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Oct., 2007), 635-658. Avi Lifschitz has also emphasized the problematic nature – and historical contexts of – Berlin's notion of a sharp Enlightenment/Counter-Enlightenment distinction. Lifschitz, Avi, 'Between Friedrich Meinecke and Ernst Cassirer: Isaiah Berlin's Bifurcated Enlightenment', in Brockliss, Laurence & Robertson, Ritchie (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin and the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2016), 51-67.

ideas remain fiercely debated. Annelien de Dijn has traced, and indeed challenged, the 'modernization thesis' that links eighteenth-century philosophy with later liberal-democratic norms, from Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (1966-1970) to Jonathan Israel's so-called 'Enlightenment trilogy' (2001-2011).<sup>181</sup> Israel's work emphasizes the intellectual struggle between a 'radical Enlightenment' and a conservative 'moderate Enlightenment'. Israel is not the only scholar to propose the existence of a radical Enlightenment exemplified by secretive organisations and the circulation of subversive, often clandestine texts.<sup>182</sup> However, his claims that the radical Enlightenment played a central role in both contemporary thought and the emergence of modern liberal-democratic values have been particularly controversial.<sup>183</sup> The latter argument in particular has been described as both anachronistic and illusory.<sup>184</sup>

By contrast, John Robertson's *The Case for the Enlightenment* (2005) offers an important response to Jonathan Israel, J. G. A. Pocock, and others who claim that historians can no longer speak of one Enlightenment. Such historians propose rather a number of Enlightenments distributed according to philosophical, confessional,

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<sup>181</sup> Dijn, Annelien de, 'The Politics of Enlightenment: from Peter Gay to Jonathan Israel', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Sept. 2012), 785-805; Gay, Peter, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 Vols. (London, 1966-1970); Israel, Jonathan, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2001); Israel, Jonathan, *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford, 2006); Israel, Jonathan, *Democratic Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>182</sup> See in particular Wade, Ira O., *The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750* (Princeton, NJ, 1938); Jacob, Margaret C., *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London, 1981); Ducheyne, Steffen (ed.), *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment* (London, 2017).

<sup>183</sup> By contrast, Martin Mulsow describes the radical ideas of the early German Enlightenment as 'a fragmented movement' that sheds light on the boundaries of acceptable contemporary discourse. Mulsow, Martin, *Enlightenment Underground: Radical Germany, 1680-1720*, trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort (Charlottesville, VA, 2015), 2, 306.

<sup>184</sup> La Vopa, Anthony J., 'A New Intellectual History? Jonathan Israel's Enlightenment', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Sept., 2009), 719.

or geographical divisions.<sup>185</sup> Robertson on the other hand identifies the Enlightenment's 'intellectual coherence' in 'the commitment to understanding, and hence to advancing, the causes and conditions of human betterment in this world'.<sup>186</sup> This did not of course imply atheism, or even a serious critique of Christian dogma, but simply a commitment to the use of reason to improve human conditions in this world without presupposing the conditions of the next. This unifying concern appears to hold from 1740 onwards, even as it is worth noting that key figures – including those discussed in this thesis – saw particular religious doctrines as uniquely suited to the betterment of mundane conditions. Robertson also emphasizes the role of the public in Enlightenment discourse and rhetoric. During the Enlightenment, thinkers adopted a self-consciously public-facing style of argument to 'set themselves a common intellectual agenda'.<sup>187</sup> Whereas Habermas' public sphere was a realm typified by the sociable exchange of independent, rational arguments, the characteristic feature of Robertson's account is the use of appeals to the public – and especially the notion of public opinion – as a means to effect social and political change.<sup>188</sup> These two modes of public writing are not mutually exclusive, but represent different emphases regarding the characteristic features of that writing. Both the idea of worldly betterment and the role of the public do appear to have characterized Enlightenment thought from the second half of the eighteenth century.

However, this thesis departs from Robertson's account in crucial ways. Robertson claims that Enlightenment thinkers thought 'the purpose of reform should be the removal of obstacles to the

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<sup>185</sup> Robertson, John, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 9-10.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-40.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



optimal course of development'.<sup>189</sup> Focusing on the cases of Naples and Scotland, Robertson argues that Enlightenment thinkers sought to limit government intervention in social and economic affairs.<sup>190</sup> This claim appears less applicable to the German lands. Rather than primarily seeking to limit government imposition, eighteenth-century German thinkers typically proposed the use of carefully calibrated policies that directly intervened in social and economic life.<sup>191</sup> Most thinkers did not suggest that governments should limit interference in the lives and transactions of their subjects, but rather that such interference should follow rational principles. To exclude these ideas from the Enlightenment would leave the German lands with less an *Aufklärung* than a scattering of isolated figures, like Kant, committed to what are now seen as 'liberal' principles. Unlike eighteenth-century Scots and Neapolitans, contemporary Germans did possess a term corresponding to the modern notion of Enlightenment. It therefore seems effective to approach their political arguments in terms of what they considered to be Enlightened [*aufgeklärt*].

The other key point on which this thesis departs from Robertson's account is his temporal limitation of Enlightenment to the period between the 1740s and 1790s. Robertson situates the beginning of the Enlightenment in the 1740s with reference to the features described in the previous paragraph. Prior to this period, the (sometimes radical) disputes around religious truth, rather than mundane betterment, dominated public debate. This may serve to characterize what could be described as an 'Enlightenment project', or self-conscious commitment to a distinctive programme of human

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Klippel, Diethelm, 'Reasonable Aims of Civil Society: Concerns of the State in German Political Theory in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', in Brewster, John & Hellmuth, Eckhart, *Rethinking Leviathan: The Eighteenth-Century State in Britain and Germany* (Oxford, 1999), 71-98.

improvement, but it does not elucidate thinkers' self-perception of living within a period of Enlightenment.<sup>192</sup>

Similarly, Robertson suggests, the 1790s saw a loss of confidence in the prospects of social progress and human betterment.<sup>193</sup> There was in this period a notable rise of overtly anti-Enlightenment thought within the German lands, alongside transformations in how Enlightenment could be conceived. In the wake of the French Revolution thinkers began reformulating notions of Enlightenment, progress, and European modernity in ways that fundamentally challenged and subverted central assumptions from previous decades. Nevertheless, most German thinkers appear to have remained broadly optimistic about the prospect of human progress, even as they expressed anxieties about the crises of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. In this sense there was a growing ambivalence about the prospects of Enlightenment. This may broadly correspond to Robertson's notion of a decline in confidence, even as many Germans – including the protagonists of this thesis – continued to perceive themselves as living within an Enlightened age.

In order to account for these nuances, this thesis approaches Enlightenment via the self-reflexive usage of the term and its associated concepts by contemporary thinkers. As indicated above, this approach owes much to the practice of conceptual history and the work of Dan Edelstein. Like Robertson, Edelstein emphasizes the unitary nature of Enlightenment, but concludes that it was 'a "master narrative" of modernity, even a myth' expressed by its

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<sup>192</sup> Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, 41. As Robertson notes, the concept 'Enlightenment project' was first used by Alasdair Macintyre to refer to 'the project of an independent justification of morality', but has since taken on a more expansive meaning. Macintyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (3rd edn. Notre Dame, IN, 2007), 36.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

participants.<sup>194</sup> According to this master narrative, contemporary Europe had, via the seventeenth-century 'Scientific Revolution', emerged from ignorance and darkness to a modernity 'finally rivalling the glorious heights of ancient Greece and Rome'.<sup>195</sup> This master narrative emerged through the specificities of the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns [*querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*] among French intellectuals between about 1675 and 1730, before undergoing important changes in scope and definition.<sup>196</sup>

Importantly, Edelstein's 'master narrative' of Enlightenment is distinct from the 'Enlightened narrative' described by Pocock. Although texts may well embody both, and indeed both are relevant to this thesis, they are distinct concepts. Both narratives understood contemporary Europe as having transcended both medieval darkness and the classical world. However, in the master narrative it was the intellectual advances of the previous century that directly precipitated this new situation, while the Enlightened narrative, examined in the third chapter, was a historiographical norm that focused on the broader conditions – typically rooted in the late Middle Ages – that had made such later advances possible. The Enlightened narrative was a means of explaining an exceptionally complex long-term historical process; the master narrative of Enlightenment was closer to a rhetorical construction that writers used to situate themselves within an Enlightened age. While these narratives are mutually compatible, they reflect distinct functions in discussions of Europe's history and circumstances.

Edelstein's work focuses on French thought during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries but his conclusion appears to be applicable to German thinkers writing a century

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<sup>194</sup> Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, 2-3, 116.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

later.<sup>197</sup> Unsurprisingly, however, the master narratives that characterized Enlightenment in the works of Schläzer, Meiners, Eichhorn and Villers differed in crucial ways from those of Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670-1742), Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757), and even later writers like Voltaire (1694-1778) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784). As the following chapters show, the narratives of Schläzer and his colleagues were preoccupied with a number of problems that, while not exclusively German, nevertheless reflect debates particularly prevalent in the German lands. Their iterations of the master narrative prioritized key problems in the controversy over Kant's Critical Philosophy, the causes and implications of human difference, and the problem of reconciling Enlightened modernity with the depredations of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Each of the protagonists of this thesis agreed that they lived in a space and a time that could broadly be described as Enlightened. Nevertheless, they delimited that space and time in different ways and offered competing explanations of the process through which Enlightenment occurred.

Before turning to the problem of culture, it is necessary to briefly discuss Romanticism. German Romanticism is now generally seen as having emerged in the second half of the 1790s before becoming one of the leading intellectual movements of the nineteenth century.<sup>198</sup> Frederick Beiser, among others, has challenged earlier notions of a clear discontinuity between Enlightenment and Romanticism.<sup>199</sup> Instead, it is more coherent to see early German

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<sup>197</sup> Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, 4.

<sup>198</sup> Schmidt, Ricarda, 'From early to late Romanticism', in Saul, Nicholas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism* (Cambridge, 2009), 21-40.

<sup>199</sup> Beiser, Frederick C., *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 4; Beiser, Frederick C., 'Introduction', in idem. (ed.), *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge, 1996), xi-xxix. See also Seyhan, Azade, 'What is Romanticism, and where did it come from?', in Saul (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, 1-9.

Romanticism as an original, albeit idiosyncratic and critical, continuation – or even radicalization – of Enlightenment thought. Rather than a fixed border between the two intellectual currents, it is more accurate to speak of a complex relationship in which Romanticism adapted, challenged, and transformed Enlightenment ideas. Equally, Romantic ideas and impulses could in turn impact Enlightenment thinkers.<sup>200</sup>

Romanticism is not one of the central themes of this thesis but, due to both its relationship with Enlightenment and its contemporary importance, it is important to establish its distinctive characteristics in this period. One crucial dimension of early Romantic thought is its mythopoeic qualities, which emphasize the use of aesthetic forms and strategies to overcome the limits of rational analysis and thereby transcend a perceived fragmentation of subjective experience and objective reality.<sup>201</sup> In Romantic thought, aesthetic subjectivity provided a source of epistemic-spiritual transcendence, whether experienced through the visual arts, literature, or other forms. Azade Seyhan has argued that, for Romantic authors, poetry – and, in later accounts, other artistic forms – should 'heal the breach in modern consciousness by recreating the consolation of the mythical'.<sup>202</sup>

While Schlözer, Meiners, and Eichhorn each discussed the value of artistic works as means of understanding specific groups and their values, none imbued such works with the transcendental qualities granted them by the Romantics. Villers' case is more complicated. His intellectual relationship with Germaine de Staël is well documented, and he engaged closely with other figures associated with Romanticism, including Jean Paul Richter (1763-

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<sup>200</sup> Perhaps most notably, Johann Gottlieb Fichte's work both influenced and was influenced by Romantic thought. La Vopa, Anthony J., *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762-1799* (Cambridge, 2001), 12-13.

<sup>201</sup> Seyhan, 'What is Romanticism?', 10-19.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

1825) and both Schlegel brothers.<sup>203</sup> He also emphasized the role of literature in shaping beneficial norms and behaviours within cultural groups.<sup>204</sup> Villers' relationship with Romanticism will be discussed in the conclusions to this thesis but, crucially, he did not present art as a means to 'heal the breach in modern consciousness'.<sup>205</sup> The protagonists of this thesis wrote concurrently with the emergence of early Romanticism, dealt with many of the same themes and intellectual problems as did their Romantic contemporaries, and in some cases – most notably that of Villers – engaged directly with Romantic ideas. They should not be seen as working in isolation from Romanticism. Nevertheless, their primary intellectual frames of reference remained the various debates, ideas, and argumentative strategies of the Enlightenment proper.

### 0.3.3. Culture

Culture is both one of the central themes of this thesis and a notoriously multivalent – and contested – concept. Ben Highmore has identified three key sets of meanings associated with culture that, while not discrete, offer an important framework for approaching

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<sup>203</sup> Villers, Charles de, 'L'"Érotique comparée": texte', in idem., *L'"Érotique Comparée"*, ed. Egli, 178. Richter's position as a Romantic is controversial, but he remains strongly associated with the movement. See Fleming, Paul, *The Pleasures of Abandonment: Jean Paul and the Life of Humor* (Bonn, 2005), 41-44; Cisbani, Valentina, *Umorismo e sublime in Jean Paul Richter* (Rome, 2012), 23-39. Letters between Villers and the Schlegels have been published. They do not substantially discuss theoretical matters, but do indicate considerable interest in each other's ideas. Grunwald, M. (ed.), 'Briefe von Karl von Holtei, aus dem Goethekreis, von Jacob Grimm, den Humboldts, Schlegels, Chr. F. Krause, Baggesen, Overbeck u. a.', in Lindau, Paul (ed.), *Nord und Süd. Eine deutsche Monatsschrift*, Vol. 84 (Breslau, 1898), 109-111.

<sup>204</sup> For example, Villers, Charles de, 'Lettre de M. Charles Villers, correspondant de l'Institut de France, à M. Millin, membre de l'Institut et de la Legion d'honneur, sur un Recueil d'anciennes poésies allemandes', in *Magasin Encyclopédique*, Vol. 5 (1810), 5-8.

<sup>205</sup> Monique Bernard has argued that Villers was a transitional figure between Enlightenment and Romanticism. This thesis supports this perspective, but emphasizes his engagement with the former. Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', 318.

it.<sup>206</sup> First, the 'activity or phenomena of growing or tending to something', as in the word agriculture; second, 'a form of *cultivation* for the mind and for the citizen (as lessons in taste, in manners, in art, in intellectual endeavour)' typically organized around specific artefacts, and often referred to in hierarchical terms like 'high culture' and 'low culture'; third, the term associated with modern cultural anthropology, of a 'way of life'. In further elucidating this last meaning, Edward Burnett Tylor's 1871 description remains valuable: culture in this sense 'is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'.<sup>207</sup> While these sets of meanings frequently overlap, this thesis is primarily interested in what would now be considered under the latter concept.

However, this concept has been subject to important shifts in meaning. The notion of culture became an important category for thinking about humanity and historical change during the 1770s, while the use of the plural form only appeared in the late nineteenth century.<sup>208</sup> In the eighteenth century, culture primarily appeared as a unitary facet of the progress of humanity that encompassed crucial dimensions of morality, customs, material products, and institutions. Describing a group in terms of culture meant establishing its position on a universal, gradational – and usually hierarchical – scale from primitive humanity to commercial modernity. This contrasts with the modern plural concept according to which cultures may be considered, at least to some extent, independent phenomena comprising ways of life unique to each group.

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<sup>206</sup> Highmore, Ben, *Culture* (London, 2015), 1-4.

<sup>207</sup> Tylor, like many figures in this thesis, used 'man' when referring to humanity in general, something that this thesis will avoid except when citing such usage directly. Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, Vol. 1 (London, 1871), 1.

<sup>208</sup> Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1976), 74-77; Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 23-26.

This distinction enjoins nuance and caution when discussing culture in Enlightenment thought. The features subsumed under culture have remained largely stable, but this shifting conceptualization of culture informs my use of the term. When describing contemporary claims, I make efforts to utilize the term in ways that are consistent with contemporary usage. Thus, I refer to cultural groups rather than cultures. While the works in this thesis did not speak of cultures, they did understand groups within particular historical moments as bearing the distinctive characteristics of their particular position in the development of human culture. The manifestations of that position characterized the behaviours and ideas of that group and thus also delineated them as a category of people, meaning that the group may fairly be described as cultural. Similarly, when in the following chapter Meiners and Villers express concerns around the 'cultural' impact of particular moral ideas, they are concerned that such ideas, should they be adopted by enough individuals, would provoke the cultural regress or progress of a certain people. Culture was a universal continuum comprising the history of human artifice and thought, but intellectuals did perceive the positionality, and possibilities of transformation, among and between different groups.

The most common expression of culture that concerns this thesis is morality, or those ideas and behaviours deemed to have ethical meaning. There was a broad lexical inventory for contemporary thinkers to describe such cultural facets. English writers typically spoke of morals (or, with fewer ethical overtones, manners), while the French wrote of *mœurs* or a genitive construction using *la moralité*, such as Villers' *la moralité des nations*.<sup>209</sup> The most common German term was *Sitten*, which – like

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<sup>209</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 2nd edn., 383.



the French *mœurs* – included a broad range of customs with strong ethical connotations. A more neutral term for customs would be *Gewohnheiten*, which also appears on occasion. When used by these writers, *Sitten* often described what, depending on context, may fairly be called the cultural morals, values, or norms of a given group. They were the morally relevant practices or ideas common to a group of people, which in turn reflected their position in the broader spectrum of human culture. The use of these concepts to comprehend the causes and effects of political events, institutions, and problems may be seen as a language in Pocock's sense.

Crucially, the kinds of cultural analysis that these thinkers performed on various groups were closely related to the emergence of new ideas about how to study human groups through time: the study of culture was inseparable from the study of history.

#### 0.3.4. History, Historicism, Ethnology, and Ethnography

Reinhart Koselleck described the period of historiographical transformation between 1750 and 1850 as the *Sattelzeit*.<sup>210</sup> This transformation, centred in the German lands, represented the transition – in Daniel Fulda's words – 'from the plurality of exemplary histories to one autonomous history' in methodology, presentation, and purpose.<sup>211</sup> By integrating specific socio-cultural contingencies into unified historical narratives, the work of the thinkers described in this thesis can be seen as emblematic of the *Sattelzeit*'s novel

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<sup>210</sup> Koselleck, Reinhart, 'Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft', in idem., *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt a. M., 2000), 302-303. On the expansion of the *Sattelzeit* concept to include other transformations, see Williamson, George S., 'Retracing the *Sattelzeit*: Thoughts on the historiography of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras', in *Central European History*, Vol. 51 (2018), 66-74.

<sup>211</sup> Fulda, Daniel, 'Sattelzeit. Karriere und Problematik eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Zentralbegriffs', in idem. & Décultot, Elisabeth (eds.), *Sattelzeit: Historiographiegeschichtliche Revisionen* (Berlin, 2016), 4.

historical thinking. However, they were also key participants in crucial currents and methodological innovations within the *Sattelzeit* itself.

Peter Hanns Reill has argued that the historical methods developed at the University of Göttingen played a critical role in the emergence of novel ideas around the nature and study of history that came to be described as 'historicism'.<sup>212</sup> Although Reill does not examine the ideas of Meiners, Eichhorn, or Villers in depth, these authors – and Schlözer, whom Reill does discuss – should be considered important participants in this process. Historicism is often seen as a foundational movement in the development of modern historical scholarship and, although the term did not appear until the late nineteenth century, it remains an important category for thinking about earlier historiography. Frederick Beiser has offered a definition of the term based on Ernst Troeltsch's claim that historicism's aim is to 'historicize our thinking'.<sup>213</sup> Accordingly,

to historicize our thinking means to recognize that everything in the human world – culture, values, institutions, practices, rationality – is made by history, so that nothing has an eternal form, permanent essence or constant identity which transcends historical change.<sup>214</sup>

As they did suggest certain unchanging aspects of human existence, the thinkers examined in this thesis were not historicists in this later sense. However, they did historicize many aspects of human experience, including – variously – 'culture, values, institutions, [and] practices'. This practice of historicization is a recurring and

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<sup>212</sup> Reill, *The Rise of Historicism*, passim.

<sup>213</sup> Beiser, Frederick C., *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford, 2010), 2; Troeltsch, Ernst, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3: *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (Tübingen, 1922), 102.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

important theme in their political thought, and they – along with their peers – laid crucial groundwork for later historicists. Consequently, the historicization of particular aspects of human existence is an important, even central, theme of this thesis.

This process of historicization is further connected to the development of 'pragmatic history'. Many of the works discussed in this thesis can be understood in terms of pragmatic history and, I argue, this concept plays an important role in understanding such works as political texts. The notion of pragmatic history that developed at Göttingen – distinct from its classical namesake – 'placed', according to Reill, 'particulate events into a complex system of acting and interreacting relations', with 'the highest, though unattainable, goal of pragmatic history [... being] the portrayal of the universal connection of all things'.<sup>215</sup> This ideal was explicitly articulated by Johann Christoph Gatterer in the first volume of his *Allgemeine historische Bibliothek*, and then developed by Schlözer, Eichhorn, and others over the following decades.<sup>216</sup> Pragmatic history was not restricted to a specific genre, and its principles were used across a range of historiographical forms. Moreover, the contextual emphasis of pragmatic history on social, cultural, and other factors in historical change necessarily encouraged investigation into these factors. In organizing and ordering 'pragmatic' accounts of historical change, historians inflected their work with political assumptions and arguments regarding the primacy of particular factors in generating desirable or undesirable circumstances. This, furthermore, meant

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<sup>215</sup> Reill, *The Rise of Historicism*, 41-45. The term 'pragmatic history' derives from classical and Renaissance historiography, whereby history was presented as a collection of events from which students could draw lessons. References to pragmatic history in this thesis are to the eighteenth-century concept. For further discussion see Vierhaus, Rudolf, 'Historisches Interesse im 18., Jahrhundert', in Bödeker, Hans Erich, et al. (eds.), *Aufklärung und Geschichte*, 264-275; Fulda, *Wissenschaft aus Kunst*, 59-99.

<sup>216</sup> Gatterer, Johann Christoph, 'Vom historischen Plan, und der darauf sich gründenden Zusammenfügung der Erzählungen', in idem. (ed.), *Allgemeine historische Bibliothek*, Vol. 1 (Halle, 1767), 84-85.

that many of the ideas about culture and its history pioneered at Göttingen were developed precisely in order to generate the knowledge required by pragmatic history.<sup>217</sup>

Such approaches to history were thus closely related to emerging ideas about ethnography and ethnology. The late eighteenth century was a period of particular importance in the emergence of modern ethnographic and ethnological ideas and practices. André de Melo Araújo has emphasized the development of ethnological methods as 'empirically-driven' responses to more metaphysical accounts of human nature.<sup>218</sup> As Jörn Garber has shown, such ideas placed increasing emphasis on the study of humanity and historical change within distinct cultural contexts.<sup>219</sup> Importantly, Han Vermeulen has emphasized the need for caution when thinking about the relationship between ethnology and ethnography on the one hand, and anthropology on the other.<sup>220</sup> Ethnography first emerged as a way to understand individual groups and was developed to study the various subject peoples of the Russian Empire, while ethnology sought to organize 'a comprehensive and critical study of [all] peoples'.<sup>221</sup> By contrast, Vermeulen writes that during the Enlightenment 'anthropology was a medical, biological, or philosophical study of humankind'.<sup>222</sup> In the Enlightenment, both ethnology and ethnography were considered part of the study of history and thus distinct from anthropology. This was because they sought to process new sources of information in terms of the historical development of humanity and its various divisions, while

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<sup>217</sup> Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen*, 17.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>219</sup> Garber, Jörn, 'Die 'Bestimmung des Menschen' in der ethnologischen Kulturtheorie der deutschen und französischen Spätaufklärung', in *Aufklärung*, Vol. 14: *Aufklärung und Anthropologie* (2002), 161-164.

<sup>220</sup> Vermeulen, Han F., *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (Lincoln, NE, 2015), 365. Ethnology 'became' part of anthropology later in the nineteenth century.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6, 8.

anthropology largely sought to understand humanity in its essential, ahistorical form.

The 'science of culture' and the development of ethnology and ethnography are therefore important, even inextricable, dimensions of the broader story of historical thought at Göttingen. Such ethnological ideas appeared packaged in a range of nominally historical genres. For example, both German and non-German writers of 'philosophical histories', like Johann Gottfried Herder, Antoine-Yves Goguet (1716-1758), and Adam Ferguson, thought that understanding past and present human societies could reveal, in Carhart's words, the 'general laws' of 'human conduct', and thereby demonstrate the conditions for progress.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, Jörn Garber has shown how works on the 'history of humanity [*Geschichte der Menschheit*]' – a term coined by Isaak Iselin (1728-1782) – were particularly important in the emergence of ethnological thinking.<sup>224</sup> Like 'philosophical histories', such texts used accounts of human difference in order to determine the central conditions and factors that would result in different forms of historical and cultural change.<sup>225</sup> Meiners' *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* – discussed in the second chapter – is one of the genre's most important examples: rather than a narrative history, the *Grundriß* describes the factors (both internal and external) that, Meiners thought, had resulted in the present conditions of various human communities around the world. Similarly, Araújo has examined how the genre of 'world history [*Weltgeschichte*]' was closely tied to the

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<sup>223</sup> Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 150-151.

<sup>224</sup> Garber, Jörn, 'Von der "anthropologischen Geschichte des philosophierenden Geistes" zur Geschichte der Menschheit (Friedrich August Carus)', in idem. & Thoma, Heinz (eds.), *Zwischen Empirisierung und Konstruktionsleistung: Anthropologie im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 2004), 219-261. On Iselin, see Gisi, Lucas Marco & Rother, Wolfgang (eds.), *Isaak Iselin und die Geschichtsphilosophie der europäischen Aufklärung* (Basel, 2011); Kaposy, Béla, *Iselin contra Rousseau: Sociable Patriotism and the History of Mankind* (Basel, 2006).

<sup>225</sup> Garber, 'Friedrich August Carus', 224-228.

emergence of ethnology, as the former sought to bring 'the *whole world empirically* into view'.<sup>226</sup> Göttingen was a crucial, and profoundly influential, site for the development of these ideas in the late eighteenth century.<sup>227</sup> Texts in each of these historical genres – philosophical histories, *Geschichte der Menschheit*, and *Weltgeschichte* – reappear as important works in the following chapters.

As with other forms of historical writing, ethnological and ethnographic debates had profoundly political implications. As Thomas Strack has noted, late eighteenth-century discussions of human difference were 'necessarily tied to the controversy surrounding slavery as well as to the debate about the general perfectibility of humankind'.<sup>228</sup> Jonathan Hess has shown how discussions around non-European, and especially Asian, peoples were tied to debates about Jewish emancipation.<sup>229</sup> Understanding the nature of Jewishness would reveal whether Jews – often seen as an 'Asiatic' people – could ever truly become part of German society. The interventions of Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers in these particular debates will be discussed in the second chapter, while the first and third chapters indicate other ways in which such writings presented political arguments.

Indeed, the political arguments advanced across such historical genres varied greatly, but allegedly beneficial features of

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<sup>226</sup> Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen*, 9-10. His emphasis.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>228</sup> Strack, Thomas, 'Philosophical Anthropology on the Eve of Biological Determinism: Immanuel Kant and Georg Forster on the Moral Qualities and Biological Characteristics of the Human Race', in *Central European History*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1996), 285. See also Wilson, W. Daniel, 'Enlightenment Encounters the Islamic and Arabic Worlds: The German "Missing Link" in Said's Orientalist Narrative (Meiners and Herder)', in Hodkinson, James & Morrison, Jeffrey (eds.), *Encounters with Islam in German Literature and Culture* (Rochester, NY, 2009), 73-88.

<sup>229</sup> Hess, Jonathan M., 'Johann David Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary: Orientalism in the Emergence of Racial Antisemitism in Eighteenth-Century Germany', in *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series: Vol. 6, No. 2 (2000), 56-101.

historical change were typically conflated with notions of Enlightenment. This created a symbiotic relationship between accounts of culture and broader conceptions of what it meant to live in an Enlightened age. Thus, late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century German notions of history and historiography were often closely tied to ethnology and ethnography, and such considerations on the relationships between history and human difference were highly politicized.

#### 0.3.5. Political Categorizations

While it had always accommodated extensive political debate, the German public sphere became increasingly politicized in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Advances in press circulation opened up new spaces for political discourse, and unrest in Europe and the Americas provoked major debates about both the unrest itself and the contemporary circumstances of the German lands.<sup>230</sup> With the outbreak of the French Revolution and the series of crises that followed, political concerns became a dominant feature of German intellectual life. Several scholars have seen the political debates around the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period as having shaped the emergence of modern political (to use Valjavec's term) 'currents [*Strömungen*]' such as liberalism, conservatism, and even socialism.<sup>231</sup> While it is clear that the period saw an increased polarization in political thought, the extent to which later political ideas can be mapped onto contemporary views is questionable. As

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<sup>230</sup> Bödeker, 'Journals and Public Opinion', 424-426; Vierhaus, Rudolf, 'The Revolutionizing of Consciousness: A German Utopia?', in Hellmuth (ed.), *Transformation of Political Culture*, 561-577; Klippel, Diethelm, 'The True Concept of Liberty: Political Theory in Germany in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', in Hellmuth (ed.), *Transformation of Political Culture*, 447-449; Goldenbaum, 'Die öffentliche Debatte', 1-118.

<sup>231</sup> Valjavec, Fritz, *Die Entstehung der politischen Strömungen*; Beiser, Frederick C., *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Epstein, Klaus, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ, 1966).

Espenhorst's work on Schlözer has shown, such approaches often fail to grasp the nuanced, complicated ways in which Enlightenment thinkers formulated political ideas.<sup>232</sup> Consequently, this thesis avoids describing contemporary intellectuals in terms of clear doctrinal categories that only crystallized in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, such as 'nationalist', 'liberal', or 'socialist'. None of the protagonists of this thesis proposed the construction of a unified German nation-state.<sup>233</sup> While each proposed ideas that may now be considered liberal, these were often either combined with deeply illiberal claims or expressed using arguments alien to later liberal thought.<sup>234</sup> None could meaningfully be described as having prefigured socialist thought. Nevertheless, certain 'directional' terms – conservative, radical, and reactionary – remain useful. Although they acquired their distinctive political meanings only later in the nineteenth century, they are helpful concepts for positioning ideas in relation to each other with regard to the prospect and form of political change.<sup>235</sup>

While they remain useful, such directional concepts remain contentious. The differences in policies, constitutions and governments across the various jurisdictions of the German lands, as

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<sup>232</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 17-21. Cf. Mühlpfordt, Günter, 'August Ludwig Schlözer und die "wahre Demokratie". Geschichts- und Obrigkeitskritik eines Anwalts der Unterdrückten unter dem Absolutismus', in *Jahrbuch des Instituts für deutsche Geschichte*, Vol. 12 (1983), 29-73; Saage, Richard, 'August Ludwig Schlözer', in Fetscher, Iring & Münkler, Herfried (eds.), *Pipers Handbuch der politischen Ideen*, Vol. 3: *Neuzeit: von den Konfessionskriegen bis zur Aufklärung* (Munich, 1985), 557.

<sup>233</sup> On the emergence of 'political nationalism' see Whaley, Joachim, 'The transformation of the *Aufklärung*: from the idea of power to the power of ideas', in Scott, Hamish & Simms, Brendan (eds.), *Cultures of power in Europe during the long eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 2010), 168-179.

<sup>234</sup> On the conceptual background of liberalism, see Rosenblatt, Helena, *The Lost History of Liberalism: from Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2018), 8-65.

<sup>235</sup> On the use of these terms in German political language, see Vierhaus, Rudolf, 'Konservativ, Konservatismus', Wende, Peter, 'Radikalismus', & Kondylis, Panajotis, 'Reaktion, Restauration' in Brunner, Otto et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Vol. 3, 531, Vol. 5, 113-133, 179-230.



well as rapid political changes within them, make it impossible to establish a comprehensive, uncontroversial set of values, ideals, or institutions through which these terms can be defined. Klaus Epstein described Ernst Brandes and August Wilhelm Rehberg (1757-1836) as 'reform conservatives' because they advocated gradual reform within contemporary institutional frameworks.<sup>236</sup> Conversely, Carl Haase disputed not only the application of this term to Rehberg and Brandes, but also the concept of 'reform conservatism' itself.<sup>237</sup> According to Haase, advocates of gradual reform are not conservatives at all, but simply pragmatists. Equally, the prominent and polarizing debates surrounding the so-called German Jacobins have considered both the popularity of 'Jacobinism' in the Holy Roman Empire, and the extent to which these 'Jacobins' were even political radicals at all.<sup>238</sup> The body of work produced by these debates is invaluable, and has contributed to a much more nuanced understanding of German history, but it has also demonstrated the difficulty of establishing conclusive definitions for these terms.

With this in mind, I use them tentatively, aware that they are necessarily tied to the specific circumstances of contemporary Europe. In this context they are considered with significant reference to the political ideals of freedom, equality, and fraternity associated with the French Revolution. While the protagonists of this thesis participated in debates with roots long before 1789, the events, ideas, and factions in Revolutionary France and then the Napoleonic era

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<sup>236</sup> Epstein, *Genesis of German Conservatism*, 548-9.

<sup>237</sup> Haase, Carl, *Ernst Brandes, 1758-1810*, Vol. 1 (Hildesheim, 1973), 311-312.

<sup>238</sup> For an overview of debates around the German Jacobins see Fehrenbach, Elisabeth, 'Deutschland und die Französische Revolution', in idem., *Politischer Umbruch und gesellschaftliche Bewegung: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Geschichte Frankreichs und Deutschlands im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1997), 29-48; Fehrenbach, Elisabeth, *Vom Ancien Régime zum Wiener Kongress* (Munich, 2001), 187-203.

nonetheless came to dominate the increasingly polarized and normative self-conception of German individuals and groups.

Accordingly, I use 'conservative' to refer to expressions of broad satisfaction with the core social and political institutions within a given territory, while allowing for a degree of limited and/or gradual change in favour of expanding the rights held by disadvantaged classes, promoting social and/or political mobility, and/or limiting hierarchical relationships of power, distinctions, and privileges insofar as such changes would not drastically alter the primary functions or fundamental structures of those social and political institutions. In cases where a territory had been incorporated into Revolutionary France or the Napoleonic Empire, such descriptions are tied to the status quo before that incorporation. 'Reactionary' refers to expressions of commitment to traditional (or historical) social and political institutions within a territory, while advocating changes that would reduce the rights of disadvantaged classes, reduce social and/or political mobility, and/or strengthen hierarchical distinctions, privileges, and relationships of power. Finally, 'radical' refers to expressions of strong dissatisfaction with the core social and political institutions within a given territory, and the consequent espousal of considerable changes to their functions and/or composition, in particular when doing so would significantly expand the rights of lower classes, promote social and/or political mobility, and/or reduce hierarchical relationships of power, distinctions, and privileges.

It is important to note, however, that Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers were thinkers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and as such presented combinations of ideas that may appear idiosyncratic to twenty-first-century readers. While these figures typically tended towards reform-oriented conservative political positions, none could be straightforwardly characterized as

conservative, reactionary, or radical. Consistent with most of their contemporaries, they offered different arguments that were combined in ways that confound the packages of ideas anticipated in present-day political categories.

#### **0.4. Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into three core chapters. The first chapter focuses on accounts of the history of philosophy and, in particular, the history and nature of ethical thought. This chapter establishes the ethical and metaphysical frameworks and assumptions through which these thinkers approached the problems of natural law and cultural change discussed in the second chapter. It reads key works by Christoph Meiners and Charles de Villers in relation to the *Atheismusstreit* around Johann Gottlieb Fichte, suggesting the need to broaden the scope of texts typically associated with the dispute. The intensely partisan arguments and rhetoric employed by Meiners and Villers further reflect the politicized concerns about culture that they understood the *Atheismusstreit* to involve. This chapter also demonstrates how Eichhorn's account of the history of philosophy was, although less overtly partisan, similarly inflected by political concerns. Eichhorn's nuanced response to the Critical Philosophy reflects profound concerns about the course of German philosophy and its relationship to contemporary culture. This chapter also argues that August Ludwig Schlözer was deeply critical of key philosophical disciplines, including ethics and the history of philosophy, seeing them as distractions from the study of political subjects. Furthermore, it suggests the need to revise Hochstrasser's claim that the genre of the history of morality went into abeyance between the rise of the Critical Philosophy and the work of Hegel.

The second chapter argues that Schlözer, Meiners, and Villers presented models of natural law that were compatible with (and even

complemented) their accounts of cultural difference. This challenges Michael Carhart's claim that novel ideas of culture were incommensurable with accounts of natural law. Moreover, this chapter analyzes how Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers explained cultural difference and change with a particular focus on emerging notions of race. It argues that Villers and Schlözer were firm opponents of Meiners' hierarchical racial theory. Although Eichhorn does not appear to have substantially adopted Meiners' ideas, he did follow Meiners in suggesting that heritable differences impacted the ideas and behaviours of certain peoples. Moreover, both Villers and Eichhorn adopted certain terms from Meiners, indicating a complex, even ambivalent, reception. The chapter concludes by emphasizing that, despite their rejection of Meiners' racial thought, Schlözer, Eichhorn, and Villers did not offer radical solutions to contemporary debates around imperialism, slavery, or Jewish emancipation. Nevertheless, understanding how they attempted to explain cultural difference establishes the frameworks through which they then analyzed transformations within Europe between the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the emergence of Enlightened modernity.

The third chapter discusses these analyses as variations of what Pocock has described as the Enlightened narrative. It builds on Michael Printy's argument that Charles de Villers' *Essai sur la Réformation* went 'beyond' the Enlightened narrative by suggesting that the exigencies and crises of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period stimulated significant reformulations and revisions to this narrative within the German lands. Meiners and Eichhorn both presented iterations of the Enlightened narrative that emphasized the historical role of the bourgeoisie. In Meiners' work, the bourgeoisie represented the most Enlightened stratum of German society, while the German aristocracy required urgent, even radical reform. Similarly, Eichhorn offered a defensive account of the

bourgeoisie that argued for the trans-historical value of *Mittelstände* – literally 'middle estates' – capable of mediating between upper and lower social groups.<sup>239</sup> Moreover, he claimed that the crises in France were the results of its failure to cultivate a mature bourgeoisie and, consequently, its failure to enter European modernity. Charles de Villers and August Ludwig Schlözer's variations of the Enlightened narrative both emphasized the importance of religion. In Villers' work this took on a profoundly confessional dimension whereby Protestantism played a critical role in the emergence of modernity. If Catholic nations wish to become fully Enlightened, Villers suggested, they should adopt the values and practices of Protestant Europe. Rather than producing a strongly confessional account, Schlözer argued that Russia should be seen as having entered European modernity alongside the rest of the continent. He thus recalibrated the scope of the Enlightened narrative to include the Russian Empire. These iterations of the Enlightened narrative suggest the difficulties of articulating that narrative during a period of profound crisis. Consequently, they suggest that the Revolutionary period marks the outer limit at which the Enlightened narrative, in its traditional formulation at least, could be considered a historiographical norm.

The concluding chapter recapitulates key themes from the thesis and outlines how it contributes to existing scholarship on Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn and Villers. It also discusses the use of different genres as vehicles for political thought before highlighting how these thinkers formulated distinctive 'master narratives' of Enlightenment. This analysis demonstrates the diversity of conceptions of Enlightenment possible during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, while examining how the work of these figures reflected important transformations in contemporary thought.

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<sup>239</sup> The nuances and meaning of Eichhorn's use of *Mittelstände* are discussed in this chapter.

## Chapter One

### Histories of Philosophy Amid European Crisis

In 1782 Christoph Meiners published the second volume of a major work on the history of ancient philosophy. Here he described Plato as, of Socrates' students, 'certainly the finest head, the most profound ponderer [*Grübler*], the most beautiful writer, and the most fortunate [*glücklichste*] educator of great men'.<sup>1</sup> Eighteen years later, in his *Kritische Geschichte der Ethik*, Meiners' description was markedly less positive. In 1800 Meiners wrote of Plato's 'ambiguity', 'undeniably numerous contradictions', and 'the incompleteness and deficit of connection in his reasoning'.<sup>2</sup>

Meiners' shift reflected the profoundly different philosophical and political contexts in which these texts were written. This chapter examines how such histories of philosophy responded to the intellectual innovations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and, crucially, how such responses were also politicized reflections on contemporary Europe. These publications reveal both the political concerns that seemed to be at stake with such works, and the distinct ways that German intellectuals conceptualized ethics, epistemology, and the course of the history of philosophy.

A central concern in much of this chapter is the dispute around the philosophical approaches – or principles – of rationalism

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<sup>1</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls der Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom*, Vol. 2 (Lemgo, 1782), 683.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the marked difference in tone, neither account is wholly negative or positive. For example, the earlier work mentions Plato's 'enthusiasms and superstitions [*Schwärmereyen und Aberglauben*]', while the latter sees historical value in Plato's comments on 'human nature, good and evil, virtues and vices, constitutions, laws, etc.' Nevertheless, the latter work is decidedly less favourable. Meiners, *Wissenschaften in Griechenland*, 686; Meiners, Christoph, *Allgemeine kritische Geschichte der ältern und neuern Ethik, oder Lebenswissenschaft*, Vol. 1 (Göttingen, 1800), 196-198.

and empiricism. With the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), Immanuel Kant introduced this distinction to differentiate between types of knowledge and, crucially, the systems of particular philosophers.<sup>3</sup> Empiricists argue that knowledge is derived from a *posteriori* experience, whereas rationalists claim that knowledge can be derived through reason alone. Kant understood his Critical Philosophy as having overcome the empiricist/rationalist distinction insofar as epistemology is concerned, while maintaining that moral laws should be derived from reason alone.<sup>4</sup> Meiners, Villers, and Eichhorn each essentially accepted Kant's distinction, even as they responded to it in different ways. By contrast, Schlözer appears not only to have taken no interest in this distinction, but no interest in Kant's thought more broadly.

This chapter builds on T. J. Hochstrasser's work on the genre of the 'history of morality' as a means of intervening in political debates. This genre was, according to Hochstrasser, characterized by 'a pattern of post-Renaissance progress in ethics'.<sup>5</sup> Such accounts understood the relationships between modern ideas as reflecting the dialectical emergence of new truths that could surpass (rather than simply rephrase) the discoveries of the ancient world.<sup>6</sup> Following the rise of Kant and his successors, Hochstrasser argues, this dialectical narrative was eclipsed. Rather than a dialectical narrative, histories of philosophy instead recounted a perpetual struggle between competing falsehoods that was only resolved by the 'final leap into

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<sup>3</sup> Caygill, Howard, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford, 1995), 170-171, 344.

<sup>4</sup> Kant, Immanuel, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft (1. Aufl.)', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 4: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft (1. Aufl. 1781), Prolegomena, Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten, Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (Berlin, 1911), 230-251; Kant, Immanuel, 'Kritik der praktischen Vernunft', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 5: *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft, Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (Berlin, 1913), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories*, 217.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

the Critical Philosophy'.<sup>7</sup> These accounts saw Kant's work as wholly superseding older ideas, meaning that ideas elaborated prior to the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* effectively lost ethical and political relevance. According to Hochstrasser, it was only with Hegel that this latter model was integrated with a trans-historical 'progressive dynamic'.<sup>8</sup> While adopting Hochstrasser's concept of the history of morality, this chapter suggests the need to revise his account: Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers continued to publish such histories prior to the work of Hegel. Whereas earlier examples of this genre were primarily concerned with the proper formulation of natural law, however, these latter variations reflected concerns around the cultural and political impact of different philosophical, and especially ethical, ideas.

Following a brief overview of the course of German philosophy between 1785 and 1800, the first section examines key works by Christoph Meiners and Charles de Villers published in the years immediately following the *Atheismusstreit* (1798-1800). After outlining their philosophical principles, it compares their distinctive accounts of the history of philosophy. As well as highlighting the value of reading such historical works in light of the *Atheismusstreit*, it indicates how historical accounts of the Critical Philosophy were freighted with political concerns. The following section examines Eichhorn's history of philosophy, and begins with a brief discussion of his methodological principles. These principles reflect his distinctive historiographic-epistemic thinking and require discussion before approaching the content of his historical works. An analysis of Eichhorn's account of the history of philosophy reveals his conception of the relationships between political circumstances and events, philosophical innovation, and the nature of 'scientific [*wissenschaftlich*]' inquiry. Moreover, it demonstrates that, while

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 12, 217.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



Eichhorn was less polemical than many other thinkers – including the other protagonists of this thesis – his work nevertheless suggests a moral universalism closely bound to political history and practices. By contrast, Schlözer challenged the value of inquiries into the history of philosophy, and even the study of ethical philosophy altogether. Schlözer reconceptualized the relationship between politics, ethics, and philosophical inquiry more broadly. In his writings, the problem of determining ethics is remarkably straightforward. Rather than philosophy, those interested in politics should investigate national histories, laws, institutions, and the most effective means of utilizing a territory's resources. The concluding section emphasizes how these different approaches to ethics, epistemology, and the history of philosophy reflect distinct notions of Enlightenment and Enlightened inquiry.

## **1.1. Meiners, Villers, and the *Atheismusstreit***

### 1.1.1. German Philosophy, 1785-1800

The final fifteen years of the eighteenth century were marked by intense intellectual tumult in the German lands. Philosophical debate in the second half of the 1780s was dominated by the *Pantheismusstreit* ('Pantheism Dispute'). The controversy began with Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's 1785 claim that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) had been a Spinozist, and quickly became a broad and multisided dispute regarding the nature of philosophical knowledge and its relationship to religious faith.<sup>9</sup> Jacobi attacked the thought of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) by arguing that all rigorous applications of reason in philosophy resulted in a lack of clear ethical

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<sup>9</sup> Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich, *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (1st edn. Breslau, 1785; 2nd edn. 1789). On the *Pantheismusstreit* see Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, 44-126.

or religious values – a condition he later termed 'nihilism'.<sup>10</sup> Kant's intervention in the controversy brought the first wave of significant scrutiny to the Critical Philosophy, and Mendelssohn's last major works were dedicated to the dispute. While the *Pantheismusstreit* tapered off by the end of the 1780s, it brought Kant's work to the forefront of philosophical debate and divided German intellectuals into a number of antagonistic philosophical camps.

The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 provoked new controversies about the relationships between events in France, the project of Enlightenment, European politics, and philosophy more broadly. In 1791, the jurist Judas Thaddäus Zauner (1750-1815) wrote of a 'war of quills [*Federkrieg*]' around the concept of Enlightenment.<sup>11</sup> The Revolutionary decade saw an increasing number of German authors openly attack Enlightenment and link its innovations to political unrest.<sup>12</sup> In France, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (1799) by Augustin Barruel (1741-1820) claimed that the philosophers of the Enlightenment – and especially Kant – were committed to overthrowing Europe's religious and political institutions.<sup>13</sup> Barruel's work was widely read in Germany and, during the *Atheismusstreit*, its popularity may have contributed

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<sup>10</sup> Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich, *Jacobi an Fichte* (Hamburg, 1799), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Zauner, Judas Thaddäus, *Ueber das unredliche Betragen der Feinde der Aufklärung. Ein Wort zu seiner Zeit* (Salzburg, 1791), 1-2. On this text see Schneiders, Werner, *Die wahre Aufklärung: Zum Selbstverständnis der deutschen Aufklärung* (Munich, 1974), 156-161.

<sup>12</sup> See in particular the anthology Weiß, Christoph & Albrecht, Wolfgang (eds.), *Von 'Obscuranten' und 'Eudämonisten': Gegenaufklärerische, konservative und antirevolutionäre Publizisten im späten 18. Jahrhundert* (St. Ingbert, 1997). See also Erker, Brigitte & Siebers, Winfried, 'Das Bahrtd-Pasquill. Ein publizistischer Streit zwischen Aufklärung und Gegenaufklärung 1790-1796', in Goldenbaum (ed.), *Appell*, 897-942.

<sup>13</sup> Barruel, Augustin, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme*, 5 Vols. (Hamburg, 1797-1799). On Kant, see Vol. 5, 245-250.

to the impression that both the Critical Philosophy and the Enlightenment more broadly were under attack.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the Critical Philosophy and its intellectual heirs are often seen as having dominated German philosophy throughout the 1790s.<sup>15</sup> In 1790 Salomon Maimon (1753-1800) began laying important groundwork for later Idealist thought, while Kant's leading 'popularizer', Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757-1823), continued to develop his mentor's ideas.<sup>16</sup> In 1795 Johann Gottlieb Fichte began publishing his *Wissenschaftslehre*, and the following year Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) began to elaborate his 'Nature-Philosophy [*Naturphilosophie*]' in response to both Kant and Fichte.<sup>17</sup> In the final years of the decade Romanticism emerged as a potent force in German letters.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Epstein, *Genesis of German Conservatism*, 503-4. On Barruel see Schaeper-Wimmer, Sylvia, *Augustin Barruel, S. J. (1741-1820). Studien zu Biographie und Werk* (Frankfurt a. M, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> Kuehn, Manfred, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge, 2001), 387-422.

<sup>16</sup> Maimon, Salomon, *Versuch über die Transcendentalphilosophie mit einem Anhang über die symbolische Erkenntniß und Anmerkungen* (1st edn. Berlin, 1790); Reinhold, Karl Leonhard, *Verhandlungen über die Grundbegriffe und Grundsätze der Moralität* (Lübeck, 1798), iii-xiv. On Maimon and Reinhold see Freudenthal, Gideon (ed.), *Salomon Maimon: Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic* (Dordrecht, 2003); Giovanni, George di (ed.), *Karl Leonhard Reinhold and the Enlightenment* (Dordrecht, 2009); Giovanni, George di, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and his Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774-1800* (Cambridge, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1st edn. Jena, 1795); Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie* (2nd edn. Jena, 1798); Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Das System der Sittenlehre nach den Principien der Wissenschaftslehre* (Jena, 1798); Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph, *Werke (Historisch-kritische Ausgabe)*, Vol. 5: *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur (1797)*, ed. Manfred Durner (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1994); Vol. 7: *Erster Entwurf eines System der Naturphilosophie (1799)*, eds. Wilhelm G. Jacobs & Paul Ziche (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2001); Vol. 9: *System des transscendentalen Idealismus (1800)*, eds. Harald Korten & Paul Ziche (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2005). On Schelling's 'Nature-Philosophy', see Rudolphi, Michael, *Produktion und Konstruktion: zur Genese der Naturphilosophie in Schellings Frühwerk* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2001). On Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, see La Vopa, *Fichte*, 183-230.

<sup>18</sup> On the Romantics' debt to Kant see Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism*, 222-278; Beiser, *Romantic Imperative*, 43-55.

Non-Kantian thought had not been eclipsed, however, and Kant's critics continued to publish important and well-received works. Christian Garve (1742-1798), a critic of Kant and one of Germany's leading intellectuals, continued to write popular works until his death.<sup>19</sup> As Falk Wunderlich has shown, empiricism continued to play a significant role in German intellectual life. Both Christoph Meiners and his colleague Johann Georg Heinrich Feder (1740-1821) were leading thinkers and committed empiricists.<sup>20</sup> Other prominent Enlighteners continued to articulate empiricist, 'eclectic', and other non-Kantian ideas, including the publisher and satirist Christoph Friedrich Nicolai (1733-1811), the historian of philosophy Dietrich Tiedemann (1748-1803), and the founder of the Bavarian Illuminati Adam Weishaupt.<sup>21</sup> Jacobi remained sceptical towards the project of philosophical inquiry more broadly. Despite the prominence of the Critical Philosophy and its successors, then, Kant's thought remained controversial, and German philosophy remained polarized.

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<sup>19</sup> Several volumes of these works appeared posthumously. Garve, Christian, *Versuche über verschiedene Gegenstände aus der Moral, der Litteratur und dem gesellschaftlichen Leben*, 5 Vols. (Breslau, 1792-1802); Garve, Christian, *Vermischte Aufsätze welche einzeln oder in Zeitschriften erschienen sind*, 2 Vols. (Breslau, 1796-1801); Aristotle, *Die Ethik des Aristoteles*, trans. & ed. Christian Garve, 2 Vols. (Breslau, 1798-1801).

<sup>20</sup> Wunderlich, 'Materialism in late Enlightenment Germany', 942; Feder, Johann Georg Heinrich, *Über Raum und Causalität zur Prüfung der Kantischen Philosophie* (Göttingen, 1787), 92-93; Feder, Johann Georg Heinrich, *Grundsätze der Logik und Metaphysik* (Göttingen, 1794), 9-14. Feder had been one of the key participants in the Pantheism controversy, and the subsequent decline of interest in his work surely exacerbated his and Meiners' continued antagonism towards the Critical Philosophy. Longo, Mario, 'The Göttingen School and *Popularphilosophie*', in Piaia, Gregorio & Santinello, Giovanni (eds.), *Models of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3: *The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age*, trans. Hilary Siddons (Dordrecht, 2015), 551.

<sup>21</sup> Nicolai, Christoph Friedrich, *Leben und Meinungen Sempronius Gundibert's: eines deutschen Philosophen* (1st edn. Berlin, 1798), 49-50; Tiedemann, Dietrich, *Theätet, oder über das menschliche Wissen, ein Beytrag zur Vernunft-Kritik* (Frankfurt a. M., 1794), 511-512; Weishaupt, Adam, *Ueber die Lehre von den Gründen und Ursachen aller Dinge* (Regensburg, 1794), 129-130.

Many of these tensions came to a head during the *Atheismusstreit*. In 1798 two essays appeared in the Jena-based *Philosophisches Journal*, one by Fichte and the other by Friedrich Karl Forberg (1770-1848).<sup>22</sup> Fichte was then professor at Jena, while Forberg, who had taught at Jena from 1792 to 1796, was deputy head of the lyceum at Saalfeld. Both essays offered radical revisions of conventional religious thought. If they were not quite statements of atheism, they did conflate religion with 'moral world-government' in ways fundamentally incompatible with traditional Christian dogma.<sup>23</sup>

The same year, an anonymous pamphlet accused both authors of atheism, and officials at Dresden brought the matter to the attention of the Saxon Elector.<sup>24</sup> In 1798 the charge of atheism was particularly serious. The Holy Roman Empire was then experiencing a fragile peace after the War of the First Coalition (1792-1797), and its rulers were nervous about any signs of radicalism. According to Anthony La Vopa, to most officials 'atheism and Jacobinism, irreligion and democracy, had become virtually coterminous'.<sup>25</sup> Fichte had already been accused of Jacobinism in 1793 and Kant had faced censorship in 1794.<sup>26</sup> The essays that appeared in 1798 only exacerbated perceptions that the Critical Philosophy was

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<sup>22</sup> Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 'Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche WeltRegierung' & Forberg, Friedrich Karl, 'Entwicklung des Begriffs der Religion', in *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher gelehrten*, Vol. 8 (Jena, 1798), 1-20 & 21-46. The journal was edited by Fichte himself and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766-1848)

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed account of the *Atheismusstreit* and its aftermath, see La Vopa, *Fichte*, 368-423.

<sup>24</sup> [Anonymous], *Schreiben eines Vaters an seinen studierenden Sohn über den Fichteschen und Forbergschen Atheismus* (n.p., n.d. [1798]); La Vopa, *Fichte*, 369-370; Estes, Yoland (ed.) & Bowman, Curtis (trans.), *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798-1800)* (Farnham, 2010), 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> La Vopa, *Fichte*, 247, 379.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87; Kant, Immanuel, 'Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft', in *idem.*, *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 6: *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft, Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (2nd edn. Berlin, 1914). On the controversy around this work see Kuehn, *Kant*, 361-382.

incompatible with Christianity. In this context, it is unsurprising that the Saxon government took action. Following the confiscation of the periodical within the borders of Electoral Saxony, Friedrich August (1750-1827) complained to the duke of Saxe-Weimar (whose lands included Jena) demanding the authors' punishment.<sup>27</sup> In 1799 Fichte responded with a series of treatises defending his work. His primary goal was to garner support on the basis of a right to freely inquire into controversial topics.<sup>28</sup> However, Fichte also called his critics 'idolatrous and atheistic' and even suggested that his was the only legitimately non-atheistic philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Rather than simply defending his work, he effectively accused his critics – including, implicitly at least, various Saxon officials – of atheism.

Fichte's interventions were a public relations disaster, and both he and Forberg lost their jobs following the dispute. Moreover, although Fichte's ideas were by this point distinct from those of Kant, the *Atheismusstreit* quickly metastasized into a rehearsal of key arguments from the *Pantheismusstreit*.<sup>30</sup> The apparently subversive nature of Fichte's thought heightened anxieties around the intellectual prominence of the Critical Philosophy and its heirs. These currents of thought had garnered significant support across the German lands, but large sections of the German reading public remained hostile to them. To the opponents of Enlightenment, the crisis seemed to prove their worst fears true: philosophers were teaching atheism to impressionable students and future officials. Alluding to the *Atheismusstreit*, the conspiracy theorist Johann August von Starck (1741-1816) later warned that Kant and Fichte's ideas had permeated throughout German educational and religious

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<sup>27</sup> La Vopa, *Fichte*, 379. The Duke at the time was Karl August (1757-1828).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 385-386.

<sup>29</sup> Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Appellation an das Publikum über die durch ein Kurf. Sächs. Confiscationsrescript ihm beigemessenen atheistischen Aeufferungen* (Jena, 1799), 3.

<sup>30</sup> La Vopa, *Fichte*, 404-424

institutions.<sup>31</sup> To the Critical Philosophy's opponents within the Enlightenment, including Nicolai, Jacobi, and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, Fichte's work made manifest the dangers implicit in Kant's thought.<sup>32</sup>

As a consequence, Kant and his advocates were effectively compelled to defend the compatibility of their ideas with the religious and political institutions of the Holy Roman Empire. Kant and others feared that their own work would be brought into disrepute, or even suppressed. Kant and Reinhold thus took pains to distance their ideas from Fichte's.<sup>33</sup> Although Fichte was left with few allies by the end of the debacle, the dispute had only exacerbated tensions among German intellectuals. In their responses to this crisis, Meiners and Villers were acutely aware of these tensions and, indeed, the major political, religious, and moral issues at stake.

### 1.1.2. The Threat of Rationalism: Christoph Meiners' Ethics

In 1800-1801 Christoph Meiners published his two-volume *Kritische Geschichte der Ethik* alongside a companion textbook titled *Grundriß der Ethik*. He presented his ethical ideas as being grounded in the work of British philosophers like the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), Frances Hutcheson (1694-1746), and Adam Smith (1723-1790).<sup>34</sup> According to Meiners, these thinkers prioritized human

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<sup>31</sup> Starck, Johann August von, *Der Triumph der Philosophie im Achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Vol. 2 (Germantown [Frankfurt a. M.], 1804), 451-452.

<sup>32</sup> La Vopa, *Fichte*, 382-401, 406-407, 421-422.

<sup>33</sup> Kant, Immanuel, 'Erklärung in Beziehung auf Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 12: *Briefwechsel: 1795, Anhang* (2nd edn. Berlin, 1922), 370-371; Reinhold, Karl Leonhard, *Sendschreiben an J. C. Lavater und J. G. Fichte über den Glauben an Gott* (Hamburg, 1799). See also Estes & Bowman, *The Atheism Dispute*, 127-143, 245-246.

<sup>34</sup> On these thinkers see Gill, Michael B., *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge, 2006), 75-198; Rivers, Isabel, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, Vol. 2: *Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge,

psychological experience as the foundation for ethics.<sup>35</sup> This, naturally, led to the investigation of human psychology and – in Meiners' formulation – its variations across different groups.<sup>36</sup> It was on the basis of this ethnological dimension that Meiners described his ethical thinking as a true 'science [*Wissenschaft*]', and it was the improvement in ethnological knowledge since the seventeenth century that, he argued, made possible the modern supersession of ancient ethical thinking.<sup>37</sup>

Meiners was an avowed empiricist, but it is important to clarify what that means.<sup>38</sup> Crucially, at least by the 1780s, he could not be described as a Lockean.<sup>39</sup> Meiners did not present the human mind as a *tabula rasa*: his account of ethics (as well as his account of racial difference described in the second chapter) required innate conditioning factors and impulses in human cognition. He consistently opposed the notion of innate ideas – the claim that humans are born with certain items of knowledge – but he did present a model of innate, natural, human psychological structures and inclinations, which in turn reflected the various characteristics of human nature.<sup>40</sup> Contrary to Locke – but consistent with the work of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Smith – Meiners argued that humans are born with varying cognitive powers and moral inclinations that served to process and respond to sensory data.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, his 1786 critique of Kant's metaphysics emphasized humanity's 'innate drives

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2000), 85-237; Haakonssen, Knud, 'Introduction', in Smith, Adam, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 2002), vii-xxiv.

<sup>35</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 21-29, 35, 356-7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9; Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik, oder Lebens-Wissenschaft* (Hanover, 1801), iii-vii.

<sup>38</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, xvi.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 236-238.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 254-255.

<sup>41</sup> Locke, John, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 48-65.



[*angeborene Triebe*]' and 'inclinations [*Neigungen*]'.<sup>42</sup> These go beyond the facets of reasoning Locke described as 'faculties'. Most notably, Locke suggested that all individuals could, regardless of birth, attain profound intellectual achievements.<sup>43</sup> Meiners did not: the achievements of individuals were fundamentally limited by innate characteristics.<sup>44</sup> Meiners' empiricism was rather a methodological principle that sought to derive as much knowledge as possible (including ethics) from experiential phenomena. This was positioned against attempts to derive knowledge from abstract – or 'first' – principles.

Moreover, although he named just Kant and Fichte, Meiners' empiricism was directed against 'Kantian ethics [*kantische Ethik*]' more broadly.<sup>45</sup> In a telling passage, Meiners' wrote that 'now the Critical Philosophers call themselves the moderns [*die Neuen*], and the empirical philosophers [*empirische Weltweisen*] are given the name of the ancients'.<sup>46</sup> He predicted, however, 'that these parties will soon exchange their names [...] the ancients will become again the moderns, and the moderns become the ancients'.<sup>47</sup> These comments almost certainly referred to the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. As mentioned in the introduction, the Quarrel had been a major debate in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century France concerning whether contemporary Europe had superseded the achievements of the ancient world.<sup>48</sup> Dan Edelstein argues that

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<sup>42</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Grundriß der Seelen-Lehre* (Lemgo, 1786), 22-24.

<sup>43</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 92-93.

<sup>44</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 92-93.

<sup>45</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 2, iii-iv.

<sup>46</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, xvi. Meiners' use of *Weltweisen* to describe empiricist philosophers may reflect a view that empiricist philosophy had a broader purview than the philosophy of Kant and his heirs. Meiners' official title was professor of *Weltweisheit*. Although often used interchangeably with philosophy, *Weltweisheit* – literally 'world-wisdom' – carried connotations of a broader field of inquiry than the modern discipline of philosophy.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Edelstein, *Enlightenment*, 24-43.

the Quarrel represented the starting point of the Enlightenment: Enlightenment was, and remained, a defence of the claim that modernity had surpassed classical civilization.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Meiners' suggestion was that the Critical Philosophy represented a fundamentally outdated way of thinking that had been overcome by the advances of modern empiricism. Despite the current dominance of Kant and his heirs, Meiners appeared confident that he and other empiricist 'moderns' would ultimately triumph.

Since each of Kant's intellectual heirs derived their ethical 'systems' from the same epistemic principles, Meiners argued that he needed only to refute the work of Kant in order to disprove the projects of his successors.<sup>50</sup> Meiners dismissed Kant's originality, criticized his concept of freedom, and claimed that his philosophy took common truisms for concepts of pure reason.<sup>51</sup> The Critical Philosophy had done little more than repackage the ideas of Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), whose attempt to establish an ethical system based on first principles had been refuted by Shaftesbury.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Kant's notion of moral freedom as the independence of reason from the influence of experience was grounded in an abstract, unrealistic conception of humanity.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Kant's notion of pure reason in fact relied on common assumptions that could only be verified with recourse to experience.<sup>54</sup> These claims were not original to Meiners' ethical writings, but instead largely rehearsed arguments from the *Pantheismusstreit*, including those of Meiners' own *Grundriß der Seelen-Lehre* (1786).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 116-118.

<sup>50</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>51</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 2, 27, 85-148, 196-245.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 225-227.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 218-223.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>55</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Seelen-Lehre*, xv-xxxv. On this work, see Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 173-176. On these and other arguments in the *Pantheismusstreit*, see Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, 165-192; Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 2, passim.

In this iteration, however, such claims were also politicized responses to the circumstances of contemporary Europe. In the *Grundriß der Ethik*, Meiners described the importance of ethical norms in political institutions and historical change, as well as the need to study ethics in order to promote the broader adoption of good values.<sup>56</sup> Most notably, the French *philosophes'* moral teachings of 'egoism' and 'unbelief' had, along with the moral degradation of Paris and the royal court, caused the Revolution.<sup>57</sup> Arguments associating the chaos of the Revolution with the contents of French philosophy were by no means new. Although most famously expressed by Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), German thinkers had utilized similar claims from the same year onwards.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Meiners proposed that Kant's ethics only required close refutation because the precedent of France had indicated the political, social, and cultural risks of dangerous philosophies.<sup>59</sup>

This argument was tied to anxieties about the egalitarianism of both French Revolutionary rhetoric and the Critical Philosophy.<sup>60</sup> If ethical egalitarianism was an important characteristic in Kant's thought, it was even more pronounced – and controversial – in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796-1797).<sup>61</sup> According to Meiners, the dangers of egalitarianism were heightened by the difficulty, and potential arbitrariness, of deriving duties from

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<sup>56</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 61-2.

<sup>57</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 275-6.

<sup>58</sup> Schneiders, *Die wahre Aufklärung*, 127-133, 140-155; Sternau, Anselm Franz Bentzel Freiherr von, *Ueber das Verhältniß der thätigen und leidenden Kraft im Staate zu der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt a. M., 1790), passim.

<sup>59</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 2, iii-iv.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre*, 2 Vols. (Jena, 1796-1797), 198-200. On this work see La Vopa, *Fichte*, 298-367.

principles of pure reason.<sup>62</sup> Meiners, following his colleague Feder, argued that the rational principles that underpinned Kant's ethics were ultimately just products of subjective speculation.<sup>63</sup> These concerns were further exacerbated by the dogmatism Meiners perceived in the notions of duty expressed by Kant and his heirs.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Kant's thought produced uncompromising, egalitarian moral positions based on arbitrary principles. Not just Meiners, but also Burke, Ernst Brandes, August Wilhelm Rehberg, and others associated such uncompromising philosophical ideas with revolutionary violence.<sup>65</sup>

Meiners described the ideas and rhetoric of Kant and Fichte in terms of 'enthusiasm', or *Schwärmerey*.<sup>66</sup> Contemporary intellectuals conceptualized *Schwärmerey* in quasi-pathological terms: it represented poor intellectual health, and could become infectious in certain circumstances. *Schwärmerey* was characterized by dogmatism, resulting in zealous and dangerous behaviours.<sup>67</sup> In this respect, Meiners was clear that Fichte was worse than Kant.<sup>68</sup> If the Critical Philosophy led to the thought of Fichte – as many observers

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<sup>62</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 392-4; Vol. 2, 159.

<sup>63</sup> Feder, Johann Georg Heinrich, *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen*, Vol. 3 (Lemgo, 1786), 171. On Feder's response to Kant, see Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 176-187.

<sup>64</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, v-xi; Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 49-51. Cf. Kant, Immanuel, 'Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 4, 397.

<sup>65</sup> Brandes, Ernst, *Politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution* (Jena, 1790), 53-66; Rehberg, August Wilhelm, *Untersuchungen über die französische Revolution*, 2 Vols. (Hanover, 1793), Vol. 1, 210-211, Vol. 2, 396-405; Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London relative to that event* (11th edn. London, 1791), 88-92, 115, 196. On this argument see La Vopa, *Fichte*, 100-130.

<sup>66</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, iv-vi, Vol. 2, 324. On the distinctive German connotations of the term, see in particular La Vopa, Anthony J., 'The Philosopher and the Schwärmer: On the Career of a German Epithet from Luther to Kant', in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1/2: *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850* (1997), 85-115.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.; Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 2, 324.

<sup>68</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 5, Vol. 2, 323-4

of the *Atheismusstreit* claimed – then the popularity of Kant's ideas represented a major threat.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, Meiners situated his polemic not just against the Critical Philosophy and its successors, but against the philosophical tradition of rationalism generally. Attempts to derive ethical principles from reason alone, he argued, were necessarily oriented around abstract, chimerical conceptions of humanity that did not reflect the verifiable realities of human characteristics, behaviours, and differences. The lack of verifiable foundations for rationalist thought predisposed it towards intellectual rigidity and totalizing claims. In this sense, rationalism – and especially the rationalism of the Critical Philosophy – necessarily tended towards universalism, egalitarianism, and *Schwärmerey*.

Meiners suggested that empiricist ethics could more readily adapt themselves to new circumstances and information. He thus grounded his ethical programme in descriptive accounts of human characteristics, circumstances, needs, abilities, and virtues [*Tugenden*].<sup>70</sup> The *Grundriß der Ethik* is largely a compendium of descriptions of human sentiments and moral impulses, as well as epistemological, aesthetic, and psychological concepts that impact behaviour.<sup>71</sup> Meiners criticized the use of duty [*Pflicht*] in ethical writings as being not only vague, but also tied to moral universalism.<sup>72</sup> Duty, Meiners suggested, presupposed that all people should be treated according to the same principles, regardless of circumstance. As an alternative to notions of duty, he described the internal qualities and external circumstances that necessitated

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 276.

<sup>70</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 6-7, 14-55, 124-9.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> It may be anachronistic to situate Meiners as a proponent of 'virtue ethics' against Kantian 'duty ethics', but Meiners' account clearly resonates with such later debates. See Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, viii, 76-107; Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 413. On these debates see McNaughton, David & Rawling, Piers, 'Deontology' & Hursthouse, Rosalind, 'Virtue Theory', in LaFollette, Hugh (ed.), *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology* (Malden, MA, 2014), 37-48, 60-69.

different behaviours. These included differences such as sex, age, social rank, official roles, and natural inequalities.<sup>73</sup> Rather than elaborating universal duties, individuals should cultivate virtues that recognize and respond to different needs and relationships.<sup>74</sup> Meiners' ethical system was overtly anti-egalitarian: different socio-political positions required the cultivation of different virtues, and different moral behaviours.<sup>75</sup>

Building on the work of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714-1780), Meiners followed his colleagues Garve and Feder (among others) by arguing that the quality of an idea is reflected in the manner of its expression.<sup>76</sup> The imperative to write well was, therefore, about more than readability. The difficulty of works like the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Wissenschaftslehre* reflected poorly conceived ideas and, as language impacts thought and action, such ideas could lead to confused, potentially dangerous behaviours.<sup>77</sup> Meiners equally considered the refined expression of British writers to be inextricable from the British people's virtuous moral norms and other achievements.<sup>78</sup> By contrast, German ethical thought was exemplified by the dense, abstract writing of philosophers like Christian Wolff (1679-1754). As a consequence, Germany failed to produce ethical writings equal to those of Britain, and this failure left Germans exposed to the dangerous abstractions of Kant and Fichte.<sup>79</sup> Precarious political circumstances only heightened these risks.

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<sup>73</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 401-403. See also Meiners, Christoph, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit der Stände unter den vornehmsten Europäischen Völkern*, Vol. 2 (Hanover, 1792), 1-11. This work uses continuous pagination across both volumes. It is notable that these claims cohere with Meiners' racial thought, as discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>74</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 342.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Zande, Johan van der, 'In the Image of Cicero: German Philosophy between Wolff and Kant', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Jul., 1995), 433-440; Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 1-3, Vol. 2, 320-1.

<sup>77</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 282-3.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

German ethical philosophy was, then, not just relevant to the nation's intellectual elite, but a project with much broader implications. The *Grundriß der Ethik*, with its detailed definitions of human qualities and concepts, was both a handbook for students and an attempt to establish a clear ethical vocabulary. Meiners aimed to re-orient German thought towards a more benign, empiricist mode of thinking about ethics. This re-orientation was driven by politicized cultural anxieties: the rationalist ethics of the Critical Philosophy and its successors threatened to encourage dogmatism, enthusiasm, and political unrest in the German lands. The *Atheismusstreit*, alongside the on-going upheavals in European politics, made these concerns particularly urgent.

### 1.1.3. Charles de Villers' Defence of Fichte, Rationalism, and the Critical Philosophy

Villers also published a major work on Kantian ethics in the wake of the *Atheismusstreit*. The 1801 *Philosophie de Kant* was his first book written from Lübeck and, more importantly, his first systematic discussion of German thought. Villers, like Meiners, argued that ethical ideas had major cultural and political implications. However, whereas Meiners advocated the German adoption of empiricist ethics, Villers encouraged the French adoption of rationalist ideas. His work rejected the empiricism that dominated French thought and presented the Critical Philosophy as a coherent ethical system capable of regenerating French morals and resolving France's political difficulties.<sup>80</sup>

French interest in Kant had first gained momentum following the 1796 translation of *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795) by Ludwig

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<sup>80</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, xlix-lxviii.

Ferdinand Huber (1764-1804).<sup>81</sup> The same year, Anton Keil (dates unknown) published an article in the *Magasin encyclopédique* calling for a more comprehensive Francophone account of Kant's work.<sup>82</sup> In 1797 Benjamin Constant published *Des Réactions politiques*, which criticized Kant's maxim against lying by pointing to the benefits of lying in order to protect the well-being of others.<sup>83</sup> Kant responded, defending his principle.<sup>84</sup> Later that same year, Jean-Joseph Mounier (1758-1806) entered the debate in defence of Constant, suggesting that ethical abstractions such as the categorical imperative obscured the value of common sense.<sup>85</sup> These publications stimulated interest in Kant's thought, as did meetings between Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), the Swiss philosopher Philipp Albert Stapfer (1766-1840), and leading French thinkers.<sup>86</sup> Even as French intellectuals remained unconvinced of the merits of the Critical Philosophy, they recognized that a systematic exposition was needed to facilitate Francophone engagement with Kant's thought.

That exposition appeared in the form of *Philosophie de Kant*.<sup>87</sup> Despite winning the approbation of Kant himself, however, most French intellectuals responded negatively to Villers' work.<sup>88</sup> Leading

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<sup>81</sup> Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 19-83.

<sup>82</sup> Keil, Anton, 'Notice sur la philosophie et les ouvrages de M. Kant', in *Magasin encyclopédique*, Vol. 3 (1796), 159-184.

<sup>83</sup> Constant, Benjamin, *Des Réactions politiques* (n.p., An V [1797]), 72-79.

<sup>84</sup> Kant, Immanuel, 'Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen (1797)', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 8: *Abhandlungen nach 1781* (Berlin, 1923), 423-430.

<sup>85</sup> Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 97-101; Mounier, Jean-Joseph, 'Lettre sur la philosophie de Kant', in *Magasin Encyclopédique*, Vol. 5 (1797), 409-415.

<sup>86</sup> Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 102-112. It is unclear whether Stapfer and Humboldt met at this time.

<sup>87</sup> Villers' work was the first comprehensive Francophone assessment of the Critical Philosophy that did not rely on its readers' ability to read German. Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 113. On the *Philosophie de Kant* in the development of Villers' thought see Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', 110-119.

<sup>88</sup> Wittmer, *Charles de Villers*, 67-136; Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 113-208.



*idéologues* like Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) and Joseph Marie Degérando (1772-1842) charged Villers with 'enthusiasm' and rejected both Villers' work and the Critical Philosophy generally.<sup>89</sup> Charles Vanderbourg and Germaine de Staël responded more positively, but they were a distinct minority.<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Philosophie de Kant* remains crucial for understanding Villers' thought and his engagement with the *Atheismusstreit*.<sup>91</sup> In 1799 Villers had published both a 33-page article discussing key dimensions of the Critical Philosophy, and an article defending Fichte in *Le Spectateur du Nord*.<sup>92</sup> This latter article recognized that the dispute around Fichte was tied to broader debates about the legitimacy and implications of the Critical

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<sup>89</sup> The central works outlining their ideas are Tracy, Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de, *Projet d'éléments d'idéologie* (Paris, An IX [1801]); Degérando, Joseph Marie, *Des Signes de l'Art de penser considérés dans leurs rapports mutuels*, 4 Vols. (Paris, 1799-1800). See Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 137-208. Note: Degérando appears to have alternated between spelling his name 'de Gérando' and 'Degérando' during his life. As both of the works cited in this thesis make use of the latter form, this has been used to refer to him. Quotes and citations have maintained the form used by the relevant author.

<sup>90</sup> Staël, Germaine de, *Correspondance générale*, Vol. 4:2 (Paris, 1978), 422-423.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Winterling, Peter, *Rückzug aus der Revolution: Eine Untersuchung zum Deutschlandbild und zur Literaturtheorie bei Madame de Staël und Charles de Villers* (Rheinfelden, 1985), 136-142.

<sup>92</sup> Villers, Charles de, 'Critique de la raison pure', in *Le Spectateur du Nord*, Vol. 10 (Apr. 1799), 1-37; Villers, Charles de, 'Métaphysicien accusé d'athéisme', in *Le Spectateur du Nord*, Vol. 10 (Apr. 1799), 385-397. This was Villers' first detailed discussion of the content of the Critical Philosophy, but already in 1797 he had praised Kant's efforts to tackle scepticism. In 1798 he also published a brief biography of Kant and an overview of his work in relation to earlier German debates, as well as a translation (without significant commentary) of Kant's *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*. 'M. le comte R. M.' [Villers, Charles de], *Lettres westphaliennes* (Berlin, 1797), 149-154; de Villers, Charles, 'Notice littéraire sur Mr. Kant, et sur l'état de la Métaphysique en Allemagne, au moment où ce philosophe a commencé à y faire sensation', in *Le Spectateur du Nord*, Vol. 5 (Mar. 1798), 335-368; Kant, Immanuel, 'Idée de ce que pourroit être une histoire universelle dans les vues d'un citoyen du monde', trans. Charles de Villers, in *Le Spectateur du Nord*, Vol. 6 (Apr. 1798), 1-39.

Philosophy.<sup>93</sup> He argued unequivocally that Fichte was not an atheist, and that neither his nor Kant's philosophies were politically dangerous. Fichte's ideas were 'a little exalted, sublime, even mystical', but posed no threat to Germany's religious or political institutions.<sup>94</sup> Villers expressed sympathy for the anxieties of those who had banned Fichte's work and criticized the philosopher's lack of tact, but concluded by emphasizing his 'enlightenment' and 'superior spirit'.<sup>95</sup> By defending not just his character, but also key dimensions of his philosophy, Villers clearly positioned himself as sympathetic towards Fichte's ideas.

Villers also expressed support for Fichte in a letter to Jacobi. Referring to the latter's response to the *Atheismusstreit*, he agreed with Jacobi's description of Fichte as 'the Messiah of speculative philosophy'.<sup>96</sup> Jacobi's comment referred to Fichte's philosophical system that grounded virtually all concepts in the notion of a 'self-positing I'. Such a foundation for philosophical knowledge, Jacobi thought, represented an unprecedented, comprehensive model of metaphysics grounded in rational principles. His comment was, however, ambivalent. While Jacobi clearly respected Fichte's philosophical rigour, he was deeply critical of the project of 'speculative philosophy' more broadly.<sup>97</sup> According to Jacobi, Fichte's project – like Kant's – was nihilistic.<sup>98</sup> Fichte's system collapsed all metaphysical knowledge into a notion of the self that was tautological and ultimately fatalistic. Rather than pure reason, religious faith was needed to establish ethical principles on a basis beyond the self's own perception. Nevertheless, while Jacobi questioned the value of 'speculative philosophy', Villers was its firm advocate. Both were fully

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<sup>93</sup> Villers, Charles, 'Métaphysicien accusé d'athéisme', 388-393.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> 'Villers an F. H. Jacobi, Lübeck 25 Nov. 1799', in Isler (ed.), *Briefe*, 143; Jacobi, *Jacobi an Fichte*, 2.

<sup>97</sup> On Jacobi's response to Fichte see La Vopa, *Fichte*, 388-401.

<sup>98</sup> Jacobi, *Jacobi an Fichte*, 39.

aware of the other's ideas, and had a decidedly constructive relationship despite their differences.<sup>99</sup> In light of this, Villers' comment may be taken at face value: in 1799 Villers had a profoundly positive view of Fichte's project.

Villers' recognition that the *Atheismusstreit* was entangled with concerns around the Critical Philosophy suggests that *Philosophie de Kant* should be read in light of the dispute around Fichte. Indeed, Villers repeated his defence of Fichte in the *Philosophie de Kant* itself. Here he described Fichte's religious thought as, along with Kant's, a valuable reorientation away from quixotic attempts to demonstrate God's existence, and towards a concept of God as a metaphysical idea.<sup>100</sup> Later in the book, Villers translated a short passage from Fichte's *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800). While the extract is a straightforward dialogue between an 'empiricist philosopher' and a 'transcendental philosopher', Villers described 'the celebrated Fichte' as having developed the epistemology of the Critical Philosophy 'with much spirit'.<sup>101</sup> This positive assessment, published in 1801, demonstrates a willingness to position himself as an ally of Fichte at a time when the latter's work remained controversial. If Villers did not explicitly adopt Fichte's philosophy, he evidently had great respect for it and its role in contemporary debates.

The *Philosophie de Kant* reflected its author's partisan response to contemporary disputes around Kant and Fichte, but its summary of the Critical Philosophy itself was largely unexceptional. It is clearly influenced by Reinhold's *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, and demonstrates a pronounced emphasis on ethics, but

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<sup>99</sup> Correspondence between Jacobi and Villers is collected in Isler (ed.), *Briefe*, 143-200.

<sup>100</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 340-1.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

otherwise offers a straightforward articulation of Kant's ideas.<sup>102</sup> Like Meiners, however, Villers' work positioned the dispute around Kant and his heirs in terms of the broader – historical – opposition between empiricism and rationalism.

Villers argued that empiricism is fundamentally superficial, responds only to appearances, and therefore cannot offer a thorough understanding of reality.<sup>103</sup> Criticizing Condillac in particular, Villers claimed that empiricism cannot explain the conditions of thought or perception, as attempts to understand those conditions with reference to experience alone are doomed to tautology.<sup>104</sup> Whereas Meiners described rationalism as dogmatic due to its reliance on ideas that cannot be empirically verified, Villers argued that empiricism was dogmatic precisely because it 'accepts sensations for realities'.<sup>105</sup> Villers claimed that the Critical Philosophy's focus on explaining the conditions of knowledge resolved empiricism's failure on this point.<sup>106</sup> He was similarly keen to emphasize that Kant's work went beyond previous rationalist systems by recognizing, rather than simply denying, the value of empirical knowledge.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, Villers agreed with Kant that the Critical Philosophy was the historical resolution of the empiricist/rationalist debate.<sup>108</sup>

For Villers, empiricism was both logically unsound and fundamentally pernicious. Empiricism cannot account for the

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<sup>102</sup> On Villers' debt to Reinhold, see Printy, 'Protestantism and Progress', 303-329.

<sup>103</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, xxii, 104.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 74, 185-7, 194-198, 218, 233-240, 265-279. Cf. [Condillac, Étienne Bonnot de], *Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines* (Amsterdam, 1746), 1-21. On the French reception of Condillac, see Azouvi, François, *L'Institution de la Raison: la révolution culturelle des idéologues* (Paris, 1992); Citton, Yves & Dumasy, Lise (eds.), *Le moment idéologique* (Lyon, 2013).

<sup>105</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 74, 185-7, 194-5.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-226.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, viii-ix, 108-130, 430.

possibility of God's intervention in the world or the complex relationship between spirit and matter because it limits human knowledge to the mechanistic interactions of sensations and objects.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, thorough empiricism is necessarily atheistic, and empiricist attempts to distinguish between matter and spirit cannot account for modern physics.<sup>110</sup> Such a mechanistic understanding of reality, moreover, leads to fatalism and a denial of free will.<sup>111</sup> As a result, empiricist philosophies have 'paralyzed the conscience of man, [...] degraded man, [...] suffocated the voice of his first judge, the divine voice which speaks inside him'.<sup>112</sup>

On the subject of ethics – according to Villers the most important 'division' of philosophy – rationalist thinkers had always offered more benign philosophies, as empiricism 'occupies itself with that which is', while rationalism assesses 'that which should and could be'.<sup>113</sup> By restricting itself to sensible knowledge, empiricism cannot produce universal duties which, of necessity, must be based on unobservable principles of abstract reason.<sup>114</sup> Empirical analyses can understand human behaviour in anthropological terms, but not articulate moral norms. Although Villers placed some emphasis – perhaps more than Kant – on the importance of conscience, compassion, and the desire for dignity as natural psychological drives, such motivations were subordinated to the rational demand for universal duties.<sup>115</sup> Humans are only able to establish a moral ideal towards which they can aspire through *a priori* 'absolute precepts' that exist outside any particular human contexts.<sup>116</sup> By failing to legislate duties and only dealing with observable human

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 156-158.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 202-3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 74-75, 161-3.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 161-3.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 44, 48.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 45-51.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 44-5, 380-1, 387.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 377-78, 384-86.

needs and inclinations, empiricism tends towards self-interest.<sup>117</sup> As such, it is precisely the normative character of the Critical Philosophy's ethics that most recommends Kant's thought to Villers, and it is only through normative ethics that social and political values such as 'liberty, duty, justice, [and] virtue' can be conceived and, eventually, established.<sup>118</sup>

Whereas Meiners rejected Kantian ethics as dangerously egalitarian, Villers embraced the equality of ethical duties.<sup>119</sup> He was clear that it is imperative for moral principles to be derived from universal reason and described the tailoring of one's moral behaviour according to circumstance as self-interested.<sup>120</sup> While Meiners claimed to unite moral behaviour with individual happiness, Villers argued that happiness should not be conflated with ethics, and the latter must always take precedence.<sup>121</sup> Villers argued that humans should seek dignity rather than happiness, and that dignity can only be achieved through duty.<sup>122</sup> Meiners saw such universalizing thought as dogmatic; Villers, conversely, saw anything else as reason's submission to circumstance.

Meiners and Villers also approached the relationship between language and philosophy in antagonistic ways. Villers rejected the view of language proposed by German empiricists like Meiners whereby the quality of an idea is reflected in its expression. Such

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 159-160.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 385-6.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 374-5, 404.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 389-391, 404. This argument echoes Kant's claim in 'Die Religion innerhalb der bloßen Vernunft', 379-416. Villers' emphasis on dignity also resembles Friedrich Schiller's. While Villers was aware of Schiller's writings, he did not significantly discuss Schiller's ethical philosophy. Villers' relationship to Schiller will be returned to in the conclusions of the thesis. Schiller, Friedrich, 'Ueber Anmuth und Würde', in idem., *Nationalausgabe der Werke Schillers*, Vol. 20: *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Julius Petersen et al. (Weimar, 1962), 251-308.

claims, Villers argued, conflated the problems of metaphysics with grammatical analyses.<sup>123</sup> This resulted in 'puerile sophisms' that 'transform all theoretical difficulties into simple word-disputes'.<sup>124</sup> Genuine philosophy could have no truck with such thinking. The critique of Kant's language was then, one of the most egregious arguments presented by Kant's opponents – it was, ultimately, the surrender of meaningful reasoning to the interests of style.<sup>125</sup>

Indeed, as in Meiners' account, these philosophical claims were mapped onto national characteristics. Villers argued that empiricist ideas dominated French cultural norms. This empiricism encouraged a national obsession with 'taste' and 'bel-esprit' that prevented deep intellectual investigation.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, the central role of Paris in shaping French trends, as well as its wealth and luxury, created a positive feedback loop between empiricist philosophy and decadent behaviours.<sup>127</sup> Financial and political influences on intellectual and artistic production distorted philosophers' interests in favour of the status quo.<sup>128</sup> This process not only resulted in the degradation of philosophy in favour of taste, but also encouraged the materialism of the *ancien régime*.<sup>129</sup> This mutually reinforcing relationship similarly encouraged despotism, as writers sought popularity by appeasing established powers rather than producing social and political critiques.<sup>130</sup> Jacobinism was equally the product of empiricist philosophy: just as empiricism

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<sup>123</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 173-4. Villers associates this argument with the work of Condillac, although it more closely corresponds to the arguments of contemporary French and German thinkers. See Zande, 'Image of Cicero', 433-440. On Condillac's linguistic thought see Aarsleff, Hans, 'Introduction', in de Condillac, Etienne Bonnot, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, ed. Hans Aarsleff (Cambridge, 2001), xi-xxxviii.

<sup>124</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 173-174.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx-xxxii.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* See also Crowley, *Charles de Villers*, 132-161.

<sup>127</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 141-4.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-150.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-154.

encouraged the corruption of the *ancien régime*, the *ancien régime's* overthrow manifested itself in bloodthirsty atheism.<sup>131</sup> Empiricism was thus responsible for 'real evils' that were 'incalculable'.<sup>132</sup>

By contrast, Germany had remained 'a nation gentle, [and] meditative', largely at peace, and 'cultivating her reason and the sciences'.<sup>133</sup> This, Villers claimed, was because the 'dominant tendency' in Germany is '*ideality*', rather than French '*sensuality*'.<sup>134</sup> This ideality encouraged the development of rationalist thought and, consequently, the moral austerity necessary to produce virtuous mores and institutions. Germany's ethical character was bound to its earnest, simple, and widespread religious convictions, which contrast with France's paradoxical combination of Catholic pomp and widespread irreligion.<sup>135</sup> The close relationship between religion and ethics in the Critical Philosophy represented the culmination of this tendency in Germany.<sup>136</sup> Villers argued that, by establishing a set of legislative norms derived from rational speculation, Kantian ethics could overcome 'the despotism of false philosophers' like the *Encyclopédistes*, as well as 'the despotism of the Jacobins'.<sup>137</sup> The Critical Philosophy, Villers maintained, offered France 'the morals, [and] the virtues, without which there is no liberty, law, [or] republic'.<sup>138</sup> Villers was confident that his readers would agree with his reasoning. As in Meiners, then, these philosophical arguments were cultural analyses with high political stakes.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 164-5.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 161-4.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 169. Villers is presumably referring only to the northern portion of the Holy Roman Empire, which had remained largely outside the Revolutionary Wars following the 1795 Treaties of Basel.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., xlv-xlix. Villers' emphasis.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 167, 395-6. Villers does not discuss religious differences within Germany, or differences between German and French Catholicism here.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 167-8, 332-346; Kant, 'Religion innerhalb der bloßen Vernunft', 149-189.

<sup>137</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 166.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 166-7, 170-1.



#### 1.1.4. Two Histories of Philosophy

These interventions in the dispute around the Critical Philosophy and its successors were grounded in contrasting accounts of the history of philosophy. Much of the *Philosophie de Kant* is a commentary on the history of philosophy, while the first volume of Meiners' *Kritische Geschichte der Ethik* is – as the name suggests – a narrative account of earlier ethical thought.<sup>139</sup> These histories are polemical works that emphasized the cultural and political causes and outcomes of different ideas. Moreover, they are clearly inflected by the methodological innovations of pragmatic history.

At the beginning of his history, Meiners established three ancient 'main systems [*Hauptsysteme*]', of ethics: 'egoism and enjoyment', 'selfless virtue [...] or well-built happiness', and 'enthusiastic [*schwärmerisch*], physicality-denying, and sense-withdrawing speculation'.<sup>140</sup> These systems correspond to three different theories of human nature – humans as fundamentally self-interested creatures, humans as creatures for whom virtue and happiness can be unified, and humans as essentially rational creatures who should despise sensibility.<sup>141</sup> Meiners argued that the most accurate understanding of human nature is the 'moderate', eudaemonistic, conception of humanity as 'a mixed, sensual, thinking, and acting system', and argued that this view would produce the best ethical theories.<sup>142</sup> In this tripartite system, then, rationalism

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 69-108, 131-250. The second volume of the *Geschichte der Ethik* is mostly dedicated to the systematic critique of Kant's ethics outlined above.

<sup>140</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 5.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 5, 231. This self-conscious emphasis on moderation was typical among German *Popularphilosophen* such as Meiners, Feder, and Garve. Meiners notably described 'temperance [*Mäßigkeit*]' as a particularly important virtue. Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 75, 78, 82; Zande, Johan van der, 'The Microscope of Experience: Christian Garve's Translation of Cicero's "De Officiis" (1783)', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jan., 1998), 79.

represents an aberration from the proper, moderate course of philosophical inquiry. Conversely, as indicated above, Villers understood philosophy as a dialectical struggle between rationalist and empiricist ideas resolved by Kant. In doing so, he projected a narrative that 'excused' earlier, innovative thinkers such as Locke, and even Condillac, as having ultimately laid the groundwork for Kant's project by problematizing earlier rationalist systems.<sup>143</sup> As it had overcome the failures of previous philosophers, however, empiricists were intellectually obliged to adopt the principles of the Critical Philosophy. As indicated in the previous section, however, in this resolution the determination of ethical principles was to be the exclusive province of rational inquiry.

Moreover, by dividing philosophical systems in these ways, Meiners and Villers established meta-historical categories through which ethical philosophy could be understood. These categories were then utilized to intervene in on-going debates around the value and legacy of particular ideas and figures.

Perhaps most notably, Plato's legacy had become a source of significant contention in contemporary German thought. In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant had defended the speculative rationalism of Plato's *Republic*, arguing that such ideals, however abstract, are necessary for the productive critique of current realities.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, Kant repeatedly identified Plato as the archetypal rationalist philosopher.<sup>145</sup> Kant's defence of Plato appears to have been written in response to Johann Jakob Brucker (1696-1770), whose influential history of philosophy had mocked the *Republic's*

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<sup>143</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, viii-ix, 108-130, 430.

<sup>144</sup> Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft (1. Aufl.)', 321-324.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 199-202; Kant, Immanuel, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft (2. Aufl.)', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 3: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft (2. Aufl. 1787)* (Berlin, 1904), 551; Kant, 'Kritik der praktischen Vernunft', 141.

implausibility.<sup>146</sup> Although Plato goes unmentioned, Kant's 1793 essay on theory and practice articulated a similar defence of the role of rational speculation in political discourse.<sup>147</sup> In 1798 Fichte's *System der Sittenlehre* followed Kant by using Plato to defend rationalist political and ethical thought.<sup>148</sup> In the same year, Christian Garve's history of ethics – against which Meiners situated his own – was both sympathetic and critical towards Plato.<sup>149</sup> Plato's philosophy was deep, original, and rich in insights.<sup>150</sup> Garve even situated Kant as being at one end of the rationalist tradition begun by Plato, praising both as 'deep thinkers' and 'beautiful spirits [*schöne Geister*]'.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, Plato's rationalism had ultimately been surpassed by the more balanced empiricism of Aristotle.<sup>152</sup> It is surely not a coincidence that Garve's critique of Kant's work was also more balanced than that of Meiners.<sup>153</sup>

By 1800, then, discussions of the reception and value of Plato had become tied to debates around the Critical Philosophy and the rationalist tradition more broadly. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, Meiners had become more critical of Plato following the intense philosophical disputes of the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>154</sup> In 1800 Meiners described Plato's writings as being useful primarily for understanding ancient Greek superstitions and customs rather than

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<sup>146</sup> Brucker, Johann Jakob, *Historia critica philosophiae*, 5 Vols. (1st edn. Leipzig, 1742-1744), Vol. 1, 648-9. On Brucker see Baldo, Italo Francesco, 'Textbooks after Brucker', in Piaia & Santinello (eds.), *Models of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, 475-477.

<sup>147</sup> Kant, Immanuel, 'Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 8, 273-313

<sup>148</sup> Fichte, *Sittenlehre*, 483.

<sup>149</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, xviii-xx.

<sup>150</sup> Garve, Christian, 'Abhandlung über die Principe der Sittenlehre, von Aristoteles an bis auf unsre Zeiten', in Aristotle, *Die Ethik*, trans. & ed. Garve, Vol. 1, 31-53.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, 175-7.

<sup>154</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 196-206.

for acquiring philosophical insights.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, Meiners particularly criticized Kant and his heirs for their supposed misreading of Plato's thought to support their own ideas.<sup>156</sup> He criticized Plato as an early rationalist thinker, but he also argued that attempts to reconcile Plato's ideas with the Critical Philosophy were anachronistic. Against this, Villers followed Kant and Fichte by arguing that Plato was an important and valuable thinker in the development of rationalist ethics.<sup>157</sup> He even claimed that Plato's philosophy provided a precursor to key concepts of the Critical Philosophy.<sup>158</sup>

Their discussions of Stoicism reveal a similar divide. The reputation of Stoicism had changed drastically between 1650 and 1750. By virtue of its emphasis on theological immanence, fatalism, and naturalism, Stoicism became associated with Spinozism – the *bête noire* of many Enlighteners – in the works of Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), Brucker, and others.<sup>159</sup> Beginning with Kant himself, the 1780s and 1790s saw extensive debate around the relationship between the Critical Philosophy and Stoic thought. Although Kant criticized key aspects of Stoic metaphysics and moral reasoning, he expressed sympathy with the tradition's deep ethical impulses.<sup>160</sup> Reinhold's popular account of the Critical Philosophy reflected Kant's view of Stoicism.<sup>161</sup> In 1797, however, the philosopher Anton Greß (dates unknown) argued that there were more parallels between the Critical Philosophy and Stoicism than Kant and Reinhold had been

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, xii, xxx, xliii, lvi, lix, 90, 96, 100, 108, 180, 248, 352, 358, 384, 430.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Brooke, Christopher, 'How the Stoics Became Atheists', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Jun. 2006), 387-402.

<sup>160</sup> Kant, Immanuel, 'Kritik der praktischen Vernunft', 11, 60, 86, 111-112, 115, 126-127; Kant, Immanuel, 'Metaphysik der Sitten', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 6, 57, 59, 422, 457, 477, 484.

<sup>161</sup> Reinhold, Carl Leonhard, *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1790), 284, 286-287, 300, 320.

willing to concede.<sup>162</sup> At the height of the *Atheismusstreit* in 1799, the writer Karl Friedrich Ernst Ludwig (1773-1846) similarly compared Fichte's thought to Stoicism, but sought to defend both against the charges of atheism and fatalism.<sup>163</sup> By contrast, Christian Friedrich von Ammon (1766-1850) positioned Christian ethics against those of Kant which, in turn, he considered a branch of Stoic thought.<sup>164</sup>

Given its increasing association with the Critical Philosophy, it is unsurprising that Meiners sharply criticized Stoicism, describing it as the product of Greek moral and political decline during the Hellenistic period.<sup>165</sup> Meiners was notably more critical of the Stoics than were his three key protagonists – Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Smith – possibly reflecting the new polemical circumstances around the Critical Philosophy.<sup>166</sup> His arguments against Stoicism were virtually identical to those he mustered against the Critical Philosophy: both represented dogmatic, rationalist systems that subordinated human nature to speculation.<sup>167</sup> Stoicism, like the Critical Philosophy, was characterized by *Schwärmerey* and a rigid

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<sup>162</sup> Greß, Anton, *De Stoicorum supremo ethices principio Commentatio* (Würzburg, 1797), 1-17. I have been unable to discover any information about Greß's life, including dates of birth and death.

<sup>163</sup> Ludwig, Carl Friedrich Ernst, *Freymüthige Gedanken über Fichte's Appellation gegen die Anklage des Atheismus und deren Veranlassung* (Gotha, 1799), 79.

<sup>164</sup> Ammon, Christian Friedrich von, *Vindictur morum doctrinae arbitrium liberum, reiecta libertate Stoica ethicae Kantianae* (Göttingen, 1799). On Ammon's complex relationship with the Critical Philosophy, see Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 224-229.

<sup>165</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 149-195.

<sup>166</sup> Smith, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury were each sympathetic towards – and, in the cases of Hutcheson and Shaftesbury at least, apparently influenced by – certain aspects of Stoic ethics. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 323-333; Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1999), 144-5, 424-5; Hutcheson, Francis, 'On the Natural Sociability of Mankind', in idem., *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, eds. James Moore & Michael Silverthorne (Indianapolis, IN, 2006), 193-194, 199, 206, 209. See Brooke, Christopher, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, NJ, 2012), 111-125, 150, 159-164, 167-171, 206-207.

<sup>167</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 149-195.

commitment to abstract duties. Villers, by contrast, consistently used the term 'stoic' as a positive adjective.<sup>168</sup> More importantly, in *Philosophie de Kant* the Stoic principle of moral perfectibility is described as a valuable example of normative ethics and an important precursor to the categorical imperative.<sup>169</sup>

Villers and Meiners were no less divided in their responses to modern philosophy. Despite praising early French essayists like Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) and Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Meiners argued that Britain had contributed most substantially to modern ethical thought.<sup>170</sup> Meiners naturally lauded Britain for its empiricist ethicists. He particularly praised Shaftesbury for his re-orientation of ethics towards human experience rather than 'first principles', even describing him as 'the first high priest who re-opened the long-closed temple of human nature'.<sup>171</sup> The course of British ethics was, moreover, dialectical, as Hutcheson, Smith, and others responded to and developed the ideas of earlier thinkers. Unsurprisingly, Villers dismissed British philosophy as 'eclectic and superficial' precisely because of its emphasis on human experience rather than rational principles.<sup>172</sup>

As noted above, Meiners argued that German ethics, being dominated by rationalists, had failed to apprehend the anthropological knowledge required to produce ethical ideas of lasting value.<sup>173</sup> Meiners wrote of the 'affectionate enthusiasms [*liebevolle Schwärmereyen*]' of Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), and the 'monstrous volumes' of Wolff's *Philosophia practica universalis*,

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<sup>168</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, lxvii.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>170</sup> *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 271-276.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 277-280.

<sup>172</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, xxii.

<sup>173</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 280.

*methodo scientifica pertractata* (1st edn. 1738-1739).<sup>174</sup> This situation was only exacerbated in the Critical Philosophy.<sup>175</sup> Whereas British ethical thought had (following Shaftesbury at least) experienced a progressive dialectic, German thought had been regressive, as philosophy became only more obscure and enthusiastic. Villers, by contrast, argued that the German Enlightenment had been at the forefront of modern ethical thought precisely because it had surpassed the particularities of human experience.<sup>176</sup> The emergence and consolidation of increasingly refined rationalist ideas from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) onwards reflected the 'ideality' of German thought and customs.<sup>177</sup> The cultural prevalence of rationalism was precisely why German ethics were so valuable. Consequently, Villers claimed, the Critical Philosophy and its heirs were emblematic of Germany's superior moral stature.

Villers and Meiners agreed regarding both the (allegedly) pernicious moral and religious effects of the French *Encyclopédistes* and the relationship between their philosophies and the decadence of the French *ancien régime*.<sup>178</sup> However, whereas Villers tied the *Encyclopédistes'* atheism to their empiricist principles, Meiners saw them as reflections of the self-interested moral character of contemporary France.<sup>179</sup> Interestingly, and unlike Meiners, Villers considered Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) to be a morally profound, if deeply flawed, thinker, and even excluded the latter from

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid. Meiners names only *Philosophie practica universalis*. Wolff published two works with this as part of the title, one comprises only about twenty pages. Wolff, Christian, *Q. D. B. V. Philosophia practica universalis, mathematica methodo conscripta* (Leipzig, 1703); idem., *Philosophia practica universalis, methodo scientifica pertractata*, 2 Vols. (1st edn. Frankfurt, 1738-1739).

<sup>175</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 283.

<sup>176</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 169; Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 280-3.

<sup>177</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 43-44.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 156-8; Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 275-6.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

his critique of the *Encyclopédistes*.<sup>180</sup> Their disagreement regarding Rousseau reflected fundamental ethical differences, as well as distinct conceptions of human nature. Villers distinguished the *Encyclopédistes* from Rousseau on epistemic-ethical lines, even arguing that the latter was an important moment in the historical emergence of Kant's ethics.<sup>181</sup> Meiners described all 'systematic' French ethical philosophy as, at best, mediocre – as in the work of Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709-1785) and Pierre Louis Maupertuis (1698-1759) – but more commonly – as in the writings of Rousseau, Voltaire, and others – dangerous. These writers, Meiners claimed, had developed universalizing philosophies based on false conceptions of humanity.<sup>182</sup> These philosophies had become increasingly dangerous, culminating in the horrors of the Revolution.

As shown above, their accounts of ethics and its history were tied to contemporary disputes that they claimed had profound political implications. In assessing thinkers like Plato and the Stoics, they were not simply drawing conclusions about the philosophical value of ancient thinkers. Instead, they were attempting to shape perceptions of perceived philosophical traditions. The reception of ancient thinkers was an important battlefield for their own ideas. Equally, they offered dialectical narratives of modern European philosophy that were associated with the values of different national groups. Meiners' tripartite egoist-empiricist-rationalist division is paralleled in his accounts of Francophone, British, and German philosophy. The egoism prevalent in eighteenth-century France and the intense rationalism of the Critical Philosophy and its heirs were both profoundly dangerous. The proper alternative was a moderate, British empiricism. Conversely, Villers' empiricist-rationalist dualism is paralleled in his accounts of France and Germany. As German

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<sup>180</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 171-172.

<sup>181</sup> On Rousseau's importance to Kant, see Kuehn, *Kant*, 131-132.

<sup>182</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 274-6.



thinkers had developed increasingly sophisticated rationalist ideas (reflected in the nation's cultural norms), France had become even more mired in empiricism. Meiners' work expressed clear anxieties about the Critical Philosophy, but also the cultural circumstances of Germany more broadly. German ethical writing would have to be overhauled, or else risk broader enthusiasm and unrest, as well as cultural regress. By contrast, Villers saw French thought as being in desperate need of German ideas. Only by adopting German norms could France experience cultural progress. Moreover, it was precisely German writers' emphasis on detailed, abstract moral speculation that placed them at the avant-garde of European philosophy.

#### 1.1.5. Blockheads and Immoralists: Rhetoric and the *Atheismusstreit*

These different accounts were not collegial disagreements. Villers' commitment to defending Kant and his philosophy was pronounced, even hyperbolic. Villers compared attacks against Kant to the executions of Jesus and Socrates.<sup>183</sup> He distinguished between Kant's 'worthy' and 'unworthy' critics. Worthy critics were those who appreciated the cogency of Kant's work and published insightful responses to it – Villers named only Jacobi and Christoph Gottfried Bardili (1761-1808) – and those who had further developed ideas from the Critical Philosophy, such as Fichte, Reinhold, and Maimon.<sup>184</sup> Villers bluntly dismissed Kant's other critics as undignified, self-interested, or lacking in intellectual ability.<sup>185</sup> They were 'envious', and constrained 'from opening [their] eyes to the light which they offend'.<sup>186</sup> Empiricism was not just 'frivolous', but 'the metaphysics of infants [...] that of savages'.<sup>187</sup> Meiners was just as dismissive and

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<sup>183</sup> Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, xxvi, 400.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii-xxxv.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, xli-xlii.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii, xxx, 202. Such comments necessarily include Meiners. Indeed, Meiners appears in *Philosophie de Kant* as part of a list of important German

insulting towards his opponents. He described new contributions to Kantian thought as the works of 'blockheads', and accused Kant's advocates of 'insufferable arrogance' and 'unscrupulous wantonness'.<sup>188</sup> Such language was emblematic of the harsh landscape of German debate around the *Atheismusstreit*.

Thus, neither the dispute nor its sharp rhetoric were limited to the pamphlets and polemics usually associated with the conflict, but instead featured in a range of other texts, including works – like Meiners' – primarily intended for academic audiences.<sup>189</sup> The writings of Villers and Meiners suggest a broader scope to the polemic, with a lasting impact in contemporary thinking about the history of philosophy. Indeed, although Meiners had opposed the Critical Philosophy since the 1780s, it was only following the *Atheismusstreit* that he published a systematic critique of Kant's ethical thought that suggested it had dangerous cultural and political implications.<sup>190</sup> While Meiners' ethical writings did not offer significant intellectual innovations, they represent a major intervention in contemporary debates. Moreover, they reflect a web of historical, ethical, cultural, and political arguments and concerns. They combined pragmatic history with ethical philosophy to form a deeply politicized history of morality.

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historians of philosophy (101-102). This apparent praise is qualified in a draft found in Villers' *Nachlass*. Here, Villers suggested that while Meiners' work showed 'vast erudition' it was not combined with 'much philosophical spirit'. Such comments reflect the common view among Meiners' critics that he produced erudite compendiums rather than rigorous or original analyses. In this light, the balance of Villers' comments is decidedly unfavourable towards Meiners. Villers, Charles de, 'Collectanea Philosophica' (unnumbered bundle of papers), in Hamburg Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Autographensammlung: Villers' *Nachlass*: Box 5.2; Gierl, Martin, 'Christoph Meiners: Rasse und Nation', 431-432; Bödeker, 'Einleitung', xv.

<sup>188</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, xii-xiii; *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, xi.

<sup>189</sup> On the texts usually associated with the dispute, see Böckelmann, Frank (ed.), *Die Schriften zu J. G. Fichtes Atheismus-Streit* (Munich, 1969); Lindau, Hans (ed.), *Die Schriften zu J. G. Fichte's Atheismus-Streit, 1798-1800* (Munich, 1913); Estes & Bowman, *The Atheism Dispute*.

<sup>190</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Seelen-Lehre*, iv-v.

Similarly, reading *Philosophie de Kant* in the context of the *Atheismusstreit* offers important insights into the work and its reception. Michel Espagne and Michael Werner have argued that historians should pay close attention to the linguistic, discursive, and other cultural contexts of ideas and texts in cultural transmission.<sup>191</sup> In particular, historians should appreciate the ways in which texts and ideas are 'transformed' in transmission between cultures and languages, resulting in distinct acculturations that reflect particular contexts.<sup>192</sup> Michel Delon has argued that negative reactions to *Philosophie de Kant* were, at least in part, the result of its polemical tone.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, French thinkers even began to base their responses to Kant on the less polemical account of the Critical Philosophy published by Johann Kinker (1764-1845) in order to emphasize that their rejection of Kant was purely philosophical.<sup>194</sup> Villers' earlier writings on Kant, written before Fichte lost his job at Jena, are noticeably less belligerent.<sup>195</sup> The *Philosophie de Kant*, however, was written in the wake of the most turbulent – and indeed aggressive – phase of the *Atheismusstreit*. The polemical tone of this work appears unusual when read alongside the mostly cordial French debates around Kant, but far less so when read alongside German accounts

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<sup>191</sup> Espagne, Michel & Werner, Michael, 'Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert: zu einem neuen interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm des C.N.R.S.', in *Francia*, Vol. 13 (1985), 502-510. See also Espagne, Michel, *Les Transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris, 1999) & Stockhorst, Stefanie, 'Introduction', in Stockhorst, Stefanie (ed.), *Cultural Transfer Through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation* (Amsterdam, 2010), 7-26.

<sup>192</sup> Espagne & Werner, 'Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer', 504-505.

<sup>193</sup> Delon, Michel, 'Clivages idéologiques', 25-38.

<sup>194</sup> Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 184-208; Kinker, Johann, *Essai d'une exposition succincte de la Critique de la Raison-Pure*, trans. J. le Fèvre (Amsterdam, 1801); Destutt de Tracy, Antoine-Louis-Claude, 'De la métaphysique de Kant: ou observations sur un ouvrage intitulé: "Essai d'une exposition succincte de la Critique de la Raison-Pure" par J. Kinker' in *Mémoires de l'Institut National des Sciences et Arts: sciences morales et politiques*, Vol. 4 (Vendémiaire An XI [Sept. 1802]), 544-606.

<sup>195</sup> These works are listed in footnote 92 of this chapter.

like Meiners'. While it is impossible to be certain, this suggests that Villers' account of the Critical Philosophy may have been inflected by the more polemical character of the German debates. In this sense, *Philosophie de Kant* may represent a failure to adequately acculturate the work for Francophone readers.

Furthermore, Villers is often described as having not engaged closely with the novel ideas of thinkers like Fichte, Schelling, and Kant's other intellectual heirs.<sup>196</sup> François Azouvi and Dominique Bourel suggest that Villers rejected – or at least took no interest in – the innovations of thinkers like Fichte and Schelling.<sup>197</sup> Here they quote Villers' obituary for Kant, where he stated that 'the revolution is accomplished [*consommée*]'.<sup>198</sup> In fact, Villers described Kant's transcendental methodology as having overcome key problems around the rationalist/empiricist dispute, before stating that 'the revolution is accomplished *in this regard*'.<sup>199</sup> In Villers' own words, 'the march is henceforth strengthened and illuminated'.<sup>200</sup> Crucially, Villers described only one aspect of philosophical debate as having been resolved, and clearly indicated the value of further innovations. In a later unpublished text, Villers spoke positively of what he called 'Nature-Philosophy'.<sup>201</sup> Here he described Fichte as 'the spiritualizer' of Kant's scientific metaphysics, upon whose work Schelling also built.<sup>202</sup> In 1799 Fichte had been the 'Messiah' of speculative philosophy; later he was the 'spiritualizer' of Kant's thought. While Villers did not publish a detailed account unequivocally in favour of

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<sup>196</sup> Winterling, *Ruckzug aus der Revolution*, 136-142; Printy, 'Protestantism and Progress', 315.

<sup>197</sup> Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 234-6.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis mine. The obituary is reprinted in Azouvi and Bourel's volume.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Villers, Charles de, sheet titled 'Natur-Philosophie' in 'Collectanea Philosophica' (*Nachlass*: Box 5.2). The sheet is undated, but refers to an article in the March 1813 edition of the *Leipziger Literaturzeitung*.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

Fichte's system, his writings clearly indicate an on-going engagement with developments in German philosophy. Given these facts, and the impact of his other writings across German-speaking Europe, Villers should be seen as an important participant in the transformations within German philosophy during the Napoleonic period.

Despite Villers' efforts, Kant's position in French philosophy became settled – at least for the following decades – with the 1804 publication of Degérando's *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*.<sup>203</sup> Kant here became one staging post in the dialectical elaboration of Degérando's (and later Victor Cousin's) own eclectic philosophy. Interestingly, Degérando was also an important figure in the French reception of Meiners, and appears to have made significant use of the latter's ideas.<sup>204</sup> In the German lands, the post-Kantian currents of Idealism and Romanticism gradually marginalized thinkers like Meiners. Nevertheless, his work gained some currency in France and was utilized by Degérando and other members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme in their development of new empiricist and ethnological ideas.<sup>205</sup>

There is, then, an irony in the transnational receptions of Meiners and Villers. Villers' account of metaphysics, prepared primarily for French readers, was rejected in France, but nevertheless engaged with the innovations that would dominate German philosophy over the following decades. Meiners' empiricism, written primarily for Germans, was essentially eclipsed in Germany, but contributed to new currents of thought in nineteenth-century France.

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<sup>203</sup> Azouvi & Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris*, 231-265; Degérando, Joseph Marie, *Histoire Comparée des Systèmes de Philosophie relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*, 3 Vols. (1st edn. Paris, 1804), Vol. 3, 505-550.

<sup>204</sup> Rupp-Eisenreich, 'Meiners et de Gérando', 21-47.

<sup>205</sup> Rupp-Eisenreich, 'Des choses occultes', passim.

While these considerations are important for understanding their individual legacies, it is crucial not to lose sight of the most salient features of their interventions: both Meiners and Villers saw ethics as a philosophical discipline with urgent cultural and political implications. Moreover, both the discipline and its implications were best elaborated through historical analyses of the causes and effects of different ideas.

## 1.2. Eichhorn, Epistemology, and Ethics

Villers' and Meiners' accounts of the history of philosophy were organized around their partisan responses to the *Atheismusstreit*. Although often less overtly polemical, the period's other major histories of philosophy reflected similar attitudes. Dietrich Tiedemann's *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie* (1791-1797) was the first comprehensive history of philosophy since Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742-1744).<sup>206</sup> Despite Tiedemann's critique of other thinkers' use of Kant's philosophy as a 'standard' against which to measure earlier ideas, his work – as contemporaries noted – reflected an eclectic, broadly empiricist, understanding of philosophy that was similarly partisan.<sup>207</sup> In the following years Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1761-1819) published his eleven-volume *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1798-1819), which attempted to revise historiographical methods according to the principles of the Critical Philosophy.<sup>208</sup> Tennemann saw Kant's project as the moment at which philosophy

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<sup>206</sup> Longo, 'The Göttingen School', 681.

<sup>207</sup> Tiedemann, Dietrich, *Geist der Spekulativen Philosophie*, Vol. 1: *Von Thales bis Sokrates* (Marburg, 1791), iv-xxxiv. On Tiedemann's work more broadly, see in particular Longo, 'The Göttingen School', 639-693.

<sup>208</sup> On Tennemann's methodology, see in particular Tennemann, Wilhelm Gottlieb, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1798), lxvi-lxvii. On the relationship between this methodology and Kant's thought, see Micheli, Giuseppe, *Tennemann: Storico della filosofia* (Padua, 1992), 9-38, 127-135.

had become truly scientific.<sup>209</sup> The German lands' other leading historian of philosophy, Johann Gottlieb Buhle (1763-1821) was much less concerned with applying the principles of the Critical Philosophy to historiography, but adopted Tennemann's position regarding the scientific credentials of Kant's system.<sup>210</sup> Emphasizing their treatment of Kant as the starting point of 'scientific' philosophy, Hochstrasser has convincingly shown that the analyses of Tennemann and Buhle broke with the tradition of histories of morality.<sup>211</sup>

By contrast, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn is rarely considered one of the major historians of philosophy in this period.<sup>212</sup> However, he wrote extensively on the subject, and his accounts more readily conform to Hochstrasser's concept. In these writings, Eichhorn presented an account of the history of philosophy that emphasized the value of intellectual unity and systematicity, rather than one or other particular philosophical system. His approach to the history of philosophy rejected accounts that read any model as the final culmination of intellectual inquiry. Eichhorn's account is, then, more historicist than the works of Meiners, Villers, Tiedemann, and others. His relativism was nevertheless limited and, as discussed below, he maintained normative standards against which historical ideas could be assessed. Indeed, the very principles of his historical methodology implied a normative account of modern ethical thought. This section outlines Eichhorn's historical epistemology and its implications for

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Buhle, Johann Gottlieb, *Entwurf der Transcendentalphilosophie* (Göttingen, 1798), 3-10; Buhle, Johann Gottlieb, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften*, 6 Vols. (Göttingen, 1800-1805), Vol. 1: *Einleitung*, 89, 416. On Buhle see Santinello, Giovanni, 'Johann Gottlieb Buhle (1763-1821)', in Piaia & Santinello (eds.), *Models of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, 787-838.

<sup>211</sup> Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories*, 187-212.

<sup>212</sup> For example his historical methodology – but not his history of philosophy – is mentioned in Piaia & Santinello (eds.), *Models of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, 529, 536-537, 548, 790, 796.

his ethical and political thought before examining how these ideas were born out in his history of morality. Eichhorn's *Litterärgeschichte* (1st edn. 1799, 2nd edn. 1812-1814) was not just a scholarly textbook, but also a politicized intervention in contemporary German philosophy.<sup>213</sup>

### 1.2.1. Eichhorn and Historical Knowledge

Despite being a self-described writer of 'pragmatic history', Eichhorn – as d'Alessandro has noted – avoided publishing programmatic presentations of his thought, and very rarely stated what he thought were his methodological innovations.<sup>214</sup> Whereas Johann Salomo Semler wrote a programmatic critique of contemporary Christian hermeneutics, and Gatterer published works on the methods of pragmatic history, there is no equivalent work by Eichhorn.<sup>215</sup> In his 'secular' historical works in particular – typically presented as 'handbooks', 'textbooks', and other research and study aids [*Hilfsbücher*] – Eichhorn self-consciously aimed to establish a body of historical facts without the superimposition of 'philosophical'

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<sup>213</sup> As an Enlightenment thinker, Eichhorn included all writings of intellectual value in the category of 'literature'. The 'history of literature' had previously been an important genre of history-writing, but had fallen out of fashion by the time Eichhorn wrote. Eichhorn hoped to revive it. D'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 7, 13-14. On this genre, see Gierl, Martin, 'Bestandsaufnahme im Gelehrten Bereich: Zur Entwicklung der "Historia literaria" im 18. Jahrhundert', in idem. et al. (eds.), *Denkhorizonte und Handlungsspielräume: Historische Studien für Rudolf Vierhaus zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen, 1992), 53-80.

<sup>214</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 5-6. All references to the *Litterärgeschichte* are to the second edition (Vol. 1, 1812; Vol. 2, 1814). On this lack of programmatic works, see d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 13, 179-180.

<sup>215</sup> Gatterer, 'Vom historischen Plan', 84-85; Semler, Johann Salomo, *Zur Revision der kirchlichen Hermeneutik und Dogmatik* (Halle, 1788). On Semler and his theology see in particular Hornig, Gottfried, *Johann Salomo Semler: Studien zu Leben und Werk des Hallenser Aufklärungstheologen* (Tübingen, 1996).



interpretations.<sup>216</sup> In 1796 he wrote that 'the historian should [...] hold simply to the facts and let these speak for themselves', and claimed that contemporary Europe lacked such historical works.<sup>217</sup>

Indeed, Eichhorn also situated his own work against overtly politicized historical writings, and especially 'philosophical histories'. He responded negatively to what he saw as the contemporary trend of constructing historical narratives according to 'great ideas'.<sup>218</sup> Such works, Eichhorn wrote, necessarily cherry-pick data to support preconceived arguments. In 1797 he situated his account of the French Revolution against the *Histoire philosophique de la révolution de France* by Antoine-Étienne-Nicolas Fantin-Desodoards (1738-1820).<sup>219</sup> Contrary to Fantin-Desodoards' overtly philosophical, deeply politicized account, Eichhorn portrayed his own work as simply collating and presenting verifiable historical data.<sup>220</sup>

Eichhorn's response to 'philosophical histories' may reflect his intellectual debt to Johann Gottfried Herder.<sup>221</sup> Herder's famous *Auch*

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<sup>216</sup> For example, Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1 (1st edn. Göttingen, 1803), iii-vi; Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, v-vi. Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, *Geschichte der Litteratur von ihrem Anfang bis auf die neuesten Zeiten*, Vol. 1 (Göttingen, 1805), iii.

<sup>217</sup> Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur des neueren Europa*, 2 Vols. (Göttingen, 1796-1799), Vol. 1, lxxxii; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, iii-iv.

<sup>218</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 4, vi-vii.

<sup>219</sup> Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, *Die französische Revolution in einer historischen Uebersicht*, Vol. 1 (Göttingen, 1797), iv; Fantin-Desodoards, Antoine-Étienne-Nicolas, *Histoire philosophique de la révolution de France*, 2 Vols. (1st edn. Paris, 1796). Fantin-Desodoards is now obscure but, as Eichhorn notes, his work was well known to contemporary Germans. The influential *Teutsche Merkur* reviewed it positively, and a German translation appeared in 1797. [Anonymous], 'Anzeigen aus der neuesten französischen Literatur', in *Der neue teutsche Merkur* (Weimar, 1796, No. 3), 221-222; Fantin-Desodoards, Anton, *Philosophische Geschichte der französischen Revolution*, trans. [anonymous], 2 Vols. (Züllichau, 1797).

<sup>220</sup> Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, iv. This work is notably presented as a compendium of data for use by historians, rather than a history in its own right.

<sup>221</sup> See d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 180-187; d'Alessandro, 'Homo historicus', passim. On Eichhorn's intellectual relationship to Herder

*eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774) responded negatively to the triumphalism of contemporary 'philosophical' narratives of progress, and his later work continued to criticize many of the assumptions of Enlightenment philosophical histories.<sup>222</sup> Both thinkers objected to the conflation of historical reality with the philosophical assumptions and expectations of contemporary Europe. Importantly, however, whereas Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*, and then his later *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1792), remained within the boundaries of philosophical history – even as they subverted many of its traditional norms – Eichhorn instead claimed to present historical data without the imposition of *any* philosophical principles. He rarely made prescriptive suggestions, and few of his works indicate a clear political agenda. Nevertheless, Eichhorn did use organizational norms and concepts that reflect particular epistemic principles with major philosophical implications.

Reflecting the emphasis on causal relationships associated with pragmatic history, Eichhorn's historical work made extensive use of the concepts of 'unity' and *Verbindung*. In the *Litterärsgeschichte* Eichhorn argued that intellectual histories should trace the formation of distinct sciences that, he claimed, had emerged through the study of different relationships between data.<sup>223</sup> The analysis of such relationships could be described as a 'science [*Wissenschaft*]' when a 'general principle' was established that could demonstrate the unity of a given field of study.<sup>224</sup> Such accounts should aim to understand the relationships between scientific

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see d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 103-114; Marino, 'Der "Geist der Auslegung"', 81-83.

<sup>222</sup> Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (n.p., 1774); Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 4 Vols. (Karlsruhe, 1784-1792), passim.

<sup>223</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 5-6.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

knowledge and the 'spirit [*Geist*]' of intellectual inquiry in a given age, as well as their integration within the specific conditions of the peoples contributing to them.<sup>225</sup> Eichhorn's emphasis on the importance of internal unity in the scientific status of a field of study mirrors Tennemann's understanding of philosophy. However, whereas Tennemann saw this process as teleologically bound to the specific advances of the Critical Philosophy, Eichhorn saw it as a broader process in the shifting fortunes of intellectual history.

Moreover, Eichhorn stated that intellectual developments are 'intimately bound [*verbunden*] to changes of the social condition, or culture, of every age', a claim recapitulated in later works.<sup>226</sup> He further described the emergence of specific philosophical ideas and movements as explicable responses to contemporary circumstances.<sup>227</sup> New ideas emerge according to the 'physical, political, and moral condition of peoples', their 'climate and national character, lifestyle and social requirements [...] morals and language, religious and political constitution', alongside more general 'aggregates of favourable and unfavourable circumstances'.<sup>228</sup>

Eichhorn's notions of unity and *Verbindung* were not limited to intellectual fields, and they were not apolitical. He emphasized that unity is dependent upon the *Verbindungen* within and between groups, and he also distinguished between the 'bound [*verbunden*]' and the 'un-bound [*unverbunden*]' world.<sup>229</sup> The interconnectedness of modern Europe meant that it could only be understood through the interdependence and sympathy existing between different groups. These relationships were manifested by the numerous

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 9-13.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., viii; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, lxxiv-lxxvi, lxxxv-lxxxvii; Eichhorn *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, vi & 2.

<sup>227</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 5-6.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, viii-x.

political, cultural, religious and commercial bonds that materially sustained the continent and ensured a sense of common kinship.<sup>230</sup> This theme is a central feature of Eichhorn's version of the Enlightened narrative discussed in the third chapter, but certain aspects of it are crucial for understanding his conception of modern ethics.

Most importantly, although Eichhorn thought that European nations are particularly interconnected, modern norms and socio-political *Verbindungen* had effectively been globalized. Eichhorn argued that, since the end of the fifteenth century, Europe had 'bound [*band*] the world [together] through shipping and trade [*Handlung*]'.<sup>231</sup> Europe's *Verbindungen* with the rest of the world not only offered unprecedented new intellectual and commercial opportunities but, following the Age of Exploration, had transformed the globe into a 'great moral unity [*große moralische Einheit*]', or 'moral world [*Welt*]-*Verbindung*'.<sup>232</sup> The claim that the world forms a moral whole has profound ethical implications. It clearly presupposes a cosmopolitan conceptualization of the role of ethical values in modernity. Despite a lack of overt, prescriptive political arguments, then, Eichhorn's concepts of unity and *Verbindung* reflect a politicized and ethically-loaded understanding of historical change.

While the creation of these circumstances may be historically contingent, such judgments were evaluated according to an ahistorical norm. Eichhorn claimed that it is on the basis of 'unity' that 'one can rank everything', tying his notions of unity and *Verbindung* to normative evaluations of ideas, institutions, and other phenomena.<sup>233</sup> The moral unity of modernity can thus be ranked as superior to previous periods. This meant that philosophical ideas

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 9-10.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

both reflected specific cultural stages and, by expressing increasingly nuanced and coherent levels of internal unity, enabled progress towards greater degrees of Enlightenment.

Eichhorn's account is not unproblematic. It is not clear how the unity and *Verbindungen* of different phenomena or periods are to be measured. As a result, in one sense it falls foul of a methodological problem contemporaries identified in the work of Tiedemann. Critics noted that Tiedemann's assessment of ideas according to their degree of Enlightenment was not objective, but instead reflected his particular, and distinctly partisan, conception of what Enlightenment meant.<sup>234</sup> The same is arguably true of Eichhorn – while his assessments of different philosophical ideas are more balanced and less teleological than those of the vocally anti-Kantian Tiedemann, his concept of unity is clearly less impartial, and indeed less relativistic, than it appears at first sight. Like Tiedemann, Eichhorn's history of philosophy is bound to implicit (and sometimes unclear) value judgments about what is or isn't Enlightened. This methodological gap enables important insights into key political and ethical assumptions within his work.

This overview of Eichhorn's methodological principles and their implications is important for understanding his account of the history of philosophy. It reveals that his analytical framework for thinking about the history of various philosophical disciplines is underpinned by concepts with normative, and not just relative, valuations. While he does not clearly specify a preferred ethical system, Eichhorn suggested that universalist ethics are most suited to global modernity. Moreover, as the basis of this universalism was the recognition of global unity, such universalism had ahistorical value.

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<sup>234</sup> Longo, 'The Göttingen School', 683-684.

These ideas have significant implications for his reception of philosophical claims, and thus permeate his history of morality.

### 1.2.2. Unity and the History of Philosophy

Eichhorn's presentation of the history of philosophy prior to the Reformation largely follows other contemporary accounts. It dedicates brief sections to ancient Asian and North African thought before focusing on Ancient Greece.<sup>235</sup> Eichhorn praised Socrates' inquisitiveness, intellectual commitment, and moral teachings.<sup>236</sup> He followed Garve's assessment of Plato by describing him as a systematic and insightful, but nevertheless flawed, philosopher.<sup>237</sup> Eichhorn, like others, described the philosophical differences between Plato and Aristotle as the origin of the rationalist/empiricist split but, unlike Villers and Meiners, did not express a clear preference for either tradition.<sup>238</sup> Rather than evaluating Stoicism, he straightforwardly described the different schools of post-Platonic thought, only noting their decline into 'mere speculations' during the Hellenistic period.<sup>239</sup> The Romans are largely ignored and the Middle Ages saw intellectual suppression and Scholastic barbarism.<sup>240</sup> The Renaissance reignited intellectual inquiry, while the Age of Discovery and the Reformation provided both unprecedented new resources and new freedoms for intellectual inquiry.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 15-107; d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 309-310, 336. On the inclusion of non-European ideas in histories of philosophy, see Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 76-77.

<sup>236</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 97-98.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-4.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 347-348, 377, 380-381, 467, Vol. 2, 1-8, 772-775.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 9-10, 467, Vol. 2, 10-13, 33-41. The broader importance of these events is described in the third chapter.

At this point, however, Eichhorn applied his distinctive notion of intellectual unity to comprehend and assess European thought. The advances of the Post-Reformation period were important but – lacking intellectual unity and a 'general principle' – such knowledge only amounted to 'an aggregate of views [*Meynungen*]'.<sup>242</sup> Systematic – and thus truly 'scientific' – knowledge was only achieved with the work of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and the establishment of the experimental method.<sup>243</sup> René Descartes (1596-1650) furthered this process first by using doubt to challenge received ideas, and second by methodically reorganizing scientific knowledge.<sup>244</sup> Locke responded to Descartes by constructing a system with 'order and internal cohesion', and ensured that henceforth all knowledge must be subjected to reason.<sup>245</sup> Eichhorn praised Locke's emphasis on toleration and his broader 'metaphysics of human rights'.<sup>246</sup> He similarly lauded British empiricist ethicists like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.<sup>247</sup> However, unlike Meiners, Eichhorn did not combine this praise with a rejection of German philosophy. Conversely, he acclaimed the work of thinkers like Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-1694) and Leibniz, and especially their contributions to political ideas.<sup>248</sup> Most notably, Leibniz established natural law upon 'the eternal principles of justice and reason'.<sup>249</sup> By contrast, Meiners effectively ignored Leibniz, while Villers considered him primarily as a precursor to Kant.<sup>250</sup>

As well as reflecting his emphasis on systematicity, Eichhorn's narrative thus far was unusually conciliatory for a work written

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 14-15, 27-28, 43.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 781-3.

<sup>245</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 43-45, 785-6.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 795.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 786-787, 976.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 786-7.

during the intense polemics of the early nineteenth century. Despite his adoption of the rationalist/empiricist distinction, Eichhorn was not a partisan in the dispute around these concepts. What mattered was not the establishment of a particular philosophical pedigree, but rather intellectual unity. His discussion of eighteenth-century thought in France and Germany is, however, much more polemical, and intervenes much more directly in contemporary debates.

Having praised the content and intellectual impact of the 'Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy', Eichhorn lamented that its ultimate decline was due not to its faults, but rather the new emphasis on aesthetic taste among the 'eclectic philosophers'.<sup>251</sup> This group included Meiners, Garve, Tiedemann, and other so-called *Popularphilosophen*, as well as Lessing and Herder. Eichhorn vigorously attacked many of their ideas. He described the posited relationship between the expression of an idea and its validity – championed by Meiners and attacked by Villers – as 'ridiculous [*lächerlich*]'.<sup>252</sup> Eichhorn went on to disparage the eclectics' focus on psychological observation and abandonment of systematic inquiry.<sup>253</sup> This observational-psychological shift led to 'shallowness' and the replacement of systematic unity by 'an aggregate of views'.<sup>254</sup> Eichhorn's use of the same phrase he had employed to describe pre-Baconian knowledge suggests that eclectic philosophy represented a retreat from scientific thought. Despite including some insightful

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 787-791, 796-798, 977. This group should not be confused with earlier 'eclectics' of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries such as Christian Thomasius. Hochstrasser has written on this group and their relationship to the thinkers associated with *Popularphilosophie*, but Eichhorn only describes the latter group as eclectics. Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories*, 187-189.

<sup>252</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 788-790, 796-8, 977.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. On the observational methods of the *Popularphilosophen*, see Zande, 'Image of Cicero', 426-437.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.



thinkers – especially Garve, Herder, and Lessing – the eclectics had failed to offer a coherent alternative to their predecessors.<sup>255</sup>

Eichhorn's critique of German eclecticism is among the clearest admissions of his own intellectual commitments.<sup>256</sup> Notably, however, by the publication of these passages in 1814, few of Eichhorn's eclectics continued to write. While Feder and Ernst Platner (1744-1818) remained active, Garve, Tiedemann, Meiners, and many others had passed away. Eichhorn wrote at a moment when the eclectics appeared to have been almost entirely defeated. Their 'shallowness' no doubt seemed more obvious with hindsight. Indeed, Eichhorn's commentary reflects an important moment in the consolidation of narrative norms in the history of German philosophy. His claims indicate a standardization of the view – initiated by Reinhold – that the *Popularphilosophen* were a distinct group of thinkers whom Kant's work had eclipsed.<sup>257</sup> Eichhorn's *Litterärsgeschichte* demonstrates that this account of German intellectual history was not exclusive to Kant and his heirs.

It is, however, more important that Eichhorn's chief complaint with the eclectics was their lack of abstract reasoning and systematicity. Their unsystematic, observational-psychological approach was incapable of producing significant new insights into key political subjects.<sup>258</sup> By contrast, Eichhorn's strongest praise for Leibniz and Pufendorf was for their systematic contributions to

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Eichhorn's comments are strong enough to contest d'Alessandro's claim that his works 'never assume a declamatory or rhetorical tone'. D'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 221.

<sup>257</sup> Zande, 'Image of Cicero', 441; Reinhold, Karl Leonhard, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (Prague, 1789), 122-123, 133-141.

<sup>258</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 788-790, 796-8, 977. Notably, in his discussion of the few eclectics who produced some valuable work – most notably Herder and Garve – he does not mention their political thought.

political ideas.<sup>259</sup> Despite not explicitly outlining his own political commitments, this reveals a subtle emphasis on the value of political philosophy in Eichhorn's account.

Indeed, Eichhorn praised the Critical Philosophy precisely for its systematic unity and revitalization of political theory (in the form of natural law) and ethical reasoning.<sup>260</sup> As will be discussed in the following chapter, Eichhorn did not clarify his own thought about the content of natural law, but he treats it as a particularly valuable dimension of the study of politics. Eichhorn does not appear to have commented on the *Atheismusstreit*, but he did commend the 'talented men Reinhold, Fichte, [and] Schelling' who worked to perfect Kant's thought and 'give Kantian Idealism systematic unity'.<sup>261</sup> Similarly, he claimed – like Villers – that Kant's eclectic critics, such as Feder, Platner, Johann August Eberhard (1739-1809), and Tiedemann, were dogmatic and unable to adequately respond to the Critical Philosophy.<sup>262</sup> He also collaborated with Kantian historians like Buhle and Carl Friedrich Stäudlin (1761-1826).<sup>263</sup> Eichhorn clearly felt that Kant and his successors offered a salutary and valuable alternative to earlier schools of thought.

Eichhorn's broad sympathy for the Critical Philosophy was however limited. He does not appear to have ever adopted key principles from Kant or his intellectual successors, and Eichhorn was

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 978-979

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 799-801.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> In the late-1790s Eichhorn had planned a collaborative project with Buhle, and the final volume of his *Geschichte der Cultur* were written by Stäudlin. Stäudlin, Carl Friedrich, *Geschichte der Litteratur von ihrem Anfang bis auf die neuesten Zeiten*, Vol. 6: *Geschichte der theologischen Wissenschaften* (Göttingen, 1810-1811). On the Buhle collaboration, see D'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 269-270. On Stäudlin's relationship to Kant, see Schneewind, Jerome B., *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1998), 508; Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories*, 206-212.

particularly critical of attempts by Kant, Fichte, and others to understand Biblical theology in wholly ethical terms.<sup>264</sup> Elsewhere, moreover, he suggested that Kant claimed criminals should be punished as a form of vengeance, and described this position as 'monstrous' and heralding a 'new barbarism'.<sup>265</sup> Eichhorn does not cite a particular passage, but seems to be referring to *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, in which Kant argued that punishment should not be based on ideas of individual or social benefit. Instead, Kant claimed, that criminals should be made to experience suffering on the basis of the 'justice principle'.<sup>266</sup> Eichhorn was also concerned that the intellectual domination of the Critical Philosophy and its successors could lead to stagnation.<sup>267</sup> Finally, like Meiners and many others, Eichhorn criticized the 'enthusiasm [*schwärmerischer Enthusiasmus*]' of some of Kant's advocates.<sup>268</sup>

Nevertheless, Eichhorn's high praise for the Critical Philosophy's systematic rigour, ethical impulses, and contributions to political ideas is important. The first of these points reflects his methodological pre-occupation with unity, while the latter two reflect his emphasis on the moral and political value of systematic, abstract reasoning. Eichhorn did not identify his own ethical and political thought with that of Kant, but his *Litterärgeschichte* displays a clear affinity for these dimensions of the Critical Philosophy and its successors.

Crucially, as an intervention in contemporary political debates, the *Litterärgeschichte* did not simply side with one tradition against another, but also assessed the impact of political and ethical ideas. This is most pertinent in his discussion of France. Like Meiners,

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<sup>264</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 1042.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Kant, 'Metaphysik der Sitten', 331-2.

<sup>267</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 1042.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 800-801.

Villers, and many others, Eichhorn strongly criticized the trajectory of eighteenth-century French philosophy, and tied it to the crises of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. Eichhorn criticized French thinkers' unwillingness to engage with German ideas, the immorality of the *Encyclopédistes*, and the broader tendency towards materialism in French thought.<sup>269</sup> He particularly criticized French notions of human rights: whereas Locke had emphasized viable individual rights – such as rights to property and religious freedoms – the *philosophes* prioritized chimerical and impracticable political rights.<sup>270</sup> In Eichhorn's words, 'the airy doctrine of political freedom and equality' lent itself to tyranny and instability.<sup>271</sup> The transition of ideas and circumstances between Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire, Mably, Rousseau, the Physiocrats, Diderot, and others, generated an increasingly dangerous and inflexible framework of moral and political thinking.<sup>272</sup> Although sympathetic to Rousseau's moral depth, Eichhorn saw his political thought as vague and dogmatic.<sup>273</sup> He detailed the ways in which these various ideas were explicable, even reasonable, responses to the circumstances of the *ancien régime*, but their popularity had laid the foundations for the chaos of the Revolution. Indeed, the attempt to realize these ideas through the Revolution had 'brought universal hardship across Europe'.<sup>274</sup> This view of French philosophy, as discussed above, was by this point commonplace in German thought. Nevertheless, Eichhorn's use of this argument reflects the politicized nature of his work, while his dialectical-regressive treatment of French thought is

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 54-55, 249 & 792-4. These complaints are notably similar to Villers', as is his claim in the same passages that the French language is in some sense shallow. Given their friendship, such parallels may indicate influence, or even collaboration. See Villers, 'Érotique comparée', 157-192. More concrete examples of their intellectual relationship are discussed in the conclusions of this thesis.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 45, 793-4.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 44, 251, 254-255, 266, 793-4, 809-810, 818-820.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.; Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 14-16.

<sup>274</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 45, 793-4.

consistent with the histories of morality elaborated by Meiners and Villers.

Indeed, Eichhorn, like Villers and Meiners, maintained that the study of metaphysics and ethics had important implications for political and cultural reality. He saw political theory as particularly valuable, and emphasized the dangers of philosophies that conflated individual rights with political ones. His account of global modernity was tied to a principle of moral universalism. These ideas were, however, for the most part framed not in terms of the greater validity of one or other philosophical tradition, but rather in terms of unity and *Verbindungen*. As such, Eichhorn's philosophical judgments were grounded in his historical methodology. These claims were, crucially, not relativistic: while ideas reflected particular historical and cultural moments, this did not mean that later thinkers could not judge these ideas by modern standards.

### **1.3. Schlözer's Political Critique of Ethics and the History of Philosophy**

Meiners, Villers, and Eichhorn each emphasized the political and cultural relevance of ethical philosophy and the importance of understanding it in historical terms. Schlözer, by contrast, argued that many aspects of philosophical study are redundant, including both ethics and the history of philosophy. Like Eichhorn, Schlözer's work challenges dichotomous approaches to the reception of the Critical Philosophy. However, unlike Eichhorn, Schlözer presented a self-consciously modern model of political thought – building on *Statistik* and the so-called 'Camerale sciences' – that eschewed the philosophical pre-occupations of Kant and his successors.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> On Cameralism see Sandl, Marcus, *Ökonomie des Raumes: Der kameralwissenschaftliche Entwurf der Staatswissenschaften im 18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 1999). On *Statistik* see Krahnke, *Reformtheorien*

According to Schlözer, those interested in political thought and practice should not dedicate their time to the study of philosophy. Instead, they should focus on systematically understanding, organizing, and mobilizing the available resources (including people) within a given territory for the good of its population.<sup>276</sup> Schlözer's critique of key philosophical disciplines reflects an alternative, and indeed unusual way of conceptualizing the relationships between political thought, political practice, and philosophy. Moreover, it exposes the deep theoretical rifts between thinkers whose work otherwise shared so many preoccupations and conceptual reference points.

Schlözer dismissed the value of studying the history of philosophy in the fifth volume of his critical edition of the Russian *Primary Chronicle* published in 1809, just months before his death.<sup>277</sup> Here he responded sarcastically to a review of his work by asking whether the reviewer, Johann Gottlieb Buhle, thought his own histories of philosophy were 'more necessary and useful than the first state history of the Russian Empire'.<sup>278</sup> The political urgency of Schlözer's comments on Russian history will be discussed in the third chapter. However, it is important that while Buhle had questioned the viability of certain aspects of Schlözer's project, he did not suggest that the *Primary Chronicle* was itself unimportant. In this context, Schlözer's attack on the value of Buhle's project is not just a polemical response to a comparable charge against his own work. Rather, it

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*zwischen Revolution und Restauration*, 295-334; Garner, Guillaume, 'Politische Ökonomie und Statistik an der Universität Göttingen (1760-1820)', in Bödeker et al. (eds.), *Wissenschaft vom Menschen*, 371-390.

<sup>276</sup> See Zande, Johan van der, 'Statistik and History in the German Enlightenment', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (July 2010), 411-424.

<sup>277</sup> The dedication is dated 'May 1809'. Schlözer died on 9 September the same year. Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 5, iv.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.; Buhle, Johann Gottlieb, 'Recension: Nestor; von A. L. Schlözer', in *Neue wöchentliche Unterhaltungen größtentheils über Gegenstände der Literatur und Kunst*, Vol. 1 (Jelgava, 1808), 97-106, 121-131.

indicates Schlözer's view that such histories of philosophy were of low intellectual priority, or even entirely lacking in utility.

Moreover, Schlözer was keen to distance the modern science [*Wissenschaft*] of politics from the broader history of philosophy.<sup>279</sup> He was particularly critical of Christian Wolff's relegation of constitutional theory to a mere 'appendage' of natural law, as well as his 'ridiculous [*lächerlich*]' re-definition of politics as purely philosophical.<sup>280</sup> The results of this mistake had been 'tragicomic, yet ever more terrible than ridiculous'.<sup>281</sup> Rather than treating politics scientifically, this diminution had, according to Schlözer, resulted in both an outdated, ineffective aristocracy (since offices were treated as hereditary rights), and the dangerous democratic impulses of theories of popular sovereignty.<sup>282</sup> Rather than a scientific study of political possibilities, then, the Wolffian formulation had reduced politics to a series of abstract, inefficient – and ultimately dangerous – notions. Whereas other thinkers – including Villers, Meiners, and Garve – were keen to cite classical precedents to their own ideas, Schlözer was exceptionally dismissive of ancient thought.<sup>283</sup>

Philosophical ideas about politics may have existed since prehistory but, according to Schlözer, the scientific study of politics had emerged only since the sixteenth century.<sup>284</sup> Most notably, Luther's thought had begun to clarify the proper relationship between religion and the state, while Machiavelli's *Prince* was a

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<sup>279</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, viii-ix.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-x.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 81-82; Schlözer, August Ludwig, *WeltGeschichte nach ihren HauptTheilen im Auszug und Zusammenhang*, Vol. 2 (1st edn. Göttingen, 1789), 265-267.

<sup>284</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 7-8.

systematic 'satire' of contemporary despotism.<sup>285</sup> The project of elaborating politics as a science continued through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, albeit unevenly and despite the setbacks of Wolffianism.<sup>286</sup> Most important in this process was the growing use of data to study the characteristics of a given territory and determine beneficial policies accordingly.<sup>287</sup> Policies should also be grounded in what Schlözer described as 'meta-politics [*Metapolitik*]', or the study of the human characteristics – physical and intellectual – that inform the emergence and development of political communities.<sup>288</sup> According to Schlözer, meta-politics is, unlike politics proper 'an abstract of natural law'.<sup>289</sup>

In short, the history of political science was the history of the emergence of studies that prioritized viable, data-driven policies and institutions which could respond to the natural needs and inclinations of humanity. These arguments built on the notion of *Statistik*, as pioneered by one of the Holy Roman Empire's most prominent political theorists – and Schlözer's predecessor as chair of politics at Göttingen – Gottfried Achenwall (1719-1772).<sup>290</sup> Achenwall's chief accomplishments were to popularize the study of *Statistik* and systematically define its relationship with natural law in the formulation of political ideas.<sup>291</sup> Schlözer adopted and further developed key aspects of Achenwall's thought, but argued more

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 83-93.

<sup>287</sup> Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Theorie der Statistik, nebst Ideen über das Studium der Politik überhaupt*, Vol. 1: *Einleitung* (Göttingen, 1804), 1-5. Schlözer published only one volume of this project.

<sup>288</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 13-14.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Achenwall had a formative impact on Schlözer's thought. Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, vi-vii; Scattola, 'Schlözer und die Staatswissenschaften' 89.

<sup>291</sup> On Achenwall see Streidl, Paul, *Naturrecht, Staatswissenschaften und Politisierung bei Gottfried Achenwall (1719-1772): Studien zur Gelehrten-geschichte Göttingens in der Aufklärung* (Munich, 2003), 162-181; Zande, 'Statistik and History', 415-416.



vigorously for politics' independence from the philosophical tradition.<sup>292</sup> It was the emergence of this modern, synthetic model of political thought, and not the history of philosophy, that Schlözer claimed was important. While he described key dimensions of the political sciences as 'philosophical', he was unambiguous that the various fields contained within the study of the state constituted their 'own class of sciences: no part of philosophy'.<sup>293</sup> Whereas Meiners, Villers, Eichhorn – and indeed others like Kant, Fichte, and Garve – essentially subsumed key political subjects within the broader field of philosophy, Schlözer subsumed certain philosophical subjects within the broader political sciences.

Schlözer particularly criticized the systematic investigation of ethics. Although cultural *Sitten* play important roles in his thought, his understanding of ethics was self-consciously opposed to the detailed analyses of many of his contemporaries. Like Pufendorf, he derived moral behaviour from humanity's tendency towards co-operation.<sup>294</sup> Schlözer's elaboration of human sociability will be discussed further in the following chapter but, notably, whereas Pufendorf saw this co-operation as fundamentally self-interested, Schlözer – like Meiners and the British moral empiricists – emphasized the role of natural inclinations.<sup>295</sup> However, rather than analyzing the nature and implications of these inclinations – or suggesting the need to accommodate human difference – Schlözer derived from them a straightforward ethic of reciprocity. This was based on the so-called 'golden rule', or – in his words – 'great phrase',

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<sup>292</sup> For example, Achenwall situated 'political phrases [Sätze]' among 'other philosophical [phrases]' and described politics as a 'philosophical science'. Achenwall, Gottfried, *Die Staatsklugheit nach ihren ersten Grundsätzen entworfen* (Göttingen, 1761), [unpaginated preface] §15, §20.

<sup>293</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 2; Schlözer, *Theorie der Statistik*, 94.

<sup>294</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 38-39; Pufendorf, Samuel von, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law*, ed. James Tully & trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge, 1991), 33-37.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

based on Matthew 7:12, and commonly summarized in English as 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'.<sup>296</sup> According to Schlözer, the simplicity of ethics obviated the need for ethical philosophy. He explicitly positioned such ethical inquiry as both distinct from political thought and intellectually vacuous: 'morality and politics are different', and one does not need to go to university to learn the former.<sup>297</sup>

Against systematic elaborations of ethics, Schlözer recommended the study of political, legal, social, and cultural history in order to shape moral behaviour towards valuable political ends. Schlözer's 'great phrase' only went so far: it may be comprehensive as an ethical principle, but the implementation of this principle necessarily depended on recognizing the impact of one's actions within particular contexts. Practicing this ethical principle therefore required diligence and knowledge. History, rather than ethics, could foster upright behaviour, patriotic concern for the public good, and a deeper understanding and appreciation of one's rights and duties.<sup>298</sup> This was not a matter of speculation: in his work on the Transylvanian Saxons, Schlözer argued that history revealed not only the diligent moral character of the German colonists, but also the legal bases of their communal rights.<sup>299</sup> Schlözer argued that this knowledge would equip the Transylvanian Saxons with both the pride and institutional knowledge necessary to challenge Habsburg encroachments.

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<sup>296</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 43. Schlözer writes 'alles was ihr wollt, daß euch die Leute...', paraphrasing Luther's translation of Matthew 7:12: 'Alles nun, was ihr wollt, dass euch die Leute tun sollen, das tut ihr ihnen auch!'

<sup>297</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 180-181.

<sup>298</sup> Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 1, [unpaginated prefatory material], Vol. 5, xi; Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 173-174, 191.

<sup>299</sup> Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Kritische Sammlungen zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, 3 Vols. (Göttingen, 1795-1797), Vol. 1, vi, xiii, 9-10, 12, 16-22. The *Kritische Sammlungen* was prepared in response to threats to the communal rights of the Transylvanian Saxons. See Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 401-414.

According to Schlözer, the historian's role was to analyze available sources and present a comprehensive understanding of the past. This, in turn, could shape present behaviours. In this sense, he did have an ethical epistemology, albeit one based on the recognition and implementation of the 'golden rule'. The systematic study of ethics, its history, and the history of philosophy more broadly, however, were essentially irrelevant to Schlözer's political thought. It is unsurprising, then, that he displayed so little interest in the course of Kantian thought, including the *Atheismusstreit*: he does not appear to have discussed the Critical Philosophy, Idealism, or Romanticism directly at all.<sup>300</sup> His thought was at least implicitly hostile to the work of Meiners, Villers, and Eichhorn, as each dedicated considerable time and energy to the subjects Schlözer dismissed. There is no evidence that these differences adversely impacted their personal relationships, and Schlözer himself described his *Theorie der Statistik* as an outcome of his conversations with Villers.<sup>301</sup> Nevertheless, his work represented an important challenge to the thinkers and ideas that dominated German political thought. His rejection of the value of key philosophical disciplines ran counter to the work of Kant's successors, their various antagonists, and even more ambivalent figures like Eichhorn.

#### 1.4. Conclusions

Meiners, Villers, Eichhorn, and Schlözer all used historical works to intervene in politicized debates about the nature of ethics. However, their interventions presented different – often mutually exclusive –

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<sup>300</sup> Espenhorst suggests that Schlözer was particularly hostile to the Critical Philosophy, Idealism, and Romanticism, citing a collection of letters published in *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*. However, these do not mention either Kant's work or his intellectual successors. Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 430; Ziegengeist, E. (ed.), 'Ungedruckte Briefe von und an Schlözer aus den Jahren 1769-1809', in *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, Vol. 30 (1985), 480-525.

<sup>301</sup> Schlözer, *Theorie der Statistik*, [unpaginated preface].

conceptions of ethics, its history, and the role of ethical ideas in history and politics.

Meiners saw the history of ethics as a struggle between egoism, a moderate empiricism, and *schwärmerisch* rationalism. In modernity, these systems could be mapped onto dominant ideas in France, Britain, and Germany. The *schwärmerisch*, egalitarian Critical Philosophy posed a distinct threat to the cultural circumstances of the German lands and, thus, political stability. In consequence, Meiners proposed the adoption of ideas drawn from British empiricism that prioritized the study and accommodation of human sentiments and inclinations. While German ethics had been steeped in obscurantism, the British empiricists had produced a model of ethics that, in his formulation, superseded the achievements of the ancient world. Unlike French and German writings, this distinctly British model had established a progressive, even dialectical tradition inaugurated by Shaftesbury and culminating in his own systematic project. As shown in the following chapter, Meiners' empiricism was a crucial framework for his thinking about human difference.

By contrast, Villers was committed to a Kantian vision of ethical rationalism. This rationalism was necessarily universalist and, Villers claimed, already a prevalent feature of contemporary Germany. France, on the other hand, had become infected with atheistic empiricism. Thus, Villers proposed that French intellectuals adopt the ethical principles of the Critical Philosophy. Kant's thought, he argued, could remedy France's social and political ills. However, Villers' work was not simply another variation on the Kantian model of the history of ethics described by Hochstrasser.<sup>302</sup> Rather than treating the Critical Philosophy as a 'leap' out of the cyclicity of previous disputes, Villers understood Kant's work as both the gradual

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<sup>302</sup> Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories*, 206-219.

culmination of a dialectical struggle between rationalism and empiricism, and one moment in the broader narrative of philosophy.

Moreover, Villers and Meiners articulated these positions in response to contemporary disputes around Kant, and especially the *Atheismusstreit*. Scholarly understanding of this dispute may benefit from considering the role of historiographical interventions like those of Villers and Meiners. This dispute was seen to have high political stakes. Their responses reflected these concerns, but also utilized pragmatic-historical approaches to the interconnections between ideas, culture, and political events. The differences between Meiners and Villers discussed in this chapter reflect an antagonistic intellectual relationship that will be explored further in the following chapter.

Eichhorn's account of philosophy and ethics is notably reserved with regard to many key debates. Nevertheless, he argued that historical ideas could be ranked according to the principle of unity, and his methodological-analytical concept of unity was not apolitical. Rather, it played a central role in his understanding of history, the relationships between different peoples, and the ethical implications of those relationships. The nature of the modern world's *Verbindungen* implied a moral universalism. Moreover, Eichhorn prioritized philosophical systematicity, the role of abstract thinking, and the ability to produce valuable insights into political subjects. This led him to a sharp critique of German eclecticism, and (qualified) support for the Critical Philosophy and its successors. Like others, he tied the work of the *philosophes* to the upheavals of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. In his discussions of Germany and Britain, Eichhorn was more concerned with the production of valuable political ideas than the direct political impact of different philosophical systems, even as he refused to grant any system or tradition conclusive philosophical authority. Eichhorn's

*Litterärsgeschichte* offered a history of morality that, like those of Villers and Meiners, reflected politicized notions of cultural change.

Hochstrasser notes that Meiners' *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* may have influenced Hegel's revival of the history of morality following the rise of the Critical Philosophy.<sup>303</sup> As this chapter has shown, however, Hegel did not need to revive the history of morality, as Meiners himself – and others like Villers and Eichhorn – had been producing examples of the genre in the intervening years. Nevertheless, and despite the continuity of the history of morality throughout this period, the works discussed in this chapter were inflected by the distinctive concerns and languages of late Enlightenment German thought. In particular, they made extensive use of ideas associated with culture by shifting the focus of their histories towards the social and political causes and effects of ethical philosophy. They also reflected the profound polarizations of German thought in the wake of the Critical Philosophy. Contrasting ideas were understood in terms of schools or traditions demarcated along epistemological lines. These were histories of morality, but ones embedded in the specific circumstances of the German late Enlightenment. They demonstrate both continuity and, through these innovations, important transformations in the genre described by Hochstrasser.

Finally, Schlözer was critical of the study of both ethical philosophy and the history of philosophy. These fields amounted to distractions from the scientific study of politics. Political thinkers should instead focus on understanding the resources, institutions, needs, and customs of a given territory.

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 219.

These works also reflect differing conceptions of the nature of Enlightenment. Meiners positioned the methods and fruits of modern empiricism as the means by which contemporary Europe had superseded both the medieval and the ancient worlds. It was advances in the study of human characteristics and differences that made possible the moral empiricism of Shaftesbury and his successors. Indeed, Meiners saw his collation and systematization of these ideas as the moment at which ethics had become truly scientific.<sup>304</sup> The anthropological, psychological, and ethnological advances of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thus made Enlightened ethical thought possible. Meiners' version of the master narrative was the triumph of empirical knowledge over the ignorance of earlier speculations. In an earlier polemic Meiners had positioned *Schwärmerey*, alongside superstition [*Aberglaube*], as antithetical to true Enlightenment [*wahre Aufklärung*].<sup>305</sup> Described throughout his *Kritische Geschichte der Ethik* as *schwärmerisch*, rationalism – and especially the Critical Philosophy – threatened Germany with a reversion to the speculative darkness of un-Enlightened ages. Nevertheless, Meiners remained confident that the true, empiricist 'moderns' would ultimately defeat the Kantian 'ancients'.

By contrast, Villers saw Enlightenment as fundamentally bound to rationalist ethics, with the Critical Philosophy and its successors at its vanguard. As a result, the *Atheismusstreit* represented a reaction not just against the work of Fichte and Kant, but the prospect of Enlightenment more broadly. Nevertheless, at the time he wrote the *Philosophie de Kant*, Villers' conception of Enlightenment was not as clearly delineated as that of Meiners. The process of philosophical elaboration that had led to the ethics of Kant remained a central component of Villers' 'master narrative', but it

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<sup>304</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Ethik*, iii-vii.

<sup>305</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Ueber wahre, unzeitige, und falsche Aufklärung und deren Wirkungen* (Hanover, 1794), 5-7.

was first fully articulated in his *Essai sur la Réformation de Luther*. As discussed in the following chapter, the *Essai* represented a more detailed – and theologically loaded – articulation of this idea, as well as a more comprehensive analysis of cultural difference.

Eichhorn's account is less straightforward. Despite arguing that progress could not be projected onto the past as an *a priori* norm, Eichhorn did not deny its reality.<sup>306</sup> Moreover, he clearly presented modern Europe – with the exception of France, as further discussed in the third chapter – as broadly Enlightened. This was rooted in the advances of thinkers such as Francis Bacon. In this, Eichhorn's account mirrors the centrality of the Scientific Revolution in the works of Edelstein's protagonists.<sup>307</sup> However, in Eichhorn's formulation it was the systematicity and unity of post-Baconian thought that enabled Enlightenment. It was not simply that there were new means of knowing things about the world, but that those means of knowing were bound to clear, systematic principles. In this context, the eclectics' 'aggregate of views' was fundamentally incompatible with the central principle of Enlightenment. Like Villers, then, Eichhorn argued that thinkers such as Meiners threatened Enlightenment itself.

In a similar manner to Eichhorn, Schlözer emphasized the importance of systematicity and, as will become clearer in the following chapters, 'unity'. However, Schlözer separated the systematic knowledge of politics from the study of philosophy. Indeed, it is precisely the emergence of the scientific study of politics as an independent, mature field of inquiry that mark its Enlightened status. This was a wholly modern narrative, independent from the history of philosophy, and culminating in *Statistik* and meta-politics.

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<sup>306</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, lxxxii-lxxxiii, lxxvii-lxxviii; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, v-vi.

<sup>307</sup> Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, 2-3, 116.



Whereas Meiners, Villers, and Eichhorn each highlighted the political implications of ethical thought in their accounts, Schlözer's 'master narrative' hinged upon the separation of politics from philosophy.

Schlözer did not reject all areas of inquiry commonly described as philosophical and, as indicated in his definition of metapolitics, he clearly understood there to be some role for natural law. The following chapter examines the relationship between theories of natural law and notions of human difference in this period. It shows how Schlözer, Meiners, and Villers presented accounts of natural law that were compatible with their thinking about cultural change. It also analyzes how these thinkers – and Eichhorn – approached one of the most fraught problems in debates about cultural difference: the question of whether or not cultural differences reflected innate characteristics.

## Chapter Two

### Human Nature and Human Difference

In 1809, Charles de Villers noted that Europe was divided into 'two principal races [...] whose temperaments and characters differ to a very high degree'.<sup>1</sup> These were, he claimed, the 'Gallic' and the 'Germanic'.<sup>2</sup> The previous year Villers had written that it was difficult to comprehend, let alone explain, the differences between the ideas, customs, morals, and intellectual works of Germany and those of France.<sup>3</sup> Such differences, Villers claimed, were as profound as the differences between the peoples of Russia, Italy, Japan, the Kalmyk Steppe, and the Arab world.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Johannes von Müller the same year he stated his case more clearly: the 'Gallo-Roman' and Germanic 'races [...] are two worlds, or rather two opposite poles [*pôles opposés*]'.<sup>5</sup> In one of his last writings – the introduction to the 1814 edition of Germaine de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* – Villers emphasized the point again, stating that the French and German 'nations' are, in terms of intellectual culture, 'at two extremities' from one another.<sup>6</sup>

Villers' comments – and especially his use of the term 'race' – have proven controversial. Nell Irvin Painter and Frank Dougherty have taken these passages, along with Villers' intellectual links to the University of Göttingen, as evidence of his commitment to Christoph

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<sup>1</sup> Villers, Charles de, *Coup-d'oeil sur l'état actuel de la littérature ancienne et de l'histoire en Allemagne: Rapport fait à la troisième Classe de l'Institut de France* (Amsterdam, 1809), 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Villers, Charles de, *Coup-d'oeil sur les universités et le mode d'instruction publique de l'Allemagne protestante* (Kassel, 1808), 2-13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Villers, 'Lettres à Jean de Müller', 451-452.

<sup>6</sup> Villers, Charles de, 'Introduction', in Staël, Germaine de, *De l'Allemagne*, Vol. 1 (2nd edn. Paris & Leipzig, 1814), xxxiii-xxxiv.

Meiners' distinctive, essentialist model of racial difference.<sup>7</sup> The second part of this chapter examines this proposed relationship, as well as contemporary notions of race more broadly, by unpacking the ways in which Villers, Meiners, Schlözer, and Eichhorn, analyzed and explained human difference. Discussions of human difference focused on the question of mutability, which was in turn central to deeply politicized Enlightenment debates about perfectibility. I argue that close examination of Meiners' and Villers' writings reveals contrasting, even antagonistic, positions regarding human difference: when they used the word 'race' they referred to very different concepts. Indeed, both Villers and Schlözer rejected Meiners' suggestion that racial groups share innate intellectual and moral differences. Eichhorn also rejected many of Meiners' claims, but nevertheless argued that physiological characteristics predisposed certain groups towards particular – morally significant – behaviours. The texts examined in this chapter reflect both the multivalent, even ambiguous, use of terms like 'race' in the late Enlightenment and the complex, philosophical points of reference through which contemporary thinkers understood and evaluated human difference.

However, in order to fully comprehend their accounts of race, it is important to understand how these thinkers conceptualized human nature and its relationship to political society. Schlözer, Meiners, and Villers, approached these problems using arguments rooted in the natural law tradition. Michael Carhart has argued that Enlightenment Germany's 'science of culture' reflected a break with the natural law tradition.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, a central argument of this chapter is that Schlözer, Meiners, and Villers constructed models of natural law that effectively complemented their cultural thought.<sup>9</sup> To illustrate this, the first part of this chapter describes these thinkers'

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<sup>7</sup> Painter, *History of White People*, 90-103; Dougherty, 'Meiners und Blumenbach', 95.

<sup>8</sup> Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 16-23.

<sup>9</sup> Eichhorn did not present an account of natural law or the state of nature.

accounts of natural law, while the second analyzes their accounts of human difference. In Pocock's terms, they used both the language of natural law and the language of culture. Indeed, these thinkers can be seen as having used ideas and arguments from natural law to provide philosophical frameworks for thinking about cultural difference. Rather than being in tension, then, cultural analysis and natural law were combined to create a systematic model for comprehending humanity.

As indicated above, the protagonists' accounts of cultural change also offer important insights into one of the central questions surrounding contemporary racial thought: the reception of Christoph Meiners' racial theories. Meiners produced some of the most controversial accounts of human difference in Enlightenment Europe. He consistently claimed that cultural differences were in large part the result of heritable moral and intellectual characteristics associated with different racial groups. While earlier thinkers often speculated about possible relationships between physiological, moral, and intellectual differences, Meiners was perhaps the earliest to produce an account of such differences that was systematic, unambiguously hierarchical, and central to his understanding of world history. Colin Kidd has argued that in the nineteenth century ideas associated with race 'acquired a novel salience' in historical thought, and that 'race seemed to promise a more authentic narrative based upon the [...] biological differences that existed between racial units'.<sup>10</sup> The use of race as a crucial means of understanding history may have become more prominent and more widely accepted, but it did not begin in the nineteenth century. With the publication of the ethnological *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* in 1785, Meiners appears to have been the first person to articulate a comprehensive,

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<sup>10</sup> Kidd, Colin, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, 2006), 121. Kidd does not discuss Meiners.

systematic view of history organized around a recognizably modern notion of race.

The issue of Meiners' reception is, consequently, of particular interest to historians of later racial thought. Britta Rupp-Eisenreich has demonstrated Meiners' impact among French ethnologists and racial theorists – most notably Julien-Joseph Virey and the members of the *Société des observateurs de l'homme* – but his German reception remains ambiguous.<sup>11</sup> Although many of Germany's leading intellectuals – including Kant, Herder, Forster, Lichtenberg, and Blumenbach – rejected Meiners' claims, it is clear that his ideas retained some degree of currency. Moreover, they did not stop generating public interest: up until his death in 1810 Meiners continued to publish works on human difference and be admitted to learned institutions around Europe.<sup>12</sup> Meiners was, of course, primarily a historian, and – as mentioned in the introduction – ethnology was at this time considered part of the broader study of history. As such, comparing Meiners' work to that of other historians reveals important dimensions of his reception that may be obscured when examining the responses of thinkers – like Kant, Lichtenberg, and Blumenbach – who worked primarily in non-historical fields. This chapter therefore aims to understand the claims of Villers, Eichhorn, and Schlözer both on their own terms and in relation to Meiners' racial thought.

This analysis leads to three closely related arguments. First, Schlözer and Villers both rejected Meiners' claim that differences of morality and intellect reflect innate racial characteristics. In this, they appear to have been part of the mainstream of contemporary German

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<sup>11</sup> Rupp-Eisenreich, 'Des choses occultes', 131-183; Rupp-Eisenreich, 'Meiners et de Gérando', 21-47.

<sup>12</sup> Vetter, *Wissenschaftlicher Reduktionismus*, 158, 160, 220-226; Zammito, 'Policing Polygeneticism', passim; Rupp-Eisenreich, 'Des choses occultes', 141, 144-145, 154-169.

thought. Second, despite key differences, the writings of Meiners and Eichhorn share important similarities in their characterizations of non-European peoples. Equally, both suggested that certain moral behaviours are the result of innate racial characteristics, even as their arguments rested on different causal mechanisms. This does not demonstrate direct influence, but it does suggest that Eichhorn's thought was not as distant from that of Meiners as has previously been supposed.<sup>13</sup> Third, both Villers and Eichhorn appear to have adopted important terminology from Meiners regarding physiological difference. The adoption of such language may have secured an on-going currency and interest in some of his ideas, even as few remained committed to his hierarchical view of human difference.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first begins with a brief overview of the tradition of natural law with which these figures engaged. It then shows how Villers, Schlözer, and Meiners responded to questions about human nature and the formation of political communities using arguments grounded in natural law. This establishes the framework through which they then approached human – and especially racial – difference. The second section discusses key conceptual and methodological issues in the historiography of Enlightenment racial thought before analyzing how Meiners, Villers, Schlözer, and Eichhorn explained and responded to human difference. As such, it hinges on the question of whether (or to what degree) non-European peoples could be considered perfectible, and thus able to attain the same degree of Enlightenment as Europeans. This section includes a discussion of Meiners' reception and its implications for mapping contemporary debates about race. The chapter concludes by examining how these arguments were mobilized in response to key political questions around slavery,

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 233-237.

imperialism, and Jewish emancipation across both the Holy Roman Empire and the rest of Europe. Claims regarding perfectibility were reflected in the political arguments made by these authors in such debates but, crucially, none came to radical conclusions. While none of these thinkers proposed radical reforms or solutions to these problems, their arguments do reflect different conceptualizations of human nature and the nature of Enlightenment.

## **2.1. Human Nature and Natural Law**

### 2.1.1. Equality, Sociability, and the Natural Law Tradition

The problem of what constituted human nature was among the most pervasively debated issues in the modern tradition of natural law. In particular, thinkers focused on the degree to which humans could be considered naturally equal and/or sociable. At stake were both the theoretical foundations of the political state and the principles by which human relationships should be governed.

The thought of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) played a crucial role in these debates. In a hypothetical 'state of nature', Hobbes argued, humans should be considered equal in moral, intellectual, and physical terms. He acknowledged that individual differences – and hence inequalities – exist, but claimed that such inequalities are effectively irrelevant as few adults could not find some way to subdue others.<sup>14</sup> This equality is reflected in the lack of an agreed authority capable of regulating interpersonal conflict. Without such an authority, each person has an equal 'right of nature' to achieve their interests by any means, including duplicity and violence.<sup>15</sup> Thus, no individual can feel secure. This generates fear, which in turn

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<sup>14</sup> Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1996), Ch. 13, 86-90.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 14, 91-93.

engenders antagonistic relationships. Such a situation can only be resolved through the establishment of a sovereign power with the authority and resources to prevent and punish violence and duplicity. In doing so, however, humanity transfers almost all of its natural rights to the ruler. Natural equality is thus given up in order to establish the state, but remains a central principle for justifying political power.

Hobbes' ideas remained influential throughout the eighteenth century largely via the work of Samuel von Pufendorf.<sup>16</sup> Although Pufendorf retained Hobbes' core argument about the need for political authority, he also introduced crucial revisions.<sup>17</sup> In particular, Pufendorf rejected Hobbes' suggestion that the state of nature is one of perpetual violence. Instead, humanity's physical weakness and the conditions of the natural world are such that individuals must exhibit sociability [*socialitas*] and co-operate in order to survive.<sup>18</sup> The notion of sociability had a profound impact on eighteenth-century thinking about natural law, ethics, and human nature.<sup>19</sup> These arguments led Pufendorf to the claim that individuals have duties towards each other even outside the political state.

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<sup>16</sup> On the reception of Hobbes' account of the state, see in particular Skinner, Quentin, *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics* (Cambridge, 2018), 361-375; Robertson, John, 'Sacred History and Political Thought: Neapolitan Responses to the Problem of Sociability After Hobbes', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Mar. 2013), 1-29.

<sup>17</sup> Dann, Otto, *Gleichheit und Gleichberechtigung: Das Gleichheitspostulat in der alteuropäischen Tradition und in Deutschland bis zum ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1980), 98. On the role of Pufendorf in German disputes about natural law during the eighteenth century, see in particular Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories*, 1-39; Hunter, Ian, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2003), 1-32.

<sup>18</sup> Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen*, 35, 46-48, 56-57. On *socialitas* see in particular Haara, Heikki, *Pufendorf's Theory of Sociability: Passions, Habits and Social Order* (Cham, Switzerland, 2018); Carr, Craig L. & Seidler, Michael J., 'Pufendorf, Sociality and the Modern State', *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 17 (1996), 357-372.

<sup>19</sup> On sociability in the European Enlightenment, see Piirimäe, Eva & Schmidt, Alexander, 'Introduction: Between Morality and Anthropology -



Moreover, the emergence of the political state – in Pufendorf via a series of agreements, rather than Hobbes' single 'Covenant' – is driven primarily by humanity's physical needs, rather than its equality. Crucially, Pufendorf argued that humanity in the state of nature is not equal in physical and intellectual terms. Natural differences between individuals are so great that they not only offered an explanatory framework for the division of social roles, but – because they occurred predictably via heredity – such differences could even justify permanent slavery and the subjugation of national groups.<sup>20</sup> Humans could be considered naturally equal, but only in formal terms as agents worthy of incorporation into the schema of rights and obligations necessary for a contractual theory of the state using principles of natural law.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Pufendorf's argument dispensed with the notion of 'real' natural equality in favour of 'formal', philosophical equality. This account could readily be reconciled with later notions of racial difference.

Natural law did not remain static in Pufendorf's wake, but instead saw new innovations throughout the eighteenth century. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Christian Thomasius, Emer de Vattel (1714-1767), Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui (1694-1748), Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among many others, published major,

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Sociability in Enlightenment Thought', in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 41, No. 5: *Sociability in Enlightenment Thought* (2015), 571-588.

<sup>20</sup> Saastamoinen, Kari, 'Pufendorf on Natural Equality, Human Dignity, and Self-Esteem', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan., 2010), 41-44; Pufendorf, Samuel von, *Innledning till Swänska historien*, trans. Petro Brask (Stockholm, 1688), 908. These comments do not appear in the Latin original but, as Kari Saastamoinen argues, Pufendorf's close involvement with the Swedish translation means that they should be considered his own rather than the translator's interpolations.

<sup>21</sup> Saastamoinen, 'Pufendorf on Natural Equality', 45-46. The other major figure in late-seventeenth century natural law, John Locke, made a similar claim, suggesting its early popularity in theories of natural law. Locke, John, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988), 304.

sometimes radical contributions to natural law.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Pufendorf's work remained the dominant framework for most thinkers.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps most importantly, by the late eighteenth century, European political thinkers broadly accepted the arguments that nature predisposes humanity towards sociability and that humans can be considered naturally equal in formal terms.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, debates around natural law intensified in the late Enlightenment. Anthony J. La Vopa has noted that 'in the 1790s German-speaking Europe produced a flood of books and articles on the subject of natural law' invigorated by both the French Revolution and the legal, political, and ethical debates surrounding the thought of Kant and his successors.<sup>25</sup> Diethelm Klippel has also argued that in the same period German theorists increasingly prioritized individual freedom – rather than happiness – as the proper purpose of the state.<sup>26</sup> In France, the increasing violence of the Revolution was accompanied by rhetoric – typically grounded in notions of natural right and natural law – that stressed increasingly radical notions of freedom and equality.<sup>27</sup> In the works discussed in the following pages, Schlözer, Villers, and Meiners utilized more authoritarian notions of natural law to respond critically to new emphases on

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<sup>22</sup> On these thinkers' debts to Pufendorf, see in particular Haakonssen, Knud (ed.), *Grotius, Pufendorf and Modern Natural Law* (Aldershot, 1999), passim.; Korkman, Petter, 'Introduction', in Burlamaqui, Jean-Jacques, *The Principles of Natural and Politic Law*, trans. Thomas Nugent (Indianapolis, 2006), ix-xix; Aichele, Alexander, 'Naturrecht', in Theis, Robert & Aichele, Alexander (eds.), *Handbuch Christian Wolff* (Wiesbaden, 2018), 269-290; Kühnel, Martin, *Das politische Denken von Christian Thomasius: Staat, Gesellschaft, Bürger* (Berlin, 2001), passim; Sæther, Arild, *Natural Law and the Origin of Political Economy: Samuel Pufendorf and the History of Economics* (Abingdon, 2017), 182-190.

<sup>23</sup> Dann, *Gleichheit und Gleichberechtigung*, 98.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-105, 114-118.

<sup>25</sup> La Vopa, *Fichte*, 301.

<sup>26</sup> Klippel, 'Reasonable Aims of Civil Society', 84-92.

<sup>27</sup> McPhee, Peter, *Liberty or Death: the French Revolution* (New Haven, CT, 2016), 102-227.

freedom and equality, and especially those they saw as being inspired by the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

### 2.1.2. *De la liberté*: Villers' Critique of Freedom

In 1791, Charles de Villers intervened in debates over the French Revolution with the polemic *De la liberté*. Although written before his engagement with German thought and history, Villers never disowned it. In May 1806, Karl Theodor Dalberg (1744-1817) wrote to Villers speaking very highly of the work.<sup>28</sup> Although only this letter survives, it appears to have been part of a longer correspondence in which Villers expressed a continued interest in – and commitment to – his earlier ideas and arguments. In an 1813 letter to Hendrik Willem Tydeman (1778-1863), Villers stated that if he were to produce a new edition of *De la liberté*, he would keep 'the core [*fond*] of the thing'.<sup>29</sup>

*De la liberté* represents an early articulation of some of Villers' most persistent concerns: freedom, culture, ethics, and the universality of justice. As a polemic, it responded directly to the increasingly radical course of the Revolution. Indeed, the negative reaction to *De la liberté* among leading revolutionaries was an important motivation for Villers' 1792 departure from France.<sup>30</sup> The book's central argument was reasonably straightforward: individual freedoms allow people to pursue vices that are harmful to society; therefore, a people must be virtuous in order to exercise such freedoms wisely; as the French people have not attained an adequate

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<sup>28</sup> Dalberg, Karl Theodore to Villers, Charles de, 05.05.1806, (Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Autographensammlung: Box 8 of Villers' *Nachlass*).

<sup>29</sup> 'Charles de Villers an Hendrik Willem Tydeman', Göttingen 24.03.1813, in Reifferscheid, Alexander (ed.), *Briefe von Jakob Grimm an Hendrik Willem Tydeman: mit einem Anhang und Anmerkungen* (Heilbronn, 1883), 117.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', 46-47.

degree of virtue, they require a strong central authority to enforce virtuous moral behaviour.<sup>31</sup>

Villers grounded his argument in an account of the state of nature in which individuals are equally free and capable of pursuing their interests without restraint from social, cultural, or legal conditions.<sup>32</sup> Humans in this state are content and able to live in peace with dignity and happiness.<sup>33</sup> In the context of regular human interaction, however, natural freedoms become a source of discord and even violence.<sup>34</sup> Villers did suggest that humans are naturally inclined towards co-operation, but that this sociability is harder to maintain with the emergence of more complex material and social arrangements. Much of his narrative parallels that of Rousseau, as prehistorical social interaction and technological changes led to private property, material inequality, and artificial desires.<sup>35</sup> However, whereas Rousseau considered the institutionalization of inequalities and the foundation of the political state as instigated by – and in the interests of – the propertied, Villers understood it in the terms of earlier accounts of natural law.<sup>36</sup> Following Hobbes and Pufendorf, Villers argued that it is in the interests of all to empower a ruler capable of providing security through the curtailment of natural freedom.<sup>37</sup> The corrupt nature of the French people meant that, in France at least, many freedoms – including those of religion and

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<sup>31</sup> Villers, *De la liberté*, 231-233.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*; Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 'Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes' & 'Du Contrat social, ou principes du droit politique', in *idem.*, *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Vol. 3: *Du Contrat social; Écrits politiques*, eds. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond et al. (Paris, 1964), 134-163, 352-360.

<sup>36</sup> Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'inégalité', 183-184.

<sup>37</sup> Villers, *De la liberté*, 20-23.

expression – should be sacrificed to ensure security (and consequently happiness).<sup>38</sup>

Villers thus presented a contractual account of the state rooted in the natural law tradition. He acknowledged the importance of Pufendorf and Montesquieu to his thinking about freedom, the nature of the state, and the role of virtue and inclination.<sup>39</sup> Villers granted fewer powers to the state than had Hobbes or Pufendorf, and he proposed a number of constitutional limits to sovereign authority.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, he stated that sovereigns must be subject to laws, and even proposed an elected body of virtuous individuals capable of limiting royal power.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, in the context of the French Revolution, *De la liberté* was a distinctly authoritarian text. Villers strongly criticized what he considered to be dangerous, chimerical accounts of freedom, popular sovereignty, and the General Will then in vogue among leading revolutionaries.<sup>42</sup> As discussed later, Villers did come to appreciate the value of religious and intellectual freedoms, but the account of natural law used in *De la liberté* ultimately complemented his later thinking about cultural difference.

### 2.1.3. Pufendorf at the Georgia Augusta: Schlözer's Account of Natural Law

In 1793, two years after the appearance of *De la liberté*, Schlözer published a distillation of his lectures on politics under the title

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 136-138.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 104, 144, 198-200, 205-206.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 65, 176-177, 214-229. Cf. Winterling, *Rückzug aus der Revolution*, 144.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Although many of these comments are directed against Rousseau, Villers also praised certain aspects of Rousseau's thought, such as the association between virtue and freedom. Villers, *De la liberté*, 106, 129, 135, 164-165, 167, 169, 175, 179-185, 190, 200.

*Allgemeines StatsRecht*.<sup>43</sup> Like *De la liberté*, much of Schlözer's text was a restatement of more conservative and authoritarian natural law arguments against the radical impulses of the Revolution.<sup>44</sup> This conservatism was not just political, but philosophical. Schlözer explicitly adopted a more traditional emphasis on sociability derived from Pufendorf – and shared by his mentor Achenwall – against Rousseau's emphasis on natural independence.<sup>45</sup> Posing a thought experiment in which two adult humans encounter each other for the first time, Schlözer asked:

What shall they do [*Quid facient*]? They will fight (Hobbes). They will be cold, passing by without taking note of each other (Rousseau). They will join together amicably on the spot (Pufendorf). – One should probably believe the latter.<sup>46</sup>

Following Pufendorf (and Achenwall), individuals have natural duties to each other even outside the political state.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, like his predecessors, Schlözer argued that individuals are to be considered naturally equal in formal terms for the purpose of justifying the state, even though they are unequal in terms of actual abilities or inclinations.<sup>48</sup>

On the basis of humanity's natural obligations and its physical vulnerability, Schlözer differed from both Rousseau and Villers by arguing that individuals cannot be considered free within the state of

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<sup>43</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, vi-xi.

<sup>44</sup> On the work's relationship to the French Revolution, see Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 443-445.

<sup>45</sup> Achenwall, Gottfried & Pütter, Johann Stephan, *Elementa iuris naturae* (Göttingen, 1750), 185-187. On similarities and differences between Achenwall's account and that of Pufendorf, see Streidl, *Achenwall*, 201-202.

<sup>46</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 38.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13, 39-40; Streidl, *Achenwall*, 181, 201, 246-248. Cf. Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 240-245.

nature. It is only once humans begin to form stable communities – and thus, in this account, leave the state of nature – that they are able to meaningfully exercise freedom.<sup>49</sup> Eleven years later, Schlözer rehearsed many of these arguments, but revised his account to further emphasize the role of sociability. Whereas *Allgemeines StatsRecht* described humans as solitary in the state of nature, in *Theorie der Statistik* – which also discusses natural law – he claimed that the 'human of nature is the human of society: without this the continuation of his existence would be unthinkable'.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, both accounts relied on core arguments derived from natural law by insisting on the formal equality of humanity and the contractual origins of political society. Schlözer's state was an 'invention [*Erfindung*]', 'artificial [*künstlich*]', and a 'machine [*Maschine*]' constructed by theoretically equal contracting partners in order to regulate social relations and provide the security necessary to exercise some degree of freedom.<sup>51</sup> Once instituted, however, the state is necessarily absolute. Rulers are morally obliged to observe the duties dictated by natural law, but the nature of political authority is such that the state holds absolute sovereignty, regardless of the nature or division of its institutions.<sup>52</sup>

Schlözer did not propose particularly authoritarian laws, however, and in this sense he may be considered less conservative than Villers in *De la liberté*. In both *Allgemeines StatsRecht* and other works he emphasized the value of broad (but not unlimited) religious tolerance and press freedoms, and insisted on the individual's

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<sup>49</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Schlözer, *Theorie der Statistik*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-97, 114.

absolute right to sustenance, even if this requires theft.<sup>53</sup> With the exception of the latter, these freedoms were not outcomes of natural law theory, but rather policy proposals intended to maximize the efficiency and happiness of a well-ordered state. Alongside the notion of popular sovereignty, Schlözer sharply rejected the idea that freedoms of trade, expression, or conscience were natural rights.<sup>54</sup>

Villers did not publish another account of natural law, and neither Schlözer nor Villers published clear engagements with each other's work on the subject, even as Schlözer described *Theorie der Statistik* as one outcome of their friendship.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, despite key differences, both Schlözer and Villers agreed that the institution of political authority is essentially contractual and that such a contract occurs between individuals who are in some sense equal. Although Villers conceived humanity as free within a solitary state of nature while Schlözer did not, they shared a justificatory conception of the state grounded in theories of natural law.

#### 2.1.4. Christoph Meiners: Inequality in the State of Nature

Meiners, by contrast, used the language of natural law to reject all claims of natural equality.<sup>56</sup> In *Geschichte der Ungleichheit der Stände unter den vornehmsten europäischen Völkern* (1792), he made significant use of well-known textbooks by Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui, Johann Georg Schlosser (1739-1799), Ludwig Höpfner (1743-1797), and his colleague Johann Georg Heinrich Feder to position himself

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<sup>53</sup> See also Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 242, 245-248, 263, 331-342, 387, 394-397, 440; Burgdorf, 'August Ludwig Schlözers Vorstellung von der Verfassung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation', 119-121.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, Schlözer does not go into detail about what the contents of those conversations were.

<sup>56</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 2-3.



within contemporary discussions of natural law.<sup>57</sup> Using these works, Meiners defined *Recht* as the highest, necessarily natural, standard of morality to which rational beings are subject. As in other models of natural law, this standard was both timeless and had clear social and political implications.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, Meiners sharply rejected Burlamaqui's defence of natural equality, natural freedom, and the idea that a person cannot willingly renounce their liberty.<sup>59</sup> Meiners justified his position by modelling natural inequalities between humans on the inequality that, he claimed, naturally exists between humans and animals.<sup>60</sup> This reasoning was then extended to different racial groups, before being further extended to within racial groups: 'extraordinarily beautiful, strong, industrious, brave, ingenious, and charitable' individuals have clear rights over those lacking such qualities.<sup>61</sup> Importantly, Burlamaqui's principle of natural equality was – like that of Pufendorf and Achenwall – formal, rather than

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<sup>57</sup> Höpfner, Ludwig, *Naturrecht des einzelnen Menschen, der Gesellschaften, und der Völker* (3rd edn. Gießen, 1785); Burlamaqui, Jean-Jacques, *Principes du droit de la nature et des gens*, ed. Fortunato Bartolomeo de Felice, 8 Vols. (Yverdon, 1766-68); Feder, Johann Georg Heinrich, *Grundlehre zur Kenntniß des Menschlichen Willens und der natürlichen Gesetze des Rechtsverhaltens* (3rd edn. Göttingen, 1789); Schlosser, Johann Georg, *Briefe über die Gesetzgebung überhaupt, und den Entwurf des preussischen Gesetzbuchs insbesondere* (Frankfurt a. M., 1789). On the significance of these thinkers see Plohmman, Michael, *Ludwig Julius Friedrich Höpfner (1743-1797): Naturrecht und positives Privatrecht am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1992); Zande, Johan van der, *Bürger und Beamte: Johann Georg Schlosser, 1739-1799* (Stuttgart, 1986); Nowitzki, Hans-Peter et al. (eds.), *Johann Georg Heinrich Feder (1740-1821): Empirismus und Popularphilosophie zwischen Wolff und Kant* (Berlin, 2018). Despite growing awareness of his importance, there is relatively little recent work on Burlamaqui's thought. Gagnebin, Bernard, *Burlamaqui et le droit naturel* (Geneva, 1944). On Burlamaqui's importance see Rosenblatt, Helena, *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749–1762* (Cambridge, 1997), 101-2, 128-9, 133-5, 154-5; Douglass, Robin, 'Rousseau's Debt to Burlamaqui: The Ideal of Nature and the Nature of Things', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (2011), 209-230.

<sup>58</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 2-4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*; Burlamaqui, *Principes du droit*, Vol. 3, 155, 300.

<sup>60</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 8-13.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

physical or intellectual.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, when Meiners rejected Burlamaqui's account, he went further than most of his contemporaries, including not just Schlözer and Villers, but also Feder, Höpfner, and Schlosser, the other natural law theorists he had cited.<sup>63</sup> According to Meiners, individuals could not be considered equal even in a strictly formal sense.

It seems likely that Meiners' response to Burlamaqui is a veiled critique of Rousseau who, though conspicuously absent from *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, made similar claims. Indeed, Hans Erich Bödeker has argued that this work should be read as a critical counter-narrative to Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité*.<sup>64</sup> Meiners probably also had in mind Kant's egalitarian ethics, as well as the more radical impulses of the French Revolution generally. Fundamentally, however, Meiners' arguments necessarily reject all accounts of equality, rather than just those of particular thinkers.

Meiners' account effectively subverted the contractual model of the state. Rather than a foundational contract (or series of contracts), he described the natural and benevolent institutionalization of a stratified political and social realm within which individuals receive rights and privileges according to their abilities.<sup>65</sup> This process is both natural and meritocratic, as people take on the social and political roles best suited to their abilities.<sup>66</sup> Crucially, because traits are heritable, the privileges associated with those roles should be too.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, political inequalities, including aristocratic privileges, emerge through merit, and Meiners

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<sup>62</sup> Burlamaqui, *Principes du droit*, Vol. 1, 183-184.

<sup>63</sup> Feder, *Grundlehre*, 202-204; Höpfner, *Naturrecht*, 34-35; Schlosser, *Briefe über die Gesetzgebung*, 126.

<sup>64</sup> Bödeker, 'Einleitung', xxxiv-xxxvi. Rousseau notably mentioned Burlamaqui with approval in 'Discours sur l'inégalité', 124.

<sup>65</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 13-15.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 21-4.

justified this inequality as both fair and socially advantageous. While he appears to have rejected contractual accounts of the state, Meiners' narrative echoed both the pre-modern, Aristotelian tradition of natural inequality and Pufendorf's comments on the natural basis of group hierarchies. Meiners rejected an important dimension of the tradition that had emerged since Grotius, but this was a transformation within (rather than a break from) modern natural law. The institutionalization of political communities was legitimized with reference to a clear standard of natural law but, whereas Pufendorf understood this standard as the principle of sociability, Meiners described it as the promotion of happiness [*Glückseligkeit*] amongst individuals and communities.<sup>68</sup> As mentioned above, this emphasis on happiness and social well-being was common in German natural law in the decades prior to the 1790s.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, despite asserting a set of (supposedly) universal human rights – 'security [...] of life, health, property and honour' – Meiners rejected claims that freedom could be considered in terms of natural right.<sup>70</sup> This corresponds to his writings on race, where he argued that freedom is not a universal characteristic of human nature, but relative to one's situation within a hierarchy determined by individual attributes.<sup>71</sup> Only those able to benefit society by being independent of the will of others held legitimate (natural) rights to freedom. Others, lacking such advantages, should be governed by those capable of determining their interests.<sup>72</sup> A corollary to this

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>69</sup> Klippel, 'Reasonable Aims of Civil Society', 76.

<sup>70</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 17-8. Meiners does not explain how these rights could be reconciled with his defence of the transatlantic slave trade. Meiners, Christoph, 'Ueber die Natur der Afrikanischen Neger', in *Göttingisches Historisches Magazin*, Vol. 6 (1790), 385-456.

<sup>71</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1st edn. Lemgo, 1785), [unpaginated preface].

<sup>72</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 17-18.

argument was the rejection of claims that all subjects are (as in Hobbes and Pufendorf) in some sense the authors of laws, or (as in Rousseau) that all subjects should constitute the sovereign.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Meiners agreed with Pufendorf's contention regarding the significance of natural differences in the organization of political communities, even as he used this position to undermine key dimensions of Pufendorf's thought.

This chapter of *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* is important both for Meiners' arguments against egalitarianism, and for its self-conscious situation within the natural law tradition. His rejection of certain arguments associated with natural law did not represent a break with that tradition, but rather a eudaemonistic variation that could readily cohere with his racial thought.

The following year, Meiners published the first two volumes of his *Historische Vergleichung* (1793-1794), which began with another response to contemporary thinking about natural law. Here he emphasized, along with Villers, Montesquieu, Adam Ferguson, and more radical thinkers like Rousseau, the relationships between moral values, happiness, and luxury within particular groups.<sup>74</sup> Meiners argued that 'morality with whole nations [...] is the principle reason for happiness or wretchedness: corrupted morals destroy or enfeeble the best constitution, the most beneficial laws, and the most

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<sup>73</sup> Rousseau, 'Du Contrat social', 368-394; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 16, 111-115. On Hobbes' and Pufendorf's notions of authorization, see Skinner, Quentin, 'Hobbes and the purely artificial person of the state', in idem., *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 3: *Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge, 2002), 177-208; Skinner, *From Humanism to Hobbes*, 364-367. On Rousseau's notion of sovereignty as a response to Hobbes, see Douglass, Robin, *Rousseau and Hobbes: Nature, Free Will, and the Passions* (Oxford, 2015), 105-148.

<sup>74</sup> Meiners' assessment of the relationship between moral corruption and luxury is, however, more straightforward than in Ferguson or Montesquieu. See McDaniel, Iain, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 20-21, 30-31, 34, 89-90, 92-118, 120-121, 136-141; Hont, István, *Politics in Commercial Society*, eds. Béla Kapossy & Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 68-88.

charitable religion'.<sup>75</sup> The collapse of a nation's morality 'engenders and feeds superstition', hinders Enlightenment, and enables despotism.<sup>76</sup> Meiners justified these positions with detailed ethnographic summaries of different cultural groups. Despite their lack of 'civilization', the early Romans, the ancient Germanic tribes, and the inhabitants of St. Kilda and Nantucket had attained both freedom and happiness through moral austerity.<sup>77</sup> These were contrasted with the Slavs, ancient Illyrians and modern Caucasians who, despite their access to fertile conditions, lived in decadence and immorality.<sup>78</sup>

Such claims parallel crucial tropes found in contemporary conjectural histories of social development.<sup>79</sup> However, in Meiners' formulation they were integrated with an account of the state of nature and the origins of political authority rooted in natural law.<sup>80</sup> In particular, he sharply criticized idealized visions of the state of nature. Meiners positioned such notions as fundamentally opposed to the project of Enlightenment, and identified Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a major culprit in their popularization.<sup>81</sup> Rousseau's descriptions of the state of nature were a 'mesh of sophisms' that ran counter to 'experience, history, and healthy reason [*gesunde Vernunft*]'.<sup>82</sup> Such

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<sup>75</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Historische Vergleichung der Sitten, und Verfassungen, der Gesetze, und Gewerbe, des Handels, und der Religion, der Wissenschaften, und Lehranstalten des Mittelalters mit denen unsers Jahrhunderts in Rücksicht auf die Vortheile, und Nachtheile der Aufklärung*, Vol. 1 (Hanover, 1793), 86-7. Note that two different editions of the first volume appear to have been published in the same year. The only difference appears to be the font size - one edition has a page count of almost 770, while the other has around 570. This thesis uses the 570-page edition.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 40-65.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 66-86.

<sup>79</sup> Palmeri, Frank, *State of Nature, Stages of Society: Enlightenment Conjectural History and Modern Social Discourse* (New York, NY, 2016), 33-34.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Meiners, *Historische Vergleichung*, Vol. 1, 4-6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 1-3, 7-8.

sophisms only required rebuttal due to their dangerous popularization among 'less-informed, proud, and ambitious people'.<sup>83</sup>

Written around the time of the Mainz Republic, this comment clearly reflected Meiners' anxieties about the dangers of radicalism and unrest within the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Meiners argued that such accounts of the state of nature were the results of failing to engage in the serious study of historical and contemporary 'primitive' peoples.<sup>85</sup> Such study revealed the state of nature as one of famine, cannibalism, perfidy, slavery, and perpetual violence.<sup>86</sup> This description echoes that of Hobbes, even as – consistent with most other natural law theorists – Meiners argued that natural duties exist within the state of nature.<sup>87</sup>

Like Villers, Schlözer, Hobbes, Pufendorf, and indeed most thinkers in the natural law tradition, Meiners' account described the institutionalization of political authority as an unambiguously positive means of managing interpersonal conflict. That he did not offer a contractual account does not mean that he abandoned natural law altogether. Instead, Meiners' thought harnessed ethnographic knowledge of different groups precisely to articulate and augment a

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 6-28. For a detailed account of Meiners' reception of Rousseau in this work, see Peters, 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen', 275-281.

<sup>84</sup> The forward to this volume is signed 4 March 1793, during the revolutionary events in Mainz (led by Georg Forster and several figures associated with Göttingen). On events in Mainz, see Dumont, Franz, *Die Mainzer Republik von 1792/93* (2nd edn. Neu-Bamberg, 1993). On perceived associations between Rousseau's thought and that of the Jacobins, see Sonenscher, Michael, *Sans-culottes: An Eighteenth-Century Emblem in the French Revolution* (Princeton, 2008), 367-406.

<sup>85</sup> Meiners, *Historische Vergleichung*, Vol. 1, 14-5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 26-34.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 32; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chs. 13- 15, 86-110; Haakonssen, Knud, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1996), 40-41. Notably, Meiners did not express concerns around the concept of *Pflicht* prior to his interventions in the *Atheismusstreit* described in the previous chapter.

model of natural law and the state of nature directed against ideas associated with Rousseau and the French Revolution.

## **2.2. Europe and the World: Accounts of Human Difference**

Meiners' use of ethnographic information in his discussion of natural law reflected a broader interest in using such information to understand human nature, the earliest human societies, and the causes of difference in human social development.<sup>88</sup> During the eighteenth century, Europeans gained access to a historically unprecedented quantity of data regarding unfamiliar groups through travel writing, geographic studies, new approaches to interpreting ancient texts, and other sources of information.<sup>89</sup> The exceptional range of resources available at Göttingen's university library meant that the town's intellectuals – as well as visitors like Charles de Villers – were in a unique position to make use of this information.

Theories of racial difference played a crucial role in debates around these new sources and ideas. Race offered a novel means of explaining the reality of cultural difference by linking cultural difference to innate physiological characteristics. Scholars agree that the Enlightenment played an important role in the emergence of, in Colin Kidd's words, 'doctrinal racism', even as the parameters and nature of this role remain subject to intense debate.<sup>90</sup> This is not to say that ideas of racial difference did not exist before the Enlightenment, but that this period saw the elaboration of increasingly systematic and hierarchical notions of race. The rest of this chapter focuses on how Meiners, Schlözer, Villers, and Eichhorn utilized and responded to notions of race in their explanations of

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<sup>88</sup> Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 139, Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen*, 139-180.

<sup>89</sup> Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 6-7.

<sup>90</sup> For an overview and analysis of these debates, see Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 79-120.

cultural difference. As well as indicating how these accounts reflect their notions of human nature, it maps crucial relationships and divisions in contemporary thinking about human difference. Before moving on to the ideas of Meiners, Schlözer, Villers, and Eichhorn, the following section outlines the discursive context of debates about race in which these thinkers wrote, as well as the methodological issues relevant to its analysis.

### 2.2.1. Race in the German Late Enlightenment

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, 'race' was one among a range of terms used to describe different human groups. The traditional denotation for groups that were thought to share common physiological, linguistic, and/or what would now be considered 'cultural' characteristics had been 'nation'.<sup>91</sup> 'Tribe' and 'people' were not uncommon, and the latter's German equivalent – *Volk* – became increasingly popular during the late eighteenth century.<sup>92</sup> Authors writing in Latin typically used *gens* or *natio*. These words were sometimes used inconsistently between authors and occasionally even suffered semantic ambiguity. Nevertheless, in themselves they remained largely uncontroversial, and represented a traditional, mostly stable cluster of words used to distinguish between groups of humans both in Europe and abroad. From 1740 onwards, German thinkers began to define new approaches to the study of peoples using the Greek *ethnos* (*Ethnographie*, *Ethnologie*) and the German *Volk* (*Völker-Beschreibung*, *Völkerkunde*, *Volkskunde*).<sup>93</sup> The French term *race* (transliterated by Germans as *Raçe* or *Rasse*) also formed part of this terminological milieu, but for much of the eighteenth

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<sup>91</sup> Hudson, Nicholas, 'From "Nation" to "Race": The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring, 1996), 247-248.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. On *Volk* see Schlobach, Jochen, 'People', in Delon, Michel et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (London, 2013), Vol. 2, 1014-1015.

<sup>93</sup> Schlözer played a key role in developing many of these terms. See Vermeulen, *Before Boas*, 131-218, 269-356.



century it retained its traditional meaning of familial lineages and, occasionally, animal breeds.<sup>94</sup> In *De l'esprit des loix* (1748), for example, Montesquieu used 'race' to refer to royal dynasties.<sup>95</sup>

In the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth, however, race established itself in the intellectual lexical inventory as, in the words of Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore, 'a scientific term denoting a historically evolved, quite possibly permanent, and essentially real subcategory' of humanity.<sup>96</sup> Nicholas Hudson describes the emergence and consolidation of this meaning as a broadening of the groups that race referred to.<sup>97</sup> From denoting lineages, race 'expanded' to become almost synonymous with nation before taking on its modern meaning, which in turn became cemented during the nineteenth century.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, the various contributions in Eigen and Larrimore's volume *The German Invention of Race* demonstrate the extent to which the word continued to be used inconsistently, and even ambiguously, well into the nineteenth century. As late as 1848 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels could expect readers to recognize the older familial meaning when they referred to the individual proletarian's 'propagation of his race [*Fortpflanzung seiner Race*]'.<sup>99</sup> Hudson notes that it was not until 1835 that a 'recognizably modern' definition of race appeared in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, and even later in English dictionaries.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, some

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<sup>94</sup> Hudson, 'From "Nation" to "Race"', 247-248.

<sup>95</sup> Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de, 'De l'esprit des loix', in idem., *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, Vol. 2, ed. Roger Caillois (Paris, 1951), 949, 966.

<sup>96</sup> Eigen, Sara & Larrimore, Mark, 'Introduction: The German Invention of Race', in idem. (eds.), *German Invention of Race*, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Hudson, 'From "Nation" to "Race"', 248.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Marx, Karl & Engels, Friedrich, *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei* (London, 1848), 7.

<sup>100</sup> Hudson, 'From "Nation" to "Race"', 247.

thinkers continued to use 'race' and 'nation' interchangeably. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, in 1809 Charles de Villers described the French and German peoples as 'races', before reverting to 'nation' in 1814. On the other hand, contemporary naturalists – including the influential Göttingen professor Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – typically avoided race altogether and instead used 'varieties [*varietates*; *Verschiedenheiten*]' to describe what others considered to be racial groups.<sup>101</sup>

Despite these nuances, the concept described by Eigen and Larrimore was commonly used and understood by thinkers writing around 1800. As well as Christoph Meiners, Immanuel Kant, Georg Forster, and many others used race in this sense.<sup>102</sup> That being said, the lack of stable terminology for describing different groups creates obvious difficulties for the study of contemporary racial thought. Identifying the use of the word 'race' in Enlightenment texts with the modern concept risks conflating a multiplicity of different meanings. Equally, placing too much emphasis on the emerging vocabulary of race can obscure the ways in which other terms or expressions could incorporate and reflect ideas associated with racial theory. It is important to be sensitive to the deep epistemic and argumentative distinctions underpinning how thinkers analyzed different groups, just as shared ideas could be expressed using different terms. In order to navigate these difficulties, I approach the work of Schlözer,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 253-255; Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, *De generis humani varietate nativa* (2nd edn. Göttingen, 1781); idem., *Über die natürlichen Verschiedenheiten im Menschengeschlechte*, trans. Johann Gottfried Gruber (Leipzig, 1798). The German edition also occasionally uses *Varietäten*, as at page 203. The translation appears to have been prepared in close consultation with Blumenbach, as detailed in its introduction.

<sup>102</sup> Kant, Immanuel, 'Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 2: *Vorkritische Schriften II, 1757-1777* (Berlin, 1912) 427-444; Kant, Immanuel, 'Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 7: *Der Streit der Fakultäten, Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (Berlin, 1917) 320-321; Forster, Georg, 'Noch etwas über die Menschenraßen', in *Der Teutsche Merkur* (1786, No. 4), 57-86.

Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers primarily in terms of how they explained and evaluated cultural difference. Ultimately, questions of racial difference were most politicized when they were used to explain intellectual and moral differences and, thus, the cultural outcomes of different human groups.

This does not mean that analyses of physiological difference were not loaded with discriminatory assumptions that would now be considered racist, and indeed discussions of physiology often included claims about moral and/or intellectual difference. In practice – and due in part to the polemical nature of the debate – claims about the origins and heredity of physiological traits were often closely tied to questions about the heritability of other characteristics. Furthermore, even the most comprehensively circumstantial accounts of cultural difference needed to confront the question of physiological difference. No observer could deny that children generally resembled their parents regardless of the circumstances in which they were born and raised. The urgent question was whether such physiological differences were related to moral and/or intellectual (and thence cultural) differences. Certain thinkers – most notably Meiners – argued unambiguously that they were, while many – such as Herder, Forster, Schlözer, and Blumenbach – argued that they were not.<sup>103</sup>

Importantly, few European intellectuals contested the notion that the behaviours and achievements of certain European peoples were superior to those of others. Even more radical thinkers like Johann Gottfried Herder and Georg Forster – who dedicated many

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<sup>103</sup> The accounts of Meiners and Schlözer will be discussed further below. Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, Vol. 1, 89; Forster, Georg, 'Über die Menschenraßen', 57-86; Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, 'Einige zerstreute Bemerkungen über die Fähigkeiten und Sitten der Wilden', in *Göttingisches Magazin der Wissenschaften und Litteratur*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Göttingen, 1782), 409-425.

pages to challenging assumptions about non-European peoples – positioned certain European behaviours, ideas, and institutions as necessarily superior to those found elsewhere in the world.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the nature, degree, and origins of such unequal characteristics remain important points for approaching contemporary thinking about cultural difference. Almost all late Enlightenment accounts of non-European peoples can be seen as having contributed to Eurocentric, even 'imperialist', ideas.<sup>105</sup> Not all accounts contributed to the idea that non-European peoples are irremediably inferior to Europeans, however, and many stressed the circumstantial (rather than innate) origins of cultural differences. This remains a necessary distinction for mapping early modern cultural, and especially racial, thought. Consequently, the crucial question for this chapter is whether or not thinkers explained cultural differences by way of supposedly immutable, inherent differences.

The issue of mutability had major political implications, especially for thinking about the relationships of power between European and non-European peoples. Primarily, it was tied to questions of perfectibility that dominated a range of Enlightenment

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<sup>104</sup> See Sikka, Sonia, *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism* (Cambridge, 2011), 126-159; On Forster's Eurocentrism see Thomas, Nicholas & Berghof, Oliver, 'Introduction', in Forster, Georg, *A Voyage Round the World*, eds. Nicholas Thomas & Oliver Berghof (Honolulu, HI, 2003), xxix-xxxvi. See the main text and critical apparatus of this edition for both Forster's thought on non-European peoples and extensive commentary.

<sup>105</sup> On the use of academic writing to reflect and validate contemporary imperialism, see Said, Edward, *Orientalism: 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York, NY, 2003); idem., *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1994). Notably, Said suggested that German accounts of non-European cultures were relatively benign due to the lack of a national overseas imperial project. Scholars of German thought have revised this account. See in particular Wilson, 'Enlightenment Encounters', 73-88; Strack, 'Philosophical Anthropology', 285-308; Hess, 'Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary', 56-101.

debates.<sup>106</sup> The question of perfectibility generally centred on two problems. First, the degree of Enlightenment that humanity could hope to achieve and, second, whether all humans – whether as individuals or groups – were capable of reaching such standards. If intellectual and moral traits were heritable and tied to racial categories, then the scope for future improvement of those groups appeared to be severely limited. Meiners, for example, argued that the heritability of inferior traits justified the virtually perpetual, unrestricted domination of perceived non-European peoples, including Jews.<sup>107</sup> He took this argument to what he saw as its logical conclusion: a defence of the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>108</sup> If, on the contrary, perceived inferiorities were the result of contingent circumstances, such domination was typically defended on much more limited terms.<sup>109</sup> As discussed towards the end of this chapter, this was, for the most part, the case in the thought of Eichhorn, Schlözer, and Villers. Thus, the problem of mutability had major implications for questions around perfectibility, the universality of Enlightenment, and disputes over slavery, imperialism, and Jewish emancipation.

One of the most controversial means of explaining supposedly innate differences was polygenism. Proponents of polygenism such as Voltaire, Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782), and Georg Forster

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<sup>106</sup> On these debates in the German lands, see in particular Baron, Konstanze & Soboth, Christian (eds.), *Perfektionismus und Perfektibilität: Theorie und Praktiken der Vervollkommnung in Aufklärung und Pietismus* (Hamburg, 2018).

<sup>107</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1st edn., 163.

<sup>108</sup> Meiners, 'Ueber die Natur', 385-456.

<sup>109</sup> On critiques of imperialism see Muthu, Sankar, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton, 2003), 2-6. Muthu is perhaps over-generous in describing certain figures, such as Edmund Burke, as critics of empire when in fact they criticized only particular imperial practices. Nevertheless, his emphasis on the role of mutability in imperial discourse is important. On the various conceptions of empire in Enlightenment thought, see in particular the papers collected in Tricoire, Damien (ed.), *Enlightened Colonialism: Civilization Narratives and Imperial Politics in the Age of Reason* (Cham, 2017).

claimed that different human groups had different origins.<sup>110</sup> Polygenism is typically associated with the emergence of scientific racism and claims that moral and intellectual differences were inherited, immutable racial characteristics. As such, Forster's critique of racial inequality from a polygenist position was exceptional.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, polygenism was religiously controversial. The claim that humanity had multiple origins contradicted the traditional Judeo-Christian doctrine that humanity descended from a single pair. Some thinkers – most notably Kames and the 'pre-Adamites' – sought to reconcile polygenism with the Bible, but their arguments were seen as tenuous and widely rejected.<sup>112</sup> As such, despite its espousal by prominent authors like Voltaire and Forster, polygenism was restricted to a small minority throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, with the exception of Forster, leading intellectuals in the German late Enlightenment overwhelmingly rejected polygenism.<sup>114</sup> As well as being religiously controversial, it was liable

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<sup>110</sup> Harris, Marvin, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2001), 86-87; [Lord Kames, Henry Home] *Sketches of the History of Man*, Vol. 1 (2nd edn. Edinburgh, 1788), 62-75; Voltaire [Arouet, François-Marie], 'Traité de métaphysique', in idem., *Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Vol. 14: 1734-1735, eds. W. H. Barber & Ulla Kölling et al. (Oxford, 1989), 423; Forster, 'Über die Menschenraßen', 57-86. On the religious controversy around polygenism see Livingstone, David N., *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore, 2008); Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 1-166.

<sup>111</sup> Forster, 'Über die Menschenraßen', 57-86.

<sup>112</sup> Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 93-102; Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, 80-108; Popkin, Richard H., *Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676): His Life, Work, and Influence* (Leiden, 1987), 115-165.

<sup>113</sup> Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 30. Notably, polygenism did re-emerge as a much more common position in the nineteenth century.

<sup>114</sup> Zammito, 'Policing Polygeneticism', 48-49. Towards the end of his life Meiners did develop a polygenist account of human difference that was published posthumously. Rather than offering an explanation of human origins, he claimed that human groups are so different that descent from a single pair is implausible. Meiners explicitly abandoned the Biblical account of creation, describing the 'Jewish legend' of creation as having no more validity than other creation myths. This work is important but, as the relevant considerations of Villers, Schlözer, and Eichhorn were published before its appearance, it did not play a role in the debate covered in this

to serious criticisms. One – advanced by Blumenbach – was that physiological differences do not manifest in discrete categories, but instead 'run into one another' so that 'one variety of mankind does so sensibly pass into the other, that you cannot mark the limits between them'.<sup>115</sup> Rather than discrete origins, this suggested the adaptation of humans to their various environments. More broadly, polygenist models could not in themselves explain how different human groups appeared at different locations in the first place. Consequently, most German thinkers of the late Enlightenment, including Kant, Blumenbach, and others argued that racial differences reflected some kind of adaptive process whereby a feature of humanity had caused groups to develop different physiological features in different environments.<sup>116</sup> There were important debates around the role of heritability and whether or not groups may undergo further adaptations, but such thinkers generally proposed what may be seen as a proto-geneticist account of human difference.

Demonstrating that moral and intellectual traits were tied to such physiological differences proved particularly difficult, especially when faced with the abilities displayed by certain individuals of non-European origins. Most famously, in 1789 Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745-

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chapter. Meiners, Christoph, *Untersuchungen über die Verschiedenheiten der Menschennaturen (die verschiedenen Menschenarten) in Asien und den Südländer, in den Ostindischen und Südseeinseln, nebst einer historischen Vergleichung der vormahligen und gegenwärtigen Bewohner dieser Continente und Eylande*, ed. Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, 3 Vols. (Tübingen, 1811-1815), Vol. 1, 6, 372-3. On this work, see Carhart, 'Polynesia and Polygenism', 58-86.

<sup>115</sup> Blumenbach, *De generis humani*, 2nd edn., 48-49. Translation from Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, 'On the natural variety of mankind (1775)', in idem., *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, trans. & ed. Thomas Bendyshe (London, 1865), 98-99. See also Zammito, 'Policing Polygenism', 47.

<sup>116</sup> Bernasconi, Robert, 'Kant and Blumenbach's Polyyps: A Neglected Chapter in the History of the Concept of Race', in Eigen & Larrimore (eds.), *German Invention of Race*, 73-90.

1797) published his exceptionally successful autobiography.<sup>117</sup> The *Interesting Narrative* went through nine English editions during his lifetime and appeared in Dutch, German, and Russian translations. German authors would probably also have been aware of the African-German philosopher Anton Wilhelm Amo (c. 1703-c. 1759) who published a series of significant works in the early eighteenth century.<sup>118</sup> Although various commentators dismissed their work, the achievements of Equiano and Amo made it harder to support claims that black Africans could not be the intellectual equals of white Europeans. Consequently, most leading German intellectuals avoided claiming that racial groups demonstrated innate moral or intellectual differences, even as some of them (most notably Blumenbach) insisted that certain groups were objectively more beautiful.<sup>119</sup>

### 2.2.2. Christoph Meiners' Racial Determinism

Meiners, however, proposed an account in which certain physiological features were adaptations, but intellect and moral inclinations were heritable traits determined by trans-generational partner selection.<sup>120</sup> Meiners' most significant text concerning human difference was the *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, first published in 1785 and followed by a slightly revised second edition in 1793. The *Grundriß* is largely a collection of statements and citations regarding the appearances, behaviours and institutions of different

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<sup>117</sup> Equiano, Olaudah, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1st edn. London, 1789). On the work's impact see Carretta, Vincent, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (London, 2006), 296-300, 321, 331-334, 340, 352-354.

<sup>118</sup> Smith, Justin E. H., *Nature, Human Nature, an Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ, 2015), 209.

<sup>119</sup> Blumenbach, *De generis humani*, 2nd edn., 51.

<sup>120</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1st edn., 45. As race is tied to intellect and morality, Meiners' racial thought cannot be separated from his cultural thought. See Peter Park, in Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, xii, 153-4. Cf. Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 244.



groups, as well as how these are affected by different heritable and non-heritable factors.

The work is presented as an introductory text and bibliographic compendium through which students can become acquainted with key concepts, problems and sources in the study of humanity.<sup>121</sup> Consistent with his empiricist methodology, Meiners' ethnological work was based on the systematic analysis of vast quantities of data about the observed features and behaviours of different groups. Indeed, like his ethical writings, Meiners argued that his work represented the dawn of a novel intellectual field centred on the broad study of human physical and cultural difference across time.<sup>122</sup> His contention clearly reflected the period's unprecedented availability of information: the best way to understand human difference was to collate and compare vast quantities of data about different groups.<sup>123</sup> His sources were wide ranging, and the bibliography to the second edition occupies seventy-three pages, or about a fifth of the main text.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, his claims are primarily based on his extensive reading of travel literature. Notably, Meiners' critics charged him with both misrepresenting his sources and failing to approach their claims with sufficient rigour.<sup>125</sup>

The *Grundriß* discusses a wide range of subjects, such as food, clothing, and religious customs, but is most notorious for its discussion of race. Crucially, Meiners considered many characteristics

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<sup>121</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1st edn., [unpaginated preface].

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> On Meiners' methodology see Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen*, 97-138.

<sup>124</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* (2nd edn. Lemgo, 1793), 311-384.

<sup>125</sup> Dougherty, 'Meiners und Blumenbach', 89-111; Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 261-262. As will be discussed below, Eichhorn's account also relied extensively on the uncritical use of travel literature, even as he drew different conclusions from those of Meiners.

– and especially intellect and moral inclinations – to be the result of inheritance. These differences resulted in the emergence of a variety of demarcated racial-cultural units, as unequal groups developed behaviours in accordance with their attributes. Indeed, where the 1785 and 1793 editions differ, the latter generally hardened its racial assessments by ascribing more differences to internal, heritable factors than had the previous version.<sup>126</sup> By positing an original humanity subject to trans-generational differentiation, Meiners' account of human difference in the *Grundriß* reconciled monogenism with the idea of innate racial differences.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, it was both more systematic and more aggressively hierarchical than other contemporary discussions of race.

From a comparative reading of his sources, Meiners extrapolated a distinctive account of human history. He claimed that humanity had originated in the Caucasus, but had split into two 'lineages [*Stämme*]' at an early stage of its existence.<sup>128</sup> The superior Caucasians had remained in the Caucasus, while the inferior Mongols had migrated to the Altai Mountains.<sup>129</sup> Meiners appears to have been the first author to use 'Caucasian' as a distinctive racial category to refer to a group that included white Europeans.<sup>130</sup> He may have also

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<sup>126</sup> Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen*, 165-170.

<sup>127</sup> Wunderlich, Falk, 'Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta – Radikalaufklärung im Hörsaal?', in *Aufklärung*, Vol. 24: *Radikale Spätaufklärung in Deutschland* (2012), 65-90. Meiners steered clear of religious controversy during his lifetime although, as noted above, his posthumous *Untersuchungen* rejected the Biblical account of creation.

<sup>128</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1st edn., 17, 91-110, 141-163.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. On the background to the claim that humanity originated in the Caucasus, see Augstein, H. F., 'From the land of the Bible to the Caucasus and beyond: The shifting ideas of the geographical origin of humankind', in Ernst, Waltraud & Harris, Bernard (eds.), *Race, Science and Medicine, 1700-1960* (London, 1999), 65-72.

<sup>130</sup> Baum, Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity* (New York, NY, 2006), 5-6.

been the first to use 'Mongol' as a broad racial type.<sup>131</sup> In the second edition, however, he primarily referred to the Caucasian and Mongol lineages as 'beautiful' and 'ugly', respectively.<sup>132</sup> As they steadily dispersed around the world, these lineages continued to split into different 'races [*Raßen*]' through partner selection based on unequal attributes. While the Caucasian lineage comprises 'Slavic' (including, among others, Slavs, Jews, Arabs, and higher-caste Indians) and 'Celtic' (most western and northern Europeans) peoples, the Mongol lineage comprises all other groups, including Finns, East Asians, black Africans, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas.<sup>133</sup> Meiners noted major differences between all racial groups, but repeatedly asserted that human beings of Caucasian (and particularly Celtic) descent are fundamentally physically, morally, and intellectually superior to those of Mongol descent. Such assertions of superiority and inferiority appear with reference to a wide range of customs, institutions, and ideas, including religious beliefs, marriage and sexual customs, cannibalism, political organization, the use of violence, technological developments, and supposed greater happiness.<sup>134</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Meiners' conclusions regarding superiority and inferiority reflected the degree to which different groups'

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<sup>131</sup> Blumenbach adopted both terms – albeit with important changes in their parameters – in the third edition of his *De generis humani varietate nativa*. It is sometimes claimed that Meiners adopted the Caucasian categorization from the second edition of Blumenbach's *De generis humani varietate nativa* (Göttingen, 1781). However, the use of 'Caucasian' in this sense does not appear until the third edition in 1795. The misattribution appears to have begun with Thomas Bendyshe in 1865. Notably, Blumenbach divided humanity into five (rather than two) groups – Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, Ethiopian, and American. See Bendyshe, Thomas, 'Editor's Preface', in Blumenbach, *The Anthropological Treatises*, viii; Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, *De generis humani varietate nativa* (3rd edn. Göttingen, 1795), 286, 304-306.

<sup>132</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 2nd edn., 3-6.

<sup>133</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1st edn., 16-80.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.; Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 2nd edn., 286-288.

behaviours corresponded to the norms and mores of Enlightened Europe. Below the various Celtic and then Slavic groups were other South, Central, and East Asian peoples, with indigenous Americans and black Africans occupying the bottom of his hierarchy. Meiners' disparaging comments about non-European groups were consistent with common contemporary stereotypes, even as his emphasis on heritability was unusual.<sup>135</sup>

As discussed in greater depth in the conclusions of this chapter, these perceived racial differences then informed how different groups should be treated. As Celtic peoples are both intellectually superior and more inclined towards moral behaviour, imperial projects are necessarily beneficial for both Europeans *and* non-European subjects.<sup>136</sup> Meiners had no illusions that this would be a peaceful affair: 'unrestricted force [*unumschränkte Gewalt*] is often necessary and beneficial when better people use it for the happiness [*Glück*] of the ignoble [*unedler*]'.<sup>137</sup> According to Meiners, the proper imperative of natural law is to increase happiness, and violent European domination is the best means by which to spread happiness among those without Celtic racial advantages.

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<sup>135</sup> Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 113-115; Sadjı, Ute, *Der Negermythos am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland: Eine Analyse der Rezeption von Reiseliteratur über Schwarzafrika* (Frankfurt a. M., 1979), 278-283; Sayre, Gordon M., *Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), 128, 206, 238, 261-263, 280; Gerbi, Antonello, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh, PA, 1973), 35-288; Bickham, Troy, 'American Indians in the British Imperial Imagination, 1707-1815', in Foster, Stephen (ed.), *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 2013), 228-253; Osterhammel, Jürgen, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia*, trans. Robert Savage (Princeton, 2018), *passim*.

<sup>136</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1st edn., 163.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

### 2.2.3. Climate, Philosophy, and Confession in Villers' Cultural Thought

Villers' account of human difference was antithetical to that of Meiners. For Villers, the crucial criterion for determining and evaluating difference was not utility, but instead the degree to which a group embodied either rationalist or empiricist norms. It was precisely a group's commitment to acting according to unobservable rational duties – rather than according to psychological inclinations – that determined its cultural position. This remained an important aspect of his thought from the publication of *Philosophie de Kant* until his death.

In the years after 1801, however, confessional differences played a much more central role in Villers' work, as he extrapolated his notion of French and German cultural difference to a broader account of difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. This is most evident in the *Essai sur l'esprit et l'influence de la Réformation de Luther* (1804). As mentioned in the introduction, Villers' *Essai* was the winning response to an Institut de France competition on the effects of the Lutheran Reformation. The question reflected heightened anxieties among French intellectuals following Napoleon's Concordat with Pope Pius VII (1742-1823) signed the previous year. The Institut felt threatened both by Napoleon's authoritarianism and by the possibility of a return of religious influence in French politics.<sup>138</sup> Villers' answer was a staunch defence of the historical role of the Lutheran Reformation and, crucially, the north German cultural attributes that had produced it.

The following chapter will discuss the *Essai's* narrative, while this section focuses on its ethnological dimension. In the *Essai*, Villers described a range of contemporary European cultures in terms of

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<sup>138</sup> Crowley, *Charles de Villers*, 91-131. On the Institut's secularism, see Azouvi (ed.), *L'Institution de la raison*, 7-198.

their positions on a scale between the most empiricist and the most rationalist, which in turn broadly corresponded to the variations within and between Catholicism and Protestantism. At one end stood the rigorous, Lutheran rationalism of northern Germany; at the other was the sensualist, Catholic empiricism of France.<sup>139</sup> The various other nations of Europe occupy intermediate spaces. Italy is virtually as corrupt as France.<sup>140</sup> German Catholicism, by contrast, is presented as more contemplative and rational than that of southern Europe, while Britain, Denmark, and Sweden – having retained many Catholic institutions – are less rationalist than northern Germany.<sup>141</sup>

In explaining the origins of Lutheranism, Villers consistently drew from current debates on the role of climate. Colder climates incline individuals towards hard work and contemplation, whereas warmer climates encourage luxury and sensuality.<sup>142</sup> The difficulty of cultivation in the lands of northern Europe fostered cultural norms of hard work and diligence, which in turn encouraged reflection on one's rights and duties.<sup>143</sup> Thus, Lutheranism appeared in Saxony because its inhabitants' 'intellectual culture' was more austere, contemplative, and inclined towards simplicity than those in southern regions.<sup>144</sup> This argument is continuous with earlier Enlightenment thinking about the role of climate as exemplified in the work of Montesquieu.<sup>145</sup> In its central principle of associating warm, fertile climates with luxury and sensuality, and cold, less-hospitable climates with austerity and discipline, it is unremarkable.

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<sup>139</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 125-206.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-73.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-118.

<sup>142</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 73-74.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4, 18, 75.

<sup>145</sup> On the impact of Montesquieu's climatic theory in Göttingen, see Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 383. On this current more broadly see Courtois, Jean-Patrice, 'The Climate of the philosophes during the Enlightenment', in *MLN*, Vol. 132 (Sept. 2017), 953-985; Withers, Charles W. J., *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago, IL, 2007), 140-145.

Villers' innovation was to extrapolate from this argument an explanatory model for the confessional Catholic-Protestant distinction, which in turn mapped onto his rationalist-empiricist notion of cultural difference.

However, his account of cultural difference underwent important changes following the first edition of the *Essai*. Villers did not substantially contradict earlier claims, but he did complicate them. These later analyses reflected an increasing emphasis on the role of historical contingency. Here, Villers recognized that climate could not adequately explain the broad variety of known morals and customs, or how very different cultures could, and indeed did, occupy identical (or nearly identical) climatic conditions.<sup>146</sup> To address this, Villers suggested that climate established the formative conditions of cultural groups, but the historical realities of those groups were shaped and impacted by myriad possible contingent factors, such as religion, interactions with other groups, and the impact of individuals.<sup>147</sup> Thus, while climatic conditions continued to provide part of the solution to the problem of difference, they became less decisive. In this sense his account became more vague as he became less willing to ascribe clear causal conditions by which difference could be explained.

Nevertheless, Villers remained committed to the notion that humanity is equally capable of cultural change.<sup>148</sup> He does not appear to have ever offered an account of cultural difference that emphasized innate characteristics, or to have considered heritable traits an important factor in cultural change. Even his earlier account considered climate as a historical explanation, rather than a determination of possible future changes. Indeed, his central

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<sup>146</sup> Villers, 'Érotique Comparée', 165-168.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Crowley, *Charles de Villers*, 143.

intellectual, and indeed political, agenda – that of convincing French readers of the virtues of German cultural norms – relied on the assumption that culture was readily mutable and nations could adopt new values and ideas. He remained committed to the 'beautiful conception of the perfectibility of our species'.<sup>149</sup>

This confessional/cultural-epistemic paradigm is the key to understanding Villers' descriptions of the French and German nations as 'antipodal'. One irony is that Villers' focus on France and the German lands partly explains why he cannot be positioned close to Meiners in contemporary thinking about humanity. Across his corpus, Villers spent very few words on non-European peoples, and even within Europe he overwhelmingly focused on France and Germany. Discussions of other European peoples – let alone those of Africa, Asia, and the Americas – are generally marginal considerations in his commentaries on France and Germany. Villers did not closely consider the cultural norms of non-European nations, let alone the possibility that such groups might disrupt the cultural polarity of France and Germany. He simply did not engage with non-Europeans in the way that was so integral to the analytical and organizational principles of Meiners' ethnological thought. One could attempt to bring together Villers' diffuse comments with a view to reconstructing a clear 'doctrine' on the attributes of non-Europeans, but such an effort would be methodologically questionable.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 285.

<sup>150</sup> On the problem of reconstructing doctrines from 'scattered or incidental remarks', see Skinner, Quentin, 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas', in idem., *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 1: *Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), 59-67. Nevertheless, the conclusions of such an effort would almost certainly challenge Painter's claim that Villers adopted Meiners' racial theories. One of Villers' most detailed comments on non-European peoples indicates that black Africans have the same intellectual capabilities as white Europeans. Villers presented the hypothetical example of a black African who had never seen a white European in order to illustrate an argument on the arbitrariness of empirical data. Villers suggested that the black African's response upon meeting white Europeans would be just as rational as a white European's on encountering an island populated with green people.



Moreover, it would serve to obscure the most salient features of Villers' cultural thought: the empiricist-rationalist distinction and its manifestation in France and Germany. Crucially, the elaboration of this cultural analysis in no way entailed an abandonment of his commitment to natural law: his account of natural equality instead complemented his analysis of perfectibility.

#### 2.2.4. Schlözer: Monogenism, Technology, and the Ottoman Threat

Like Villers, Schlözer also avoided using deterministic models to explain cultural change. He did emphasize the role of climate, but placed far greater emphasis on contingency [*Zufall*] and circumstances [*Umstände*].<sup>151</sup> While Schlözer noted natural differences in physical and intellectual characteristics between individuals, in his historical writings he stressed the prospect of perfectibility, and especially the mutability of different groups over time.<sup>152</sup> Schlözer also rejected claims that physiological differences reflect differences in intellect or ability.<sup>153</sup> While humans are born with varying characteristics, innate differences in intellect and inclination are not distributed along racial lines. Instead, the norms and behaviours associated with cultural groups emerged through the circumstances in which they existed and, as such, were mutable. In a telling passage of his *WeltGeschichte*, Schlözer differentiated 'humans' from 'nations' alongside a distinction between 'bodily' and 'mental [*geistig*]' conditions: 'There are white and black, big and small humans; there are wild, barbarous, and cultivated nations.'<sup>154</sup>

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The analogy is arguably patronizing, but clearly indicates that the intellectual faculties of black Africans are equal to those of white Europeans. Villers, *Philosophie de Kant*, 213.

<sup>151</sup> Schlözer, August Ludwig, *WeltGeschichte nach ihren HauptTheilen im Auszug und Zusammenhange*, Vol. 1 (2nd edn. Göttingen, 1792), 49-53. On these concepts see Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 179-181.

<sup>152</sup> Schlözer, *WeltGeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 1, 34-36, 56-57.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-60.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

Physiology and national culture are distinct, ultimately unrelated, categories by which peoples could be understood.

Schlözer presented his description of human origins in explicitly theological terms. He declared that 'God created humanity' and, in an argument clearly positioned as a sharp rejection of polygenism, Schlözer stated further that 'all hitherto discovered nations [*Völker*] and people descend from one pair' – all are 'of the House of Adam'.<sup>155</sup> Later he noted that, despite 'all of its [...] variety, [humanity has] nevertheless essentially one nature'.<sup>156</sup> Schlözer insisted that human nature was unitary and, crucially, he did not assign a clear hierarchy to the physiological differences that had emerged through humanity's dispersion around the world.

Factors that could impact cultural change include environmental conditions like climate, food resources, the quality of soil, and dangerous animals, as well as the adoption and historical transmission (and transformation) of customs, religion, and trading practices.<sup>157</sup> Political institutions developed alongside the circumstances and values of a people, and significant individuals could shape development.<sup>158</sup> Schlözer emphasized the importance of humanity's relationship to its surroundings, and especially its ability to shape environments through drainage, agriculture, and other geographical interventions.<sup>159</sup> Such interventions transform the world and, most importantly, ameliorate human circumstances in ways that make future innovations possible.<sup>160</sup> In understanding the contemporary world, Schlözer stressed the particular importance of technological developments, and especially those that enabled

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 33-35, 54-55.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>157</sup> Schlözer, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 1, 61-66.

<sup>158</sup> Scattola, 'Schlözer und die Staatswissenschaften', 106-108; Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 369.

<sup>159</sup> Schlözer, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 1, 43-46.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 49-51.

communication and exchange across long distances. Thus trade, periods of peace, printing, and advances in shipping each represented major advances for humanity by enabling the secure distribution of unprecedented quantities of useful information and ideas.<sup>161</sup> The relationships between these factors were complex and multivalent, creating dynamic, bilateral relationships (and, crucially, *Verbindungen*) across geographical and cultural spaces.

Nevertheless, Schlözer was emphatic that the peoples of modern Europe had values, ideas, and technologies fundamentally superior to those beyond the continent. This is closely tied to what he thought were the cultural benefits of Christianity. By contrast to Christian Europe, Schlözer saw the Ottoman Empire as barbaric, backwards, and dangerous.<sup>162</sup> Such comments were typical of his contemporaries, although Schlözer's anxieties about Ottoman expansionism were unusual, and even led him to propose pre-emptive war.<sup>163</sup> As Jürgen Osterhammel notes, during the eighteenth century commentators placed less emphasis on the Ottomans' religious difference than on their other cultural characteristics. Following the Ottoman defeat in the Great Turkish War (1683-1699), few Germans believed that the Ottomans remained a serious threat to the rest of Europe.<sup>164</sup> Schlözer's emphasis on the religious character of Ottoman rule – and its consequent threat to Christian culture – reflects the particular salience of Christianity in his conception of cultural difference.<sup>165</sup>

Similarly, Schlözer attributed the geopolitical and economic rise of northern Europe – Russia, Britain, Prussia, and Scandinavia –

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<sup>161</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 187-188.

<sup>162</sup> Schlözer, *WeltGeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 2, 364.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. On Schlözer's attitude towards the Ottomans see Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 204.

<sup>164</sup> Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 44-50.

<sup>165</sup> Schlözer, *WeltGeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 2, 364.

since 1500 to its work ethic, shaped first by climate and then by tradition, but also by the broader intellectual and religious circumstances that arose from these.<sup>166</sup> As in Villers, Schlözer's discussion was sensitive to differences between northern peoples, treating such climatological circumstances as predisposing groups to certain norms, rather than determining them. As in Villers, Schlözer's account also contained a distinctive religious dimension. In his thought, however, the key distinction was not between Catholicism and Protestantism (though that remained important), but rather between Christianity and other religions.<sup>167</sup>

A corollary to these claims was Schlözer's insistence that progress was not inevitable, and that regression remained possible. Maintaining progress relied on the *Verbindungen* that exist within and between groups capable of transmitting both ideas and artefacts. These were necessary for securing living standards, maintaining values and practices, and ensuring socio-political unity. According to Schlözer, the ways that human groups interact with each other and their environments, rather than physiology or innate characteristics, determine cultural difference. Human individuals were naturally equal only in a formal sense, but human groups were equally perfectible.

#### 2.2.5. Eichhorn on Human Nature and Human Difference

Schlözer, Villers, and Meiners placed great emphasis on the need to understand the circumstances of 'natural' humanity. Eichhorn, by

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<sup>166</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 372. This argument prefigures Max Weber's description of the 'Protestant ethic'. On the use of such ideas in the Enlightenment, see Münch, Paul, 'The Thesis before Weber', in Lehmann, Hartmut & Roth, Guenther (eds.), *Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (Cambridge, 1995), 65-67.

<sup>167</sup> See Espenhorst, Martin, 'Der "mobile" Europäer: Zur historischen Konstruktion des europäischen Menschen bei August Ludwig Schlözer', in *Schlözer in Europa*, 210-212.

contrast, did not see such considerations as relevant to his project. In his *Weltgeschichte* he stated that the historian's role was to describe 'the social human [*der gesellschaftliche Mensch*]'.<sup>168</sup> As a historian writing within such parameters, Eichhorn did not discuss the possible relationship between 'the social human' and the 'natural human' (or whether such a distinction is even valid). Eichhorn did not elaborate his own account of natural law, and his notion of human nature is elusive. As such, it requires brief discussion before approaching his comments on cultural difference.

Giuseppe d'Alessandro argues that Eichhorn had a fully historicized conception of humanity, according to which there is no stable, ahistorical human nature.<sup>169</sup> Instead, human 'nature' is entirely constructed through historical circumstance and experience. D'Alessandro argues that, whereas Kant's moral hermeneutics presupposed a universal, ahistorical conception of humanity (and consequently ethics), Eichhorn emphasized the historical relativity of human experience, ideas, and ethical values.<sup>170</sup> D'Alessandro's argument is largely compelling, and Eichhorn's approach to thinking about humanity was arguably more historicized than Kant, earlier natural law theorists, and indeed most of his contemporaries.

I would argue, however, that Eichhorn could not have seen human nature as wholly historical. As shown in the previous chapter, Eichhorn praised Leibniz for establishing the study of natural law on 'the eternal principles of justice and reason'.<sup>171</sup> While Eichhorn did

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<sup>168</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, vi, 2.

<sup>169</sup> D'Alessandro, 'Homo Historicus', *passim*.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 439-440, 443-444.

<sup>171</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 976, 978-979. Eichhorn's wording could be interpreted as suggesting that Leibniz merely believed that he had founded natural law on such principles. However, in the next sentence Eichhorn states 'Thus had Pufendorf and Leibniz already brought philosophical jurisprudence to a considerable height'. Even if Eichhorn was paraphrasing Leibniz, he clearly thinks there is some validity to the claim.

not clearly delineate these principles, or suggest that Leibniz had produced a conclusive account of natural law, he is unambiguous that such principles are eternal. Indeed, Eichhorn praised not just Leibniz, but also Kant and his successors for their contributions to natural law.<sup>172</sup> By contrast, one of his chief complaints against the eclectic philosophers was that their lack of intellectual systematicity prevented them from producing valuable ideas about natural law.<sup>173</sup>

Articulations of an ahistorical human nature had generally been central to thinking about natural law, reason, and justice. This was especially so in Leibniz's own work.<sup>174</sup> Based on his discussion of Leibniz, Eichhorn clearly thought that human nature must have some ahistorical form, although, as d'Alessandro rightly emphasizes, he did not himself describe the contents of that nature. This may seem like a minor point but, as discussed below, his comments on non-European peoples rely on the assumption that there are certain natural psychological characteristics universal to humanity. Readers only glimpse certain aspects of Eichhorn's thinking about human nature, and it would be methodologically problematic to attempt to reconstruct Eichhorn's 'doctrine'.<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, he approached the world's peoples with some notion of universal human nature, and this has major implications for understanding his thought.

Eichhorn's historical works – and especially his *Geschichte der drey letzten Jahrhunderte* – deal more extensively with non-European

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 796-8.

<sup>174</sup> Brown, Gregory, 'Leibniz's moral philosophy', in Jolley, Nicholas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz* (Cambridge, 1994), 411-441; Korkman, Petter, 'Voluntarism and Moral Obligation: Barbeyrac's Defence of Pufendorf Revisited', in Hochstrasser, T. J. & Schröder, P. (eds.), *Early Modern Natural Law Theories: Contexts and Strategies in the Early Enlightenment* (Dordrecht, 2003), 206. On the role of human nature in natural law, see Haakonssen, Knud, 'Introduction', in idem. (ed.), *Modern Natural Law*, xiii-xvi.

<sup>175</sup> Skinner, 'Meaning and understanding', 59-67.

regions and peoples than do the works of Villers and Schlözer. Eichhorn's *Geschichte* is a voluminous account of what was then known about the peoples of just about every corner of the globe. As with many of his contemporaries Eichhorn argued that humanity originated in Asia, despite the lack of reliable textual evidence that could substantiate this.<sup>176</sup> With the dispersion of humanity from Asia, Eichhorn claimed, different circumstances encouraged the emergence of different groups.<sup>177</sup> This largely echoes Villers and Schlözer's emphases on contingent factors, and Eichhorn even stated that 'no human understanding' could fully comprehend the causes of human difference.<sup>178</sup> Despite positioning himself in such apparently rigorous terms however, his work is frequently inconsistent with this professed methodology.

Eichhorn described Europeans as lucky to be born into a 'continent [*Welttheil*] secured through well-ordered states, and cultivated and illuminated [*erleuchtet*] through arts and sciences'.<sup>179</sup> The happiness of modern Europe is not due to heritable factors or even its moral norms, but the fortuitous contingency of historical conditions. By contrast, the supposedly dire circumstances of black Africans are the products of their customs, and especially their moral values. He described the Chaga peoples of modern-day Tanzania as 'the most bloodthirsty and detestable of all cannibals', while the Oromo are 'a wild, dirty people' who commit 'all kinds of cruelty'.<sup>180</sup> Some Senegalese groups are 'active' and 'refined', but many are 'lazy'

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<sup>176</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, 10-14. On the view that humanity originated in Asia, see Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 69-76.

<sup>177</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, 10-14.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 5, iii.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, 263-267. Eichhorn used the contemporary exo-ethnonym 'Gallas' rather than Oromo, which has pejorative connotations. See Hassen, Mohammed, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860* (Cambridge, 1990), xi-xiii.

and 'insipid'.<sup>181</sup> He noted that some peoples, such as the 'Bororo' – now usually described as the Wodaabe – had, under Portuguese coercion, adopted 'a kind of Christianity' and undergone some degree of 'civilizing', but any progress was negated by the fact that they had 'exchanged their moral simplicity [*Sitteneinfalt*] for European vices'.<sup>182</sup> Consistent with contemporary stereotypes, Eichhorn's assessments are, with few exceptions, overwhelmingly negative.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, Eichhorn relied extensively on the uncritical use of contemporary travel accounts – his citations in these passages are primarily travel reports, many of which were also used by Meiners.<sup>184</sup> Unlike Meiners' more overtly polemical account, these passages are presented straightforwardly and with little overt commentary, even as they present many of the same views and assumptions.

Notably, however, and unlike Meiners, Eichhorn described such characteristics as the results of circumstantial – rather than innate – factors. In his discussion of the Wodaabe, Eichhorn clearly implied that their cultural backwardness could be ameliorated via the inculcation of better religious and moral values.<sup>185</sup> Similarly, he criticized both Dutch settlers for having 'hindered [...the] civilizing process' by withholding Christianity from native Africans, and Portuguese traders for not having encouraged Enlightened norms

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<sup>181</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 6, 222-223.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-2. Bororo is an exo-ethnonym 'Bororo [*Bororoer*]'. On the complex (and contested) relationship between the term Bororo and the groups now normally identified as Wodaabe see Loftsdóttir, Kristin, 'Bounded and Multiple Identities: Ethnic Identifications of WoDaaBe and FulBe', in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 47, Cahier 185 (2007), 65-92.

<sup>183</sup> Sadjí, *Der Negermythos*, 278-283.

<sup>184</sup> Eichhorn cites, for example, Pury, Jean Pierre, *Mémoires sur la pays des Caffres et la terre des Nuyts* (Amsterdam, 1718); Oldendorp, Christian Georg Andreas, *Geschichte der Mission der evangelischen Brüder auf den caraischen Inseln S. Thomas, S. Croix und S. Jan*, 2 Vols. (Barby, 1777); Bosman, Willem, *Nauwkeurige Beschryving van de Guinese Goud-Tand-en Slave-Kust* (Utrecht, 1704); Atkins, John, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil, and the West-Indies* (2nd edn. London, 1737). These also appear in Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 2nd edn., 314, 319, 358, 365.

<sup>185</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 6, 270.



and 'civic [*bürgerlich*] freedom' in Ethiopia.<sup>186</sup> This emphasis on the mutability of African cultures does not make Eichhorn's views less troubling to modern readers, but it does distance his thinking about Africa from Meiners' more essentialist claims. Whereas Meiners thought that the differences between African and European peoples justified unrestricted domination, Eichhorn suggested that European involvement with Africans should be oriented towards encouraging 'civic freedom' and other Enlightened principles.

Eichhorn's discussions of Asian peoples are, broadly speaking, more generous than those of black Africans, while nevertheless describing them as more primitive than Europeans. Eichhorn wrote admiringly of the 'great character' of the Arabs as 'keen defenders of freedom [*eifrige Vertheidiger der Freyheit*]', and described the Kurds as 'a brave people of war [*Kriegsvolk*]', despite their crude norms and customs.<sup>187</sup> China was despotic, but had a rich artistic and literary tradition.<sup>188</sup> Tibet had benefitted intellectually and spiritually from its interactions with India, but had failed to produce works of lasting value, and its theocratic government had fostered superstition and laziness.<sup>189</sup> Indeed, Eichhorn compared Tibet to the Vatican, and Tibet's religious mores to Catholicism. In both, he suggested, the lack of separation between earthly and religious authority was an important source of backwardness.<sup>190</sup>

Such assessments are largely consistent with Eichhorn's peers.<sup>191</sup> Closely echoing other eighteenth-century descriptions, the

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 230-231, 277, 279-280.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., Vol. 5, 90, 93-4, 106, 125-126.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 356-390.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 410-417.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Pigulla, Andreas, *China in der deutschen Weltgeschichtsschreibung vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 65-154; Kow, Simon, *China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought* (London, 2017), 200-202; Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, passim.

material and historical conditions of Asia had resulted in a patchwork of despotic states that lacked the political-institutional benefits of Europe.<sup>192</sup> Although Eichhorn praised certain Asian rulers – such as Persia's Nader Shah Afshar (1688-1747) – across the continent as a whole there was 'nowhere [...] security of persons and property, nowhere civic [*bürgerlich*] freedom and undisturbed enjoyment of one's earnings under the protection of laws, but instead everywhere arbitrariness in government, oppression, and slavery'.<sup>193</sup> This was framed, and partially explained, in terms of weak, or otherwise faulty, *Verbindungen* between rulers and ruled: governments were isolated from their peoples, and ignorant of their subjects' lives and interests.<sup>194</sup> Eichhorn is notably much more sympathetic towards Asian peoples and their oppression than towards Africans.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, as discussed in the concluding sections to this chapter, Eichhorn was particularly critical of European imperial projects in Asia, describing them as – for the most part – having greatly worsened the circumstances of Asian peoples. Moreover, his overall maintenance of European institutional, moral, and legal standards belies any strict relativism. As in his account of Africa, however, these conditions are described as the mutable products of contingency, rather than the products of innate characteristics.<sup>196</sup>

By contrast, Eichhorn does ascribe the perceived inferiority of the indigenous peoples of the Americas to innate, physiological causes. Eichhorn suggested that indigenous Americans' 'morals, disposition, and nature' reflect their 'Mongol' physiology.<sup>197</sup> They are 'physically weak, lazy [...] cowardly, despondent,' and 'averse [to] all

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<sup>192</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 5, iii-i, vi, ix-xi, xiv-xvi.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 156.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, ix-xi, xiv-xvi.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, iii-xvi.

<sup>196</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, v-vii.

<sup>197</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 6, 371-2.

prolonged work'.<sup>198</sup> Eichhorn claimed that the Americans' weakness caused indolence and cowardice, and made them 'vindictive and cruel'.<sup>199</sup> These groups were, at least for the most part, 'unacquainted with sympathetic feelings and empty of noble social inclinations'.<sup>200</sup> Eichhorn was more generous regarding certain peoples, such as the indigenous Caribbeans who he described as 'good natured', 'clean', and 'chaste'.<sup>201</sup> Similarly, he praised the rulers of Mexico and Peru for having cultivated their lands, produced valuable art, and established 'civil societies [*bürgerlichen Gesellschaften*]'.<sup>202</sup> Eichhorn noted, however, that the achievements of these peoples were the results of a 'stronger bodily constitution than the other Indians', and that, consequently, they must have had different ancestors from other indigenous groups.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, the 'advantageous laws [*vortrefflichen Gesetze*]' introduced by the Incas did not succeed in transforming 'the raw morals [*rohen Sitten*]' of their subjects.<sup>204</sup>

As indicated above, such strongly negative descriptions of indigenous Americans were not uncommon in the eighteenth century.<sup>205</sup> Like his descriptions of black Africans, Eichhorn's comments on indigenous Americans are notably redolent of Meiners' own claims. Unlike Meiners, however, Eichhorn did not treat the moral and intellectual inferiorities of indigenous Americans as innate psychological traits. Instead, these inferiorities were psychological responses to innate physiological differences. The distinction is fine, yet important. Eichhorn's conceptualization of indigenous American

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, 717.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 375-376.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>205</sup> Sayre, *Les Sauvages Américains*, 128, 206, 238, 261-263, 280; Gerbi, *Dispute of the New World*, 35-288; Bickham, 'American Indians in the British Imperial Imagination', 228-253.

inferiorities had a different causal relationship to heredity than did Meiners'.

Nevertheless, his descriptions of indigenous Americans drew a cultural-deterministic account of physiology that was not present in his accounts of Asian and African peoples. Such a causal link between physical strength and moral character was necessarily speculative, relying on assumptions about the universality of certain human psychological processes. The assumption that certain physical characteristics will inevitably provoke particular psychological responses even in culturally distant peoples presumes a universal, natural mechanism behind such responses. While Eichhorn avoided many of the speculative approaches that characterized Meiners' work, his descriptions of indigenous Americans – like his uncritical use of travel accounts – are clearly incompatible with his claims regarding the proper relationship between historians and textual evidence. Indeed, Eichhorn's claims are inconsistent even with other volumes of his *Geschichte*: he did not draw such inferences about 'Mongol' physiology in his accounts of East Asian or 'Mongol' peoples, including Mongolians themselves.<sup>206</sup>

#### 2.2.6. Meiners' Ambivalent Reception

As the discussions of Schlözer, Villers, and Eichhorn suggest, Meiners occupied one extreme of thinking about the relationship between innate racial traits and cultural difference. It seems that few thinkers in Germany adopted his views wholesale. M. Gottfried Winkler (dates unknown) and Christian Schulz (dates unknown) both appear to have

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<sup>206</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 5, 3-4; Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 114.

adopted Meiners' account of race, but both are now obscure, and appear to have been minor figures during their lifetimes.<sup>207</sup>

On the other hand, the 1789 review of his *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* in the influential *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* strongly criticized Meiners' work, pointing to his misinterpretation of key sources and uncritical use of travel reports. A second review, by Georg Forster, took Meiners to task for his conclusions about non-European peoples.<sup>208</sup> Leading scholars at Göttingen overwhelmingly rejected his views. The university's other leading race theorist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, disputed Meiners' claim that racial groups exhibit moral and intellectual differences.<sup>209</sup> Georg Christoph Lichtenberg and Christian Gottlob Heyne also rejected Meiners' racial thought.<sup>210</sup> Schlözer and Villers offered accounts of cultural difference that were antithetical to Meiners'. Eichhorn's response was more complicated, but did not substantially adopt Meiners' causal arguments.

Nevertheless, paying further attention to how these thinkers commented on and responded to Meiners' thought reveals important nuances regarding both their ideas and the parameters of Meiners' reception.

As mentioned previously, Villers' relationship with Meiners has been particularly controversial. In *The History of White People*, Nell Irvin Painter argued that 'whiteness' as a modern concept of

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<sup>207</sup> Schulz, Christian, *Ueber Gott und die Natur als belehrender Unterricht bey einsamen Spaziergängen* (Leignitz, 1793), 74-84; Winkler, M. Gottfried, *Sätze zur mathematischen Erdkunde, physischen Geographie, Geogenie, Naturhistorie und Astronomie* (Dresden, 1806), 73-74. Winkler should not be confused with Gottfried Winckler (1731-1795), the merchant and art collector.

<sup>208</sup> See Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 261-264.

<sup>209</sup> Dougherty, 'Meiners und Blumenbach', 89-111.

<sup>210</sup> Vetter, *Wissenschaftlicher Reduktionismus*, 158, 160.

racial purity emerged in the aesthetic writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), which were further developed at Göttingen by Blumenbach and Meiners.<sup>211</sup> According to Painter, Meiners 'attracted a coterie of French counterrevolutionaries in the late 1790s', including both Charles de Villers and Julien-Joseph Virey, who adopted his racial hierarchy.<sup>212</sup> When Germaine de Staël began engaging with German ideas via the work of Villers, Painter claims, she also adopted these notions of whiteness. The 'Meiners-Villers-de Staël race theory' was then further popularized by Goethe, and henceforth emerged into mainstream European and North American culture.<sup>213</sup> Virey's importance to nineteenth century racial thought is well documented, but Painter's argument largely rests on Villers' crucial role as cultural mediator.<sup>214</sup> Closer scrutiny of her claims about Villers (and de Staël) suggests, however, the need to revise this narrative.<sup>215</sup>

The sources Painter refers to when describing Meiners' 'coterie of French counterrevolutionaries' make no mention of Villers, and her claim that in the 1790s 'Villers settled in Göttingen and studied with Meiners' appears without citation.<sup>216</sup> I have found no

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<sup>211</sup> Painter, *History of White People*, 59-104.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 99; Panese, Francesco, 'The Creation of the "Negro" at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century: Petrus Camper, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, and Julien-Joseph Virey', in Bancel, Nicolas et al. (eds.), *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations* (New York, NY, 2014), 48-59.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Staël, Germaine de, *De l'Allemagne*, Vol. 1, 1-2. Although not the subject of this thesis, Painter's discussion also appears to conflate de Staël's climatological account of national-cultural difference with Meiners' biological-essentialist account. De Staël used the term 'race' largely interchangeably with 'nation', and did not suggest that the characteristics of different 'races' are heritable. Like Villers, de Staël's account is closer to Montesquieu than Meiners.

<sup>216</sup> The footnote to this statement directs the reader to 'Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 136; Baum, *Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race*, 98'. Although Painter does not list which of the four volumes of Poliakov's work Villers supposedly appears in, I have been unable to find any reference to Villers in

biographical or archival information that mentions Villers as Meiners' student during his brief time at the university in 1796-1797, and he did not 'settle' in Göttingen until 1811 – a year after Meiners' death. There are no surviving letters between Meiners and Villers. Despite describing Charles de Villers as 'a member of the reactionary, race-obsessed Göttingen circle of Christoph Meiners', Painter offers no evidence for this beyond quotations from a 1915 book on de Staël. The passage Painter cites here is Villers' description of Germany and France as profoundly different 'nations'.<sup>217</sup> It does not indicate that such differences are innate. Painter does not cite any of Villers' writings directly, and it is unclear why she connects either Villers or de Staël's comments with Meiners' distinctive racial theory. I have found no passages in de Staël's œuvre that mention Christoph Meiners. Indeed, Painter presents no passages from the work of either de Staël or Villers that indicate a preoccupation with whiteness or heritable racial differences. Instead, she only indicates their emphasis on the virtues of northern peoples.

The previous chapter showed that Meiners and Villers took opposing sides in the fierce debates around Kant and Fichte, and this chapter has shown that their accounts of cultural difference were mutually exclusive. Archival documents appear to confirm that they had low opinions of each other's thinking about history and culture. In an unpublished biographical sketch written for the *Biographie*

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any volumes or editions. De Staël does not appear in Baum's work either. She appears briefly in Poliakov's work as an attendee of Recha Mendelssohn's salons and as a commentator on the German national 'character', but not as a race theorist. Painter, *History of White People*, 90; Poliakov, Léon, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, 4 Vols. (Philadelphia, 2003), Vol. 2, 159-160, 197.

<sup>217</sup> Painter, *History of White People*, 100. Painter cites Jaeck, Emma Gertrude, *Madame de Staël and the Spread of German Literature* (New York, NY, 1915), 6. Jaeck in turn cites the anonymous review 'Madame de Staël. Mélanges de Littérature et de Politique – Par. M. Benjamin Constant', in *The North American Review*, Vol. 37, No. 80 (July 1833), 13. The passage in question appears to be a translation of part of Villers' 1814 introduction to *De l'Allemagne*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

*universelle* of Louis Gabriel Michaud (1773-1858), Villers described Meiners' racial theories as 'absurd'.<sup>218</sup> The sentiment was mutual: in 1806 Meiners dismissed Villers' credentials as a historian, suggesting he is 'no real scholar [*kein eigentlicher Gelehrter*]'.<sup>219</sup> Villers and Meiners did not have a constructive relationship, but rather an antagonistic one. Villers did not promote Meiners' ideas, and it does not seem that de Staël did either.

Nevertheless, Villers' reception of Meiners' racial thought was in one sense ambivalent. Despite the supposed absurdity of Meiners' racial determinism, in an unpublished manuscript from 1808 Villers cited Meiners as having demonstrated 'that there are two races of men: the Mongol and the Celtic; the Orient and the Occident'.<sup>220</sup> It is curious that Villers' categories do not align with those of Meiners, who described humanity as divided between Mongol and Caucasian peoples (with Celtic peoples being a subcategory of the latter). While the terminological debt is unambiguous, Villers' misreading of Meiners' categories suggests a cursory – rather than extensive – engagement with the latter's racial thought. More importantly, he did not extrapolate from these 'two races' innate moral or intellectual differences comparable to those of Meiners. Culture remained readily

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<sup>218</sup> Villers, Charles de, 'Christoph Meiners', (Hamburg Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Autographensammlung: Box 6 of Villers' *Nachlass*). This is one of many short sketches of German intellectuals based at Göttingen written by Villers for Michaud, and does not reflect a particular interest in Meiners' thought or legacy. On Villers' involvement with Michaud's project, see Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', 158-159.

<sup>219</sup> Meiners, Christoph to Muraviev, Mikhael, 11 May 1806, in 'Correspondenz, betr. die Vocationen verschiedener Gelehrten', 267-268. At first glance, this comment may appear to refer to Villers' lack of an academic position. However, this correspondence is dedicated to Meiners' work recruiting German intellectuals for Russian universities. Most people Meiners referred to in these letters did not have academic positions, and he did not criticize other intellectuals in these terms. In this context, Meiners' comments are unambiguously – and strongly – pejorative.

<sup>220</sup> Villers, Charles de, 'Prisonniers de Guerre', in *Essai sur l'Esprit des lois de la guerre relativement aux prisonniers* (Hamburg Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Autographensammlung: Box 5 of Villers' *Nachlass*), 21-22.



mutable and not bound to heredity. Villers' adoption of Meiners' terminology without its associated hierarchy does however suggest one means by which Meiners' ideas could have retained some currency despite the broader rejection of his racial thought.

In his histories of literature Eichhorn made frequent reference to Meiners' works on European classical and medieval history, but not to his racial writings.<sup>221</sup> I have been unable to find passages by Eichhorn discussing Meiners' writings on non-European peoples in either his published works or his correspondence (and vice versa). The most substantial body of Meiners' correspondence – concerning his involvement with Russian universities – does discuss his role in arranging for a Russian student to stay with Eichhorn while studying at Göttingen.<sup>222</sup> Not much can be gathered from this except that they had a professional relationship, however, and Eichhorn does not appear to have used the term 'race' at all in his historical works.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Eichhorn should be excluded from considerations on the emergence of racial thought. In fact, he also adopted Meiners' claim that certain groups outside Asia – such as Finns and indigenous Americans – share 'Mongol' descent.<sup>223</sup> Like Villers, however – and with the exception of indigenous Americans – Eichhorn's use of these categories was not bound to innate intellectual or moral differences.<sup>224</sup> This should not obscure

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<sup>221</sup> These works do not substantially discuss ethnological ideas more broadly. Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 247, 250, 256, 275, 317, 778; Vol. 2, 71, 119,

<sup>222</sup> Muraviev to Meiners, 17 Feb & 22 August 1806, in 'Correspondenz, betr. die Vocationen verschiedener Gelehrten', 260, 278.

<sup>223</sup> I have found no examples of Eichhorn using 'Caucasian' in a way comparable to Meiners' usage. Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 114.

<sup>224</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 114. It is possible that Eichhorn's use of this term derives from the work of Blumenbach, who in turn had adopted it from Meiners, but rejected both Meiners' binary Caucasian/Mongol account and his claims about the moral and intellectual implications of such differences. Attempting to establish a clear 'genealogy'

the many other similarities between Eichhorn and Meiners' accounts of non-European peoples, however. While Meiners and Eichhorn ascribed causality in different ways, Eichhorn's discussion of the indigenous peoples of the Americas suggests an important role for heritability and physiology in his work that deserves further attention. Although many of their descriptions of non-European peoples were relatively common at this time, their uncritical use of travel accounts, and their positions as two of Göttingen's leading historical thinkers may indicate a closer intellectual relationship than has previously been recognized.

Of these figures, Schlözer's arguments were most consistently opposed to those of Meiners, even as he does not appear to have mentioned the latter by name. Schlözer was insistent that natural human equality must be presupposed for explaining and justifying the state, and argued that cultural difference is entirely the product of historical contingency. Furthermore, Schlözer made several methodological arguments that appear to be oblique criticisms of Meiners.

In his *WeltGeschichte*, Schlözer warned of the need to distinguish 'travel-writer fairy tales [*ReiseBeschreiberMärchen*] from [the] observations of real physicians [*wirklich Physiker*]' when describing the characteristics of non-European peoples.<sup>225</sup> Although Schlözer did not mention Meiners by name, he did identify two key precursors of Meiners' racial thought – Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778)

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of transmission would be problematic given that all three were at Göttingen at the same time, and Eichhorn was almost certainly aware of the work of both figures. However, Meiners appears to have been the first to use 'Mongol' in this sense, and Eichhorn adopted it, whether directly or indirectly. See Blumenbach, *De generis humani*, 3rd edn., 302-321.

<sup>225</sup> Schlözer, *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, 35-36. At this time *Physiker* was used to refer to both physicians and natural philosophers more generally. Based on the context of examining human difference, the former definition appears more likely.

and Lord Kames – as guilty of this error. More importantly, Meiners' reliance on the use of travel accounts was well known. Although Meiners' most notorious work on race was published the same year as Schlözer's *WeltGeschichte*, the former had begun publishing accounts of human difference based on travel reports more than a decade earlier.<sup>226</sup> In addition, Meiners' *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* was written as a companion textbook to a course he had begun teaching in 1784 concerning 'the original differences of all peoples'.<sup>227</sup> Schlözer would almost certainly have been aware of his colleague's work. The use of travel accounts in scholarly work was by no means limited to Meiners, of course, but he was at this time Göttingen's most prominent figure to make such extensive – and uncritical – use of them to categorize non-European peoples.<sup>228</sup>

Göttingen's other major race theorist – Blumenbach – was, by contrast, a 'real physician'. Blumenbach was professor of medicine, and his work involved close analysis of human anatomy. Crucially, Meiners and Blumenbach had a major dispute about the methods and implications of the study of human difference and, as mentioned above, Blumenbach was deeply critical of Meiners' claims regarding intellectual and moral inequalities. While this dispute first erupted in print at the end of the 1780s, John Zammito has persuasively suggested that Blumenbach had rejected Meiners' methodology and conclusions as early as the 1770s.<sup>229</sup> In this context, Schlözer's distinction between 'travel-writer fairy tales' and 'real physicians' appears to have been a polemical response to the differences between Meiners and Blumenbach. Here, Schlözer clearly took the side of the latter.

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<sup>226</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1775), 164-179, 251-27.

<sup>227</sup> Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen*, 110-112, 267.

<sup>228</sup> Indeed, Eichhorn did not begin to make extensive use of travel accounts until he began writing his secular histories in the late 1790s.

<sup>229</sup> Dougherty, 'Meiners und Blumenbach', 89-90; Zammito, 'Policing Polygeneticism', 48.

Similarly, in the second volume of his *Russische Annalen* (1802), Schlözer included an aside emphasizing the unreliability of the medieval historian Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1160-c. 1220), noting that it is hard to believe 'that a man who writes so beautifully, with the mien of an annalist, could so grossly versify [*derbe dichten*] and lie'.<sup>230</sup> Christoph Meiners had listed Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* as a key source for his accounts of 'primitive' human groups in both his *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* and his *Historische Vergleichung*.<sup>231</sup> Given the importance of these works to Meiners' claims about human nature – and indeed Schlözer's rejection of these claims – it seems possible that Schlözer's strictures were, at least in part, directed towards Meiners.

These methodological considerations are central to understanding Schlözer's distance from thinkers like Meiners. Like Eichhorn, Schlözer maintained that historians should not attempt to construct specific accounts of prehistorical human differentiation based on speculation. The contingency of known history was enough to bring into question any suppositions about events prior to the existence of written evidence.<sup>232</sup> Indeed, Schlözer differentiated geological (and other scientific) speculations from those concerning human development.<sup>233</sup> The natural sciences were based on clear, predictable laws while human history was not. By contrast, the *Geschichte der Menschheit* genre that Meiners worked within relied on the presupposition that human origins and pre-history could be

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<sup>230</sup> Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 2, 34.

<sup>231</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, [unpaginated prefatory material]; Meiners, *Historische Vergleichung*, Vol. 3 (Hanover, 1794), 616. In both instances Meiners cited the following edition: Grammaticus, Saxo, *Historiae Danicae, libri XVI*, eds. Stephen Hansen Stephanius & Christian Adolph Klotz (Leipzig, 1771).

<sup>232</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 185-186.

<sup>233</sup> Schlözer, *WeltGeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, 13-31.

understood by extrapolating causal laws from historical data.<sup>234</sup> Unlike Eichhorn, however, Schlözer appears to have remained consistent in this methodology, at least in his academic writings on history and politics. Unlike both Eichhorn and Villers, Schlözer does not appear to have adopted any of Meiners' racial terminology.

The fact that Villers and Eichhorn adopted key terms from Meiners' work without accepting his claims about the causes of moral and intellectual differences suggests an important dimension of Meiners' contemporary reception. Authors could adopt certain aspects of Meiners' race theory without accepting its broader hierarchy. This is not in itself a new insight: Blumenbach's response to Meiners' thought was broadly similar.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, Blumenbach's physiological work – and not Meiners' 'history of humanity' – is usually seen as the source for the broader adoption of 'Caucasian' as a term referring to white Europeans.<sup>236</sup> However, the adoption of Meiners' terminology by contemporary historical writers is suggestive, and may yield important insights into the diffusion of his thought in nineteenth-century Germany. The early adoption of such terminology by thinkers like Eichhorn indicates that this dissemination may have occurred through historical works as well as the physiological writings of Blumenbach.

The same cannot be said of Villers, as his reference to Mongol and Celtic lineages remains unpublished. Nevertheless, his partial, inconsistent adoption of these terms is perhaps exemplary of the ways that Meiners' racial thought could retain currency even as its moral and intellectual implications were abandoned. Neither Villers nor de Staël appears to have played a role in the transmission and popularization of Meiners' racial thought. While Britta Rupp-

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<sup>234</sup> Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 158-160, 241-247.

<sup>235</sup> Baum, *Caucasian Race*, 5-6, 59, 73-94.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

Eisenreich and others have laid crucial groundwork, much work remains to be done regarding Meiners' reception. However, it is crucial to carefully track how Meiners' ideas were selectively used, partially adopted, and even distorted by his readers. This approach reveals a much more complicated and ambiguous narrative than that described by Painter.

### **2.3. Conclusions**

This chapter has emphasized the similarities and differences between how Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers conceptualized natural law and cultural difference. In doing so, it has focused on the relationship between these ideas and hierarchical thinking about racial difference. I have also sought to demonstrate how accounts of cultural difference were constructed alongside, and consistent with, accounts of natural law.

These debates had serious political implications. As mentioned above, discussions of cultural difference – and especially differences between Europeans and non-Europeans – were bound to major on-going political debates.<sup>237</sup> This section reviews the main arguments from this chapter before outlining how their theories of human difference reflected key ideas about the course and nature of perfectibility and Enlightenment. It concludes by noting how these ideas were used in response to debates about empire, slavery, and Jewish emancipation.

Both Schlözer and Villers grounded their analyses of culture within the framework of natural law. In order to justify the state, human beings were in some sense naturally equal. Given this natural equality, culture was the result of historical contingency and

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<sup>237</sup> Strack, 'Philosophical Anthropology', 285; Hess, 'Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary', 56-101.

therefore readily mutable. Schlözer emphasized the role of technology and communication, as well as the moral-cultural content of Christianity. Villers presented an account of cultural difference that centred on confessional points of reference couched in philosophical terms. While both authors were among the *avant-garde* of contemporary thinking about history and culture, their use of theological categories is an important reminder that late Enlightenment innovations remained deeply inflected by religious commitments. Indeed, the following chapter explores how religious notions shaped their variations on the Enlightened narrative.

Meiners, on the other hand, argued that human beings were naturally unequal. Morally and intellectually inferior groups, therefore, had much more limited capacity for change. László Kontler has noted that 'racial superiority was an idea difficult to reconcile with both Christianity and natural law'.<sup>238</sup> This may have been true for many other thinkers, but Meiners both avoided religious controversy and used the language of natural law in ways coherent with his racial thought. This racial thought was consistent with Pufendorf's own comments on human difference, even as Meiners expanded the implications of these notions to reject a contractual account of political society. Moreover, while – as shown in both the previous and following chapters – he emphasized the possibility of cultural change among white Europeans, most non-European groups were virtually excluded from the possibility of substantial improvement. According to Meiners, heredity played a strongly determining role in one's place in the world. Few German intellectuals appear to have accepted this pessimistic view of perfectibility, even as they adopted and incorporated other aspects of his thought.

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<sup>238</sup> Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenments*, 175.

Of these thinkers, Eichhorn is the most difficult to categorize. He did not articulate an account of natural law or human nature, even as he praised the former and hinted at the latter. Equally, his discussions of non-European peoples were not tied to a general causal framework. The emergence of different groups was explained in different ways. His accounts of Asian and African peoples emphasized their mutability, even as they reflected contemporary stereotypes. His comments on the indigenous peoples of the Americas, on the other hand, claimed that physiological factors could determine cultural backwardness. A close analysis of his discussions of non-European peoples suggests that he fell short of his own standards of textual criticism and historical analysis. Nevertheless, Eichhorn did not have a 'racial doctrine' and, as in Villers, it would be a dubious project to attempt to distil a consistent theory from his various remarks. He did however analyze different groups using language that implied varying, inconsistent accounts of the possibility of perfectibility and the relationships between heritable characteristics, morality, and intellect. Regardless, these comments suggest that his account of non-European groups was more complex – and indeed more indebted to certain assumptions about psychology, physiology, and European superiority – than previously thought.<sup>239</sup>

For each of these thinkers Enlightenment was a fundamentally European project, in which European peoples had overcome the superstition, ignorance, and barbarism of earlier eras. Nevertheless, they explained this reality in very different ways. For Villers, Enlightenment was more specifically Protestant. Schlözer, Villers and Eichhorn each saw European progress primarily in terms of historical contingency. The Enlightenment had occurred where it had due to fortunate circumstances peculiar to a certain portion of the globe. Un-

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<sup>239</sup> See d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 233-237.



Enlightened peoples were (at least in most cases) perfectible, provided that they adopted the right customs and ideas. Nevertheless, whereas Villers and Schlözer suggested any people could, theoretically at least, adopt the customs necessary for Enlightened progress, Eichhorn suggested that the physiology of indigenous Americans may have doomed them to cruelty and indolence.

Meiners went further by arguing that Enlightenment could only ever be European as only Caucasian peoples had the moral and intellectual faculties required for such progress. Furthermore, the recognition and expansion of European projects of global domination were central to his notion of Enlightenment, as they represent the spread and consolidation of superior ideas and institutions. According to this logic, efforts to decentre European assumptions – such as those of Forster and Herder – were not just wrong, but inimical to the entire project of Enlightenment.<sup>240</sup> Meiners, as the following chapter shows, also emphasized the role of historical contingency, but this happened within the parameters of Europeans' inherent, biological superiority.

These arguments had important implications for responses to contemporary debates around slavery, imperialism, and Jewish emancipation, even as none of these thinkers suggested radical solutions to these problems. Meiners' positions on all three questions may fairly be described as reactionary. Using racial arguments he defended unlimited European imperial power, slavery, the slave trade, and perpetual Jewish civic inferiority.<sup>241</sup> He notoriously argued that, despite its inherent cruelty, the transatlantic slave trade

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<sup>240</sup> On Meiners' response to Forster's sympathetic treatment of non-European peoples, see Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 265.

<sup>241</sup> Meiners, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1st edn., 163.

was an improvement in the conditions of black Africans.<sup>242</sup> In the same article Meiners claimed that 'Jews and blacks, so long as they are Jews and blacks' cannot expect the same rights and freedoms as the 'Christians and whites' they live among.<sup>243</sup>

Meiners' positions on imperialism and Jewish emancipation were not unusual, even as his defence of *unrestricted* imperialism and *innate* Jewish inferiority represented extreme positions within these debates.<sup>244</sup> Nevertheless, in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, slavery had become increasingly controversial.<sup>245</sup> While many German intellectuals opposed the immediate emancipation of slaves, few disagreed that slavery should ultimately be abolished. The transatlantic slave trade was even more controversial, and Meiners appears to have been one of very few German intellectuals to write in its defence.

Eichhorn, Villers, and Schlözer, by contrast, all expressed their disapproval of slavery. Eichhorn described the enslavement of Africans (and, earlier, indigenous Americans) as a 'crime against humanity [*Verbrechen gegen die Menschheit*]'.<sup>246</sup> Regardless, he opposed immediate emancipation: such a 'gift' would only be meaningful if those emancipated were first 'prepared' for freedom.<sup>247</sup> Schlözer also opposed slavery on the basis that there were no natural

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<sup>242</sup> Meiners, 'Ueber die Natur', 385-456.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 386-387.

<sup>244</sup> As discussed below, Johann David Michaelis notably also argued that, as an Asiatic people, Jews could not become fully European. See Hess, 'Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary', 56-101.

<sup>245</sup> Schüller, Karin, 'Deutsche Abolitionisten in Göttingen und Halle. Die ersten Darstellungen des Sklavenhandels und der Antisklavereibewegung in der deutschen Historiographie des ausgehenden 18. und beginnenden 19. Jahrhunderts', in Grunwald, Susanne et al. (eds.), *Pasajes, Passages, Passagen: Festschrift für Christian Wentzlaff-Eggebert* (Seville, 2004), 611-622.

<sup>246</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 6, 291-292, 294, 305, 315-316, 322-324, 333-334, 612, 630-631, 722. This quote is on page 631.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 149.

inequalities along racial lines.<sup>248</sup> Ultimately, however, he agreed with Eichhorn that emancipation should not be immediate.<sup>249</sup> Both indicated that enslaved groups were perfectible, but that they must undergo a process of Enlightenment before they could be meaningfully freed. Rather than discussing contemporary slavery directly, Villers praised the 'humanity of the European, who [...] no longer suffers slavery upon his soil'.<sup>250</sup> While evidently critical of slavery, Villers' position was self-congratulatory rather than prescriptive. Rainer Koch has described two distinct positions on slavery in the German lands during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. 'Liberal' critics demanded the immediate abolition of slavery; 'conservative' critics saw emancipation as viable only following the proper education of the enslaved.<sup>251</sup> Villers' position is ambiguous, but both Schlözer and Eichhorn clearly fall into the latter camp.

Similarly, Villers, Eichhorn, and Schlözer each agreed that imperial practices were legitimate insofar as they benefitted subject peoples. Villers praised Europeans for having spread Enlightenment as far across the globe as 'to Philadelphia and to Calcutta'.<sup>252</sup> By contrast, Schlözer and Eichhorn were vocal critics of Europe's current overseas projects. Neither was opposed to imperialism in principle: Schlözer took England's side during the American War of Independence, and Eichhorn described the pursuit of multinational empires as valuable for modern states.<sup>253</sup> Nevertheless, both were

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<sup>248</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 40-43, 62-63.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 18.

<sup>251</sup> Koch, Rainer, 'Liberalismus, Konservativismus und das Problem der Negersklaverei. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des politischen Denkens in Deutschland in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 222, No. 3 (Jun., 1976), 529-537.

<sup>252</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 18.

<sup>253</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, xxxv; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 6, 764-765. On Schlözer's

deeply critical of the practices of European states and colonial entities.

According to Eichhorn, Europeans had exploited native Africans when they should have 'civilized' them.<sup>254</sup> Instead of ameliorating the harsh conditions of indigenous Asians, or liberating them from despotic rulers, Europeans had largely exploited, abused, and further oppressed the peoples they encountered.<sup>255</sup> The European failure to uphold Enlightened values was more egregious than Asia's native despotisms.<sup>256</sup> Despite his overwhelmingly negative portrayal of indigenous American peoples, Eichhorn decried the 'barbarities [*Unmenschlichkeiten*]' of the 'rapacious [*raubsüchtig*]' Spaniards.<sup>257</sup> Schlözer summarized his view of European colonial projects in similar terms: 'we discovered three new worlds, and enslaved [*unterjochten*], plundered, cultivated, or lay waste to them'.<sup>258</sup> Such criticisms of colonial practices were by no means uncommon and, as László Kontler notes, attracted a considerable readership in contemporary Europe.<sup>259</sup> However, while distant from Meiners' reactionary arguments, by maintaining that European domination can be legitimate they also fell short of the radical critiques of imperial power described by Sankar Muthu.<sup>260</sup>

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opposition to American independence, see Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 280-291.

<sup>254</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 6, 270, 277, 279-280, 290.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, xvii-xxii.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, 349, 378-379, 630, 645-646, 677-678.

<sup>258</sup> Schlözer, *WeltGeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 1, 105.

<sup>259</sup> Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenments*, 126.

<sup>260</sup> Muthu identifies Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant, and Johann Gottfried Herder as having challenged 'the idea that Europeans had any right to subjugate, colonize, and 'civilize' the rest of the world', in *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 1-2. His account of Kant may be over-generous, however. See Desch, Michael C., 'Benevolent Cant? Kant's Liberal Imperialism', in *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (Fall 2011), 649-656.

Just as he wrote little on contemporary imperialism, Villers appears to have taken little interest in Jews or Judaism. In a very brief discussion in the *Essai*, he praised several Jewish intellectuals and noted that the Reformation had 'ameliorated their fate' by 'destroying a host of superstitious prejudices' held against them by 'the vulgar'.<sup>261</sup> While these comments indicate a broad sympathy with Jews, Villers did not declare a position in the debate about emancipation. Moreover, despite his profound attention to Luther's life and thought, he does not appear to have commented on Luther's anti-Jewish writings.<sup>262</sup> Villers may have supported the immediate emancipation of both Jews and slaves but, if so, he was not sufficiently concerned about these issues to state his positions publicly.

Eichhorn did, however, participate in this debate. He appears to have recommended extending religious toleration not just to different Christian confessions, but also to Jews and even Muslims.<sup>263</sup> He associated unwillingness to tolerate different religious groups with socio-cultural stagnation and regress. Religious tolerance enabled all confessional groups to be incorporated into a unified political culture, whereby sectarian differences would not interfere with the relationships between ruler and ruled. Nevertheless, he opposed immediate Jewish civic equality. Following the crises of the first century AD, Jewish customs had 'degenerated'.<sup>264</sup> Whereas other

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<sup>261</sup> Villers, Charles de, *Essai sur la Réformation* (3rd edn. Paris, 1808), 210-211.

<sup>262</sup> Luther's most infamous anti-Jewish text is *Von den Juden und iren Lügen* ('On the Jews and their lies') (1543) which recommended the extensive use of violence against Jews, including forced labour and even murder. For a detailed analysis of Luther's comments on Jews, see Kaufmann, Thomas, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism*, trans. Lesley Sharpe & Jeremy Noakes (Oxford, 2017).

<sup>263</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 4, 107, Vol. 6, 112, 492, 495, 497-498.

<sup>264</sup> Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried '[Review] Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs, Metz 1789', in idem. (ed.), *Allgemeine Bibliothek der biblischen Litteratur* (Leipzig, 1789), Vol. 2, 301-302.

European nations had adopted Christianity – and thus gradually developed better values – Jews had not. Eichhorn did not think it necessary that Jews convert to Christianity, but instead proposed that Judaism should itself be reformed. If this were to take place, he confidently predicted that in several generations the Jewish people would be worthy of equality.<sup>265</sup> Eichhorn's comments clearly reflect an emphasis on perfectibility, even as, again, they represent a 'conservative' position in eighteenth-century debates about Jewish emancipation.

Eichhorn's position was notably less hostile than many others at Göttingen.<sup>266</sup> His predecessor, Johann David Michaelis, infamously suggested that – as an 'Asiatic' people – Europe's Jewish population might best be put to use operating plantations in the Caribbean.<sup>267</sup> Similarly, Schlözer, alongside other derogatory comments, mocked the belief that civic emancipation would transform Jews into 'wholly industrious, wholly useful' citizens within a few decades.<sup>268</sup> The transformation of the Jewish people, Schlözer suggested, would take many generations. He also blamed Jews for students' financial difficulties and supported expulsions from Göttingen.<sup>269</sup> These remarks are perhaps surprising given his traditional association with more progressive, 'liberal' currents of Enlightenment thought.<sup>270</sup> More research should be conducted into Schlözer's comments on

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> On the contemporary treatment of Jews in Göttingen, see Sabelleck, 'Juden in Göttingen (1648-1866)', 649-651. Hanover would not grant legal equality to Jews until 1842 – thirty years after Prussia, the first German state to do so.

<sup>267</sup> On the debate around Michaelis' proposition, see Hess, Jonathan M., *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven, CT, 2002), 51-90.

<sup>268</sup> Comart, [first name unknown] & Ditterich [no first name given] (trans.), 'Untertänigste Vorstellung der Gemeinde zu Strasburg, über eine Bittschrift, welche den 28 Jan. dieses Jars, im Namen der Juden des Elsasses, der Nat. Versamml. vorgelegt werden', in Schlözer, August Ludwig (ed.), *Stats-Anzeigen*, Vol. 15, No. 60 (1790), 459. Schlözer also blamed Jews for the poor conditions in which they lived.

<sup>269</sup> Sabelleck, 'Juden in Göttingen', 649-651.

<sup>270</sup> On this view, see Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 6-9, 18-19.

Jews, as well as the role of his periodicals in debates over Jewish emancipation. Regardless, if not so crass as Meiners, Schlözer's views on European Jews appear to have been notably more reactionary than those of Eichhorn and Villers.

Despite their emphases on natural equality and cultural mutability, then, neither Villers nor Schlözer took radical positions regarding the treatment of European Jews or non-European peoples. This should not be surprising for, as Colin Kidd has noted, prior to the emergence of 'doctrinal racism', acts of violence and domination were defended using arguments derived from egalitarian models of natural law.<sup>271</sup> Villers and Schlözer's arguments about natural equality were congruent with conservative currents of the natural law tradition and did not reflect radical political positions. Equally, Eichhorn's innovative historiographical thought was not paralleled by original or relativizing approaches to contemporary peoples outside Europe. All three conceptualized Enlightenment in Eurocentric terms, even as they argued that other peoples could – with proper tutelage, and perhaps over generations – achieve progress comparable to those of Western Europe.<sup>272</sup> Their emphases on perfectibility rendered them supporters of 'Enlightened' imperialism and, in the cases of Eichhorn and Schlözer at least, the possibility of future emancipation.

While it should not be interpreted as exempting Schlözer, Eichhorn, and Villers from significant prejudices concerning non-Christian and non-European peoples, their intellectual distance from Meiners remains important. It demonstrates both the variety of ways that the language of natural law could be incorporated into theories of culture, and the variety of ways that such theories of culture could respond to notions of race.

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<sup>271</sup> Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 54.

<sup>272</sup> Excepting, in Eichhorn's case, indigenous Americans.

This chapter traced how these thinkers conceptualized and analyzed human difference in terms of natural law, cultural change, and contemporary political debates. Two themes were the distinctly European character of Enlightenment and the historical contingency of European progress. The following chapter deals with the ways that these authors turned their thinking about cultural change to the continent in which they lived. It examines more closely how they explained European progress, and how these accounts responded to contemporary political crises.



## Chapter Three

### The Enlightened Narrative in Germany, c. 1789-1815

In the introduction to his 1797 account of the French Revolution – *Die französische Revolution in einer historischen Uebersicht* – Johann Gottfried Eichhorn listed the reasons why he felt himself able to produce a fair account of the events in France. Chief among these was his claim that he had never been either 'aristocratically or democratically minded'.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the possibility that as a member of the bourgeoisie he might be envious of the aristocracy – and thus inclined towards anti-aristocratic, even revolutionary, sympathies – Eichhorn countered that he recognized it as his duty to honour those through whom he lived 'at peace under the protection of the laws'.<sup>2</sup> Eichhorn was emphatic that progress is best achieved through the 'quiet forces of time and morality [*Sittlichkeit*]'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, reflecting earlier tropes in German thinking about the bourgeoisie, he described himself as moral, independent of the will of others, honest in his convictions, and committed to the pursuit of truth.<sup>4</sup>

This self-description attests to Eichhorn's anxiety that the bourgeoisie's position in contemporary German discourse had become increasingly contested. Over the following years, he formulated an account of world history in which *Mittelstände* – including the bourgeoisie – played a unique role by enabling strong and benevolent social and political institutions, as well as cultural and intellectual achievements.<sup>5</sup> In particular, the bourgeoisie had

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<sup>1</sup> Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, xiii-xv.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The German word *Stand* (plural *Stände*) is traditionally translated as 'rank' or 'estate'. However, Eichhorn described *Mittelstände* as a broad, trans-

been essential for the emergence of modern, Enlightened Europe. This narrative reflected both traditional German thinking about the bourgeoisie as an Enlightened (and Enlightening) force in European history *and* anxieties that such positive associations were beginning to wane.

Eichhorn's historical writings of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period reflect a variation of what Pocock has described as the 'Enlightened narrative'. Eichhorn's version of this narrative formed a defence of the role of the bourgeoisie in European history. This chapter examines a range of works that exhibit many of the central characteristics of the Enlightened narrative. I argue that Meiners, Eichhorn, Villers, and Schlözer produced works that closely paralleled this narrative, even as they went beyond it in crucial ways. In response to the crises of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, these writings recalibrated, revised, and ultimately transformed the assumptions and arguments integral to earlier accounts of modernity.<sup>6</sup> While they remained broadly hopeful about the project of Enlightenment, new threats to that project forced them to rethink its parameters.

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historical social category necessary to a people's well-being, making the specificity implied by 'middle estates' or 'middle ranks' unsuitable. As such, 'middle class' arguably carries more conceptual congruity with Eichhorn's usage. Nevertheless, the use of the word 'class' carries anachronistic connotations of post-industrial, and especially Marxist, historiography. Moreover, as discussed below, other thinkers employed the term *Mittelstand* to refer to the aristocracy. I have consequently opted to retain *Mittelstand* and *Mittelstände* untranslated. On the concept of *Stände* and its relationship to later notions of class, see Kocka, Jürgen, *Weder Stand noch Klasse: Unterschichten um 1800* (Bonn, 1990), 33-35; Conze, Werner & Walther, Rudolf, 'Stand, Klasse', in Brunner et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Vol. 6, 200-257.

<sup>6</sup> Although not the focus of this chapter, these shifting notions of modernity broadly reflect what Koselleck has described as the 'acceleration' of historical time during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. Each recognized that the dramatic changes to European politics and society required new ways of conceptualizing the past and present. See Koselleck, Reinhart, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York, NY, 2004), 40-41.

Before discussing these accounts in greater depth, it is necessary to outline 'the Enlightened narrative' as defined by J. G. A. Pocock. This was a historiographical 'norm' used by thinkers to explicate and comment upon the transition from medieval 'barbarism' to Enlightened modernity.<sup>7</sup>

'[T]he Enlightened narrative' proceeded to recount the emergence from the 'Christian millennium' of the political, social, and cultural orders in which the Enlightened historians believed themselves to be living and to which they applied the term 'Europe'. Their narratives [...recounted] the emergence of a system of strong sovereign states [...] This system of states was supported by, and might be thought the outward expression of, a cultural system of shared manners, possible only in a deeply commercial civilisation, which cemented the relations between both Enlightened Europeans and European states. The 'Enlightened narrative' thus set itself to be both a historiography of state and a historiography of society, and took as its telos the ideally Enlightened system existing (roughly) between the wars of the Spanish succession and the American and French revolutions.<sup>8</sup>

Such works combined 'narrative, erudition, and philosophy' to produce a 'macronarrative of great systemic complexity' through which their authors' circumstances could be understood.<sup>9</sup> They were deeply concerned with 'manners' as well as the emergence of distinctive cultural, political, and economic relationships and

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<sup>7</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 2, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6.

institutions.<sup>10</sup> These projects shared a conviction that contemporary Europe was intrinsically superior to both the Middle Ages and the classical world. Pocock describes Pietro Giannone (1676-1748), Voltaire, David Hume, William Robertson, Adam Smith, and Adam Ferguson as having authored versions of the Enlightened narrative.<sup>11</sup>

Variations on the Enlightened narrative were significant undertakings that represented an awareness of the complex interplay of different factors in historical change. Moreover, the ways in which intellectuals explained and assessed Europe's transformations had important political implications. In particular, such accounts revealed what their authors thought to be the advantages (and disadvantages) of modernity, as well as the dimensions of human experience they thought to be historically significant. The tenor, rhetoric, and causal analyses that thinkers used in constructing their accounts offered diagnoses of what was valuable in Europe's present. As such, they also served as warnings about what should be preserved (or strengthened) in order to maintain or improve contemporary prosperity.

As well as differences between particular accounts, Pocock notes crucial shifts in the Enlightened narrative during the last decades of the eighteenth century. These changes happened in response to what Franco Venturi described as 'the crisis of the *ancien régime*'.<sup>12</sup> The apparent increase in political turbulence following the American War of Independence encouraged European thinkers to reformulate, and even question, earlier assumptions concerning

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 369-379. Edward Gibbon, Pocock argues, shared the metanarrative of such works, but departed from it by focusing much of his narrative on the Orthodox east.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Vol. 2, 2; Venturi, Franco, *Settecento riformatore*, Vol. 3: *La prima crisi dell'Antico Regime (1768-1776)* (Turin, 1979) & Vol. 4: *La caduta dell'Antico Regime (1776-1789)* (Turin, 1984).

notions of progress and modernity.<sup>13</sup> German intellectuals mostly saw the American War of Independence as confirming, rather than challenging, their notions of Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> The same cannot be said of the escalating crises that followed the first years of the French Revolution.

This chapter adopts Pocock's definition of the Enlightened narrative with one crucial exception. Pocock writes that the 'Enlightened narrative was a western narrative [...] it did not have much to say about the expansion of Latin Christian culture through Saxony into Baltic and Central Europe'.<sup>15</sup> This is certainly true of the authors described by Pocock, but it does not account for the complicated relationship between Germany and its western neighbours. Robertson, Hume, and Voltaire may have considered the German lands to be peripheral to Europe's transition from medieval barbarism to modernity, but German historians did not. László Kontler has shown that intellectuals within the Holy Roman Empire frequently sought to rectify and amend foreign perceptions of Germany as a peripheral actor in Europe.<sup>16</sup> They stressed the importance of German events, achievements, and individuals in shaping the modern world, even as they shared with their western peers the other features of the narrative. French and British writers may have excluded Germany from the Enlightened narrative, but German ones did not. Instead, they adopted (or rather shared) the Enlightened narrative, but broadened its geographical horizons to include the German lands.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Dippel, Horst, *Germany and the American Revolution, 1770-1800: A Sociohistorical Investigation of Late Eighteenth-Century Political Thinking*, trans. Bernhard A. Uhlendorf (Wiesbaden, 1978); Dippel, Horst, *Die amerikanische Verfassung in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert: Das Dilemma von Politik und Staatsrecht* (Goldbach, 1994), 14-17. Schlözer was a notable exception to this trend. Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 280-291.

<sup>15</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 2, 379.

<sup>16</sup> Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenment*, 112-116, 151-152, 162.

Unsurprisingly, however, the thinkers discussed in this chapter also responded to concerns that represented key preoccupations in contemporary German thought and politics. Although it is no longer customary to treat the decades prior to the 1806 dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire as years of inexorable political decline, the period was marked by intense debate about the nature of the Empire, its legacy, and the question of reform.<sup>17</sup> Writers were acutely aware of the Empire's intricate legal, territorial, and institutional composition, as well as the complexities of its religious, social, and other demographics. While very few thinkers proposed – or anticipated – its dissolution, key debates focused on whether, how, and to what extent the Empire should be reformed.<sup>18</sup> Answers to these questions typically turned on whether the Empire's institutions could be considered Enlightened. Although their accounts were often European in scope, the variations of the Enlightened narrative discussed in this chapter were particularly concerned with the fate and idiosyncrasies of the German lands.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first looks at the role of the bourgeoisie in the works of Meiners and Eichhorn.

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed account see Whaley, Joachim, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, Vol. 2: *The Peace of Westphalia to the dissolution of the Reich, 1648-1806* (Oxford, 2012), 453-650. See also Rowe, Michael, 'The Political Culture of the Holy Roman Empire on the Eve of its Destruction', in Wilson, Peter H. & Forrest, Alan (eds.), *The Bee and the Eagle: Napoleonic France and the End of the Holy Roman Empire, 1806* (Basingstoke, 2009), 42-64; Gagliardo, John G., *Reich and Nation: The Holy Roman Empire as Idea and Reality, 1763-1806* (Bloomington, IN, 1980), passim. Peter H. Wilson has recently emphasized the deep structural problems facing the Holy Roman Empire during the eighteenth century, but concludes that, had France not intervened in Imperial politics, the Empire would probably have survived until later in the nineteenth century. Wilson, Peter H., *The Holy Roman Empire: A Thousand Years of Europe's History* (London, 2016), 654.

<sup>18</sup> On immediate responses to the Empire's dissolution, see Burgdorf, Wolfgang, 'Once we were Trojans!' Contemporary Reactions to the Dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation', in Evans, R. J. W. & Wilson, Peter H. (eds.), *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495-1806: A European Perspective* (Leiden, 2012), 51-77.

Following an overview of contemporary German thinking about the bourgeoisie, it shows how Meiners narrated the emergence of the bourgeoisie to present a strong critique of the contemporary German aristocracy. The following section approaches the normative role of *Mittelstände* in Eichhorn's historical thought, demonstrating his emphasis on the role of the bourgeoisie in facilitating Enlightened modernity. Accordingly, the catastrophe of the Revolution was the result of the failure of the French *ancien régime* to cultivate an Enlightened bourgeoisie. These were re-articulations of the Enlightened narrative that stressed the role of a particular social stratum in the emergence of modernity. In Meiners, this narrative served to justify wide-ranging reforms to Germany's aristocratic institutions. In Eichhorn, it served to explain the French crisis while justifying conditions within the German lands.

The second part shows how Villers and Schlözer proposed important relationships between forms of Christianity and European modernity. Villers excluded France from Enlightened modernity, but explained this exclusion in confessional terms. As indicated in the previous chapter, he argued that Enlightenment was, crucially, a Protestant project. In order to truly enter Enlightened modernity, France – and by extension other Catholic nations – should adopt Protestant cultural norms. Finally, Schlözer's edition of the *Primary Chronicle* emphasized Russia's position as a European nation. Thus, Schlözer extended the Enlightened narrative geographically to include the Russian Empire.<sup>19</sup> Crucially, in Schlözer's analysis it was Russia's adoption of Christianity in the Middle Ages that enabled its participation in Enlightened modernity. In Villers' account, then, religion is a temporal factor: Lutheranism made Enlightenment possible. In Schlözer's version, by contrast, religion is a spatial factor:

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<sup>19</sup> On eighteenth-century perceptions of Eastern Europe as occupying a different cultural realm to Enlightened (Western) Europe, see Wolff, Larry, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA, 1994), 356-360.

the bonds of Christendom brought Russia into Europe's historical trajectory. Nevertheless, both prioritized religion ideas in the explication of contemporary Europe.

The concluding section draws together key themes across these works and reflects on their relationship to the Enlightened narrative. Understanding the works of Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers in relation to – and largely continuous with – the Enlightened narrative indicates the distinctive pressures that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period brought to bear on German historical thought.

### **3.1. Enlightenment and the Bourgeoisie**

#### 3.1.1. The Bourgeoisie in Eighteenth-Century German Thought

In the Enlightenment the terms *Bürgerstand* and *Bürgertum* generally corresponded to what would later be considered the 'middle class'. The *Bürgerstand* was historically associated with the free citizenry that emerged in cities from the late Middle Ages onwards, and typically engaged either in commerce or professions that required higher educational qualifications.<sup>20</sup> The growing *Bürgerstand* accounted for around 10-12 per cent of the population by 1800.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, the aristocracy were only about 1 per cent.<sup>22</sup> During the Enlightenment, however, the terms *Bürger* and its derivatives – especially *Staatsbürger* – were increasingly used to refer to the broader position of citizen, while *Bürgerstand* retained the meaning of a distinctive social class. Agricultural labourers could be described

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<sup>20</sup> On changing definitions of the Bourgeoisie, see Riedel, Manfred, 'Bürger', in Brunner et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Vol. 1, 672-725.

<sup>21</sup> James, Leighton S., *Witnessing the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in German Central Europe: War, Culture, and Society, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke, 2013), 24.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



as *Bürger*, while they would rarely be considered members of the *Bürgerstand*. Members of the bourgeoisie were usually expected to engage in some kind of work, but not work that involved physical labour. As such, artisans and other independent handworkers were normally (although not always) excluded. As members of the bourgeoisie could be very wealthy, the upper boundary was usually the possession of aristocratic privileges rather than any particular level of wealth.

In the same period the adjective *bürgerlich* took on its modern meaning – roughly coterminous with the English terms 'civic' or 'civil' – in phrases such as *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (civil society) or *bürgerliche Freiheit* (civic freedom).<sup>23</sup> However, in the works of Meiners and Eichhorn – and many others – the adjectival form had not lost its associations with the *Bürgerstand* as a distinct social group. Such terms carried a web of connotations and meanings that are not as readily apparent to modern readers in the English terms citizen, civic, and civil. These words simultaneously reflected a historical link to cities, a socio-hierarchical association with the bourgeoisie, and broader notions of what it meant to be a citizen or bearer of civil/civic characteristics (whether freedoms, manners, or otherwise).<sup>24</sup> These nuances create distinct challenges for adequately

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<sup>23</sup> Notably, in eighteenth century German *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* primarily referred to the notion of the political community, or *societas civilis*, rather than a sphere of public activity in some sense independent of the government. The transformation to the latter concept began towards the end of the eighteenth century – including in the work of Schlözer – but the older concept remained commonplace. Riedel, Manfred, 'Bürgerliche Gesellschaft', in Brunner et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Vol. 2, 719-720, 738-771. As mentioned below, however, Eichhorn used *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* to refer to a specifically 'bourgeois' form of society.

<sup>24</sup> Möller, Horst, 'Aufklärung und Adel', in Fehrenbach, Elisabeth (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland 1770-1848: Schriften des Historischen Kollegs Kolloquien 31* (Munich, 1994), 1-11; Schmuhl, Hans-Walter, 'Bürgertum und Stadt' & Hettling, Manfred, 'Bürgerliche Kultur – bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System', in Lundgreen, Peter (ed.), *Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Bürgertums: Eine Bilanz des Bielefelder Sonderforschungsbereichs (1986-1997)* (Göttingen, 2000), 224-248, 319-339.

translating such words into English. I have generally opted for the terms 'bourgeois' or 'bourgeoisie' but, where the context indicates that another word is more appropriate, I include the German in square brackets.

Crucially, these concepts had a range of moral associations. The bourgeoisie was usually described as being subject to distinct pressures and motivations that, in turn, fostered certain behaviours and values. Unlike labourers, the bourgeoisie were not seen as dependent on (and therefore beholden to the interests of) others. The need to work, however, encouraged a diligence and industriousness often seen as lacking in the aristocracy. Horst Möller has summarized the values associated with the bourgeoisie as 'inner merits [*innere Werte*], virtue, diligence, frugality, honesty [*Ehrlichkeit*], [and] self-sufficiency'.<sup>25</sup> Germans considered these values both to be the products of the bourgeoisie's particular socio-economic circumstances and to have normative moral worth.<sup>26</sup> This was especially true when compared with the (negative) values increasingly associated with the aristocracy. The reliance on inherited wealth, it was thought, typically inclined aristocrats towards indolence, vanity, disingenuousness, pomp, 'empty etiquette', wastefulness, and immorality.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, one did not have to be a member of the bourgeoisie to practice the values associated with it and, as discussed below, Meiners implored aristocrats to adopt bourgeois practices and ideas. As James Sheehan notes, '*Bürgerlichkeit* was a moral not a social category'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Möller, 'Aufklärung und Adel', 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; Conze, Werner, 'Adel', in Brunner et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Vol. 1, 25-28.

<sup>28</sup> Sheehan, James J., 'Introduction: culture and power during the long eighteenth century', in Scott & Simms (eds.), *Cultures of Power*, 12.

These ideas also meant that conceptions of the bourgeoisie had important implications in debates about social, legal, and political equality. Otto Dann has traced the emergence of 'the bourgeois equality-postulate' in German discourse from the late Middle Ages onwards.<sup>29</sup> This 'postulate' – named for its association with the 'bourgeois' moral norms of diligence and independence – emphasized moral, rather than social, political, or material equality. According to Dann, it emerged through natural law theory and manifested itself in claims that institutionalized inequalities of social rank should be disregarded in certain realms – most notably law, commerce, and public debate. As such, the 'bourgeois equality-postulate' broadly corresponds to what would now be described as 'equality of opportunity' rather than 'equality of outcome'.<sup>30</sup> While advocates of this postulate rarely proposed social and political equality, they did claim that social and political rights should, at least for the most part, depend on individual merit rather than the estate into which one was born.

By the late eighteenth century, major intellectual innovations, the growth of commerce, educational changes, shifting confessional dynamics, and the institutional circumstances of the Holy Roman Empire had created a dynamic range of contexts for these debates.<sup>31</sup> While the period saw increasingly critical analyses of the German aristocracy and a growing emphasis on individual merit, arguments were largely framed in terms of the desirability of raising the status of the bourgeoisie rather than the abolition of institutional inequalities.<sup>32</sup> The principle of equality before the law was broadly accepted, as was the argument that access to commercial ventures,

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<sup>29</sup> Dann, *Gleichheit und Gleichberechtigung*, 85-90. See also Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 89-116.

<sup>30</sup> On the notion of 'equality of opportunity', see Roemer, John E., *Equality of Opportunity* (Cambridge, MA., 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Dann, *Gleichheit und Gleichberechtigung*, 91-118.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 122, 126-131, 143-149

official positions, and the professions should be based on merit. Advocates of the abolition of social inequalities were rare and controversial, while proposals for political and economic equality were only found at the most radical margins of contemporary thought.

Although the early years of the French Revolution sharpened these debates and pushed some German intellectuals towards more egalitarian views, full social – let alone political or economic – equality remained an unpopular position.<sup>33</sup> While there were increasing demands to re-orient inequality around merit, terms like 'equality-men [Gleichheitsmänner]' and 'equality-fanatics [Gleichheitsphanatiker]' appeared as common pejoratives.<sup>34</sup> Even notoriously radical figures like Adolph Knigge (1752-1796) understood, in Dann's words, 'the implementation of social equality more as a procedure of Enlightenment and moral understanding' than an immediate political demand.<sup>35</sup> Political egalitarianism remained restricted to confirmed Jacobins like Georg Wedekind (1761-1831) and Georg Forster, and even these radicals overwhelmingly considered material equality undesirable.<sup>36</sup> In advocating the expansion of political rights and the abolition of social privileges, Kant and Fichte were close to the *avant-garde* of German egalitarianism: both were perceived as controversial, even shocking,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 143-149; Langewiesche, Dieter, 'Bürgerliche Adelskritik zwischen Aufklärung und Reichsgründung in Enzyklopädien und Lexika', in Fehrenbach (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Dann, *Gleichheit und Gleichberechtigung*, 144-145.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; Knigge, Adolph Franz Friedrich Ludwig Freiherr von, *Ueber den Umgang mit Menschen*, 3 Vols. (3rd edn. Hanover, 1790), passim.

<sup>36</sup> Wedekind, Georg, *Über Freiheit und Gleichheit* (Mainz, 1792), 7-8; Forster, Georg, 'Anrede an die Gesellschaft der Freunde der Freiheit und Gleichheit', in idem., *Werke in vier Bänden*, Vol. 3: *Kleine Schriften zu Kunst, Literatur, Philosophie, Geschichte und Politik*, ed. Gerhard Steiner (Leipzig, 1970), 611-616. The Vienna Jacobins are a noteworthy group who advocated material equality. See Dann, *Gleichheit und Gleichberechtigung*, 150-151.

and many commentators described them as Jacobins.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, it is now recognized that relatively few of those described as German Jacobins were in fact committed to revolutionary change within Germany itself. This was especially the case following the execution of Louis XVI (1754-1793, r. 1774-1792) and the outbreak of the Terror in 1793.<sup>38</sup> More mainstream were the views of the jurist Wilhelm August Friedrich Danz (1764-1803) and the diplomat Karl Friedrich Reinhard who argued that, while German social and political structures may require some reform, such reforms should be minor, or restricted to particularly pernicious laws and institutions.<sup>39</sup>

As indicated above, debates about the bourgeoisie, inequality, and social reform were closely tied to notions of merit. Anthony La Vopa identifies two competing concepts of merit in thinking about inequality and social mobility in eighteenth-century Germany.<sup>40</sup> The more common 'neocorporate' concept recognized the need for adequate institutional provisions to ensure that individual talent could be rewarded, but did so in order to maximize 'usefulness' within the existing – inegalitarian – social order.<sup>41</sup> While neocorporatists accepted that natural intelligence was not distributed according to estate, their arguments emphasized the role of upbringing in preparing individuals for particular functions.<sup>42</sup> Neocorporate thinkers differed among themselves regarding the relationships and value-systems of different social groups, as well as

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<sup>37</sup> Maliks, Reidar, *Kant's Politics in Context* (Oxford, 2014), 39-79; La Vopa, *Fichte*, 81-130.

<sup>38</sup> See Saine, Thomas, *Black Bread-White Bread: German Intellectuals and the French Revolution* (Columbia, SC, 1988), 42-48. For a detailed analysis of the changing positions of German Jacobins, see Lachenicht, Susanne, *Information und Propaganda: Die Presse deutscher Jakobiner in Elsaß (1791-1800)* (Munich, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Schmidt, Georg, *Geschichte des alten Reiches* (Munich, 1999), 320-6.

<sup>40</sup> La Vopa, Anthony J., *Grace, Talent, and Merit: Poor Students, Clerical Careers, and Professional Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, 1988), 197-246, 391-397.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-207.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

the desirable limits of mobility, but nevertheless agreed on the need for a division between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, they agreed on two key controls to social mobility: first, the limited number of available positions necessitated clear numerical restrictions to social advancement and, second, as a result of socialization, only the most talented among the poorer classes would be able to transcend the groups into which they were born.<sup>44</sup>

The competing 'egalitarian' concept of merit proposed that comprehensive public schooling should be introduced in order to create a skilled and virtuous citizenry capable of pursuing careers unrestricted by individual socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>45</sup> While few proposed political revolution, such figures argued that egalitarian pedagogical reforms would better promote the values – often implicitly bourgeois – proper to modern Europe.<sup>46</sup> Both concepts accepted the need for educational practices that would recognize individual merit, but (for the most part at least) neither sought to substantially overturn contemporary political institutions.

### 3.1.2. Meiners' Critique of the Historical Aristocracy

In 1792, Meiners published what may fairly be described as a neocorporate account of European history, but it was one that claimed the German aristocracy required urgent, radical reform. The previous chapter showed how, in his *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, Meiners made a case for human inequality based on principles of natural law. This natural-inegalitarian principle in turn corresponded to his racial thought. However, the bulk of Meiners' *Geschichte* is a variation of the 'Enlightened narrative' that sought to explain the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 216-230.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 230-243.

emergence of different European social groups as well as their moral norms, characteristics, and socio-political circumstances.<sup>47</sup> The following pages read this work as a major intervention in contemporary debates about institutions of the Holy Roman Empire.

### 3.1.2.1. Meiners' Narrative

Meiners' narrative begins by identifying five hereditary ranks among the early Germanic tribes, with privileges linked to martial prowess and distributed according to individual virtues.<sup>48</sup> His account is more generous than those of Robertson, Voltaire, and, indeed, Villers, but it was neither unusual, nor particularly chauvinistic to praise the Germanic tribes as virtuous and austere.<sup>49</sup> Rather than maintaining these virtues, however, the Germanic tribes had adopted the decadent morals of the Romans they conquered. This included concubinage and other sexual customs unsuited to the strict regulation of hereditary ranks. These new practices caused the heritable attributes of the 'natural' Germanic aristocracy to deteriorate.<sup>50</sup> This was compounded by the discovery of new vices,

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<sup>47</sup> In this text, Meiners emphasized the divergence between natural inequalities and the historical reality of unequal institutions. The text itself does not establish or consistently use distinct terms for these two concepts. For the purpose of clarity, the adjectives 'natural' or 'true' refer to those aristocrats whom Meiners claims are genuinely superior according to an objective (or 'natural') standard. Conversely, 'contemporary' or 'historical' refer to those recognized as aristocrats by contemporary European institutions.

<sup>48</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 25-41, 50-52. Meiners cited Tacitus and Caesar as evidence. On the role of Tacitus' *Germania* in Enlightenment thought, see Krebs, C. B., 'A Dangerous book: the Reception of the *Germania*', in Woodman, A. J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2010), 289-293.

<sup>49</sup> Robertson, William, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V, with a View of the Progress of Society in Europe*, 4 Vols. (1st edn. London, 1769), Vol. 1, 212; Voltaire, *Essai sur les Mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, ed. René Pomeau, 2 Vols. (Paris, 1963), Vol. 1, 342-343; Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 207-208. On the political implications of perceptions of the early Germans see Wood, Ian, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013), 1-73; Thom, *Republics, Nations, and Tribes*, 11-85.

<sup>50</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 41-46.

while rulers' over-generous distribution of titles and privileges further corrupted Europe's social and political institutions. Notably, Meiners here asserted the priority of moral norms in determining historical change.

These changes generated unnatural inequalities, convoluted socio-political structures, and continuous war.<sup>51</sup> The difficulty of maintaining the security of early medieval states drove a process of centralization, as kings were granted increased powers but were nevertheless unable to institute lasting reforms.<sup>52</sup> Meiners emphasized that these changes both affected and were affected by social institutions. The political and legislative rights of lower ranks and tribes were diminished, further distorting the social order.<sup>53</sup> Such changes, as in other Enlightenment histories of the Middle Ages, resulted in a feudal despotism characterized by serfdom, superstitious Catholicism, and disregard for natural rights.<sup>54</sup>

The primary catalyst for change, according to Meiners, was the monarchical investiture of cities with privileges against territorial nobilities.<sup>55</sup> Although Meiners cited only Robertson, other key thinkers – including Adam Smith, Voltaire and David Hume – also stressed the importance of cities in the emergence of modern Europe.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Meiners made extensive use of Robertson's *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* (1769) to trace the development of cities as spaces for the free exercise of commerce and industry.<sup>57</sup> This process led to meritocratic distributions of wealth and power, and,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 55-68, 132.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 41-42, 88-114, 146-7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 169-185, 282-303.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 319-454.

<sup>56</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, 11-12, 48-49, 88-89; Smith, Adam, *The Wealth of Nations: Books I-III*, ed. Andrew Skinner (London, 1999), 496-506; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 2, 247-248, 254-255.

<sup>57</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 320, 324-5, 333-337; Robertson, *Charles V*, Vol. 1, 11-29, 33-39, 79-80.



consequently, the emergence of a new, virtuous – bourgeois – ‘aristocracy’ within a free citizenry. The freedoms afforded by cities encouraged individual diligence, the free exchange of new ideas, and the reward of virtuous behaviour. Urban openness, dynamism, and the meritocratic allocation of wealth, status, and power fostered individuals’ sense of personal investment in their political and social success. This, in turn, encouraged the emergence of strong civic cultures.<sup>58</sup>

While cities played an important role in Robertson’s account, for him they were ultimately secondary to the Crusades in the emergence of modern Europe.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, in Meiners’ work cities take precedence over other factors. Despite this difference, however, their narratives – along with those of Voltaire and Hume – share other key elements in explaining the emergence of European modernity: major military, legal and bureaucratic changes, the end of serfdom, and protracted wars.<sup>60</sup> In the *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, these factors each accelerated the processes of political centralization, the moral decay of the historical aristocracy, and the emergence of modern bourgeois norms.

Meiners described the formation of early modern, state-controlled militaries organized around foot soldiers rather than nobles.<sup>61</sup> This process was motivated by monarchs’ divestment of power from the increasingly unreliable, unwarlike, and morally corrupt nobility.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the education of professional lawyers with ‘knowledge, diligence, und incorruptibility’, alongside the extension of the jurisdictions of royal courts, gradually stripped

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<sup>58</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 401.

<sup>59</sup> Robertson, *Charles V*, Vol. 1, 22-29.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 22-29, 39-41, 66-69, 95-96, 112-114; O’Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, 47-51, 88-92.

<sup>61</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 454-485.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

aristocrats of their legal powers.<sup>63</sup> The rise of universities and formal qualifications enabled the development of state bureaucracies, with members of the bourgeoisie displacing members of the aristocracy from ministerial and other official positions.<sup>64</sup> Finally, the Crusades and other protracted conflicts drained the aristocracy of men and money, further weakening their role and importance in European society.<sup>65</sup> With each of these processes states became more centralized while aristocrats became redundant or outmoded. At the same time, socio-political space was created for the nascent bourgeoisie.

These factors also contributed to the erosion of serfdom.<sup>66</sup> Meiners followed Robertson by arguing that, as unhappy serfs could effectively flee to cities, urban centres both enabled greater upward mobility and encouraged lords to better treat their subjects.<sup>67</sup> The end of serfdom favoured self-interested kings: with the increased importance of hired and then standing armies, as well as bureaucratic institutions more generally, peasants who owed their taxes and loyalties to monarchs were more valuable than those who worked largely to enrich the aristocracy.<sup>68</sup> Crucially, as serfs were freed from feudal restrictions, they were able to practice their natural talents, cultivate virtue, and marry their natural equals. Able and virtuous peasants were thus absorbed into the bourgeoisie.

To summarize, the historical aristocracy's loss of virtue and change of circumstances provoked a struggle for power between nobles and monarchs. The constitutive elements of modern European society arose through this struggle: an industrious and virtuous

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 496-499.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 536-544.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 524-533.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 515-18.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.; Robertson, *Charles V*, Vol. 1, 39-41.

<sup>68</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 515-518.

urban bourgeoisie, military, legal and administrative professionalization, and centralized governments based on taxation rather than feudal obligations. By tracing the emergence of European modernity, moreover, Meiners explained the existence of a new, natural, aristocracy, as well as the contemporary superfluity of the historical aristocracy and its martial values. The institutions and relationships of Enlightened Europe had emerged in spite of the corruption of medieval aristocrats. At the heart of Meiners' account, moreover, is a moral narrative. Historical change was driven by a transformation in moral behaviours, including the degeneration of the historical aristocracy and the emergence of a virtuous bourgeoisie suited to the exigencies of modern Europe. This set the stage for a radical critique of contemporary institutions.

### *3.1.2.2. The Aristocracy in Late Enlightenment Europe*

With the exception of Britain – which had benefitted from its 'noble people' and 'admirable constitution' – Meiners' assessment of contemporary European aristocrats is generally negative.<sup>69</sup> Consistent with other eighteenth-century accounts of southern Europe, he depicted Iberian and Italian nobles as particularly corrupt.<sup>70</sup> Wholesale transformations of moral norms, constitutions, and education would be required for this situation to improve.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 544-571. According to Meiners, in Britain numerous distinctions were recognized and maintained, while deserving individuals supposedly receive greater privileges. Positive descriptions of Britain's social and political institutions were, of course, not unusual in Enlightenment Europe. See Beiser, *Enlightenment*, 281-309; Epstein, *Genesis*, 548-581; Sonenscher, Michael, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 2007), 3-4, 42-94, 101, 171.

<sup>70</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 545-566; Moe, Nelson, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), 13-83; Crozier Shaw, Michael, 'European Travellers and the Enlightenment Consensus on Spain in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in *Dieciocho: Hispanic Enlightenment*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 2008), 23-44. On the portrayal of Spanish people in Meiners' other work, see Anderson, Lara

The French aristocracy receives curiously little attention given the rich contemporary discussion of the 1789 abolition of French feudal privileges (and its implications for Germans).<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Meiners signalled his approval of at least some aspects of the French Revolution by praising the peaceful end of 'baleful' French privileges.<sup>73</sup> Even if he did not approve of the Revolution wholesale, he blamed the French aristocracy for the nation's crises. The aristocracy had acted despotically, corrupted the king, oppressed the provinces, and ruined the kingdom to such an extent that, as of 1792, it was unclear how the French state could survive.<sup>74</sup> This position was not unusual. Most German observers were critical of the French aristocracy and supported many of the Revolution's early anti-aristocratic impulses.<sup>75</sup> The discussion of France was, however, written with an eye to the Holy Roman Empire.

The situation of the contemporary German aristocracy was, by Meiners' reckoning, appalling. Moral degradation and sweeping changes in European culture had made it unfit for purpose.<sup>76</sup> Meiners is often vague regarding the identification of specific offenders among the Holy Roman Empire's myriad territories, titles, and privileges. This may be due to anxieties about appearing partial, or even fear of repercussions. Nevertheless, and typical of many contemporary assessments, Meiners described the Imperial Knights as enjoying far

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& Merle Benbow, Heather, 'Christoph Meiners' *History of the Female Sex* (1788-1800): The orientalisation of Spain and German nationalism', in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 35 (2009), 433-440.

<sup>71</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 545-571.

<sup>72</sup> See Saine, *Black Bread-White Bread*, 7-57.

<sup>73</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 594, 621-622.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Aretin, Karl Otmar von, 'Deutschland und die französische Revolution', in idem. & Härter, Karl (eds.), *Revolution und Konservatives Beharren: das Alte Reich und die Französische Revolution* (Mainz, 1990), 10-19.

<sup>76</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 571-572.

greater privileges than they should.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, he criticized the aristocracy's domination of official positions and other unfair legal, social, and political rights in terms consistent with other German advocates of the bourgeoisie.<sup>78</sup> The nobility enjoyed bourgeois advantages without 'bourgeois burdens'.<sup>79</sup> Meiners argued that the adjustment of aristocratic privileges must accommodate the values and attitudes of the bourgeoisie, declaring that 'the third estate has long felt that the aristocracy possesses harmful prerogatives'.<sup>80</sup> Should the situation not be rectified, the bourgeoisie might be forced to take actions similar to those in France.<sup>81</sup> If not quite a threat, such a statement must certainly have seemed like one to many.

Meiners situated himself as a moderate thinker between opposing camps of 'ochlocrats' (favouring the abolition of all aristocratic inequalities) and 'oligarchs' (favouring the maintenance of most, or even all, current privileges).<sup>82</sup> To represent the former, Meiners chose Jacques-Antoine Dulaure (1755-1835). Dulaure's life and work are now obscure, but his pamphlets and books on the nobility sold well and he later became a deputy to the National Convention.<sup>83</sup> Meiners clearly took Dulaure seriously, and listed his *Histoire de la Noblesse* (1790) as a key source for the *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*.<sup>84</sup> The *Histoire* itself is largely a compendium of crimes perpetrated by European – and especially French – aristocrats, published with a view to dispelling lingering sympathies for the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.; Gagliardo, *Reich and Nation*, 227-241; Umbach, Maiken, 'Culture and *Bürgerlichkeit* in eighteenth-century Germany', in Scott & Simms (eds.), *Cultures of Power*, 180-199.

<sup>79</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 571-572.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 575.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 578-579

<sup>83</sup> On Dulaure, see Boudet, Marcellin, *Les Conventionnels d'Auvergne: Dulaure* (Paris, 1874).

<sup>84</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, vi-x.

nobility.<sup>85</sup> Meiners agreed with Dulaure's argument that all privileges must be earned through merit. However, whereas Dulaure rejected the claim that the virtues worthy of privileges could be inherited, Meiners argued that such traits were heritable, meaning that associated privileges should be as well.<sup>86</sup> Subsequently, Meiners claimed that the principle of merit that he shared with Dulaure simply demanded that aristocratic dynasties should have to continually justify their privileges.<sup>87</sup> Rather than doing away with heritable privileges, then, Meiners argued that the aristocracy should be radically modernized by introducing greater upwards and downwards mobility.<sup>88</sup>

As for the 'oligarchs', Meiners cited Cicero, 'Philander von Sittewald' (1601-1669), and Edmund Burke, and agreed with them that the nobility did not originate in violence and venality.<sup>89</sup> Meiners also cited Burke to argue that the existence of different social classes is inevitable.<sup>90</sup> He added that, historically, all estates had committed crimes akin to those of the aristocracy, and claimed further that the (early) German aristocracy had shaped the nation's virtuous moral character.<sup>91</sup> Most importantly, Meiners also cited Burke and Montesquieu to argue that properly formed aristocratic institutions act as bulwarks against despotism.<sup>92</sup> However, Meiners' key contention was that the historical aristocracy had become a corrupt

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<sup>85</sup> Dulaure, Jacques-Antoine, *Histoire critique de la Noblesse* (Paris, 1790), 312-322.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, iii-iv; Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 579-580.

<sup>87</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, 579-583.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 584-600. Philander von Sittewald was the pseudonym of the seventeenth-century German statesman and satirist Johann Michael Moscherosch.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

and ineffective class and must therefore either earn its privileges or lose them.<sup>93</sup>

Although he positioned his views as occupying a political middle ground, Meiners' conclusions were distinctly radical within their German context. He proposed a comprehensive overhaul of the German aristocracy, arguing both that the historical aristocracy had lost its previous virtues *and* that the virtues it had once possessed had lost their value. The virtues that had previously justified privileges were 'beauty, strength, bravery, [and] experience in arms and at war'.<sup>94</sup> These were no longer as socially useful, and therefore should not be accorded special rights. Previously warriors were needed, but now it was those with 'a great, active, and educated [*gebildet*] spirit' and a brave, selfless, 'elevated soul'.<sup>95</sup> The historical aristocracy had lost both its moral compass and its social utility: Meiners was emphatic that new historical circumstances created new virtues. This historicization of aristocratic virtue meant that new aristocrats were needed. The modern aristocracy should be composed of Enlightened, public-spirited individuals, and Meiners considered these values to be exemplified by the bourgeoisie.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, one of Meiners' chief proposals was that official positions and other privileges should be opened to members of the bourgeoisie.<sup>97</sup> However, he also recommended a significant reduction of aristocratic privileges generally. Unfair privileges violated the principles of natural law and hampered the exercise of industrious and virtuous behaviour. Exclusive access to higher positions in the clergy, courts, and state administration should be abolished, as should freedom from taxation and feudal duties that demanded

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 601-603.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 604-607, 639-641.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

labour and resources from peasants.<sup>98</sup> In order to ensure that complaints could be dealt with fairly, aristocrats should have less legal influence.<sup>99</sup> While Meiners clearly advocated some kind of aristocratic system, even his ideal aristocrats seem left with few, if any, significant privileges.<sup>100</sup> In short, he recommended a 'modern' aristocracy founded on neocorporate merit, but which was explicitly bourgeois and would only benefit from limited privileges.

### 3.1.2.3. Positioning the *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* and its legacy

The *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* appears to have found a positive reception. It received a positive review in Christoph Friedrich Nicolai's influential *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, and continued to be cited in histories, legal textbooks, and other writings for decades after its publication.<sup>101</sup> Citing the *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*, one scholar described Meiners as one of the eighteenth century's 'greatest philosophers'.<sup>102</sup>

More importantly, other German critics of the aristocracy swiftly began making use of Meiners' work. As early as 1793, the *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* appeared as a source in *Was sollte der*

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 609-614, 618-634.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. Meiners does not state which privileges aristocrats should maintain.

<sup>101</sup> [Anonymous], 'Geschichte der Ungleichheit der Stände unter den vornehmsten europäischen Völkern', in Nicolai, Friedrich (ed.), *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, Vol. 2:2 (1793), 471-488; Proff, Karl Freiherrn von, *Ueber Titel und Würden in den regierenden Deutschen Fürstenthäusern* (2nd edn. Munich, 1816), 7; Beck, Christian Daniel, *Anleitung zur Kenntniß der allgemeinen Welt- und Völker-Geschichte für Studirende*, Vol. 4: *Bis auf die Entdeckung von Amerika* (Leipzig, 1807), 877; Wachler, Ludwig, *Geschichte der historischen Forschung und Kunst* (Göttingen, 1818), Vol. 2:2, 888; Mittermaier, C. J. A., *Lehrbuch des deutschen Privatrechts* (Landshut, 1821), 128.

<sup>102</sup> [Anonymous] *Archiv für Standes- und Grundherrliche Rechte und Verhältnisse, Geschichte und Statistik, alter und neuer Zeit* (Karlsruhe, 1822), Vol. 2:1, 145.



*Adel jetzt thun?* by Johann Ludwig Ewald (1748-1822). Ewald's book argued that the German aristocracy should forsake its unfair privileges in order to avoid unrest.<sup>103</sup> Likewise, in 1794, the anonymous *Frey müthige Gedanken über die allerwichtigste Angelegenheit Deutschlands* used Meiners' text to attack aristocratic institutions.<sup>104</sup> The following year, Friedrich Georg August Schmidt (b. 1766) drew on the *Geschichte* to argue in favour of legal equality.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps most significantly, in 1802, it appeared in *Ideen zur natürlichen Geschichte der politischen Revolutionen* by the radical philosopher Saul Ascher (1767-1822). The *Ideen* attacked the German status quo, offering instead a radical vision of the future that was cosmopolitan, tolerant, and abounding in individual rights. Ascher's argument built upon a historical analysis in which the *ancien régime* was in the process of giving way to the values of the bourgeoisie, and one of his key sources was the *Geschichte der Ungleichheit*.<sup>106</sup> Meiners' 1792 work appears to have had a more positive reception than his racial thought, and more authors were willing to publicly endorse its arguments and conclusions. Moreover, Meiners' contemporaries clearly recognized the work's radical implications.

Hans Erich Bödeker has argued that the *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* is primarily a negative response to the egalitarian

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<sup>103</sup> Ewald, Johann Ludwig, *Was sollte der Adel jetzt thun?* (Leipzig, 1793), 26-28, 39, 48, 51, 68, 72, 84.

<sup>104</sup> [Anonymous], *Frey müthige Gedanken über die allerwichtigste Angelegenheit Deutschlands* (n.p., 1794), 172, 201, 230, 240, 290.

<sup>105</sup> Schmidt, Friedrich Georg August, *Fortgesetzte Beyträge zur Geschichte des Adels und zur Kenntniß der gegenwärtigen Verfassung desselben in Teutschland* (Leipzig, 1795), 20, 36-38, 44-49, 59, 97, 242.

<sup>106</sup> Ascher, Saul, *Ideen zur natürlichen Geschichte der politischen Revolutionen* (n.p., 1802), 218-219. Notably, he had attempted to publish the *Ideen* in 1799, but the Prussian censor prevented the work's appearance, calling it 'an open call to revolution'. Fischer, Bernd, *Ein anderer Blick: Saul Aschers politische Schriften* (Vienna, 2016), 71. On Ascher generally, see Hiscott, William, *Saul Ascher, Berliner Aufklärer: eine philosophiehistorische Darstellung* (Hanover, 2017).

impulses of the French Revolution.<sup>107</sup> This is, strictly speaking, true, despite Meiners' praise of the anti-aristocratic legislation of 1789. In a letter from July 1792, he wrote that 'all Europe would rejoice' should Louis XVI rid France of 'the abominable [*scheußlichen*] Jacobins'.<sup>108</sup> In the same letter, however, Meiners also distanced himself from Johann Georg Zimmermann (1728-1795), who had recently linked religious toleration and 'Enlightenment' to godlessness and amorality.<sup>109</sup> Zimmermann had also associated himself with the 'disdained and contemptuous' Leopold Alois Hoffmann (1760-1806).<sup>110</sup> Hoffmann is usually considered one of contemporary Germany's most reactionary figures, and Meiners' rejection of both Hoffmann and Zimmermann is important for situating his political thought. While Meiners was clearly not a German Jacobin, at the time of writing *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* he was broadly positive regarding the early Revolutionaries, strongly critical of reactionaries like Hoffmann and Zimmermann, and in favour of exceptionally far-reaching reforms within the *Reich*. Meiners' categorical anti-egalitarianism clearly made him a more conservative figure than Kant and Fichte but, when compared with more mainstream views like those of Danz and Reinhard, the *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* can be situated towards the more radical end of contemporary German thought.

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<sup>107</sup> Bödeker, 'Einleitung', v.

<sup>108</sup> Meiners, Christoph, 'Brief an Unbekannt, 08.07.1792', Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen (signature: 2 Cod. Ms. philos. 182: C. Meiners).

<sup>109</sup> Zimmermann, Johann Georg, *Fragmente über Friedrich den Grossen zur Geschichte seines Lebens, seiner Regierung, und seines Charakters*, 3 Vols. (Frankfurt a. M., 1790). See especially Vol. 3, 153-199. On Zimmermann see Weiß, Christoph, 'Royaliste, Antirépublicain, Antijacobin et Antiilluminé. Johann Georg Zimmermann und die "politische Mordbrennerey in Europe"', in idem. & Albrecht (eds.), *Von 'Obscuranten' und 'Eudämonisten'*, 367-401.

<sup>110</sup> Meiners, Christoph, 'Brief an Unbekannt, 08.07.1792'. On Hoffmann see Reinalter, Helmut, 'Gegen die "Tollwuth der Aufklärungsbarbarei". Leopold Alois Hoffmann und der frühe Konservatismus in Österreich', in Weiß. & Albrecht (eds.), *Von 'Obscuranten' und 'Eudämonisten'*, 221-244.

Meiners articulated a variation of the Enlightened narrative that described a complex range of factors, while placing a particular emphasis on the value of the bourgeoisie. Published in the years between the outbreak of the Revolution and its collapse into Jacobin violence, his radical critique of contemporary aristocracies reflects both a moment in which deep socio-political reform seemed possible, and a moment of crisis. While Meiners appears to have remained broadly confident in the course of Enlightenment, *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* was a warning to German readers about the need for deep institutional reform. In the following years Meiners stressed the German people's aversion to revolution.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, the example of France demonstrated that poorly regulated aristocracies could threaten the well-being of even powerful nations.

### 3.1.3. *Mittelstände* and Historical Progress in the work of Eichhorn

Christoph Meiners was not alone in placing the bourgeoisie at the forefront of Enlightened modernity. In the late 1790s, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn began publishing a range of works that shared core themes, narrative structures, and even verbatim passages that reflect a distinctly 'bourgeois' version of the Enlightened narrative. Indeed, Eichhorn's concept of Enlightened Europe was inextricable from a set of values associated with the bourgeoisie as a particular *Mittelstand*, and explaining the emergence and importance of this social group is a central theme of his work.

The idea of *Mittelstände* as beneficial social and political forces had emerged in German thought following Montesquieu's notion of 'intermediary powers' in *De l'esprit des loix*. However, as in Montesquieu, German thinkers generally associated such stabilizing

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<sup>111</sup> Meiners, *Ueber Aufklärung*, 63, 115-117, 122-125.

groups with the aristocracy.<sup>112</sup> Thus, when Eichhorn adopted this notion to describe the bourgeoisie (and other groups that would now be associated with the middle classes), he also transformed its meaning to reflect his concerns about the bourgeoisie's position in contemporary Germany. In this context, and despite not offering a set of proposals comparable to Meiners', Eichhorn's reconceptualization of *Mittelstände* may be seen as a diminution in the perceived role of the aristocracy in favour of the bourgeoisie.

Recalling key themes in other discussions of the bourgeoisie, moreover, Eichhorn argued that, by virtue of their social position, *Mittelstände* neither struggle with poverty nor have the freedom to be indolent, meaning that they inevitably tend towards diligence, energy, and modesty.<sup>113</sup> Such norms, moreover, promote 'morality and order, effort and ingenuity' and thereby encourage trade, art, and science.<sup>114</sup> A nation's *Mittelstand* is, in Eichhorn's words, 'the favourite seat of intellectual culture [*der Lieblingssitz der geistigen Cultur*]'.<sup>115</sup> Eichhorn writes that 'Where it [the *Mittelstand*] arises, there also develops the spirit of nations; where it is in bloom, there intellectual refinement everywhere shows itself, and where it is absent, there reigns barbarism and crudity [*Barbarey und Rohheit*]'.<sup>116</sup>

This social dynamic enables both particular kinds of achievements and the emergence of certain moral norms. Indeed, Eichhorn – unlike Meiners – saw the ideas and behaviours associated

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<sup>112</sup> Montesquieu, 'De l'esprit des loix', 247-249; Conze, 'Adel', 20-21. Carl Friedrich von Moser notably thought that bourgeois groups could constitute a *Mittelstand*, but – unlike Eichhorn – argued that the Holy Roman Empire lacked a *Mittelstand* altogether. Moser, Carl Friedrich von, *Patriotische Briefe* (Frankfurt a. M., 1767), 62-63.

<sup>113</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 3.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 348-349.

<sup>116</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 3.

with the bourgeoisie as having universal value insofar as they are generic characteristics of the *Mittelstand*. According to Eichhorn, *Mittelstände* operate as stabilizing factors within societies and make possible valuable social, political and cultural *Verbindungen*. *Mittelstände* (as a category) and the bourgeoisie (as one example within that category) thus play crucial roles in facilitating and maintaining unity within cultural groups. As a result, Eichhorn's treatment of the bourgeoisie is such as to make it almost coterminous with the possibility and reality of Enlightenment itself.

Explaining the emergence of modern, bourgeois society and its values was then a central part of Eichhorn's historical project. In the *Weltgeschichte* he stated his intention to trace the emergence of modern social relationships by 'accompanying' humanity from 'the simplest society up to the most intricate and most complex, from the merely domestic up to the bourgeois [*bürgerlich*]'.<sup>117</sup> Such works assessed the specific social, cultural, and political norms of different nations and periods, charting their moments of progress and regress. Progress was by no means a given, and Eichhorn's account is neither straightforward nor linear. This account was however built on the notion that modern European society is, broadly speaking, inherently better than earlier societies. In this respect, and indeed in many argumentative particulars, Eichhorn followed many of the central features of the Enlightened narrative. Eichhorn's account is, moreover, highly politicized. Not only is it a defence of the bourgeoisie, but it uses its analysis of the bourgeoisie to exclude France from Enlightened modernity.

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<sup>117</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, 2. Here and elsewhere Eichhorn uses *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* to refer to the institutions and norms of modern, 'bourgeois' Europe, rather than 'civil society' in either the traditional sense of *societas civilis* or the notion of an autonomous sphere of public activity outside the government.

### 3.1.3.1. Unity and Mittelstände in the Middle Ages

Eichhorn drew a sharp divide between ancient and post-Roman history, even arguing that each period requires distinct methodologies.<sup>118</sup> He was emphatic that 'through the Migration Period [*Völkerwanderung*] Europe reached an entirely new geographical and political form [*Gestalt*]'.<sup>119</sup> The destruction of the Western Roman Empire fundamentally transformed the continent, with the Germanic states of the early Middle Ages creating the conditions out of which modernity could later emerge.<sup>120</sup> Whereas Meiners and Villers apportioned blame to one or other group, Eichhorn's account is profoundly critical of the late Roman Empire, the Catholic clergy, and the Germanic conquerors.<sup>121</sup> In Eichhorn's telling, by the time of the Germanic invasions the 'good taste' of the 'educated nations [*gebildeten Nationen*]' had long since dwindled, and almost all parts of the sciences they had cultivated had degenerated'.<sup>122</sup> The clergy's 'fanatical diligence' against supposedly 'pagan' cultural objects provoked further regress and ignorance, which was then exacerbated by the depredations of the conquerors.<sup>123</sup> The conquerors then ruled Europe according to their 'paternal morals [*väterlichen Sitten*]'.<sup>124</sup> Whereas Meiners emphasized a shift in the values and customs of the conquerors, Eichhorn (like Villers) emphasized their continuity. Crucially, moreover – again like Villers and unlike Meiners – Eichhorn described these morals negatively. The 'raw hordes' invaded the

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<sup>118</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 4. See also d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 216.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, 2.

<sup>121</sup> On some of the political implications of debates around the collapse of the Roman Empire, see Pocock, J. G. A., *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 4: *Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (Cambridge, 2005), 1-8; Wood, *Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages*, 1-73; Thom, *Republics, Nations, and Tribes*, 11-85.

<sup>122</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, 1st edn., Vol. 1, 347-348.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 4.

territories of Western Europe and 'demolished all the good things which the human mind and diligence had worked for centuries'.<sup>125</sup>

This moral-civilizational collapse was manifested in the period's fractured institutions and the near-complete 'destruction of the entire *Mittelstand*'.<sup>126</sup> The rise of a religious monopoly on thought and the socio-political domination of a 'temporal ruler-class [*weltliche Herrenstand*]' drastically limited the capacity for a new *Mittelstand* to emerge.<sup>127</sup> Without a *Mittelstand*, intellectual culture languished. In the early centuries following the conquests, there was 'no rest, no peace, no freedom, no secure enjoyment of property', but only 'wanton [*übermüthige*] lords, oppressed [people], and serfs'.<sup>128</sup> The Germanic invasions almost entirely 'extinguished' the flourishing *Mittelstand* and, in so doing, created a society divided into oppressors and oppressed, with no intermediary capable of tempering the actions of rulers.<sup>129</sup>

By contrast, the allodial system that eventually emerged out of this turmoil was comparatively benign. Eichhorn described this system as mitigating some of the worst aspects of the Middle Ages. He emphasized the limited powers of early medieval kings and – contra Meiners – claimed that aristocracies were largely meritocratic.<sup>130</sup> Freeman constituted a small, independent *Mittelstand* that enjoyed some legislative powers.<sup>131</sup> Even serfs held some property, and priests served their kings rather than the Pope.<sup>132</sup> Eichhorn also discussed the system's violence, its territorial instability, and the

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<sup>125</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, viii.

<sup>126</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 347-349.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, viii, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 13-19, 29-30; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 4-6.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

hardships of serfdom.<sup>133</sup> Compared with the depredations of the *Völkerwanderung* and the period that followed, however, it was relatively peaceful. Moreover, the allodial system afforded some individual rights, which Eichhorn framed in terms of the limited powers of kings, priests, and nobles but, most importantly, the relative strength of the *Mittelstand*.<sup>134</sup>

Unfortunately, the allodial system survived only until around the middle of the ninth century. As rulers accumulated greater tracts of land and sought to translate this into greater powers, European institutions mutated into the more rigidly hierarchical feudal system.<sup>135</sup> Now, within their territories, the upper clergy and aristocracy ruled 'absolutely [*unumschränkt*]' and arbitrarily.<sup>136</sup> If the allodial system established a *Mittelstand* alongside some degree of balance, mobility, and rights, the feudal system concentrated power in aristocrats and the church.<sup>137</sup> As in the *Völkerwanderung*, the destruction of the *Mittelstand* was framed as a particularly disastrous consequence of feudal Europe's lack of secure property rights.<sup>138</sup> Whereas Meiners had claimed that the medieval aristocracy became more complacent and disinclined to fight in wars, Eichhorn argued that the aristocracy's warlike culture encouraged violence and the pursuit of booty.<sup>139</sup> Both agreed, however, that medieval aristocrats made for bad rulers.<sup>140</sup> Monarchs, for the most part, became poorer and, consequently, politically weaker.<sup>141</sup> As the aristocracy

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.; Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 350.

<sup>134</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 28-29; Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, 'Erläuterungen und Beweise [Appendix]', in idem., *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 19-23.

<sup>136</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 4-6; Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn. Vol. 2:1, 13-30, 94-97.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 6-8.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 95, 103-105.



dominated politics, the clergy tightened its monopoly on knowledge and further restricted innovation.<sup>142</sup>

As the clergy sought and gained more powers under the feudal system, it became a distinct temporal power.<sup>143</sup> From the ninth century onwards, Eichhorn claimed, the Catholic Church consolidated its authority across Europe by acquiring increasingly broad legal and territorial rights.<sup>144</sup> This shift amounted to the Catholic Church claiming both universal sovereignty and independence from all temporal rulers and laws: 'At the end of this period the pope became lord of Rome, despot of the Church and of the world'.<sup>145</sup> This despotism, Eichhorn suggested, was reinforced by the intentional dissemination of superstitious ideas in religious doctrines.<sup>146</sup>

Nevertheless, medieval Catholicism ultimately established and strengthened new *Verbindungen* among Europe's various groups, which in turn made possible the emergence of bourgeois norms and ideas.<sup>147</sup> The Crusades brought the various nations of Europe 'into a unity [*Einheit*]' for the first time, thereby enabling the co-operation and cosmopolitan moral norms that emerged in the following centuries.<sup>148</sup> The idea that medieval Catholicism had acted to bind European peoples together was becoming an important trope in German history-writing. In 1790 Friedrich Schiller had argued that the moral fervour of the Crusades enabled the regeneration of European culture and institutions, and the unifying role of Catholicism became an important theme in Romantic historical

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<sup>142</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 4-6; Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 24-28, 94-97.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 98-102, 104-107.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 23, 109; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 11-14.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1 (Göttingen, 1805), 4-5.

<sup>148</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 7, 293; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, xiv, xxii-xxiii.

thought.<sup>149</sup> Eichhorn is far less sympathetic to Catholicism than either Schiller or the Romantics, but he nevertheless stressed its significance in the emergence of a unified European political culture.

### 3.1.3.2. *The Emergence of the Bourgeoisie*

Despite Catholicism's importance, the most significant agent in Eichhorn's version of the Enlightened narrative is the bourgeoisie. As in Meiners and Robertson, the bourgeoisie arose through a range of protracted changes beginning in the eleventh century.<sup>150</sup> The Crusades challenged the social and institutional make-up of Europe and offered vast new resources for intellectual inquiry. These changes allowed the socio-political and intellectual self-assertion of individuals outside the aristocracy and clergy.<sup>151</sup> Parallel to this, cities emerged as independent spaces that could offer freemen and fleeing serfs security and other individual freedoms.<sup>152</sup> Cities thereby offered 'the basis of all industry and better morals, better policy and lifestyle, and a thousand other ennobling changes'.<sup>153</sup> As in Meiners, Robertson, and others, centralizing monarchs strengthened internal security within medieval states. This made possible the protection of individual property and the abolition of serfdom, as rulers acquired the apparatus to overcome the power of regional lords.<sup>154</sup> Also following other variations of the Enlightened narrative, these new,

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<sup>149</sup> Schiller, Friedrich, 'Universalhistorische Übersicht der vornehmsten an den Kreuzzügen teilnehmenden Nationen, ihrer Staatsverfassung, Religionsbegriffe, Sitten, Beschäftigungen, Meinungen und Gebräuche', in Schiller, Friedrich, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 6 (Stuttgart, 1985), 102-121. On Catholicism and the early Romantics, see Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism*, 223-224, 264-278. Unlike these thinkers, Robertson emphasized the Crusades' commercial (and consequently material and intellectual) impact, rather than their moral dimension. Robertson, *Charles V*, Vol. 1, 22-29.

<sup>150</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 116-117.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-294.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 297-300, 378-379; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, 5.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1, 2-3; Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 295-297.

centralized, and distinctly modern states were characterized by taxation, standing armies, territorial sovereignty, and increasingly standardized legal systems.<sup>155</sup>

The extinction of serfdom, the rise of cities, and the enforcement of individual rights through legal documents like Magna Carta provided the contexts necessary for the emergence of independent thought and commerce.<sup>156</sup> Such freedoms fostered diligence and the exercise of talent, which further strengthened states through increased revenues and encouraged laws to regulate commerce.<sup>157</sup> This was reinforced by the arrival of chivalry as a cultural norm, which encouraged a more paternalistic and protective – rather than exploitative – relationship between the aristocracy and lower classes.<sup>158</sup> As a result, 'an estate [*Stand*] of free citizens' emerged that was capable of mediating between different social groups.<sup>159</sup> The burgeoning bourgeoisie was able to alternately limit aristocratic and royal power, which encouraged the institution of laws that benefitted both themselves and the peasantry.<sup>160</sup> Eichhorn further claimed that new legal systems were primarily administered by the bourgeoisie, as Roman Law was more palatable to the intellectual *Mittelstand* than the martial aristocracy.<sup>161</sup> The bourgeois

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<sup>155</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 293; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, xiv; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, 5.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 378; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 17; Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1, 2.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1, 2-3, 295; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, x-xi; Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 299-300.

<sup>161</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 308.

administration of laws stabilized constitutions and political institutions, which in turn improved diplomatic relations.<sup>162</sup>

As mentioned above, the new *Mittelstand* was uniquely suited to intellectual endeavour, and 'with the creation of a free bourgeoisie, the first light had come to the sciences'.<sup>163</sup> The bourgeoisie spearheaded intellectual innovation, and it was in large part these innovations that made modernity possible. Eichhorn suggested that it was only with the advent of cities that figures like Petrarch and Boccaccio could meaningfully challenge Scholastic hegemony.<sup>164</sup> Aided first by Greek monks fleeing Constantinople in 1453 and then the invention of the press, these developments laid the intellectual foundations for the gradual expansion of modern ideas.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, the Renaissance, Eichhorn argued, helped forge a unified pan-European intellectual culture.<sup>166</sup>

The post-Columbian conquest of the Americas and new contacts with Asia and Africa not only offered unparalleled resources for scientific investigation, but also generated opportunities for the bourgeoisie to enrich itself.<sup>167</sup> The rapid material transformations caused by the emergence of global commercial networks 'refined luxury and morals', while trade and imperial conquest renewed the *Verbindungen* between European states that had weakened since the Crusades.<sup>168</sup> The subsequent expansion of inquiry, combined with the

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<sup>162</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, xvii-xxiv; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, 8-19; Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 378-379.

<sup>163</sup> Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1, 4-8.

<sup>164</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 381-382, Vol. 2, 1-3, 772-775.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 3-8.

<sup>166</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, xxxii-xxxv; Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1, 9-10; Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 304-306.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, 18; Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 7; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, xxxv.

increasingly clear limitations of Scholasticism, paved the way for the Reformation.<sup>169</sup>

As in the work of Villers, the Reformation is a cornerstone of Eichhorn's thought. It both freed the newly Protestant lands from papal despotism and encouraged major reforms within Catholicism itself.<sup>170</sup> Like Villers, Eichhorn was keen to argue that the Reformation did not emerge *ex nihilo*. Unlike Villers, he did not locate its origins in the peculiarities of northern Germany. Instead, the Reformation was the culmination of broader religious, social, and cultural tensions across Catholic Europe.<sup>171</sup> Regarding its impact however, Eichhorn largely – and indeed explicitly – followed Villers.<sup>172</sup> The Reformation unleashed new intellectual and political impulses that had profound cultural effects.<sup>173</sup> Education improved, and the establishment of territorial authorities independent of the Catholic Church enabled new freedoms.<sup>174</sup>

These freedoms generated both new civil rights and new economic behaviours among Protestants, leading to 'a spirit of activity, industry, and tolerance'.<sup>175</sup> They also transformed European politics and commerce more broadly. Europe became a 'system of states' with strong diplomatic ties. Crucially, by dividing the Holy Roman Empire, the Reformation limited the risk that the Emperor would gain undue power in European diplomacy.<sup>176</sup> In short, 'religion, reason and fortuitous institutions [...] finally restored order,

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<sup>169</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 467.

<sup>170</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, 19-20; Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 11-13.

<sup>171</sup> Eichhorn, *Weltgeschichte*, 2nd edn., Vol. 2:1, 309-315.

<sup>172</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 10-13, 33-41.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, xxxvii-xxxviii; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, 20-21.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, 152-153.

security, and freedom, [and] hence the benevolent *Mittelstand* of citizens [*Bürger*].<sup>177</sup> The Reformation was not just a theological project, but one that transformed Europe into the system of sovereign states with the strong diplomatic, commercial, and cultural ties that mark the telos of the Enlightened narrative.

The Reformation, moreover, was both tied to the new intellectual activities of the bourgeoisie, and a crucial moment in the consolidation of the latter's rights and commercial agency. The bourgeoisie was thus able to play a leading role in the developments of the following centuries. The refinement and expansion of modern trade and industry created historically unprecedented wealth and transformed social relationships.<sup>178</sup> The rising socio-economic role of movable property, as well as greater food security, created a much more dynamic society characterized by innovation, diligence, and social mobility.<sup>179</sup> This made possible the development and dissemination of Enlightened ideas.<sup>180</sup> These convergent forces set in motion the rapid changes in European society, politics, and culture of the modern world.<sup>181</sup> As in other Enlightened narratives, the period around 1500 thus catalyzed the emergence of the characteristic features of European modernity.

### 3.1.3.3. *Enlightened Modernity*

Enlightenment as an intellectual – and ultimately political, social, and cultural – project emerged, according to Eichhorn, after the end of the seventeenth-century wars of religion.<sup>182</sup> The norms established by the Peace of Westphalia and the consolidation of territorial

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<sup>177</sup> Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1, 2.

<sup>178</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 2, 3-4.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, lii-liiii; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, iii-iv.

<sup>182</sup> Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1, 24-25.

sovereignty provided stable political circumstances within which new ideas could flourish.<sup>183</sup> New norms in law, trade, international relations, and individual rights, Eichhorn argued, were directed towards bringing European laws and institutions into line with the 'current condition of civil society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*]'.<sup>184</sup> Enlightenment, as a self-conscious project, was a process in which social, political, legal, and cultural practices were gradually made to correspond with the norms associated with the bourgeoisie.

Enlightened states were thus characterized by a range of supposedly 'bourgeois' ideas: the rule of law, free intellectual inquiry, rational and benevolent policies, broad religious tolerance, industriousness, trade, property rights, and land cultivation.<sup>185</sup> As in Villers' *Essai*, the value of 'the separation of spiritual and temporal' spheres is taken for granted, and one of Eichhorn's chief criticisms of the French *ancien régime* was the role of the clergy in political life.<sup>186</sup> Like Meiners, Eichhorn spoke favourably of inequalities originating in 'wealth, talent and personal service' rather than birth, even as his account did not make prescriptions for contemporary states.<sup>187</sup> The Enlightened citizen recognized the value of these ideas, was modest, hard working, and cultivated his reason and knowledge.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, a strong bourgeoisie was central to the stability and equitable reform of Enlightened states. As the bourgeoisie stood to lose from both

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<sup>183</sup> Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, lxxii-lxxiii.

<sup>184</sup> Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Litteratur*, Vol. 2:1, 26-27; Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 44-45.

<sup>185</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 4, 77, 107, Vol. 6, 112, 403, 470, 476-477, 480-481, 492, 495-497, 549-550; Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Cultur und Litteratur*, Vol. 1, xv & xxiii-xxiv; Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 193-195, Vol. 2, 5-6, 211-219.

<sup>186</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 5, 413, 417 & Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 13.

<sup>187</sup> Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 148-150, 226-227, Vol. 2, 259; *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 45; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 6, 440-441.

<sup>188</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, vi-vii.

democratic and aristocratic rule, it was necessarily predisposed towards moderate governance and the mediation of different interests.<sup>189</sup>

By the eighteenth century, Eichhorn argued, 'the societal condition [*gesellschaftliche Zustand*] of Europe had [...] ascended to a perfection' in which 'the old order of estates' had become incompatible with the norms of 'bourgeois society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*]'.<sup>190</sup> Accordingly, 'the hitherto relationships of the estates within states [were] overturned, and swapped for a different estate system [*ständisches System*]'.<sup>191</sup> By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the processes begun in the late Middle Ages had come to fruition, and Europe could fairly be described as Enlightened. There was, however, one major exception: France.

#### 3.1.3.4. Excluding France

Up to this point, Eichhorn's account conforms to the Enlightened narrative described by Pocock, even as it placed particular emphasis on typically German concerns like the bourgeoisie and the Reformation. However, and despite Eichhorn's repeated use of the term Europe, Eichhorn appears to have considered France outside this process. Excluding one of Europe's leading states from Enlightened modernity represents a significant departure from the Enlightened narrative.

Eichhorn emphasized both the historic suppression of the French bourgeoisie and its discontent prior to the Revolution.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3, 214; Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 45; Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 77-80, 188, 306, 317, Vol. 2, 80.

<sup>190</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 2, 3.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 18.

<sup>192</sup> Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 55; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 3, 155.



Whereas other states had made efforts to modernize and become unified political entities, Bourbon rule had encouraged socio-cultural fragmentation and dissolved the *Verbindungen* that could have maintained France as a cohesive entity. Louis XIII (1601-1643, r. 1610-1643) disempowered the bourgeoisie and consolidated the French state without sufficiently breaking from its feudal past.<sup>193</sup> Louis XIV (1638-1715, r. 1643-1715) continued and intensified this process.<sup>194</sup> The expulsion of the Huguenots, Eichhorn claimed, had a particularly damaging effect on France's cultural norms and products.<sup>195</sup> Despite popular hopes for better government under Louis XV (1710-1774, r. 1715-1774) and Louis XVI, France's cultural, political, and financial problems became more severe.<sup>196</sup>

Such poor governance transformed the peasantry into a tyrannized, impoverished, and 'slavish' mass ignorant of its rights.<sup>197</sup> In addition, the dynamic of the royal court encouraged flattery. This ensured that kings were surrounded by ignorant and self-interested courtiers rather than diligent and talented advisors.<sup>198</sup> This corrupt political culture exacerbated the kingdom's dire finances, worsened inequalities, and isolated the king.<sup>199</sup> The court remained ignorant of both the harsh conditions faced by most of the population and rising discontent with its policies.<sup>200</sup> According to Eichhorn, the French *ancien régime* was, despite the good intentions of Louis XVI, a despotism.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 3, 99, 102-103, 142-143, 147-148, 155-166.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-4, 168-170; Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 4.

<sup>195</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 3, 169-170.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-179, 183-5, 190-195.

<sup>197</sup> Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 8-9.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-13; Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 3, 197-199.

<sup>200</sup> Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 16-18.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 264, Vol. 2, 13-14;

These conditions produced a national bourgeoisie that was immature and prone to un-Enlightened ideas and behaviours. The immorality of the upper clergy encouraged atheism as the intolerance of French Catholicism made Christianity appear both inherently corrupt and uniquely culpable for France's problems.<sup>202</sup> Despotic policies encouraged radical socio-political ideas.<sup>203</sup> Unlike their German counterparts, members of the French bourgeoisie were excluded from political and administrative roles.<sup>204</sup> This meant that the French public were inclined towards solutions based on impracticable 'speculations' – influenced by the dangerous ideas of the *philosophes* described in the first chapter – rather than viable practices.<sup>205</sup> The French people thus fell into 'an illusory exaltation of ideas [*Ideenexaltation*]'.<sup>206</sup> The problematic circumstances of the French bourgeoisie was thus linked to the calamitous enthusiasm of the Revolutionary period.

Such opposition to the French government only exacerbated the disharmonious relationship between rulers and ruled.<sup>207</sup> French social fragmentation had become virtually insoluble as the demands and interests of the upper clergy and aristocracy were irreconcilable with those of the bourgeoisie.<sup>208</sup> France lacked the *Verbindungen* that a properly formed bourgeoisie should have provided. The goals, proposals, and demands of the various estates were mutually exclusive, reflecting the fractured nature of French society.<sup>209</sup> Like most German observers, Eichhorn was sympathetic to Louis XVI but argued that the king had lacked the capacity to navigate and resolve

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 11-13.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 13-15 & Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 2, 4-5.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, 13.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 46-47, 55-57, 73-75, 78-79, 83-84.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

France's crises.<sup>210</sup> While Eichhorn also sympathized with many representatives of the third estate, the National Assembly's actions and statements ultimately encouraged the proliferation of dangerous ideas among an ignorant population.<sup>211</sup> Espenhorst has noted the thematic importance of 'extremes' in Eichhorn's thinking about the Revolution: rather than a coherent, unified process, events were marked by extremes of virtue and vice, heroism and cowardice, duty and lawlessness.<sup>212</sup> France had remained a feudal state, and the *ancien régime* could not withstand the intense, destabilizing forces unleashed by the Revolution. Lacking an adequate bourgeoisie, France had not entered Enlightened modernity, and thus had not taken full part in the Enlightened narrative.

Eichhorn's account is, then, like Meiners', one of the bourgeoisie's ascendance. However, whereas Meiners' *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* centres on the emergence of a specific, historically contingent, group within Europe's social hierarchy, Eichhorn emphasized the generic role of *Mittelstände* in stimulating valuable ideas, behaviours, institutions, and 'unity'. Eichhorn's argument was not radical, but it is possible to see why he was concerned that readers might question his objectivity. In his account, the collapse of the French state was not simply the result of destructive revolutionaries, but the product of the long-term failures of the French *ancien régime*. Readers may well have wondered whether Eichhorn did not consider other states to have failed to fully modernize. Unsurprisingly, then, when Eichhorn excluded France from the trajectory of Enlightened modernity he took pains to 'localize' the origins of the Revolution. The Revolution happened where it did due to circumstances peculiar to France. His account of modern Germany, by contrast, emphasized the stability and unity of

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 75-76, 308-311, Vol. 2, 54-58.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 77-78, 96, 143-144.

<sup>212</sup> Peters, 'Revolution und Gleichgewicht', 788.

its political institutions, as well as the maturity of its bourgeoisie.<sup>213</sup> Although Eichhorn did not establish a prescriptive political agenda, his account represents a highly politicized reading of European history and the origins of the continent's current crises.

Pointing to the political and cultural differences between France and the Holy Roman Empire was a common theme in 'conservative' responses to the Revolution, as German intellectuals sought to distance their notions of Enlightenment from those of the *philosophes*.<sup>214</sup> In this sense, Eichhorn's account represents a systematic historicization of this process in relation to the rest of the continent. With the exception of France, Europe had, broadly speaking at least, entered bourgeois modernity. The actions of the French third estate should not lead observers to question the virtues of the German bourgeoisie. Equally, the current crises should not cause observers to doubt the course of Enlightenment in Germany. Nevertheless, by excluding one of Europe's most powerful states from the project of Enlightened modernity, Eichhorn's account represents a profound transformation of the Enlightened narrative.

## **3.2. Religion and Enlightenment**

### 3.2.1. Villers' Confessional Narrative

Villers' account of history in the *Essai sur la Réformation* also went beyond the Enlightened narrative by excluding certain nations from full Enlightened modernity. Imbued with ideas rooted in the Critical Philosophy, the *Essai sur l'esprit et l'influence de la Réformation de Luther* was, essentially, a version of the Enlightened narrative in defence of three ideas enduringly associated with the period:

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<sup>213</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 3, 442-482, 498, Vol. 4, 341-370.

<sup>214</sup> Schneiders, *Die wahre Aufklärung*, 85-86, 127-132.

freedom of thought, rational inquiry, and religious tolerance. In Villers' account, these were the products not of broad socio-political developments across Europe, but of Protestantism in particular.

Like Eichhorn, Villers emphasized the importance of the Protestant Reformation in the emergence of European modernity. However, unlike Eichhorn's account, this confessional dimension took precedence over the role of *Mittelstände*. If Eichhorn's version of the Enlightened narrative was fundamentally bourgeois, Villers' was Lutheran. As Michael Printy has argued, the *Essai* presented a confessionalized variation of that narrative, and thus broke with the post-confessional impulses of earlier accounts.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, Villers described the *Essai* as a response to 'the political and religious events of the last years', and it clearly reflected his anxieties about the resurgence of Catholicism in Europe.<sup>216</sup>

### 3.2.1.1. Catholicism and the Middle Ages

Meiners blamed the cultural collapse of the medieval world on the Germanic conquerors' adoption of corrupt Roman customs, and Eichhorn criticized Romans, Germans, and the early clergy. Villers – perhaps surprisingly given his emphasis on the cultural superiority of Germany – held that it was German barbarism that had obliterated the achievements of the Romans.<sup>217</sup> While Villers considered the climate of the German lands to be uniquely suited to the cultivation of austere morals, the ancient Germans had apparently not yet developed the cultural norms necessary to appreciate or incorporate the advances of the conquered Romans. Nevertheless, the despotism and immorality of the Middle Ages had less to do with the collapse of classical civilization, and more to do with the hegemony of the

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<sup>215</sup> Printy, 'Protestantism and Progress', 325-326.

<sup>216</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., v.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Catholic church. Whereas Eichhorn's account of Catholic ascendance traced the vacillations of power between different groups, Villers agreed with Meiners that Catholicism established its domination early in the Middle Ages.

Among the *Essai's* chief criticisms of pre-Reformation Catholicism is the (perceived) amalgamation of church and state and the associated confusion of the 'rights and constitutions' of temporal and spiritual powers.<sup>218</sup> This, as discussed above, was also an important theme in Eichhorn's work. The usurpation of worldly power by the church was one of the chief ills of the Middle Ages, creating not just 'a state within the state', but also bringing Europe under the perpetual threat of 'passing under the yoke of an absolute theocracy'.<sup>219</sup> In a sheet in his *Nachlass*, Villers offered the following equations regarding the Pope's spiritual and political pretensions: 'Pope = God; and vice-God', 'Pope = Emperor and Emperor-Pope, Pope-king becomes universal-king'.<sup>220</sup> The transformation of the ancient Church into a temporal power betrayed the straightforward moral and spiritual teachings of the historical Jesus.<sup>221</sup> Catholicism was 'exclusive and intolerant', seeking to dominate European thought and hinder progress.<sup>222</sup> Moreover, it tended towards the physicality of ritual and ceremony, lending itself to superstition, enthusiasm, and

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 2-3, 39-40.

<sup>220</sup> Villers, Charles de, 'Lettres projetées sur la réunion des églises catholique et protestante' (Bundle), (Villers' Nachlaß Box 4, Hamburg Autographensammlung). Despite the title of this bundle, it does not appear to contain letters concerning a possible reunion of the Catholic and Protestant churches. On the debate around confessional reunion, see Rosenblatt, Helena, *Liberal Values: Benjamin Constant and the Politics of Religion* (Cambridge, 2008), 116-118. I have not found sufficient evidence for Rosenblatt's claim that Villers' work on Luther 'was at the centre of the controversy'. See also Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae*, 36-38.

<sup>221</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 31-2.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 96.

sensualism, thus enabling 'the greatest excesses and the most horrible cruelties'.<sup>223</sup>

The second and third editions incorporated further criticisms of Catholicism, and repeated the above arguments in additional places.<sup>224</sup> In the second edition Villers claimed that crime was more common in Catholic territories, and that the Catholic Church had, at times, not considered Protestants to be fully human.<sup>225</sup> Catholics had done less to cultivate and improve their lands.<sup>226</sup> Despite the coarseness of Luther's language, it had never been 'cruel and ferocious like that of certain popes'.<sup>227</sup> In the third edition, Villers went further, emphasizing the overweening and intolerant censorship in Catholic states and using stronger language to criticize Catholic rulers.<sup>228</sup> Taken alone, these changes are minor. However, the increasingly polemical tone of new editions should not be overlooked: the intensification of Villers' anti-Catholic rhetoric responded to the contemporary fortunes of Catholicism on both sides of the Rhine.

This may at first seem puzzling. By 1804, and certainly by the appearance of the third edition in 1808, it had become clear that Bonaparte's restoration of Catholicism had been about consolidating power rather than genuine religious commitment. In 1809 the Emperor was excommunicated.<sup>229</sup> Religious toleration for Protestants (and, less consistently, Jews) persisted throughout the

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>224</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 3rd edn., 334, 342, 358-9, 361, 369, 375-376.

<sup>225</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 2nd edn., 61, 105-6, 285.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 287-288.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 239-329.

<sup>228</sup> For example, in the third edition Villers described Ferdinand II as an 'ambitious and devout prince, entirely dominated by the Jesuits', whereas the first did not. Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 3rd edn., 68; Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 85.

<sup>229</sup> O'Dwyer, Margaret M., *The Papacy in the Age of Napoleon and the Restoration: Pius VII, 1800-1823* (Lanham, MD, 1985), 83-124.

period.<sup>230</sup> Nevertheless, the first years of the nineteenth century were marked by the gradual re-emergence of the Catholic Church in French public life, as the Church began to stabilize after the destruction of the Revolutionary period.<sup>231</sup> The Grand Séminaire at Montpellier reopened in 1806, and ordinations began to increase.<sup>232</sup> Key figures in Napoleon's government – most notably Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis (1746-1807) – were devout Catholics. Portalis promoted the expansion of Catholic religious orders, the provision of scholarships for seminary students, and the power of the church to refuse sacraments and remarriage to divorcées.<sup>233</sup>

Catholicism also gained significant ground in the public sphere. The most important Catholic author at this time, François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), published his apologia for Catholic mysticism *Génie du christianisme* in 1802.<sup>234</sup> This work proved exceptionally popular, and even received papal approval.<sup>235</sup> Louis de Fontanes (1757-1821) was a devout Catholic, prominent writer, and, from 1805, member of Napoleon's Legislative Body.<sup>236</sup> The Catholic royalist Joseph de Maistre published very little during this period, but his *Considérations sur la France* (1797) remained influential.<sup>237</sup> In 1802, Louis Gabriel Ambrose de Bonald (1754-1840)

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<sup>230</sup> Schwarzfuchs, Simon, *La politique napoléonienne envers les juifs dans l'Empire* (Paris, 2010), passim.

<sup>231</sup> Cholvy, Gérard & Hilaire, Yves-Marie (eds.), *Histoire religieuse de la France 1800-1880* (Toulouse, 2000), 22-23, 28.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Aston, Nigel, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Basingstoke, 2000), 337-338.

<sup>234</sup> Cholvy & Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse*, 22.

<sup>235</sup> Chateaubriand, François-René de, *Génie du christianisme, ou beautés de la religion chrétienne* (Paris, 1802); Scott, Malcolm, *Chateaubriand: The Paradox of Change* (Bern, 2015), 153-6.

<sup>236</sup> Roger, [first name unknown], 'Fontanes (le marquis Louis de)', in Michaud, Louis Gabriel (ed.), *Biographie Universelle ancienne et moderne: nouvelle édition*, Vol. 14 (2nd edn. Paris, 1856), 341-351.

<sup>237</sup> Maistre, Joseph Marie de, *Considérations sur la France* (London, 1797), 35; Armenteros, Carolina & Lebrun, Richard A., 'Introduction', in idem. (eds.), *Joseph de Maistre and his European Readers: From Friedrich von Gentz*



published his landmark *Legislation primitive*, in which he described Catholicism's principles as 'general truths'.<sup>238</sup> In the German lands, Romanticism's 'Catholic turn' had also begun. The poet Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg-Stolberg (1750-1819) converted in 1800, and corresponded with many leading Romantic figures, including Friedrich Schlegel (who converted in 1808).<sup>239</sup> Raised a Catholic, Clemens Brentano (1778-1842), also began publishing poetry in these years, and the Romantic political theorist Adam Müller (1779-1829) converted in 1805.<sup>240</sup>

Villers' sharpened rhetoric thus responded to the rising fortunes of contemporary Catholicism. However, as Printy has argued, his broader confessional emphasis also went beyond the Enlightened narrative. Villers' critique of Catholicism was grounded in a conviction that Enlightenment was uniquely tied to the mores implicit in Protestant thought. Consequently, resurgent Catholicism threatened to undo many of the gains of the past three hundred years.<sup>241</sup> Villers' account of the Catholic Middle Ages can thus be seen as a cautionary tale. Indeed, many of Villers' criticisms of Catholicism were already familiar to eighteenth-century German Protestants. Meiners and Eichhorn made similar claims, as did the leading church historian Ludwig Timotheus Spittler (1752-1810).<sup>242</sup> What made

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to Isaiah Berlin (Leiden, 2011), 6; Armenteros, Carolina, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and his Heirs, 1794-1854* (Ithaca, NY, 2011) 7-9.

<sup>238</sup> Bonald, Louis Gabriel Ambrose de, *Législation primitive, considérée dans les derniers temps par les seules lumières de la raison*, 3 Vols. (Paris, 1802), Vol. 1, 308.

<sup>239</sup> Joshua, Eleoma, *Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg and the German Romantics* (Oxford, 2005), 21.

<sup>240</sup> Brentano, Clemens, *Die Lustigen Musikanten: Singspiel* (Frankfurt a. M., 1803); Sauzin, Louis, *Adam Heinrich Müller, 1779-1829. Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris, 1937), 139.

<sup>241</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 18.

<sup>242</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Historische Vergleichung*, Vol. 1, 396-8, 400; Vol. 2, 140; Spittler, Ludwig Timotheus, *Grundriß der Geschichte der christlichen Kirche* (2nd. edn. Frankfurt a. M., 1788), Vol. 1:1, 221-222; Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, 4-6. Villers notably used proofs of Eichhorn's *Geschichte der drey letzten Jahrhunderte* to provide the

Villers' project different was its polemical rhetoric and circumstances. Whereas other versions of the Enlightened narrative had not considered contemporary Catholicism a barrier to Enlightened modernity, Villers' did.

### 3.2.1.2. Kant, Luther, and Dialectical History

The usurpation of temporal power by a corrupt, cruel and sensual church had necessitated 'a reminder of the primitive spirit [of Christianity]': the Reformation of Luther.<sup>243</sup> Like other Enlightened narrators, including Robertson, Eichhorn, and Meiners, Villers suggested that the defining characteristics of European modernity had emerged in the decades around the year 1500.<sup>244</sup> Each emphasized the role of conflicts and treaties such as the Peace of Westphalia in the gradual emergence of commercial society alongside stable and orderly international relations.<sup>245</sup> However, while each author emphasized the importance of centralization at this time, Villers – unlike others – saw this centralization as primarily a product of the Reformation.<sup>246</sup> Indeed, while Eichhorn described the Reformation as a central event in the evolution of European modernity, it was ultimately one moment, however important, in the broader consolidation of the bourgeoisie. In Villers' work Lutheranism was a manifestation of the spiritual and intellectual norms of northern Germany, but in the *Essai* Germanic mores were a causal mechanism for the Reformation, rather than the broader narrative into which the latter was subsumed.

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historical data of his *Essai*. Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., vii. On Jesus as a moral teacher, see in particular Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 118-147.

<sup>243</sup> Villers, Charles, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 32.

<sup>244</sup> Michael Printy has discussed the parallels between Robertson's work and Villers' *Essai*, indicating the greater weight given to Protestantism in the latter. Printy, 'Protestantism and Progress', 325-329.

<sup>245</sup> Villers, Charles, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 83-89, 107, 212-214, 227-228.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-9.

Villers argued that Protestantism – in theory, if not always in practice – recognized the need for a distinction between the powers of church and state, with religion remaining subordinate to the state in temporal matters.<sup>247</sup> The role of religion was to teach moral truths, while that of the state was to secure the rights of individuals.<sup>248</sup> The Reformation had – Villers claimed – brought the recognition of this division to the institutions, practices, and relationships of Protestant Europe.<sup>249</sup> According to this account, moral-spiritual freedom, latent throughout the Middle Ages, was recovered in human nature via the pursuit of reason initiated by the Reformation.<sup>250</sup> This 'true' freedom, Villers argued, prioritized 'the conservation of his [man's] social rights' and 'the independence of his religious opinions: freedom in his civil actions [regarding religion], and the freedom of his conscience in these acts'.<sup>251</sup>

As shown in the previous chapter, Villers conflated Protestantism with philosophical rationalism, and his understanding of the Reformation itself was deeply inflected by Kant's philosophy.<sup>252</sup> Echoing Kant's definition of Enlightenment, Villers described the rational agent as 'leaving [his] tutelage' in the wake of the Reformation.<sup>253</sup> Recalling Kant's dictum of 'Sapere aude' Villers

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 4, 32.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>252</sup> This appears to reflect Villers' engagement with the work of Karl Leonhard Reinhold, who emphasized the compatibility of Kant's thought with Lutheranism. Printy, 'Protestantism and Progress', 313.

<sup>253</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 358-9. Kant defined Enlightenment as 'humanity's exit from its self-imposed immaturity [*der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit*]'. Importantly, however, whereas Kant argued that Europe was experiencing 'an age of Enlightenment', rather than 'an Enlightened age', Villers does not appear to have made such a distinction. Kant, Immanuel, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 8, 35, 40.

claimed that following the Reformation 'one dared think, reason, [and] examine'.<sup>254</sup> Whereas the fundamental principle of Catholicism was, allegedly, '*believe!*', that of Protestantism was '*examine!*'<sup>255</sup>

Indeed, Villers' account of the Reformation utilized a model of historical change that echoes Kant's in *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784). Here, moral progress occurred through the pursuit of reasoned solutions to problems despite the self-interested nature of many of the impulses behind those solutions.<sup>256</sup> Villers largely followed this account. He further paralleled Kant's thought by arguing that the notion of perfectibility could direct humans 'towards an order of things more just, [and] more humane', and that it was only through the broad lens of historical narrative that progress could properly be perceived.<sup>257</sup> Accordingly, when seen through such a lens, human behaviour demonstrated a distinct logic that – as in Kant's *Idee* – could be subsumed within the trans-historical concept of providence.<sup>258</sup> Thus, also following Kant, reversals are either temporary or illusory, as the process of world-historical progress involved the gradual, dialectical emergence of the requisite conditions for Enlightened modernity.<sup>259</sup> In this way Villers conceptualized contemporary Enlightenment thought – and especially the Critical Philosophy and its heirs – as the latest refinement of a tradition of inquiry ignited by Luther.<sup>260</sup> The *Essai* thus narrated the emergence of distinctly Kantian concepts of freedom and ethics, which Villers then presented as broader cultural norms among German Protestants. Villers' *Essai* was both a

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<sup>254</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 4.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. His emphasis.

<sup>256</sup> Kant, Immanuel, 'Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht', in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 8, 15-32.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 18; Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 14-16, 24-25, 365-366.

<sup>258</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 10-11.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 22-24, 360-1.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 268, 270-290, 318-319.

confessional variation of the Enlightened narrative, and a Kantian one.

### 3.2.1.3. *Charles de Villers as Conservative Republican*

Villers' *Essai* was also politically conservative. The telos of his narrative was a distinctly Kantian notion of republicanism. In Villers' rendition, however, this republicanism was considered a fundamentally Protestant form of rule. Villers joined the chorus of thinkers who argued that Germany had no need of revolution. The achievements of the Reformation and then the Peace of Westphalia meant that the Empire's inhabitants had long known 'this language and these principles' of rights and freedoms – '[t]he freedom to think and write is to them as natural as the air that they breathe'.<sup>261</sup> Within Protestant states, subjects critically examined, challenged, and responded to both religious and political authorities.<sup>262</sup> Similarly, Protestant monarchs now had to rely on the loyalty of their subjects rather than the coercive reach of Catholic institutions.<sup>263</sup>

These factors stimulated patriotism, 'common cause' and 'a public spirit of agreement and harmony between the people and the government'.<sup>264</sup> Villers claimed that this relationship rendered rulers more accountable and thereby forced the better management of public affairs.<sup>265</sup> The close relationships between rulers and ruled that characterized these states meant that they should be considered republican regardless of their actual political institutions.<sup>266</sup> The Protestant 'will to be free in matters of conscience' thus became the 'will to be free in civil matters': republican freedom was a product of

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 135-6.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 226-7.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 125-9, 277.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

Protestant moral disposition.<sup>267</sup> Indeed, this relationship was bilateral, as those peoples with indigenous republican traditions and mores had most swiftly adopted Protestantism.<sup>268</sup> This notion of republicanism – and in particular its emphasis on the primacy of public engagement over political institutions – is strikingly similar to that of Kant in *Zum ewigen Frieden*.<sup>269</sup> Just as Kant was careful to define republicanism in such a way that it could include contemporary Prussia, Villers described Prussia (and Denmark) as republican in character.<sup>270</sup>

By contrast, France's cultural norms made republican government impossible. Villers was sympathetic to the principles of the early French Revolution, comparing the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen to the Augsburg Confession.<sup>271</sup> Had his power not been wholly usurped, Louis XVI could have directed France towards reform.<sup>272</sup> Tragically, however, the Jacobins – modern-day Anabaptists – had failed to understand the political needs of France's cultural condition.<sup>273</sup> Rather than a reasoned response to the circumstances in which they found themselves, the Jacobins had, like John of Leiden (1509-1536) before them, been driven by zeal and enthusiasm. The *Essai* thereby adhered to the typical 'moderate' German narrative of the Revolution, but argued further that the failure of French republicanism was tied to the nation's cultural circumstances.

The *Essai* was, then, like *De la liberté*, a 'conservative' text insofar as it sought to defend what had been the political status quo.

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 55, 159-162.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Kant, Immanuel, 'Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf' in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, Vol. 8, 351-3, 372-373.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.; Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 117-8.

<sup>271</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., 23-4, 28-29.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 138.

However, the status quo in 1803 was very different to that of twelve years earlier. In 1791, Villers had opposed freedom of the press and religion on the grounds that such liberties threatened social order. In 1803, he was a firm advocate of both, seeing them as the fruits of a three-hundred-year process begun in Saxony. Importantly, Villers did not propose significant political change in either Germany or France. Rather, the *Essai* was a defensive work emphasizing the value of the status quo of the early, Enlightened Napoleonic period against the threat of resurgent Catholicism. It was a narrative driven by confessional impulses in which the republican telos of modernity was found in the circumstances of Protestant northern Germany. Unlike Eichhorn, Villers did not simply exclude France from Enlightened modernity, but he did situate it as occupying a position that was both precarious and notably behind that of Protestant Germany. In order to fully participate in Enlightened modernity, France should both maintain the secular advances of Napoleonic rule and, crucially, adopt cultural values consistent with those of German (supposedly rationalist) Protestantism. Only once it adopted republican mores could France be considered ready for republican institutions.

### 3.2.2. Russia and Europe in Schlözer's *Russische Annalen*

Prior to the French Revolution, Schlözer was in many ways an archetypal author of works conforming to the Enlightened narrative. Indeed, one of Schlözer's central intellectual aims was to explain the emergence of modern Europe.<sup>274</sup> In his 1772 *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie* he had stressed the centrality of the 'connection of incidents [*Zusammenhang der Begebenheiten*]' in thinking about historical change.<sup>275</sup> Characteristic of Göttingen pragmatic history, the full complexity and interrelationships of historical events had to be understood in order to adequately comprehend Europe's

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<sup>274</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 364-365.

<sup>275</sup> Schlözer, *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie*, Vol. 1, 44-58.

transformations between the fall of Rome and the present. In the 1780s Schlözer lectured extensively on European history, emphasizing the emergence of Enlightened Europe's religious, diplomatic, economic, and intellectual circumstances.<sup>276</sup> Schlözer's historical writings typically sought to legitimize notions of historical progress, global – especially European – interconnectedness, and legal and political centralization.<sup>277</sup> Like Eichhorn, Schlözer emphasized geographical discoveries and technological innovations that bound nations and individuals together in moral, political, and cultural terms.<sup>278</sup>

The French Revolution does not appear to have substantially altered the analytical framework through which Schlözer approached European politics but, as the crisis deepened, he ceased publishing broad accounts of European history.<sup>279</sup> With the exceptions of a slightly revised edition of his *Weltgeschichte* in 1792 and the second volume of his *Weltgeschichte für Kinder* in 1806, from 1789 Schlözer published no further broad histories of Europe or the world. Instead, he focused his efforts on a series of monographs dealing with specific documents or aspects of material history.<sup>280</sup> More importantly, the crises of the Revolutionary period rendered him increasingly frustrated with the Holy Roman Empire and pessimistic regarding its

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<sup>276</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 173, 200-206, 280-291. On Schlözer's concept of 'Europe', see also Espenhorst, Martin, 'Der "mobile" Europäer: Zur historischen Konstruktion des europäischen Menschen bei August Ludwig Schlözer', in idem. & Duchhardt (eds.), *Schlözer in Europa*, 197-212.

<sup>277</sup> An important exception to this emphasis on centralization was his *Kritische Sammlungen*, which defended the communal rights of the Transylvanian Saxons. See Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 404-414.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 380-394.

<sup>280</sup> For example, Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Münz-, Geld-, und Bergwerks-Geschichte des Russischen Kaiserthums, vom J. 1700 bis 1789* (Göttingen, 1791); Schlözer, *Kritische Sammlungen*.



future.<sup>281</sup> By 1789 Schlözer already considered the Empire to be 'fragmented', and the Emperor lacking in effective power.<sup>282</sup> Schlözer had hoped that an Imperial War against France might stimulate much-needed reforms.<sup>283</sup> In 1793 he argued that the Empire could no longer be considered a state as it lacked the power to adjudicate between competing interests.<sup>284</sup> Instead, the Holy Roman Empire had become a 'state-system [*StatenSystem*]'.<sup>285</sup> This category included the Swiss Federation, the United States of America, the United Netherlands, and historical entities such as the Achaean League.<sup>286</sup> According to Schlözer, state-systems were inherently flawed and faced inevitable deterioration through internal conflict and factionalism.<sup>287</sup>

Despite his pessimism, however, in 1802 Schlözer published the first two volumes of his text-critical edition of the *Primary Chronicle – Russische Annalen* – which incorporated key aspects of the Enlightened narrative. Unlike earlier accounts, this version of the narrative stressed Russia's participation in the broader project of European modernity. Moreover, it was motivated by the hope that Russia would play a greater role in the struggle against Napoleon.

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<sup>281</sup> Burgdorf, Wolfgang, 'August Ludwig Schlözers Vorstellungen von der Verfassung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation', in Duchhardt & Espenhorst (eds.), *Schlözer in Europa*, 115-116.

<sup>282</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa.*, 401.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>284</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 117-119.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.* Schlözer was particularly critical of the Swiss Federation and the United States.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.2.2.1. Schlözer's Turn to Russia and Napoleonic Geopolitics

Schlözer published little on Russia and other parts of northern Europe during the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>288</sup> From 1801 onwards, however, his productive output again focused on the region. As Espenhorst has argued, Schlözer's turn to Russian history was primarily driven by foreign policy concerns.<sup>289</sup> In September 1800 Tsar Paul I (1754-1801, r. 1796-1801) had withdrawn from the Second Coalition, and in February 1801 the Holy Roman Emperor Francis II (1768-1835, r. 1792-1806) had signed the Treaty of Lunéville. At Lunéville Austria relinquished the Austrian Netherlands and various Italian possessions, and the Empire recognized French sovereignty on the left bank of the Rhine.<sup>290</sup> Like most of his compatriots, Schlözer did not anticipate the Empire's imminent collapse, but he was deeply concerned about Napoleonic rule and French hegemony more broadly.<sup>291</sup> In this context, Schlözer's renewed focus on Russian history reflected his hope that the young Tsar Alexander I (1777-1825, r. 1801-1825) would be more active in European affairs and rescue the continent from French hegemony.

Notably, successive volumes of *Russische Annalen* appeared at moments when Russia seemed to be remaining aloof from European affairs. The first two volumes appeared in 1802, following Russia's departure from the Second Coalition. The third volume is signed March 1805, shortly before Russia's alliance with Sweden and Britain

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<sup>288</sup> With the exception of the short work on Russian money and metal-working cited above, Schlözer's previous major work on 'northern' Europe had been a 1785 collaboration with Ludwig Albrecht Gebhardi (1735-1802) titled *Geschichte von Littauen, Kurland und Liefland*.

<sup>289</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 414-416, 418.

<sup>290</sup> Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, Vol. 2, 581. The dates in brackets refer to Francis' rule as Holy Roman Emperor. He also reigned as Francis I, Emperor of Austria from 1804 until his death.

<sup>291</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 414-416, 418. On Lunéville, see Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, Vol. 2, 614-620; Gagliardo, *Reich and Nation*, 192-264.

as part of the Third Coalition.<sup>292</sup> Similarly, the fifth volume is signed May 1809, after the war of the War of the Fifth Coalition began without Russian involvement.<sup>293</sup>

Most importantly, *Russische Annalen* was not just a scholarly presentation of an important document, but an extensive analysis of Russian history more broadly.<sup>294</sup> Schlözer stressed the historical importance of Russian engagement with Europe, and his work constituted a rare – perhaps unique – affirmation of Russia's full integration into European history.

### 3.2.2.2. *Russia's Path to Enlightened Modernity*

The emergence of Russia as an important force in European history was part of Schlözer's distinctive account of Christianization and acculturation. His narrative centred on a historical transition whereby 'Providence [...] let three powerful empires arise, which in shorter or longer time were nurseries [...] for Europe's culture'.<sup>295</sup> This represented a shift of European cultural progress towards the north east of the continent. First, the Romans conquered southern Europe, thereby spreading the culture it had 'collected' from the Etruscans, Greeks, Egyptians, Carthaginians, and 'Asians'.<sup>296</sup> Crucially, Rome fostered and disseminated Christianity which, 'even in its subsequent corruption, yet remained a means to render even savages and barbarians more noble [*geschlechter machen*]'.<sup>297</sup> The second phase saw the Germanic peoples introduce both Christianity and new

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<sup>292</sup> Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 3, viii.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, iv.

<sup>294</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 419.

<sup>295</sup> Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 3, 25-27. Schlözer employed two different words for 'nursery' in the agricultural sense: 'Baum- und PflanzSchulen'. I have been unable to adequately render both terms separately.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

legal norms as far north as Scandinavia.<sup>298</sup> Finally, the emergence of Russia enabled the Christianization, and indeed Europeanization, of the lands up to the Ural Mountains.<sup>299</sup> Notably, Schlözer suggested that this process occurred as early as the Middle Ages.<sup>300</sup> Moreover, this account clearly reflects his perception that Russia played a formative role in both the spread of Christianity and the construction of Europe. As in other Enlightened narratives, Europe is here not just a geographical entity, but a cultural realm bound together through historical experience. Unlike other Enlightened narratives, however, Russia played an integral role in the emergence and definition of this realm.

Schlözer emphasized both similarities and distinctions in the historical trajectories of Russia and the rest of Europe but, where Russian history deviated from the rest of the continent, Schlözer stressed the former's comparative Enlightenment. In the wake of the *Völkerwanderung*, Russia had adopted serfdom through the same processes as western and central Europe.<sup>301</sup> However, the early Russian state – Kievan Rus' – was exceptional in that it was (supposedly) formed through the willing subjection of five peoples to Rurik (c. 830-879, r. 862-879), an invited sovereign.<sup>302</sup> As well as exemplifying the Enlightened political principle of contractual rule, the foundation of Kievan Rus' was a distinctly more benign event than the formation of other medieval European states.<sup>303</sup>

Oleg of Novgorod (r. c. 879-913) is described as having secured the nascent state as a viable political entity and transformed

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Vol. 1, 31, 35-37; Vol. 3, 27-28, Vol. 4, 116-117.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 209-210.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3, 14, 19-20.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

Kiev into a major cultural and political centre.<sup>304</sup> Most importantly, Oleg established close cultural ties with the rest of Europe, and especially with Byzantium: 'powerful impulses to Enlightenment came now from Constantinople, the most powerful of which was the adoption of the Christian religion'.<sup>305</sup> Despite the weakness of Oleg's successor, Igor I (c. 878-945, r. c. 914-945), these connections brought Kievan Rus' into the European cultural sphere.<sup>306</sup> In the Middle Ages, 'everything in Russia is Byzantine: religion and superstition, sciences and arts, laws and punishments, also many morals and vices'.<sup>307</sup> Both the Russian lands and Byzantium, moreover, were part of European Christendom.

Russia's connection to Byzantium – rather than Rome – was to its advantage. Greek Orthodoxy, Schlözer argued, was a better cultural force than Roman Catholicism. Orthodoxy had the great benefit of being preached in Russia in Old Church Slavonic, a language that (Schlözer claimed) was intelligible to most listeners.<sup>308</sup> Thus, Russian laypeople were less susceptible to the manipulation and distortion of Christian ideas by priests. Schlözer also described the Orthodox lands as having benefitted from 'more rational religious services'.<sup>309</sup> Orthodox Christianity was, Schlözer suggested, closer to Protestantism than was Catholicism: while the rest of Europe was steeped in Papal barbarism, Eastern Christendom had been (relatively) Enlightened.<sup>310</sup> Indeed, Schlözer stressed that a more

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 6-7. The dates of Oleg's life and reign are subject to debate, but Schlözer dates Oleg's reign from 879-913. See Zuckerman, Constantin, 'On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion to Judaism and the Chronology of the Kings of the Rus Oleg and Igor. A study of the Anonymous Khazar *Letter* from the Genizah of Cairo', in *Revue des études byzantines*, Vol. 53 (1995), 237-270.

<sup>305</sup> Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 1, 31, 35-37; Vol. 3, 27-28.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., Vol. 4, 116-117. As successor to Oleg, the dates of Igor's reign are also debated.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 149.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 46-50.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

nuanced understanding of the European Middle Ages could be gained through closer attention to both Byzantine and Russian sources.<sup>311</sup> Such comments suggest an attempt to re-orient thinking about the nature and parameters of medieval Europe.

As in other versions of the Enlightened narrative, *Russische Annalen* hinges on the period around 1500. Following the depredations of marauding Kipchaks and then the Mongol conquests, Ivan III (1440-1505, r. 1462-1505) resumed diplomatic relations first with Italy, and then the Holy Roman Empire and Spain.<sup>312</sup> The renewal of relations with other European states signalled Russia's re-emergence as part of modern Europe.<sup>313</sup> Schlözer described Ivans III and IV (1530-1584, r. 1547-1584), Boris Godunov (1551-1605, r. 1598-1605), Peter and Catherine (1729-1796, r. 1762-1796) as having resumed 'God's work [*GottesWerk*]' of re-integrating Russia with the rest of Europe.<sup>314</sup> At this time Russia gained many of the same technological advances as the rest of Europe, such as gunpowder and clockwork.<sup>315</sup> The most important exception was the printing press, which Russia lacked until 1711. As well as establishing a press, Peter the Great (1672-1725, r. 1682-1725) encouraged interest in Russia and strengthened the *Verbindungen* between his court and other European polities.<sup>316</sup>

Schlözer's argument was unambiguous: Russia could not be considered external to Europe, and nor could it be considered apart from Europe's longer historical trajectory into Enlightened modernity. While there were peculiarities in Russia's history – as there were for all European nations – these did not reflect a

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 149.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 77-81; Vol. 2, 27-28, 149, 297.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3, 28.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 86.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

fundamental otherness. More importantly, Russia's close relationship with the rest of Europe was central to its own status as a modern, Enlightened nation: remaining aloof from European affairs would inevitably be to Russia's detriment.

### *3.2.2.3. Positioning Schlözer's Narrative*

Russia occupied a complicated position in contemporary thinking about Europe. Few doubted that Russia could be considered broadly European following the reforms of Peter and Catherine. This Europeanness was, however, considered the recent acquisition of wise monarchs rather than the result of protracted historical experience.<sup>317</sup> Russia was a beneficiary of – rather than a participant in – Europe's transition to modernity. Compared to the rest of the continent Russia was in some sense alien or exotic, and it was typically considered to be behind its western neighbours in terms of culture.<sup>318</sup> By contrast, Schlözer presented Russia as having long been part of Europe, with the successes of Peter and Catherine only the latest stages in a much longer narrative of integration.

Voltaire and Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) saw Russia's role in Enlightened modernity as being to settle the Eurasian steppe, rather than to participate in European affairs on equal terms with western rulers.<sup>319</sup> While Voltaire considered Russia important in the trajectory of Enlightenment, it could only be considered partly European. Despite Peter's advances, the Russian Empire remained in

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<sup>317</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 4, 334-335.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. On German perceptions see Kopelew, Lew, 'Einleitung', in Keller, Mechthild (ed.), *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht*, Vol. 2: 18. Jahrhundert: Aufklärung (Munich, 1987), 11-34; Kopelew, Lew, 'Einleitung und historische Einführung: Zunächst war Waffenbrüderschaft', in *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht*, Vol. 3: 19. Jahrhundert: von der Jahrhundertwende bis zur Reichsgründung (Munich, 1991), 13-27.

<sup>319</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 4, 334-335.

many ways barbarous.<sup>320</sup> Indeed, Schlözer positioned his own account against that of Voltaire, seeing the latter's work as having failed to fully understand Russia, and especially its history prior to the seventeenth century.<sup>321</sup> In this view, Voltaire did not have the knowledge to appreciate Russia's far deeper relationship with the rest of Europe.

Of Pocock's Enlightened narrators, Voltaire was by far the most significant commentator on Russia. William Robertson discussed the country briefly, noting that it had remained in medieval 'barbarism and obscurity' prior to the efforts of Peter the Great.<sup>322</sup> In Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), Russia appears only as an exemplar of national foolishness, and certainly not as a full member of Enlightened Europe.<sup>323</sup> Adam Smith mentions Russia several times in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, but here he treats it as essentially Asiatic and comparable rather to Turkey, Persia, and the Moghuls than the rest of Europe.<sup>324</sup> Giannone discussed Russia's Christianization, its relationship to Byzantium, and Peter's construction of St. Petersburg.<sup>325</sup> This is not wholly dissimilar to Schlözer's account but, again, Giannone presents Russia as only on the edge of European history. Diplomatic and trading relations with Muscovy (and then Russia) appear in David Hume's *History of England*, but these are asides from the central narrative, and do not

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 72-82; Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 195-234; Voltaire [Arouet, François-Marie], *Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Vols. 46-47: *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, eds. Michel Mervaud et al. (Oxford, 1999), 390-396, 459-460, 867- 940-942.

<sup>321</sup> Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 1, 103.

<sup>322</sup> Robertson, William, *Charles V*, Vol. 2, 436.

<sup>323</sup> Ferguson, Adam, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge, 1996), 110, 194.

<sup>324</sup> Smith, Adam, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, eds. R. L. Meek et al. (Indianapolis, IN, 1982), 198, 323.

<sup>325</sup> Giannone, Pietro, *Opere Inedite*, Vol. 2: *La chiesa sotto il Pontificato Gregorio il Grande*, ed. Pasquale Stanislao Mancini (Turin, 1852), 177, 457. Russia does not seem to appear at all in his history of Naples, which is the focus of Pocock's account. Giannone, Pietro, *Dell'Istoria civile del Regno di Napoli libri XL*, 4 Vols. (Naples, 1723).



indicate Russia's broader importance to modern Europe.<sup>326</sup> Russia and the Muscovites play a similar role in Hume's *Political Essays*, where they are treated as peripheral historical actors.<sup>327</sup> Gibbon notably considered Byzantium to be essentially European but, as mentioned above, Russia's part in European modernity was only ancillary to the rest of the continent.<sup>328</sup>

Schlözer's position was also unusual among his German peers. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century Germans expressed a variety of views about Russia, from the profoundly positive to the aggressively negative.<sup>329</sup> Nevertheless, only Schlözer appears to have included it in Europe's long-term passage to modernity. Meiners, as discussed in the previous chapter, considered Slavic peoples to be innately inferior to those of Celtic descent. In 1798 he published a comparative study of modern and pre-modern Russia.<sup>330</sup> While he detailed the Russian peoples' current moral and cultural failings, he did stress the improvement to Russian customs over previous centuries.<sup>331</sup> Meiners was optimistic that, with proper administration and education – and provided that they did not mix with inferior racial groups – even the lowest classes could overcome much of their

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<sup>326</sup> Hume, David, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688*, ed. William B. Todd, 6 Vols. (Indianapolis, IN, 1983), Vol. 3, 463, Vol. 4, 358, 375-6, Vol. 5, 56.

<sup>327</sup> Hume, David, 'Of national characters' & 'Of the original contract', in idem., *Political Essays*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1994), 91, 193, 326.

<sup>328</sup> Pocock, J. G. A., *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 3: *The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge, 2003), 334. Pocock suggests that Gibbon's emphasis on Byzantium was also unusual among contemporaries. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 2, 371.

<sup>329</sup> Kopelew, 'Einleitung', 11-34; Keller, Mechthild, 'Geschichte in Geschichten: Rußland in der literarischen Historienmalerei', in *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht*, Vol. 3, 789-805.

<sup>330</sup> Meiners, Christoph, *Vergleichung des ältern und neuern Rußlandes, in Rücksicht auf die natürlichen Beschaffenheiten der Einwohner, ihrer Cultur, Sitten, Lebensart, und Gebräuche, so wie auf die Verfassung und Verwaltung des Reichs*, 2 Vols. (Leipzig, 1798). See also Meiners, *Untersuchungen über die Menschennaturen*, Vol. 3, 104-105.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 294-295.

current backwardness. This process was necessarily slow, however, leaving the Russia of the eighteenth century outside the fold of Enlightened Europe.

By contrast, Johann Gottfried Herder was deeply sympathetic to the Slavic peoples. Nevertheless, while Russia had experienced much progress since Peter the Great – and may fairly be considered part of Europe – it still lagged behind its western neighbours.<sup>332</sup> In his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, he described all Slavic groups as having fallen into a state of cultural dormancy following the thirteenth-century Mongol invasions.<sup>333</sup> Although he anticipated a complete revival of the Slavs' cultural vitality, this was a prognosis for the future rather than a diagnosis of the present. Moreover, the Slavs had been dormant during Europe's passage to modernity, rather than participants in it.

Eichhorn was also broadly sympathetic to Russia, and his work stressed the achievements of Peter the Great and the efforts of Catherine.<sup>334</sup> However, Catherine's attempt to develop untamed regions largely failed due to the moral-cultural deficiencies of the native populations.<sup>335</sup> The struggle for Russian modernization faced constant setbacks, especially as 'raw and barbarous tribes [*Stämme*]' were continually incorporated into the Empire.<sup>336</sup> To Russia's misfortune 'barbarism, not culture, is infectious'.<sup>337</sup> Moreover, the lack of cohesion across Russia's multi-ethnic geography made the

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<sup>332</sup> On Herder's discussion of Russia, see Keller, Mechthild, "'Politische Seeträume": Herder und Rußland', in idem., *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht*, Vol. 2, 357-395.

<sup>333</sup> Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, Vol. 4, 35-40.

<sup>334</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 4, 44-5, 50-56, 64, 77-78 & 82-96.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. Eichhorn's use of 'culture' as a necessarily positive attribute in this passage is noteworthy, although he does not use it in this way throughout his work.

construction of a unified political culture virtually impossible.<sup>338</sup> This problem also doomed Catherine's legal reforms to failure.<sup>339</sup> Eichhorn's account, while certainly not dismissive of Russia's achievements, or even precluding the possibility of future Europeanization, clearly excludes it from Enlightened modernity. Notably, it considered the Russian Empire *in toto*, whereas Schlözer primarily discussed its Slavic regions. This is an important distinction that ultimately reinforces the point: when they spoke of Russia, they had very different ideas of what it was and how it was connected to Europe.

Indeed, despite having written extensively on Russia earlier in his career, *Russische Annalen* appears to be Schlözer's first published work to emphasize Russia's participation in the Enlightened narrative. *Probe Russischer Annalen* (1768) and *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte* (1771) deal almost exclusively with medieval history, and do not chart Russia's pathway to modernity.<sup>340</sup> His account of Catherine II's early reign focuses almost exclusively on her achievements, noting only that the Empress continued Peter's modernization project.<sup>341</sup> Schlözer's 1777 analysis of Russia's constitution [*Reichsgrundgesetze*] comes closer by analyzing crucial dimensions of the early modern polity.<sup>342</sup> His analysis clearly positions modern Russia as part of Christian Europe, but it does not construct a macronarrative of modernization.<sup>343</sup> This work may

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>340</sup> *Probe Russischer Annalen* is a collection of methodological essays for approaching early Russian history. *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte* is a detailed, often ethnographic study of different peoples and the available historical literature. Schlözer, *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte*; Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Probe Russischer Annalen* (Bremen, 1768).

<sup>341</sup> Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Neuverändertes Rußland, oder Leben Catharina der Zweyten, Kayserinn von Rußland aus authentischen Nachrichten beschrieben*, 2 Vols. (Riga, 1767-1772), Vol. 1, [unpaginated preface].

<sup>342</sup> Schlözer, August Ludwig, *Historische Untersuchung über Rußlands Reichsgrundgesetze* (Gotha, 1777).

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., [unpaginated preface].

reflect a relationship to the Enlightened narrative as a broader intellectual framework, but it is only with *Russische Annalen* that Schlözer offered a complex macronarrative of Russian modernity.

Schlözer's emphasis on Russia was a distinctive feature of his historical thought. In *Russische Annalen* he responded to thinkers like Voltaire by articulating an account stressing Russia's long-term role in European history. Schlözer's use of narrative to highlight the importance of Europe in Russia's own success reflects his polemical commitment to the struggle against Napoleon: by emphasizing Russia's role in European history, Schlözer hoped that Alexander I would commit to ridding Europe of Napoleonic rule. Affirmative accounts of the role of Russia – and especially the Tsar – in Europe would become a major theme in anti-Napoleonic writings.<sup>344</sup> *Russische Annalen* appears to have been among the very earliest of these, with the first two volumes published in 1802. Moreover, Schlözer's work became a staple source in pro-Russian writings of the post-Napoleonic era.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> For example, Angeloni, Luigi, *Sopra l'Ordinamento che aver dovrebbero i governi d'Italia, ragionamento* (Paris, 1814), 28-42; [Görres, Joseph], *Authentische Darstellung der Hauptmomente des Lebens und des Charakters Napoleon Bonaparte's* (n.p., 1814), 23-27; Staël, Germaine de, *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. 15: *Dix années d'exil* (Paris, 1821), 249-251, 310-314, 346-347; [Arndt, Ernst Moritz], *Kurze und wahrhaftige Erzählung von Napoleon Bonapartes verderblichen Anschlägen* (n.p., 1813), 28-29, 49-50, 58, 108. Angeloni, Görres, and Arndt significantly changed their views on Russia across their careers. See Wiegand, Günther, "'Ernst Moritz Arndts nationalistische Vorurteile und Stereotypen' & Kahle, Wilhelm, 'Kirchliche Rußlandbilder. Ein Überblick', in Kopelew (ed.), *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht*, Vol. 3, 473-493 & 864-865; Iermano, Toni, *Il Giacobinismo e il Risorgimento italiano: Luigi Angeloni e la teoria della forza* (Naples, 1983), 28-30; Körner, Axel, *America in Italy: The United States in the Political Thought and Imagination of the Risorgimento, 1763-1865* (Princeton, NJ, 2017), 86-87.

<sup>345</sup> For example, Ségur, Louis-Philippe Comte de, *Histoire de Russie et de Pierre le Grand* (Paris, 1829), 486; Schnitzler, Jean-Henri, *Statistique et itinéraire de la Russie, ou manuel complet du diplomate, du négociant et de tout voyageur en Russie* (Paris, 1829), v, xv, 168, 182, 273, 394, 401; Jordan, J. P. (ed.), *Jahrbücher für slawische Literatur, Kunst, und Wissenschaft*, 7 Vols. (Leipzig, 1843-1849), Vol. 1, 5, Vol. 4, 264, Vol. 5, 181. Joseph Müller (dates unknown) directly expanded on Schlözer's work: Müller, Joseph,

Finally, Schlözer's account stressed Christianity's role in shaping Russia and binding it to the rest of Europe. His work was far less laden with confessional concerns than was Villers', but it made great thematic use of Christianity to reframe Russia as a leading nation of Enlightened Europe. *Russische Annalen* offered not just a Russocentric version of the Enlightened narrative, but an overtly Christian one.

### 3.3. Conclusions

Michael Printy has argued that Villers' *Essai sur la Réformation* went 'beyond' the Enlightened narrative in two key ways.<sup>346</sup> First, he noted the Kantian inflection of Villers' narrative, which emphasized 'moral forces' in historical transformations.<sup>347</sup> Second, the anti-Catholic impulse behind the *Essai* represented a confessionalization of the Enlightened narrative. In Printy's words, Villers' 'sharp attention to the supremacy of Protestantism in creating the conditions for enlightenment heralded the rise of neo-confessional history'.<sup>348</sup> Thus, the *Essai* went beyond 'Enlightenment themes of moderation and recovery of civil society from ecclesiastical tutelage'.<sup>349</sup>

While Printy's article is an important assessment of Villers' *Essai*, I would argue that it was not just Villers who moved beyond the Enlightened narrative. Rather, German historians were effectively compelled to reformulate that narrative in response to the circumstances of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. Reading

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*Altrussische Geschichte nach Nestor, mit Rücksicht auf Schlözers Russische Annalen* (Berlin, 1812), i, 36, 49, 181-185, 198, 204. On Schlözer's importance for Slavic historiography, see Lauer, 'Schlözer und die Grundlegung slavistischer Methodologie', 634-644.

<sup>346</sup> Printy, 'Protestantism and Progress', 325-326.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

Villers' *Essai* alongside the accounts of Meiners, Eichhorn, and Schlözer reveals a shared perception that the crises of the period posed a challenge to earlier accounts of European modernity. Such a comparative reading also reveals the various ways in which that narrative could be reworked and reconfigured in response to contemporary exigencies.

Meiners and Eichhorn – and to a lesser degree Schlözer – also emphasized distinctive 'moral forces' in the shaping of European modernity. Meiners' *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* identifies first the alleged moral failings of early medieval Europe, and then the moral virtues fostered in late medieval and early modern cities. These values characterized a new 'natural' aristocracy uniquely suited to the demands of modern Europe. Similarly, Eichhorn stressed both the generic circumstances of *Mittelstände* and the specific dynamics of the bourgeoisie in stimulating the moral norms necessary for Enlightened progress. Schlözer was arguably less concerned with moral impulses, but his emphasis on the role of Christianity as an ennobling force had clear moral implications. In each account, 'moral forces' played crucial roles in shaping European modernity, despite the distance of these thinkers from overtly Kantian approaches to history. This dimension of Villers' *Essai* therefore appears to echo a broader theme of German thinking about history, and not simply a Kantian one.

Printy's second point suggests, however, a broader issue concerning the historiography of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. It raises a crucial question about the fate of the Enlightened narrative as a norm in historical thought: was it still possible to write accounts of Europe's passage into Enlightened, civil modernity at a time of acute – and seemingly intractable – crisis?

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic period clearly presented challenges to the Enlightened narrative. The fall of the Bourbon monarchy, the ideological forces unleashed by the Revolution, the almost-constant warfare among Europe's leading powers, the crises afflicting the Holy Roman Empire, and then the aftermath of Francis II's abdication – alongside myriad other upheavals – represented violent transformations in European politics unprecedented since at least the War of the Spanish Succession. The end of that war saw the establishment of the principle of a European balance of power, which in turn became an important dimension of the Enlightened narrative.<sup>350</sup> That principle dissipated in the face of Napoleon's conquests. The polarizations of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period meant that earlier, typically more confident accounts needed to be revised. Historians seeking to explain Europe's passage into modernity had to reconcile traditional ideas about the nature of Enlightened Europe with the continent's current predicament.

In this context, it is unsurprising that Meiners' *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* hews more closely to the Enlightened narrative than the works of Eichhorn and Villers. Published at the beginning of the War of the First Coalition and before the execution of Louis XVI, the crisis had not yet spiralled completely out of control. Meiners' assessment of the German aristocracy is certainly harsh, and he expressed serious anxieties about both France and the Holy Roman Empire. Nevertheless, he was also hopeful that his wide-ranging reforms would bring the Empire's aristocratic institutions in line with the values of (bourgeois) Enlightened modernity. It was in this sense

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<sup>350</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 3, 308. The idea of a European balance of power was first expressed by Charles Davenant (1656-1714) in 1701, but became a principle of international relations following the 1713 Peace of Utrecht. See Ghervas, Stella, 'Balance of Power vs. Perpetual Peace: Paradigms of European Order from Utrecht to Vienna, 1713-1815', in *The International History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2017), 404-425; Davenant, Charles, *Essays upon I. the Ballance of Power. II The Right of Making War, Peace, and alliances. III. Universal Monarchy*. (London, 1701).

optimistic. His response to contemporary events was to present a version of the Enlightened narrative that culminated in a range of reforms, rather than to redefine the parameters of European modernity.

By contrast, Eichhorn, writing from 1797 onwards, articulated an account of modernity that excluded France from the rest of Europe's historical trajectory. Although his work does not reveal a clear prescriptive political agenda, it clearly sought to justify the social, cultural, and political role of the German bourgeoisie. Eichhorn's account in this sense mirrors later *Sonderweg* – or 'special path' – theses that explained the rise of National Socialism in terms of the long-term peculiarities of German history.<sup>351</sup> Eichhorn effectively redefined what it meant to be part of European modernity by prioritizing the historical role of a mature *Mittelstand*. France's political culture had supposedly stunted its bourgeoisie and generated fragmented social relations. Consequently, France had not joined the rest of Europe in the project of modernity. Thus, Eichhorn was optimistic about the circumstances of the German lands while issuing a strong indictment of the French *ancien régime*. The exclusion of one of Europe's leading contemporary powers from the Enlightened narrative is in clear tension with Pocock's account of this historiographical norm.

Similarly, Villers' assertion of Protestant superiority in both the emergence of European modernity and current political and intellectual culture amounted, as Printy suggests, to a confessionalization of the Enlightened narrative. Like Eichhorn, Villers constructed a narrative that strongly criticized the values and customs of contemporary France. As a result of these values and

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<sup>351</sup> On the controversy around the *Sonderweg* thesis see in particular Evans, Richard J., *Rereading German History, 1800-1996: From Unification to Reunification* (London, 1997), 12-22.



customs, France was unready for republican governance. The *Essai* was, however, a critique of Catholicism more broadly, and an attempt to understand modern Europe in terms of confessional differences. It thus went further than Eichhorn by questioning the degree to which other Catholic states could be considered Enlightened. Villers presented Protestant political mores in republican terms, but his republicanism was ultimately conservative. Despite his anxieties regarding Napoleon's Concordat with the Pope, when the first two editions of the *Essai* appeared Villers did not oppose Napoleonic rule. France's best hopes, he thought, lay with a strong monarch capable of legislating and enforcing tolerant, progressive, and (implicitly) Protestant principles. Moreover, the telos of perfectibility ensured that any setbacks would in fact prove either temporary or illusory.

Schlözer's account in *Russische Annalen* less overtly reflected Europe's current crises. In this sense it is perhaps closest to the Enlightened narrative as described by Pocock. It is an interesting coincidence that in the first volume's dedication, Schlözer wrote that Russia deserved a history written with the 'taste' of Robertson, the 'impartiality' of Giannone, and the 'grace' of Voltaire – three thinkers identified by Pocock as shaping the Enlightened narrative.<sup>352</sup> Like Giannone's *Istoria civile del Regno di Napoli* and David Hume's *History of England*, *Russische Annalen* is a version of that narrative concerned chiefly with one nation.<sup>353</sup> Schlözer's turn to Russia in the 1800s was precipitated by his anxieties about Europe's future and his hopes that Tsar Alexander I would take a firm stand against Napoleon. Rather than attempting to reconcile the crises of contemporary Europe with broader notions of Enlightenment, however, Schlözer emphasized Russia's participation in Enlightened modernity. This variation of the Enlightened narrative was as much a product of contemporary political pressures as the works of Eichhorn and Villers.

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<sup>352</sup> Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 1, [unpaginated preface].

<sup>353</sup> Pocock, *Babarism and Religion*, Vol. 2, 29-71, 163-257.

If these works extend beyond the remit of the Enlightened narrative, then it seems likely that the early years of the French Revolution mark the chronological limit at which that narrative could be considered a historiographical norm. Accounts adhering more strictly to Pocock's criteria may have been written past this point, but they were almost certainly far less common. While it is important not to conflate the Enlightened narrative with Dan Edelstein's 'master narrative' of Enlightenment, the reformulation of attitudes to the evolution of European modernity reflects major transformations in how contemporaries thought about Enlightenment. Emergence from past darkness had to be reconciled with present dusk. The accounts of Meiners, Eichhorn, Villers, and Schlözer demonstrate significant continuities with the Enlightened narrative, and each figure should be considered an Enlightenment author more broadly. However, their various attempts to reformulate that narrative indicate that Enlightenment itself appeared embattled.

## Conclusions

This thesis has examined how German historical works were used to intervene in key political debates in the period between the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 and the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. In particular, it has focused on the use of ideas about ethics and culture in constructing political arguments. Using approaches informed by both the so-called Cambridge School and *Begriffsgeschichte*, it has investigated the different ways that thinkers understood and utilized concepts such as ethics, natural law, race, and European modernity across a range of political debates. It has also emphasized crucial points of continuity in the use of certain argumentative norms, even as the exigencies of the period encouraged important discursive innovations. It is conducive to think of these continuities and transformations in terms of J. G. A. Pocock's notion of political languages: the emergence of new languages did not entail discontinuity with older ones. Rather, German thinkers employed newer idioms alongside, and often overlapping with, older ones in order to respond to contemporary circumstances.

The first chapter showed that German thinkers continued to employ what T. J. Hochstrasser has described as 'histories of morality' beyond the rise of the Critical Philosophy. While such histories were not eclipsed by the rise of Kant's philosophy and its successors, they did become inflected with new conceptualizations of culture and, especially, the role of moral thought in cultural change. This lent urgency to their ethical arguments during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, when both philosophical truth and broader cultural norms appeared to be at stake. By focusing primarily on histories of philosophy by Meiners, Villers, and Eichhorn, this chapter sought to broaden the scope of texts commonly associated with the

*Atheismusstreit* and other debates around the Critical Philosophy. It revealed the role of historical texts in responding to these debates, as well as the profound cultural and political concerns that such works expressed. Moreover, this chapter indicated Schlözer's self-conscious distance from – even rejection of – debates about metaphysics and ethics.

The second chapter emphasized the ways that arguments derived from natural law could be used to complement novel notions of cultural difference and cultural change. It also approached the reception of Meiners' racial thought among contemporary historians. Despite widespread criticism of Meiners' hierarchical racial theories, both Villers and Eichhorn adopted key typological concepts in ways that suggest a broader currency of these ideas among historians. Nevertheless, while Villers, Eichhorn, and Schlözer each rejected many of Meiners' ideas, this rejection did not entail radical positions in key political debates around slavery, imperialism, or Jewish emancipation. The third chapter analyzed a range of works using Pocock's framework of the 'Enlightened narrative'. While authors of historical works continued to employ crucial features of this narrative during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, they also reformulated it. These different reformulations reflected the need to reconcile contemporary crises with a broader narrative of European triumph. Across the variety of texts and debates discussed in this thesis, thinkers consistently emphasized the central role of ethics in historical change: arguments frequently rested on the perception of certain moral norms as facets of culture with major political implications.

While Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers were selected primarily for the insights that their work offers regarding German thought in this period, they are also important subjects of study in their own rights. The first section of this concluding discussion

highlights the key ways in which I hope to have contributed to scholarship on these figures. This project has also analyzed works across a range of genres not normally considered in discussions of contemporary political thought such as textbooks, academic primers, and reference works. The following section therefore discusses the role of such genres in late Enlightenment Germany and in this thesis. The final section approaches the broader theme, or problem, of Enlightenment. Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers were each committed to this concept, even as they offered very different accounts of what Enlightenment meant. This discussion concludes by approaching these authors' accounts using Dan Edelstein's definition of the Enlightenment as a 'master narrative', while reflecting on their relationships to the novel intellectual currents of the early nineteenth century.

#### 4.1. Protagonists: Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers

Each protagonist of this thesis was a major figure in the German Enlightenment and the subject of a growing body of modern scholarship. In the cases of Meiners and Eichhorn, I have focused on texts that have received little scholarly attention. With Villers and Schlözer, I have sought to re-contextualize key works within a range of important debates and discursive trends. Moreover, approaching these figures comparatively has revealed important insights into their thought and intellectual relationships.

Christoph Meiners was an anti-egalitarian thinker, whose work consistently prioritized the role of moral norms and practices in the expression and identification of natural inequalities. His discussion of natural law provided a normative and meta-ethical conception of justice that cohered with his empiricist ethics, his racial theory, and his defence of the bourgeoisie. Meiners' critique of the aristocracy complicates previous accounts of him as a

straightforwardly 'reactionary' or 'conservative' political thinker. Without discounting or otherwise mitigating the reactionary nature of his racial thought, Meiners is much harder to situate than such designations suggest. Indeed, in the 1790s and early nineteenth century, his *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* appears to have had a much greater impact and positive reception than his works on race. Nevertheless, while the 1792 *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* is Meiners' most radical work, it does not reflect a distinct 'radical' phase of his career. The following year Meiners published the second edition of his *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit*, in which he accentuated his racial hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> In 1793 he also began publishing *Historische Vergleichung*, which – although not repudiating *Geschichte der Ungleichheit* – emphasized the general importance of gradual reform.<sup>2</sup> Rather than representing a clear shift in his political thought, Meiners appears to have simultaneously offered a reactionary racial theory, a radical critique of the aristocracy, and a conservative approach to broader political reform.

By strongly emphasizing ethno-cultural hierarchies while sharply criticizing the aristocracy, Meiners' thought resembles the nationalist writings of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769-1860), and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852) more closely than it does the aristocratic political thought of later racial theorists like Egon von Eickstedt and Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann.<sup>3</sup> Like Arndt,

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<sup>1</sup> Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen*, 165-170.

<sup>2</sup> Meiners, *Ueber wahre Aufklärung*, 57-63, 115-117. *Ueber wahre Aufklärung* is an extract of the third volume of *Historische Vergleichung*. Both were published in 1794, but Meiners claimed these passages were completed in 1793. Meiners, *Historische Vergleichung*, Vol. 3, iii.

<sup>3</sup> On Mühlmann see Klingemann, Carsten, *Soziologie und Politik: Sozialwissenschaftliches Expertenwissen im Dritten Reich und in der frühen westdeutschen Nachkriegszeit* (Wiesbaden, 2009), 363-373. On Eickstedt see Gutberger, Hansjörg, *Bevölkerung, Ungleichheit, Auslese: Perspektiven sozialwissenschaftlicher Bevölkerungsforschung in Deutschland zwischen 1930 und 1960* (Wiesbaden, 2006), 153-155. Whereas one might expect Arthur de Gobineau to feature in this list, Steven Kale has convincingly shown that Gobineau, like Meiners, lamented the unsuitability of the

Jahn, and Fichte, Meiners' work combined strongly exclusionary attitudes towards supposedly non-Germanic groups with a critique of contemporary aristocratic norms.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Meiners did not straightforwardly prefigure the thought of Arndt, Jahn, and Fichte, who conceptualized the German *Volk* in terms of popular culture and traditions. In the work of Arndt and Jahn in particular, this *völkisch* culture was contrasted with the supposedly avaricious, elitist, and ultimately vacuous values of the bourgeoisie.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Meiners was a consistent advocate of self-consciously Enlightened bourgeois norms and behaviours. He advocated a revitalized, limited aristocracy, and was fundamentally anti-populist and anti-democratic. He did not reflect, let alone advocate, the Franco-German antagonism that characterized Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, while both Meiners and these nationalists considered different peoples in terms of distinct cultural characteristics, in Meiners' work these characteristics were explicitly bound to heritable traits. This biological dimension is central to Meiners' cultural thinking, whereas Arndt, Jahn and Fichte emphasized other, primarily non-biological sources of difference.<sup>7</sup> It is precisely in his emphasis on biology that Meiners' ideas appear to resemble later 'scientific' racial theories: he was explicit that racial

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contemporary aristocracy. Kale, Steven, 'Gobineau, Racism, and Legitimism: A Royalist Heretic in Nineteenth-Century France', in *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2010), 33-61.

<sup>4</sup> See, Klaus von, *Freiheit und Gemeinschaft: völkisch-nationales Denken in Deutschland* (Heidelberg, 2001), 18-25.

<sup>5</sup> Arndt, Ernst Moritz, *Ansichten und Aussichten der Teutschen Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1814), 463; Jahn, Friedrich Ludwig, *Deutsches Volksthum* (1st edn. Leipzig, 1810), 67, 77. Although presented as the first volume, Arndt did not publish any further volumes of *Ansichten und Aussichten*.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Arndt, Ernst Moritz, *Ueber Volkshaß und über den Gebrauch einer fremden Sprache* (Leipzig, 1813).

<sup>7</sup> Vick, Brian, 'The Origins of the German Volk: Cultural Purity and National Identity in Nineteenth Century Germany', in *German Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 2003), 241-256.

characteristics reflected heritable biological realities with profound moral and socio-political implications.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the degree to which Meiners' synthesis of ethno-cultural inequality and anti-aristocratic sentiment anticipates later populist-xenophobic German nationalism is severely limited. Notably, whereas Meiners became a staple source for other critics of the aristocracy, nineteenth-century nationalists do not appear to have cited his work. While he may be considered a transitional thinker in the history of political thought, Meiners' work resists easy categorization. He was not a nationalist, but rather an exemplary case of an Enlightenment thinker whose thought challenges later expectations of particular ideological 'packages'.

Conversely, by focusing on Charles de Villers' German intellectual contexts, this thesis has revealed his antagonistic relationship to Christoph Meiners. In thinking about the relationship between nature and cultural difference, Villers occupied a position sharply opposed to claims that cultural inequalities originated in heritable characteristics. Approaching his thought in this way also reveals a range of other important insights. The tone and rhetoric of *Philosophie de Kant* can be better understood by reading it in relation to the turbulent disputes around the *Atheismusstreit*. Similarly, Villers' move beyond the Enlightened narrative in the *Essai sur l'esprit et l'influence de la Réformation de Luther* reflected broader tensions in contemporary German thinking about Enlightened modernity. Villers was not only a French thinker transmitting German ideas to Francophone readers, but also an author who responded to the philosophical and political debates within both national contexts. Goethe's description of Villers as 'Janus Bifrons' remains a valuable observation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 250. It is noteworthy that biological accounts of race were uncommon among German intellectuals before the 1880s. Mosse, George L., *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (2nd edn. New York, NY, 1981), 89-99.

<sup>9</sup> Villers, 'Villers an Goethe', 118.



Taking the side of Kant and his intellectual heirs, Villers' thought was clearly part of the German philosophical *avant-garde*. Villers engaged with – and greatly admired – Fichte. He appears to have read and engaged with both Reinhold and Schelling. Villers' friendship with Jacobi is well documented, and he repeatedly championed the latter's work. As discussed later in this concluding discussion, Villers also engaged with important Romantic thinkers and ideas. Perhaps most importantly, his *Essai sur la Réformation* had a lasting impact on German thinking about Protestantism. While Villers did not develop an original philosophical system, he should be recognized as an important participant in the transformations in contemporary German thought.

Yet, unlike Fichte and the early Romantics, Villers was not a political radical. His political thought has long been a source of contention. In particular, scholars have debated the relationship between Villers' Germanophile critique of French thought and the bellicose nationalism of thinkers like Arndt and Fichte. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French commentators typically reviled Villers, while German nationalists praised him. The historian Wilhelm von Bippen (1844-1923) – whose essay revived interest in Villers in the late nineteenth century – praised Villers' critique of 'the monstrosities of French madness', while the pioneer of comparative literature Fernand Baldensperger (1871-1958) described Villers as having put himself 'in the service of the German menace'.<sup>10</sup> Such claims reflect the political concerns of their authors rather than Villers' actual ideas. Despite his deeply critical analysis of French culture and his celebration of Napoleon's defeat, there is no

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<sup>10</sup> Bippen, 'Charles von Villers', 288; Baldensperger, Fernand, *Le mouvement des idées dans l'émigration française (1789-1815)*, Vol. 2: "Prophètes du passé" – *theories de l'avenir* (Paris, 1924), 263-264. On this politicized reception see Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', 14-19.

evidence that Villers favoured either German revanchism or hostile policies towards France following the Treaty of Paris in 1814.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, scholars like Monique Bernard have perhaps overstated Villers' credentials as a liberal, or even radical, thinker whose ideas prefigure present-day values.<sup>12</sup> Although not unusual or particularly 'reactionary' by contemporary standards, his deep hostility towards Catholicism – including his suggestion that Protestantism could 'civilize' Ireland – cannot readily be reconciled with twenty-first century notions of religious tolerance.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, he saw European imperialism as a vehicle for the dissemination of Enlightenment. Villers was essentially satisfied with the German *ancien régime*, and argued that major French reforms should come only in the wake of protracted cultural change. As Villers' republicanism did not entail republican institutions, it was, in practice, conservative.<sup>14</sup> He was, like most of his German contemporaries, neither an aggressive nationalist nor a liberal radical, but rather a broadly conservative Enlightenment thinker. Moreover, Villers' work deserves scholarly attention for its historical importance, not for the degree to which it may or may not prefigure later liberal or nationalist principles.

Eichhorn has been subject to much less scholarship than Meiners and Villers and, understandably, discussions of his thought have tended to focus on his methodological innovations in Biblical hermeneutics. By contrast, this thesis has emphasized the politicized nature of his historical work. Far from remaining aloof from political controversies, Eichhorn was an active participant in a range of major debates, even as he typically avoided clear policy prescriptions. While

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<sup>11</sup> Villers did not live to see Napoleon's 'Hundred Days', or the more punitive 1815 Treaty of Paris.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', 325, 329-330.

<sup>13</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 3rd edn., xix-xx.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bernard, 'Charles de Villers', 325.

his thought was, broadly speaking, more prone to historicizing facets of human experience than that of Schlözer, Meiners, and Villers, this historicism had clear limits. Eichhorn remained committed to the value of pursuing ahistorical ethical, political, and anthropological truths, even as he was much more cautious about claiming to have found them. He was, moreover, an outspoken proponent of both the bourgeoisie (and other *Mittelstände*) and the Enlightenment.

In the second edition of his *Litterärsgeschichte*, Eichhorn adhered closely to Villers' account of the Reformation.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Villers' *Essai* is Eichhorn's main source in these passages. This is important for two reasons. First, this example suggests a bilateral intellectual relationship between the pair. Eichhorn's *Geschichte der drey letzten Jahrhunderte* provided much of the data – but not the meta-narrative – for Villers' *Essai*.<sup>16</sup> The incorporation of Villers' thought into Eichhorn's later work suggests a significant reciprocity to their relationship. Second, and perhaps most importantly, Eichhorn's use of Villers indicates the limits of his own methodological thoroughness. Villers' *Essai* was a philosophical history using Kantian ideas to construct a teleological meta-narrative of post-Reformation Europe. This observation suggests the need for caution when describing Eichhorn's rigour.<sup>17</sup> As in his accounts of non-European peoples, there are clear tensions between Eichhorn's professed methodological principles and the ways that modern historians would interpret them.

Like Villers, Eichhorn may also broadly be described as a conservative political thinker. His history of Europe was largely an affirmative, albeit defensive, endorsement of the bourgeoisie and 'progressive' Enlightenment practices such as toleration, press

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<sup>15</sup> Eichhorn, *Litterärsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, 10-13, 33-41.

<sup>16</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 1st edn., vii.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 39-40, 102, 187.

freedoms, and commerce. While Eichhorn did not offer significant political prescriptions for modern European states, he was deeply critical of Europe's treatment of Asian peoples – even as he did not reject imperialism more broadly. He opposed slavery in principle, but claimed that slaves should only be freed once they had been suitably prepared for liberty. Eichhorn's comments on non-European peoples frequently reflected contemporary stereotypes and the uncritical use of sources.

If Eichhorn has been subject to relatively little scholarly analysis, the same cannot be said of Schlözer. In this thesis I have sought to re-examine some of Schlözer's most important works. Espenhorst has interpreted Schlözer's later works, and especially *Russische Annalen*, as a negative response to the Critical Philosophy, Idealism, and Romanticism.<sup>18</sup> The first chapter of this thesis argued that Schlözer's critique is much broader, and that he does not target these currents in particular. Indeed, as well as having a productive intellectual relationship with Charles de Villers, Schlözer made use of the Kantian work of Gottlieb Hufeland (1760-1817).<sup>19</sup> Rather than criticizing particular philosophical currents, Schlözer's emphasis on the centrality of political action and historical change led him to criticize fields that he considered to be unnecessary, including ethics and the history of philosophy.

Similarly, in his account of human nature and cultural difference Schlözer, like Villers, was an opponent of Christoph Meiners. While Schlözer did not see human beings as naturally equal in attributes, he maintained that they must be considered equal for the purposes of comprehending and justifying the state. This argument went beyond Samuel von Pufendorf's: Schlözer opposed

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<sup>18</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 423, 430, 438.

<sup>19</sup> Schlözer, *Theorie der Statistik*. iii-iv, 94. Schlözer cites Hufeland, Gottlieb, *Versuch über den Grundsatz des Naturrechts* (Leipzig, 1785). On Hufeland's thought in relation to Kant's, see Maliks *Kant's Politics*, 17, 33-36.

slavery, and did not argue that certain natural inequalities were tied to specific ethnic groups. Equally, *Russische Annalen* was both a pioneering source-critical contribution to the study of Slavic history and a version of the Enlightened narrative that emphasized the roles of Byzantium and Russia in European history. Schlözer appears to have hoped that this narrative would encourage Tsar Alexander I to declare war on Napoleon.

Finally, both Schlözer and Eichhorn stressed the notions of unity and *Verbindungen* as crucial elements in the success of human groups. These concepts were linked to the broader methodological impulses of pragmatic history. Schlözer and Eichhorn emphasized both 'material' factors – such as diplomatic missions, commerce, transportation networks, and new technologies – and 'metaphysical' factors such as morals, inclinations, and language. However, Schlözer placed greater emphasis on the former category, while Eichhorn stressed the latter. In *Russische Annalen*, Schlözer prioritized Russia's diplomatic and commercial relationships with the rest of Europe, as well as the transmission of technologies like gunpowder and printing. By contrast, Eichhorn's account of Europe emphasized the role of *Mittelstände* in stimulating moral norms and customs capable of binding polities intellectually and culturally. This difference may reflect Eichhorn's greater interest in the study of ethical and metaphysical philosophy. It may also attest to his more positive relationship with the work of Johann Gottfried Herder and the latter's notion of *Geist*.<sup>20</sup> Regardless, their differences underline the fact that, while Eichhorn may fairly be described as one of Schlözer's chief

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<sup>20</sup> Whereas Herder's two-volume *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie* (1st edn. Dessau, 1782-1783) appears to have influenced Eichhorn's work on the Bible, Schlözer had an important dispute with Herder regarding the nature of historical research. Fulda, *Wissenschaft aus Kunst*, 191-227; Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 189-192; d'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 103-114.

successors, he also adapted and developed Schlözer's ideas in distinctive ways.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.2. Specialist Genres in late Enlightenment German Political Thought

This thesis has also emphasized the use of political arguments in scholarly genres such as handbooks, textbooks, and introductory texts. While often neglected, these works played a prominent role in the political debates of the German Enlightenment. Most of the publications examined in this thesis were written with the expectation that they would be used chiefly by scholars and students, or as reference works. While it would be anachronistic to superimpose strict notions of academic and non-academic writing on this material, these texts were clearly composed with particular audiences in mind.

This was typical of contemporary historical thought in the German lands. László Kontler has shown that, whereas British historical works were commonly written as 'literary' texts for popular consumption, the source-critical emphasis of German historical thought encouraged the production of more rigorous, less broadly accessible texts.<sup>22</sup> Eighteenth-century Francophone historiography appears to have resembled Britain more than Germany. Writers like Montesquieu and Voltaire produced literary works for broad audiences, and German commentators often criticized their lack of rigour.<sup>23</sup> Historical thought played a profound

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<sup>21</sup> Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenments*, 35-36.

<sup>23</sup> Vierhaus, Rudolf, 'Montesquieu in Deutschland: Zur Geschichte seiner Wirkung als politischer Schriftsteller im 18. Jahrhundert', in Böckenförde, Ernst-Wolfgang et al. (eds.), *Collegium Philosophicum: Studien Joachim Ritter zum 60. Geburtstag* (Basel, 1965), 415-416; Knabe, Peter-Eckhard, 'L'Accueil fait à Voltaire par les Göttingischen Gelehrten Anzeigen (1739-1779)', in Brockmeier, Peter et al. (eds.), *Voltaire und Deutschland: Quellen und*

role in the broader intellectual culture of the German Enlightenment, but there were few bestsellers comparable to Robertson's *History of the Reign of Emperor Charles V* or Hume's *History of England*.<sup>24</sup> For the most part, the works of Meiners, Eichhorn, and Schlözer appear to have been widely read by readers interested in a range of fields. Nevertheless, they were also texts primarily oriented towards particular audiences.

Importantly, however, the specialist writings discussed in this thesis also interacted with more popular works. They are thus exemplary cases of texts operating beyond present-day notions of a boundary between the academic and the popular. The difference between specialist and non-specialist writings is better understood as a spectrum than a binary. Works could compete for a range of audiences, even as they addressed themselves primarily to one or another particular group.

Perhaps most notably, Christoph Meiners' infamous *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* was produced as an introductory work for those interested in the emerging field of the 'history of humanity'. Despite the polemical nature of much of its contents, the *Grundriß* is essentially a compendium of statements and references for students and scholars. Crucially, moreover, Meiners saw his work as not only operating within the nascent field, but in fact establishing its main aims, themes, methods, and parameters. Similarly, his history of ethics and its accompanying textbook were written with students in mind, even as they were directed explicitly against Kant and Fichte in the context of the *Atheismusstreit*. Indeed, Meiners responded to what he perceived to be the domination of abstract, obscurantist rationalism in Germany by recommending the supposedly more

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*Untersuchungen zur Rezeption der Französischen Aufklärung* (Stuttgart, 1979), 343-355.

<sup>24</sup> Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenments*, 36.

refined works of British ethicists and historians.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Meiners used a scholarly format as a vehicle for his engagement with (and recommendation of) more accessible, even literary publications. These were positioned *against* what he saw as unnecessarily (and indeed dangerously) abstract and inaccessible ideas dominant in German ethical thought. In this sense, he was an exemplary advocate of 'philosophy for the world', the motto associated with *Popularphilosophie*.<sup>26</sup> Meiners positioned his works as contributions to specialist academic scholarship while simultaneously seeking to subvert and challenge perceived scholarly norms.

Eichhorn's works discussed in this thesis were each presented as a handbook, encyclopaedic study, or other reference text. Even his account of the French Revolution was introduced as a chronological compilation of known facts for use by historians and commentators.<sup>27</sup> While these were written with academic readers in mind, Eichhorn expected them to be used by the broader reading public.<sup>28</sup> His project played an important role in German debates over encyclopaedic writing, and he published interventions concerning the purpose, structure, and organizing principles of such works.<sup>29</sup> Despite its own limits, his critique of the imposition of philosophical ideas on historical accounts was, of course, a call for scholarly rigour – and indeed caution – against more common, less rigorous accounts of the past. These writings were not simply compendia of established facts, but accounts that sought to synthesize, incorporate, and respond to contemporary debates.

Whereas Meiners and Eichhorn are known primarily as academic figures, Schlözer is more commonly recognized as having

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<sup>25</sup> Meiners, *Geschichte der Ethik*, Vol. 1, 276.

<sup>26</sup> See Böhr, *Philosophie für die Welt*, passim.

<sup>27</sup> Eichhorn, *Französische Revolution*, Vol. 1, iii-iv.

<sup>28</sup> Eichhorn, *Drey letzten Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 1, iii.

<sup>29</sup> D'Alessandro, *L'Illuminismo Dimenticato*, 267-268.



straddled the more specialist realm of academic thought and the broader public sphere. Many of his writings were clearly written as specialist texts: *Allgemeines StatsRecht* and *Theorie der Statistik* were introductory texts for those interested in the methods and principles of contemporary political science [*Wissenschaft*]. Much of *Russische Annalen* was a technical analysis of the *Primary Chronicle* with professional Slavacists and philologists in mind.<sup>30</sup> Schlözer himself presented *Russische Annalen* as a rigorous, source-critical response to more fanciful – and popular – accounts of Russian history.<sup>31</sup>

Villers, by contrast, wrote no handbooks, textbooks, or primers. Both *De la liberté* and the *Essai* were written as popular works for non-specialist audiences, as were most of his other writings. He did produce a report on German historical writing for the Institut de France, as well as an overview of German universities with educationalists in mind. These are, however, introductions to specific themes within German intellectual life for external Francophone readers.<sup>32</sup> They were summaries of particular topics rather than direct engagements with them. Equally, while Villers' introduction to the Critical Philosophy was written with France's intellectual elite in mind, it was not presented as a scholarly resource. Despite his close engagement with German debates, his work appears to have conformed more to the popular, even literary norms of French philosophy and history-writing than to the specialist norms of Germany.

Indeed, Villers' work exemplifies the interactions possible between specialist and non-specialist works. Both the *Philosophie de Kant* and the *Essai* sought to distil and disseminate key ideas from

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<sup>30</sup> On the demanding nature of the work, see Peters, *Altes Reich and Europa*, 419.

<sup>31</sup> Schlözer, *Russische Annalen*, Vol. 1, 103.

<sup>32</sup> Villers, *Coup-d'oeil sur la littérature ancienne et de l'histoire*; Villers, *Coup-d'oeil sur les universités*.

German philosophical, theological, and historical scholarship in accessible forms. His intellectual relationships with Schlözer and Eichhorn – as well as the *Essai*'s reception by later German authors – exemplify the reciprocal relationships that existed between specialist and more popular works. Villers did not simply absorb and repackage German specialist literature, but ultimately contributed to it. In this sense, his work is a particularly salient reminder of the porous boundaries between such genres in the eighteenth century. Villers' work indicates how ideas produced in specialist scholarly formats could be reformulated in popular form and then re-appropriated by later scholars. As such, he is an exemplary figure for understanding the nuances of intellectual exchange in the late Enlightenment. Villers' work reveals important insights about cultural transmission: texts and ideas were transformed in their transmission from one cultural context to another, but the results of such efforts could also impact the cultures whose ideas they were intended to transmit.<sup>33</sup>

Building on the work of Hans Erich Bödeker, this project has aimed to suggest key ways in which such specialist and reference works were employed to intervene in contemporary political debates.<sup>34</sup> In his account of the 'science of culture' in Germany between the Seven Years' War and the French Revolution, Michael Carhart notes that the objects of his study were the works of 'dusty-dry pedants'.<sup>35</sup> In these publications, Carhart argues, political concerns were usually marginal.<sup>36</sup> This thesis has shown that, 'pedantic' as many of the authors may have remained, during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period political concerns played a much more central role in such works.

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<sup>33</sup> On the transformation of ideas through cultural transfer, see Espagne & Werner, 'Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer', 502-510.

<sup>34</sup> Bödeker, 'Von der "Magd der Theologie" zur "Leitwissenschaft"', 52.

<sup>35</sup> Carhart, *Science of Culture*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

### 4.3. The Enlightenment: Master Narratives, Continuities, and Transformations

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis builds on Dan Edelstein's description of the Enlightenment as 'a "master narrative" of modernity, even a myth'. This narrative expressed its participants' self-consciousness of having overcome the long period of darkness that had engulfed Europe following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire *and* of having surpassed the achievements of the ancient world.<sup>37</sup> Edelstein's work focused primarily on pre-Revolutionary French figures. The variations on this master narrative in the works of Schlözer, Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers differ in key ways from those described by Edelstein. The debates with which these figures engaged were by no means exclusively German, but they did represent problems with particular currency in the German lands. Equally, while these debates had long pre-Revolutionary pedigrees, they were often moulded by the crises of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. In addition, these authors' accounts frequently prefigured crucial themes and ideas that emerged in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. Therefore, postulating a clear terminus for the Enlightenment is impractical: as shown in the previous chapters, new concepts and modes of argumentation often demonstrated strong continuities with earlier ideas. Novel currents like Romanticism, post-Napoleonic nationalism, liberalism, and even Hegelianism had strong, identifiable roots in Enlightenment thought.

Perhaps most notably, Meiners' emphasis on heritable racial inequalities prefigured key ideas associated with scientific racism. His racial thought was inextricable from his empiricist epistemology, and his 'master narrative' of Enlightenment was primarily one of

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<sup>37</sup> Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, 116-117.

European liberation from the superstitions of earlier ages.<sup>38</sup> These superstitions, he argued, rested on the elaboration of unverifiable claims about the nature of the world. In his history of ethics such claims were presented as analogous to modern rationalism. In terms of intellectual culture, this meant the consolidation of empiricist methods, as well as the collation and synthesis of documentary evidence about the world at large. These processes had been made possible by the intellectual innovations of the late seventeenth century. Enlightenment enabled an ordered, systematized understanding of the universe through verifiable facts. Ethnological analysis was thus an expression of Enlightened Europe's intellectual mastery of the world. Meiners' hierarchical conception of humanity was a product of the self-affirmation of this process: European political and economic supremacy was a clear reflection of European intellectual superiority. Much work remains to be done to chart Meiners' reception during the nineteenth century and the degree to which his ideas impacted later currents such as scientific racism. His work nevertheless clearly reflects a transitional moment in the emergence of nineteenth-century ethnological thought, as his positive reception by the *Société des observateurs de l'homme* suggests. Distinctive as it is, however, his account of racial difference was embedded in the narrative and discursive norms of the Enlightenment. It is, moreover, wholly compatible with his more radical, bourgeois variation of the Enlightened narrative.

Just as Meiners was a crucial figure in the emergence of nineteenth-century ethnology, Eichhorn's work on the Bible played a key role in the emergence of nineteenth-century hermeneutics. As a political thinker, Eichhorn, like Herder, sought to establish a way of thinking about the world that could adequately reconcile universality

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<sup>38</sup> On superstition see Meiners, *Ueber wahre Aufklärung*, 5-8.

and historical particularity.<sup>39</sup> Eichhorn also shared Herder's resistance to strict relativism and remained committed to certain universal values. Eichhorn's 'master narrative' was oriented around the emergence of a 'moral world-union' and the cultural advances made possible following the Lutheran Reformation. However, knowledge only became properly scientific following the work of Bacon. It was the emergence of systematic approaches to the investigation, analysis, and ordering of information in the seventeenth century that heralded the dawn of Enlightenment. Enlightenment meant the emergence of a modern Europe that was inextricably bound to the concerns of the rest of the world, but also one that ordered knowledge in a rigorous, systematic manner.

Villers' version of this master narrative was one of intellectual liberation made possible by the historical contingencies of north German culture set in motion by the Reformation and epitomized by contemporary Germany's philosophical *avant-garde*. Villers placed less emphasis on the specific scientific advances of the seventeenth century than Eichhorn and Meiners. In this sense he departed most clearly from the master narrative described by Edelstein, even as his emphasis on the elaboration of rationalism reflects a similar narrative arc. Crucially, for Villers, Enlightenment is both Protestant and rationalist.

Moreover, Villers is an exemplary case of a figure whose thought complicates sharp distinctions between Enlightenment and Romanticism. His later discussions of the importance of language and literature in shaping the values and customs of national groups were probably formed in dialogue with Romantics like the Schlegel brothers. Villers notably recommended that Francophone readers

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<sup>39</sup> Sikka, *Herder: Enlightened Relativism*, passim. For a more recent, philosophically critical assessment of Herder's attempts to balance relativism with universalism, see Forster, Michael N., *Herder's Philosophy* (Oxford, 2018), 218-220.

rediscover their medieval literary heritage, and especially the works of 'those singers, once called prophets, seers, bards, as well as troubadours, singers of love [*chantres d'amour*], etc.'<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, unlike key Romantic authors, Villers did not come to see the Middle Ages as a period of exemplary moral or spiritual unity. In fact, he became increasingly critical of Catholicism in the same years that Romantics like Adam Müller and Friedrich Schlegel converted. Villers remained committed to a deeply Protestant defence of Enlightenment: the darkness out of which modern Europe had emerged was fundamentally Catholic.

Most importantly, however, returning to medieval literature was not a method by which France could – in Azade Seyhan's words – 'heal the breach in modern consciousness', but rather a way to circumvent the artificiality and materialism of French Classicism.<sup>41</sup> The rediscovery of more authentic, spiritual, and indeed Germanic forms of French literature would serve to steer France towards the rationalist moral-cultural norms of Protestant Germany. In this respect, Villers' work is similar to Friedrich Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795), which also proposed the use of aesthetic means to reach Enlightened, republican ethical and political goals.<sup>42</sup> Villers did not discuss Schiller's philosophy in depth, but he does describe Schiller suggestively as 'the most remarkable' of Kant's 'aesthetic school'.<sup>43</sup> Villers was, like Schiller, an Enlightenment thinker whose arguments demonstrate clear affinities with Romantic thought without being part of Romanticism proper.

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<sup>40</sup> Villers, 'Lettre de Villers à M. Millin', 5-8.

<sup>41</sup> Seyhan, 'What is Romanticism?', 14.

<sup>42</sup> Schiller, Friedrich, 'Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen', in *Nationalausgabe der Werke Schillers*, Vol. 20, 309-412. On this work, see Beiser, Frederick C., *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford 2005), 119-168.

<sup>43</sup> Villers, *Essai sur la Réformation*, 3rd edn., 267.

It is now recognized that Schlözer made major contributions to ethnology, political science, source-critical historiography, linguistics, and, especially, the study of Slavic peoples. These contributions had a lasting impact on European thought, and provided an important background for the writings of Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers. However, Schlözer's account of Enlightenment was distinctive. In his thought, Enlightenment was characterized by the transformation of politics into a practical science that could analyze and improve the functions, practices, and institutions of the state. This development had in turn been made possible by the rapid transformations in technology, bureaucracy, diplomacy, and communication since the late fifteenth century. Moreover, it was a fundamentally Christian process. Schlözer's version of the master narrative was, thus, one of Enlightened, political-scientific triumph in which Europe could be understood as having largely overcome dysfunctional political institutions and ideas. With the growth of the press during the eighteenth century such advances had, for the most part at least, bound (Christian) Europe together into a cultural whole capable of sharing political innovations.<sup>44</sup> Russia was a key participant in this process.

Despite their differences, the Enlightenment master narratives of these authors broadly conform to Edelstein's emphasis on the reception of seventeenth-century innovations as uniquely transformative. In addition, they shared a broad emphasis on the value of Protestantism in creating the possible conditions for Enlightenment, as well as an affirmative assessment of the significance of historical study. They saw the fruits of Enlightenment in terms of religious toleration, broad press freedoms, and flourishing commerce. These various dimensions of modern Europe reflected the cultural prevalence of specific moral ideas and practices. Schlözer,

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<sup>44</sup> Schlözer, *Allgemeines StatsRecht*, 191-195.

Meiners, Eichhorn, and Villers all emphasized the indispensability of ethics for understanding history, contemporary politics, and human difference. Each offered innovative perspectives on the study of humanity that nevertheless demonstrated significant continuities with older modes of reasoning. Despite their methodological, philosophical, and political differences, however, their works reflect the centrality of ethical, cultural, and historical ideas in German political thought of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period.



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<sup>1</sup> 'Nestor' has been transliterated from the Cyrillic script used by Schlözer.

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