# Kant's Rejection of Stoic Eudaimonism
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**Abstract:** This chapter situates Kant's rejection of Stoic eudaimonism within his overarching anti-eudaimonist agenda. I begin by emphasizing the importance of the Stoic tradition for Kant's critical reception of ancient ethical theory. I then reconstruct the central commitments of ancient Stoic eudaimonism and of Christian Garve's quasi-Stoic eudaimonism. Turning to Kant's anti-Stoic argument in the Dialectic of the Second *Critique*, I argue that the primary target of Kant's error of subreption (*vitium subreptionis*) is the Stoic Seneca, specifically his account of joy (*gaudium*) as an accompaniment of one's consciousness of virtuous activity. After reconstructing Kant's argument in detail, I offer a new way to understand its anti-eudaimonist implications: practical illusion leads the Stoic to rationalize, and, ultimately, to disfigure the moral law. Even in their moral ardor—or rather, propelled by it—the Stoic commits an error of self-love.

# 1. Introduction

The prevailing view among scholars is that Kant was committed to a reductive picture of non-moral motivation and, thereby, of happiness.[1] All non-moral motives, or motives other than respect for the moral law, aim at pleasure or agreeableness.[2] In its most general form, Kant's anti-eudaimonism is the claim that all practical principles that posit something other than the moral law as the determining ground (*Bestimmungsgrund*) of the will are thereby committed to the view that an agent's own happiness is the ultimate basis of moral action. The undercurrent of eudaimonism flows through all material and heteronomous practical principles—principles that are ultimately, and often despite themselves, rooted in self-love ("*Selbstliebe*") or one's own happiness ("*eigenen Glückseligkeit*") (KpV 5:21-22).[3] In this broad sense, eudaimonism characterizes a mistake made by all moral philosophers that

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[1] For an early challenge to the standard view of Kant's hedonism, see Reath 1989. For a detailed reply, see Johnson 2005. Unless otherwise noted, translations of Kant are from the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, translations of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* are from Margaret Graver & A.A. Long (2015), translations of Seneca's *De Vita Beata* are from James Ker (in Fantham *et al*. 2014), and translations of Christian Garve are my own.

[2] 'Happiness' is special among non-moral motives in that it is *necessary* for finite creatures like us (G 4:415). Kant might not have a single conception of happiness, but one definition provides a rough sketch of his view: "a rational being's consciousness of the agreeableness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence" (KpV 5:22; see also G 4:399, A806/B834, MS 6:387, MS 6:480). For a thorough discussion of Kant's various conceptions of happiness, see Wike 1994.

[3] It is easy to lose sight of the sweeping nature of Kant's anti-eudaimonism if we focus on his disagreements with straightforwardly eudaimonistic philosophers, for example with Christian Garve on moral motivation (MS 6:377; RPT 8:395 note), or with Epicureans on the empirical principle of happiness (G 4:442). The reduction of all other determining bases of the will to "*Glückseligkeitsprinzip*" is mentioned at KpV 5:93. On the relationship between Kant's differing classifications of material

came before Kant.[4] There is plenty of room to disagree with this reductive strategy, as many have, but it is clear that Kant wanted to level this charge against his predecessors in order to establish the formal purity of the moral law.

Even the Stoics, who are often hailed as proto-modern, deontological outliers in the ancient ethical tradition, are implicated in Kant's global anti-eudaimonism. This is despite the fact that Kant thought that the Stoics "had chosen their supreme practical principle [viz. virtue] quite correctly" (KpV 5:126); that a duty-bound Stoic exhibits a "sublime state of mind" (VM-Vigantius 27:610); and that "Stoic doctrine is the most genuine doctrine of true morals" (R6607 19:106). Despite these "Kantian" antecedents, Stoicism is built on Socratic foundations, centering "on the question of the *Summum Bonum* and what it consists of" (VM-Collins 27:247).[5] In other words, Kant understood that the radicalness of Stoic ethics did not constitute a break from the ancient eudaimonist *framework*—a framework that Kant praises for the consistency and transparency with which it falls into empiricist error (KpV 5:64; see also 5:24).

The bewildering scope of Kant's anti-eudaimonism, coupled with his narrowly hedonistic conception of happiness, make his critical assessment of ancient ethical theories difficult to assess in a meaningful way. It also makes it easy, almost trivial, to *reconcile* Kant with his ancient counterparts who did not hold the instrumentalized conception of virtue that he targets, or who anticipate Kant's own view by subordinating all "non-moral" value to the goodness of virtue (i.e., almost every major ancient sect except the Epicureans).[6] Along these lines, scholars have argued that Kant overshoots his criticisms of eudaimonism in a way that brings him around to basic agreement with some of its ancient adherents, or that he operates with such a narrow conception of 'happiness' that ancient *eudaimonia* and Kantian

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practical principles across his corpus, see Beck (1963: 103-104, and cf. G 4:441-443). Of course, Kant has unique objections for each of the specific heteronomous principles (e.g., that the Wolffian principle of perfection is empty and indeterminate), and thinks some mistakes are worse than others.

[4] The perfectionist, the divine command theorist, the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the moral sense theorist (among others) are all guilty of eudaimonism in this totalizing sense, although in importantly different ways. Eduard Zeller (1873:519) describes Kant as opposing the 'prevailing eudaimonism' ("*herrschenden Eudämonismus*") of his times. Among Kant scholars, Pinheiro-Walla (2022: 43-48) uses 'eudaimonism' to refer narrowly as a theory of moral motivation that Kant opposes, semantically distinct from 'heteronomy' as a theoretical model of the will that Kant opposes. Grenberg (2022: 4-9) takes eudaimonism in Kant to refer to "quantitative and empirical conceptions of happiness" in particular (so, not including rational principles like perfection). Pinheiro-Walla's interpretation has the benefit of capturing Kant's own usage of the term '*Eudämonismus*'. However, both interpretations obscure the fact that Kant claims that all heteronomous practical principles invariably have an egoistic character—even if they enjoin radical altruism, or have a rationalistic basis—and that Kant's principle target among his contemporaries and predecessors is a broad form of eudaimonism underlying all systems.

[5] As Wood (2005) has emphasized, strictly speaking Kant did not think the ancients offered moral *principles* at all (a modern innovation)—only that they theorized about the form and content of the *summum bonum.*

[6] If eudaimonism is, for Kant, a theory of prudential reward and punishment, or a theory according to which virtue and morality could only ever be pursued instrumentally (see MS 7:378), then it is not clear how Kant's charge would land against anyone but the Epicureans (see Weidemann 2008).

*Glückseligkeit* are like two ships passing in the night rather than coordinate concepts.[7] These efforts have painted a realistic picture of the limits of Kant's understanding of ancient ethics, while also correcting the false impression that he has no place for notions like happiness and virtue in his critical moral philosophy. Yet despite considerable progress, the existing scholarship suffers from two kinds of imbalance.

First, most commentators have focused primarily on Aristotle at the expense of later Hellenistic and Roman philosophers. Admittedly, Aristotle offers what is arguably the most precise and influential account of the structure of ancient ethical theory, including the formal features of the *summum bonum* (i.e., that it is 'self-sufficient' and 'complete'; *EN* 1097a-b) and its possible ingredients (virtue, pleasure, and external goods). With very few exceptions, the ancient ethical tradition operates within the conceptual parameters that Aristotle articulated. And yet the dominant focus on Aristotle is hard to justify on historical grounds. Kant is not known for naming his sources or for engaging in careful exegesis of historical philosophers, but he makes frequent use and mention of Stoic and Epicurean ideas. Furthermore, his affinity for the Latin language and his lifelong engagement with the writings of Roman philosophers such as Cicero, Lucretius, and Seneca are beyond doubt.[8]

If we want to know how Kant understood ancient ethics, we should look first and foremost to Rome. But we should also look to 18th-century Germany, as Kant is more often than not in conversation with his near contemporaries. When it comes to eudaimonism, no one is more pivotal for Kant's intellectual development than the quasi-Stoic, Ciceronian "popular philosopher" Christian Garve.[9] Garve

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[7] In an early and influential treatment of Kant's criticisms of ancient eudaimonism, Irwin concluded that most of the ancients, and especially the Stoics, satisfy Kant's *desiderata* for an adequate moral theory (Irwin 1996). More recently, Elizondo (2022) argued that Aristotle is *not* a eudaimonist by Kant's lights and that Kant *is* a eudaimonist by Aristotle's lights, and that the two share fundamental ideas about the constitutive aims of moral philosophy. Other important discussions include Engstrom 1996, Irwin 1996, Engstrom 2015, Holberg 2018, Visnjic 2021, Grenberg 2022. Not everyone aims for reconciliation. Some insist that Kant's own aims in moral philosophy, when situated in their historical specificity, are worlds apart from those of the ancients (see Schneewind 2009, Wood 2000, and Wood 2015).

[8] On Kant's Roman antiquarianism, see Stuckenberg (1882: 28): "The diligent study of the classics was of great and permanent value to Kant...In his conversations he frequently referred to the Latin authors; and even in old age when his memory for recent impressions had become very weak, he was still able to quote easily and correctly numerous passages from Latin writers, especially from the work of his favourite author, Lucretius, 'De Natura Rerum.'" Of particular interest to my project here are Kant's debts to Seneca. See, for example, Jachmann (1804: 42): "*Noch in den letzten Jahren seines akademischen Lehramts las er mit vielem Geschmack die romischen Klassiker, besonders studierte er den Seneca zum Behuf seiner praktischen Philosophie…*"

[9] Garve's eclectic brand of Ciceronian eudaimonism is a clear example of the syncretistic age ("*synkretistischen Zeitalter*" at KpV 5:24; see also G 4:409-410 and 4:426) that Kant so often bemoans, and a paradigm of 18th-century *Popularphilosophie*. Garve's objections to Stoic rigorism and his eschewal of Stoic *paradoxa* mirror Cicero's moderate Stoicizing tendencies and Kant's own quibbles with Stoic extremism. On the exaggeration that the Sage is happy even while burning in the bull of the tyrant Phalaris, see (1798a: 84); cf. Kant KpV (5:158-159) on Juvenal *Satire* 8.79-84. On Garve's criticism that Stoic virtue does not admit of degrees, see (1783a: 39). On Garve's preference for Aristotelian *metriopatheia* over Stoic *apatheia,* see (1798a: 6). On Garve as an interpreter of the Stoic tradition, see Hahmann 2021.

and Kant were interlocutors for the greater part of Kant's mature period.[10] One noteworthy example of the prominence of this relationship is that Kant coined the term *'Eudämonismus'* to describe (pejoratively) Garve's philosophical position.[11] Many of Kant's criticisms of ancient eudaimonism are mediated through Garve's creative appropriation of their ideas, which are themselves mediated through Garve's creative appropriation of Cicero's philosophical writings. So, when assessing Kant's rejection of Stoic eudaimonism, it is important to avoid assuming from the outset that Kant's engagement is direct and unmediated.

In the account that follows, I emphasize Kant's debts both to the Roman Stoa and to Garve. I begin by reconstructing the basic commitments of Stoic eudaimonism. I claim that Garve is, in most respects, not only a eudaimonist, but a *Stoic* eudaimonist (I use the term 'quasi-Stoicism' to capture the eclectic character of his Stoicism, a point to which I return at the very end of the chapter). I then proceed to analyze what I take to be the central episode of Kant's critical engagement with Stoic eudaimonism, as opposed to eudaimonism generally, which comes in the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason of the Second *Critique*. I argue that Kant's anti-Stoic argument based on an "error of subreption" is aimed primarily at Seneca's account of joy (*gaudium*), which corresponds to Kant's notion of moral self-contentment (*Selbstzufriedenheit).* I then offer an interpretation of how the critical treatment of Stoicism in the Dialectic fits into Kant's overarching anti-eudaimonist agenda I mentioned at the outset: the Stoic's error of subreption leads to "rationalizing" (*Vernünfteln*), and, ultimately, to a disfigurement of the moral law. Even in their moral ardor—or rather, propelled by it—the Stoic commits an error of self-love.

## 2. Stoic and Quasi-Stoic Eudaimonism

According to an influential account, ancient eudaimonism in its general form has two central commitments:[12]

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[10] Their relationship had a rocky start with the handling of Garve's Göttingen review of the first *Critique*, but their exchanges were sustained over time. Years later and with some self-awareness, Garve relishes the fact that his work provided an occasion for Kant to precisify his own important ideas (Garve to Biester, 11 Oct. 1793; Kant Ak. 11: 473).

[11] *'Eudämonismus'* at MS (6:377); see also RPT (8:395n). Kant uses the term roughly in the sense of (1a) under 'Monism of Practical Reason' below, namely as the thesis of psychological eudaimonism.

[12] See Crisp (2003). On the "the Eudaemonist axiom," see Vlastos 1991 (esp. 203-209). See also Sidgwick (1874: 75): "Indeed it may be said that Egoism in this sense was assumed in the whole ethical controversy of ancient Greece. For when men inquired, 'What is the Supreme Good?' they meant the supreme good for each individual inquirer, and assumed that this was for him the right and proper end of action."

1. **Monism of Practical Reason:** 'Happiness' (*eudaimonia*) is (1a) the sole, ultimate object of desire and (1b) the sole, ultimate justification for rational action.

In contrast to eudaimonism, Kant maintained a strict dualism between two kinds of goodness, rooted in the rational and sensible dimensions of our nature, which gives rise to two distinct sources of normativity (viz. moral and prudential). Kant's account of morality as the sovereign good and as the supreme condition that silences prudential value has superficial Stoic resonances, but these two views rely on fundamentally distinct accounts of the structure of practical reason. Far from serving as a condition on one's pursuit of happiness, "moral" virtue is for the Stoics wholly constitutive of happiness—it is the supreme *prudential* good, which is the only kind of good on offer for a eudaimonist. Furthermore, Stoic virtue is an empirical ideal, derived from experience, that consists in "applying one's knowledge of the natural order" (Cic. *Fin.* 3.31; see also D.L. 7.87).

2. **Formal Egoism:** The 'happiness' (*eudaimonia*) that a rational agent aims at is *one's own*.

Egoism of this kind is compatible with substantive conceptions of the *summum bonum* that range from narrowly selfish to radically self-effacing. Stoicism is arguably the clearest example of how a formally egoistic ethical theory can be extensionally adequate by the standards of modern moral philosophy. For example, consider the Stoic exemplar and Roman general Regulus.[13] Regulus set aside all self-interest, turning himself over to Carthaginian torture rather than break his promise or jeopardize the good of the Roman *res publica*. The Stoics claimed that Regulus' dutiful act was not only morally virtuous (*honestum*), but also prudentially beneficial (*utile*), since "everything that is honourable is beneficial, and nothing beneficial that is not honourable" (*Off.* 3.11; see also *Off.* 2.10, 3.35, 3.74). This analysis stems from the Stoic view that all human motivation, including self-sacrifice, issues from a natural impulse to maintain one's own constitution in a state that is, ultimately, *good for* it. In this way, the Stoics are not outliers, but purveyors of an egoistic ethical framework that Socrates initiated.

As Kant frequently mentions, eudaimonism fell out of favor in the modern period, when the search for moral principles supplanted the search for moral ideals (e.g., KpV 5:64). Christian Garve, however, was an exception. Garve, like Kant and the ancients, held that it is a basic psychological fact

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[13] Cicero's use of Regulus is reminiscent of the Gallows and Ann Boleyn cases in Kant (see KpV 5:30 and 156-157)

about creatures like us that we want to be happy (Garve 1798a: 19).[14] Unlike Kant, Garve did not have a narrowly hedonistic conception of happiness, and like the ancients he maintained that happiness is our sole conative channel. Even moral conduct, for Garve, is wholly rooted in our desire for happiness.[15] A skilled translator of ancient and modern philosophy, Garve chose the German '*Glückseligkeit'* for the Greek *'eudaimonia'*, situating himself in an ethical tradition according to which happiness consists in 'doing well' (*eu prattein*) what humans characteristically do (see esp. Garve 1798a: 414).[16]

In addition to adopting eudaimonism as a general framework, Garve shows a clear preference for the Stoics' substantive account of the *summum bonum*.[17] He approves of the widely used Hellenistic strategy of looking to the cradle, at our uncorrupted dispositions at birth, to identify the human *telos*.[18] And he thinks the Stoics were the most successful in carrying out this empirical project (1783a: 11-12).[19] Garve approvingly notes that the Stoics located human perfection ("*menschliche Vollkommenheit*") in virtue ("*Tugend*") and the development of our characteristically human capacities. In siding with the Stoics, Garve attached *Glückseligkeit* first and foremost to the exercise and cultivation of virtue, since, he says, virtue is the only possible source of happiness' lasting and enduring character as a "perpetually desirable condition" ("*immerwährender wünschenswerther Zustand";* 1798b: 21).[20] Furthermore, Garve is emphatic that Epicureanism gives the wrong account of self-love ("*Selbstliebe*") and differs fundamentally from the happiness system ("*Glückseligkeits-System*") he endorses (1798a: 150).[21] Admittedly, Garve often objects to the needless subtleties and extremities of Stoic doctrine, and as a Christian (so to speak) he maintains that complete perfection is not possible in our short and beset

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[14] There Garve takes it for granted that to be alive is to be aware of one's self and to have some conception of one's own well-being. Elsewhere Garve says that consciousness that one's own state is preferred to other states is the "basic material of happiness" ("*der Grundstoff der Glückseligkeit*"; 1792: 115). Echoes of the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis* are clear.

[15] Garve writes, for example: "From happiness ("*Glückseligkeit"*), in the most general sense of the word, spring the motives for every endeavor, including also obedience to the moral law ("*auch zur Befolgung des moralischen Gesetzes"*)" (1792: 114). On the same page, he calls happiness "the only conceivable purpose of all things" ("*dem einzig denkbaren Zwecke der Dinge"*). While not the main focus of the present chapter, most of Kant's critical exchanges with Garve center on the general, not distinctively Stoic, thesis of psychological eudaimonism (1a above).

[16] See also Garve's note on the Greek term *'prattein'* in his *Versuche* (1792: 464).

[17] Garve praises the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Adam Ferguson for locating happiness in the unyielding commitment to self-perfection and the performance of pro-social duties—an ethical position he calls Stoic (Garve 1798a: 158).

[18] Garve says that the "foundations of morality" ("*die Gründe der Moralität*") can be derived from "the first springs of our desires" ("*die ersten Triebfedern unsrer Begierden*") (1783a: 10).

[19] Garve calls this a "natural history of man" ("*Naturgeschichte des Menschen*") (1783a: 11).

[20] See also Garve (1798b: 22-23). Importantly, Garve does not reject pleasure altogether in his conception of happiness, which is an un-Stoic element of his view.

[21] Despite his respect for Epicurus' character and morals, Garve rejects his system (1798a: 114). Garve does not object to the Epicurean framework of self-love—after all, this is a framework shared by all eudaimonist theories—but rather to the narrowness of their interpretation of self-love (see 1798a: 150-151, where Garve aligns his own happiness system with a non-Epicurean interpretation of self-love). Here I am indebted to the exposition of passages offered in Walschots (2021).

lifetimes.[22] Important as these objections are, they only serve to highlight that Garve is in general alignment with the Stoics in holding that happiness consists in rational self-perfection.

In the *Groundwork* Kant offers a sweeping rejection of the approach to morals just outlined.[23] But Kant's criticism in that work, just like the anti-eudaimonism of the Analytic, extends well beyond the Stoics and Garve. The most pointed and direct engagement with *Stoic* eudaimonism does not come until the Dialectic of the Second *Critique*. The Stoic ideas that form the basis of Kant's criticisms there are succinctly captured by Seneca, whose role alongside Cicero in Kant's understanding of Stoicism cannot be overstated:

> [1] What is this good? Just this: a mind made flawless, a mind that rivals the divine, that elevates itself above the human sphere and places nothing beyond itself. You are a reasoning animal (*[r]ationale animal es*). What, then, is the good in you? It is perfect reason (*perfecta ratio*). Take your reason from where it is now to its own ultimate achievement, let it grow to its fullest possible extent. Do not judge yourself to be happy (*beatum*) until all your joys arise from yourself (*ex te gaudium omne nascetur*)… (*Ep.* 124.23-24)

> [2] So ponder this: the result of wisdom is steadiness of joy (*gaudii aequalitatem*). The wise mind is like the superlunary heaven: eternally serene. *Thus you have reason to desire wisdom* (*quare velis sapiens esse*) if wisdom is always accompanied by joy. But this joy has only one source: a consciousness of the virtues (*ex virtutum conscientia*). (*Ep*. 59.16; emphasis mine)

The subjective side of rational perfection, according to Seneca, is the experience of "unending tranquility, freedom" ("*perpetuam tranquillitatem, libertatem*") and a "huge joy" (*"ingens gaudium"*) (*VB* 3.4).[24] These claims are the basis of Kant's pointed diagnosis of the errors of Stoic eudaimonism in the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, to which I now turn.

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[22] Another way Garve puts it is this: *if* we assume humans are immortal, then the Stoic thesis that virtue alone guarantees happiness is true—otherwise, external circumstances have too great an effect on our prospects for development to say so confidently in this lifetime (1783a: 15-16; on this point see also 1783b: 57-58).

[23] For an account of the role of Garve's *Cicero* in Kant's composition of the *Grundlegung* that gives prominence to Cicero's role as a mediator of the Stoic eudaimonist tradition, see Hahmann and Vazquez 2022.

[24] The Stoic Sage is "joyous in virtue" ("*virtute laetus*"; *VB* 4.2) since they know that "true happiness" is "located in virtue" (*VB* 16.1). See also 7.3: "Virtue is something sublime, elevated and regal, invincible, inexhaustible."

## 3. Identifying Kant's Target(s) in the Dialectic

In the Dialectic, Kant offers an extended critique of Epicurean and Stoic eudaimonism as part of a larger argumentative strategy to establish that the highest good is a synthetic, causal, condition-conditioned relation between virtue and happiness. While it is clear that Kant invokes Stoicism and Epicureanism in this way, his exact targets are unclear. In this section I argue that Kant's primary target when articulating the "error of subreption" (*vitium subreptionis*) is the Stoic Seneca, specifically his account of joy (*gaudium*) as an accompaniment (*consequens*) of virtuous activity.[25] By extension, I argue, Kant implicates philosophers as diverse as Epicurus and Garve.

Kant's overarching argument in the Dialectic centers on the highest good as the object of pure practical reason, rather than its determining basis. By 'highest' Kant means the 'complete' (*consummatum*), not merely 'supreme' (*supremum*) good. Whereas the latter refers only to the unconditioned condition (virtue), the former refers to "whole and complete good as the object of the power of desire of rational finite beings" (KpV 5:110).[26] In other words, the highest good must incorporate both the object of pure practical reason (virtue) and the object of empirical practical reason (happiness), thereby uniting the ends of our rational and sensible natures into one object (see A813/B841). The *supremacy* of morality entails that the two elements of the highest good are combined in a particular way, namely that happiness is distributed in proportion to one's virtue or one's worthiness to be happy.

For Kant, this non-accidental combination of ideas that we cognize *a priori* could only obtain analytically (via the law of identity or principle of contradiction) or synthetically (via the law of causality or real combination).[27] He thinks the falsity of the analytic view follows straightforwardly from the heterogeneity of happiness and morality established earlier in the *Critique*. Even so, it is a view that enjoyed widespread currency among the ancients and moderns alike, and thereby stood as the main obstacle to Kant's account and resolution of the antinomy of practical reason. Famously, Kant points to

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[25] Contrast this approach with Albrecht (1978: 134-135) and Dyck (forthcoming) who lean heavily on Cicero (*De Finibus*) and Garve's *Cicero* respectively. We know Kant had in his possession an edition of Seneca's *Opera Philosophica* (Warda 1922: 55) that contained the essay *De Vita Beata.* Although that edition did not contain the *Epistulae Morales*, it is very plausible that Kant nonetheless had access to Seneca's letters by other means. More generally, if a work is absent from Kant's library, one cannot infer on that basis that Kant did not engage with it (as Melissa Merritt has pointed out to me, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is a case in point). The inverse is more straightforward: if a work is present in Kant's library, it probably did hold some importance for him. Even if Kant did learn about Stoicism in part from doxographical accounts of the early Greek Stoa (e.g., Diogenes Laertius, Brucker's *Historia Critica,* Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*), the effort to identify a Chrysippean core of his understanding of Stoicism is, in my view, futile.
[26] Kant signaled earlier in the Analytic that he would return to the highest good, not as an object of the will that would serve as the basis for the moral law, but as the object of a pure will that has been determined formally and *a priori* (KpV 5:64).
[27] Note that, for Kant, happiness *arising* from the consciousness of one's own virtue is not a synthetic relation of cause and effect.

two rival Hellenistic schools to describe the two possible applications of the analytic law of identity to the elements of the highest good. According to the Epicurean, virtue is contained in the maxim of one's own happiness, and according to the Stoic, happiness is contained in the consciousness of one's own virtue (KpV 5:112).[28]

Scholars disagree about the details of Kant's argument against these two schools and how far beyond them it extends. It is at least clear that Kant begins by addressing a uniquely Epicurean problem; Epicurus exhorts us to a "peace of mind" that arises from the consciousness of virtue without first exhorting us to cultivate the moral disposition that would give rise to *ataraxia* (KpV 5:116). Kant then immediately transitions his argument (the transition is clearly indicated by the signpost '*Andrerseits*')— but in what direction? In the lines that follow, he explains the origins of "an illusion that even the most practiced cannot altogether avoid" that consists in mistaking the special feeling that follows from acting virtuously (namely, self-contentment or *Selbstzufriedenheit*) for a genuine form of happiness. Kant calls this an "error of subreption" ("*Fehler des Erschleichens*") and, so to speak, an "optical illusion" ("*optischen Illusion*") of the inner sense.[29] The error stems from a mistaken perception of "what one *does* as distinguished from what one *feels*." But who is guilty of this *vitium subreptionis*—the Stoics or the Epicureans? Many commentators have adopted the latter reading.[30] However, in the setup of the Dialectic Kant led us to expect a two-fold refutation of Epicureanism and Stoicism as competing alternatives, which would suggest the former reading. I think the answer is more complicated and more indicative of Kant's anti-Stoicism than hitherto appreciated.

A few lines before the error of subreption is introduced, Kant claims that each of the two ancient schools is "separated infinitely from each other inasmuch as one put its principle on the aesthetic side and the other on the logical side, the former in consciousness of sensible need, the other in the independence of practical reason from all sensible determining grounds" (KpV 5:112). While the Epicureans claimed that "happiness is the *whole highest good*" and virtue only a means to it, the Stoics claimed that "virtue is the *whole highest good*" and happiness only the consciousness of one's exercise of it. While these two positions seem to be worlds apart, this is not Kant's considered view, even in the

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[28] See also VM-Collins (27:249) and R6825 (19:173). Kant's expression of this Stoic-Epicurean dichotomy is similar to Garve's own statement of it in the third volume of his commentary on Cicero's *De Officiis* (see 1783c: 45, "*Der Epikureer sagt…Der Stoiker sagt…*"). See also Garve 1783a: 14.

[29] While 'subreption' plays an important role throughout Kant's theoretical and practical works, it resists easy definition. On a very basic level, the error of subreption is to mistake one thing for another thing that it appears to be (e.g., the confused "substitution of a respect for the object instead of for the idea of humanity in our subject" in one's experience of the sublime [KU 5:257]). For a detailed history of the concept and its usage by Kant, see Birken-Bertsch 2006.

[30] An Epicurean reading is advanced by Milz (2002: 354), Pinheiro-Walla (2022: 50), and Kolomy (2023: 109-110). In contrast, Dyck (forthcoming) advances a 'Stoic only' reading of the *vitium subreptionis*.

Dialectic. Just a few paragraphs later, Kant groups the Stoics and the Epicureans *together* for having "extolled above all the happiness that arises from consciousness of living virtuously" (KpV 5:115), before then proceeding to diagnose an error that arises from one's consciousness of living virtuously.[31] This is consistent with Kant's insistence throughout his corpus that Epicurus, when freed from the caricatures foisted upon him since the polemics of Cicero, is as a *de facto* Stoic. As we read in the lecture notes, "At bottom, *it was only a misunderstanding* lying between [Epicurus and the Stoics; MV] that produced the difference" (VM-Vigilantius 27:646; emphasis mine).

If this reading is correct, it might seem puzzling that Kant would set up a false distinction between Stoicism and Epicureanism at the outset. The puzzlement is lessened, I think, if we say that Kant really does have the Stoics first and foremost in mind when he speaks of an error of subreption. He has, only thereafter, concluded that the most plausible understanding of Epicurus, and that of many eudaimonist thinkers ancient or modern, is *de facto* Stoicism. This is just another instance of Kant's reductive impulse, only this time the reduction moves in a positive direction. It stems from Kant's belief in humankind's widespread access to moral cognition, no matter their station and often despite their erudition: "Any man has and must have it in his power, to provide himself with self-contentment; for it rests, of course, on consciousness of the conformity of our actions with the moral law" (VM-Vigilantius 27:649). The Stoic does not uniquely experience moral self-contentment nor uniquely err in identifying it as a positive form of enjoyment. The Stoics are unique, however, for building a theory around what others only managed to prove with their actions: that the exercise of freedom gives rise to an abiding, sublime, and secure form of self-contentment.

This interpretation is further bolstered by the overwhelming similarities between Kant's account of *Selbstzufriedenheit*[32] and Seneca's account of the joy (Ltn. *gaudium;* Grk. *chara*) that accompanies virtuous activity in *De Vita Beata* and the *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. The textual parallels between Kant and Seneca are too numerous to list here, but it helps to consider some examples, in part because I am not aware of any existing arguments in the literature for Kant's reliance on Seneca. Seneca, like Kant, frames his discussion of the happy life around two competing accounts of the place of pleasure in the *summum bonum* (Stoic vs. Epicurean)*.* Seneca describes *gaudium* as a negative kind of satisfaction that we feel when we silence the call of desire or inclination and rest content with what is securely our own ("*domesticis*" at *VB* 4.4).[33] Kant, similarly, describes *Selbstzufriedenheit* as "a negative satisfaction with

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[31] Kant writes shortly after: "...[Epicurus'] chief divergence from the Stoics consisted only in his placing the motive in this pleasure, which they quite rightly refused to do" (KpV 5:115).

[32] For a more detailed treatment of this notion in Kant, see Walschots (2017 and 2019).

[33] See Seneca, *VB* (3.4, 4.1-4.5, 10.3) and *Constant.* (19.2).

one's existence, in which one is conscious of needing nothing."[34] Senecan *gaudium* is explicitly contrasted with Epicurean *voluptas* in just the same way that Kant distinguishes *Selbstzufriedenheit* from *Glückseligkeit* (on which more below). Seneca, like Kant, emphasizes that this negative satisfaction forms no part of the *summum bonum.*[35] It is only an ἐπιγέννημα or *accessio* of virtue, or as Kant puts it, these "particular joys" are "only results" of virtue (KpV 5:117).[36] Seneca claims that "wisdom is always accompanied by joy. But this joy has only one source: a consciousness of the virtues (*virtutum conscientia;* Seneca, *Ep.* 59.16)—an unmistakable parallel to Kant's "*Bewußtsein der Tugend,*" and a Latin phrase that to my knowledge has no parallel in the earlier Greek Stoic lexicon. Kantian *Selbstzufriedenheit* and Senecan *gaudium* are stable and enduring (Kant says "*unveränderlichen Zufriedenheit*" at 5:117 and Seneca says "*inconcussum et aequale*" at *VB* 3.4). Seneca even announces what his "fellow Stoics would be unwilling to say" and what Kant makes a point of saying in the Dialectic, "namely that Epicurus's teachings are sacred and right and, if you approach more closely, sobering" (Seneca, *VB* 13.1).[37] In sum, there is overwhelming textual evidence for the claim that Kant is engaging directly with Seneca's account of *gaudium* in his own treatment of *Selbstzufriedenheit,* and consequently evidence for the Stoic reading of the error of subreption. And yet, while Kant's objection is aimed primarily at the Stoics, it extends to anyone who claims to "have found happiness in precise proportion to virtue already *in this life* (in the sensible world), or persuaded themselves that they were conscious of it" (KpV 5:115).[38] Epicurus is thereby implicated, for reasons already discussed. Garve is, too, although his quasi-Stoic position is complicated by factors that I will return to at the very end of this chapter.

## 4. The Error of Subreption

For Kant, *Selbstzufriedenheit* is "an analogue of happiness that must necessarily accompany consciousness of virtue" (KpV 5:117). Like happiness, it is a type of satisfaction (*Wohlgefallen).* Unlike

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[34] Kant also describes *Selbstzufriedenheit* as "consciousness of freedom as an ability to follow the moral law with an unyielding disposition," "the sole source of an unchangeable contentment," and "consciousness of mastery over one's inclinations, hence of independence from them" (KpV 5:117-119). See also KpV (5:72) and MM (6:377-378).

[35] In addition to classifying 'pleasures' that supervene (*supervenit)* on natural activities (e.g., drinking a glass of water) as 'indifferent', Seneca does not even admit *gaudium* into his supreme good. As *consequentia* they are good, but they do not complete or fill one's highest good (*consummantia*). See *VB* (4.5 and 15.1-2).

[36] At *VB* 15.2 Seneca calls *gaudium, laetitia,* and *tranquilitas* "*consequentia*" rather than "*consummantia*" (results of the highest good rather than constitutive elements of it). See also D.L. (7.94), where joy is listed among the ἐπιγεννήματα of virtue.

[37] He calls his hedonism "sober and temperate" hedonism at *Ep.* 12.4 (cf. *Ep*. 85.18).

[38] Relevant to my interpretive hypothesis is that Garve is much less interested in Seneca than he is in Cicero (who above all he thinks has, in *De Finibus* 3 and in *De Officiis,* captured the spirit of Stoic philosophy) and Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. See Garve 1798a: 57.

happiness, its original source is contentment with one's person, not one's condition—and, to that extent, it is more secure and one's own than are nature's fortuitous endowments.[39] And yet, if *Selbstzufriedenheit* is more stable than *Glückseligkeit*, it is also too fragile to count as *Seligkeit* (bliss). In this life humans could never achieve the complete independence from inclination constitutive of bliss.[40] In a Senecan idiom, *Selbstzufriedenheit* is the moral pleasure enjoyed by the progressor (*proficiens*) who has made sufficient progress in cultivating a moral disposition but who is not yet virtuous (i.e., foolish by Stoic standards, but virtuous by Kantian standards).[41] The claim that *gaudium* is accessible to the fool is not orthodox Stoic doctrine, nor need we suppose that Seneca innovated in this way. Seneca knew full well that only the Sage's joy is true, since only the Sage's joy is based on her possession of virtue, which is an all-or-nothing affair. Even so, Seneca surely had a hand in what appears to be Kant's creative appropriation of Stoic joy. First, there is the risk Seneca assumed when he decided to write in a rhetorical and popularizing mode, as he did in *De Vita Beata*.[42] Alternatively, one could say that Seneca did innovate, but in that characteristically subtle way he so often does in which he outstrips the conceptual resources of orthodox Stoicism without thereby running afoul of it.[43] For example, it might be that Seneca created conceptual space for something like *gaudium* for progressors—a "progressor emotion" that would sit between irrational *pathē* and Sagely *eupatheia*.[44] This progressor-joy would be an intellectual or spiritual analogue of *hēdonē,* understood as the indifferent feeling that results from befitting activities, not the vicious passion ('*adfectus*' in Seneca's Latin, or *pathē* in Greek; see *Ep.* 59.4).[45] In either case, it suffices for my argument that Kant seems to have interpreted Seneca as affording the progressor, foolish and wretched though he is, a simulacrum of joy that accompanies moral activity on the road to virtue (e.g., by performing *kathēkonta* or by cultivating psychological

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[39] See VM-Vigilantius (27:643), V-Theo (28:1089), and RMet [1783-88] (18:460, 6116, and 6117). Kant regularly contrasts what is our own (freedom, virtue) and what nature provides (luck, *Glück)* (see, e.g., TP 8:283).

[40] Bliss is "the self-sufficiency that can be ascribed only to the supreme being" (KpV 5:119). Kant is often critical of the Stoics for elevating the Sage to the status of a god and thereby laying claim to bliss in this life, but the present argument is not about the unattainability of their ideal. Seneca, in contrast, confidently reports that "the joy that attends on the gods *and those who imitate the gods* has no intermission and no end" (*Ep*. 59.18, emphasis mine).

[41] That also means that Kant does not have in mind the *eupatheiai* of the Sage, which is an elation of the soul ("*animi elatio*") in the presence of real goods. For joy as a *eupatheia*, see D.L. (7.116) and Cicero, *Tusc.* (4.12–14). For the goodness of this kind of joy, see D.L. 7.94. Seneca demonstrates his awareness of these technical Stoic distinctions at *Ep.* 59.1-4.

[42] Asmis describes this work as "noisy, full of rhetorical amplification and repetition, and carefully adjusted to different listeners" (1990: 220). Seneca's persuasive strategy aims in part to counteract the idea "that Stoic happiness is a stern and cheerless ideal" (Asmis 1990: 232).

[43] For a treatment of Senecan *gaudium* that takes roughly this approach to its orthodoxy, see Graver 2016.

[44] Graver develops the notion of a progressor emotion in Chapter 9 of *Stoicism and Emotion* (2007), and again in the context of so-called "reader emotions" in Graver 2017.

[45] The Stoics used the term '*hēdonē*' to describe two very different things: an emotion (which is categorically bad and rooted in a false opinion about value) and a feeling that accompanies our completion of befitting activities (which is indifferent). See D.L. 7.85. Seneca sometimes uses the phrase '*vera voluptas*' to describe the Sage's joy.

detachment from indifferents). On this scheme, Stoic pleasure (*hēdonē*) stands to Stoic progressor-joy (*gaudium*) as Kantian happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) stands to Kantian self-contentment (*Selbstzufriedenheit*).

What, then, is the Stoic mistake with respect to *Selbstzufriedenheit*? Kant reasons as follows.[46] When a sufficiently virtuous agent acts morally, their will is determined directly by the law. Lawful determination is an exercise of freedom (*Freiheit*—used here in the strong sense of 'autonomy'). The exercise of freedom has the same "inward effect" as the determination of the will by the faculty of desire, namely an impulse to act that results in a feeling of agreeableness (*Gefühl der Annehmlichkeit*). The exercise of freedom has this effect because it consists in mastery over one's inclinations and independence from their cumbersome demands, thereby achieving by absence what desire achieves by accomplishment. Thus, the exercise of freedom is indirectly responsible for a negative satisfaction in one's own *condition* (*Zustand),* which has its origins in contentment with one's own *person.*[47] So, consciousness of one's exercise of freedom is phenomenologically indiscernible from consciousness of the feeling of agreeableness that results from acting on desire, even though the former in no way depends on the concurrent positive feelings associated with the latter. Indiscernibility leads the Stoic to conflate negative satisfaction with satisfaction proper, creating the illusion that they have secured happiness through virtue.

At this point it is important to acknowledge a confusing terminological situation. If we follow Kant in his usage of *Glückseligkeit,* not as referring to the whole highest good, but to the agreeable state that results from getting what you want, then Kant is correct to say that the Stoics omit happiness from the highest good altogether.[48] After all, the Stoic view is that *eudaimonia* is wholly constituted by one's possession and exercise of virtue, where virtue is understood as a corporeal disposition or pneumatic tenor of one's mind. Strictly speaking, the feelings that accompany virtuous activity are indifferent to the Stoic. The phenomenology of Sagehood, vivid as it may be, has no place in the Stoic's account of the rationality of virtue—just as the phenomenology of emotion, vivid as it may be, plays no role in the Stoic's account of their pathological character. At the same time, Kant's representation of Stoic happiness seems like an honest attempt to make sense of the mystifying thesis that *eudaimonia* is *identical* to virtuous activity. Aided perhaps by Seneca's unconventional emphasis on the positive

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[46] Here I am offering a reconstruction of KpV 5:116-119.

[47] On the negative satisfaction that comes with freedom from the painful pangs of conscience, see MS (6:394 and440).

[48] As Seneca says, "pleasure is not the reward or the motive of virtue but an accessory (*accessio*); and it is not approved of (*placet*) because it gives pleasure but, if approved of, it gives pleasure also" (*VB* 9.2; see also *Ep.* 76.29).

phenomenological experience of moral activity, Kant seems to interpret Stoic *eudaimonia* as analytically connected to a conscious psychological state—to *Glückseligkeit* of a sort, namely *Selbstzufriedenheit*.

If Kant is correct that the Stoics fall prey to an error of subreption, then he has toppled that Stoic edifice of virtue built upon unmistakably true impressions about the way the world is (Grk. *phantasia katalēptikē*, Ltn. *visum comprehendible*). More importantly, if Kant's argument is properly anti-eudaimonist then it must show that the Stoics are guilty of committing a eudaimonist error, or an error of self-love. Counterintuitively, the way in which the "dear self" (G 4:407) rears its head in the case of Stoic eudaimonism is not in naked subordination of the moral law to prudential benefit, but in moral fanaticism and demandingness.[49] Stoic "rationalizing" (*Vernünfteln*), or sophistical moral reasoning and pseudo-justification, is thus more like the rationalizing of moral saints. The stridently altruistic utilitarian, for example, rationalizes the violation of perfect duties in the name of otherwise admirable, other-regarding ends. Even as they appear to be acting selflessly, even to themselves, the utilitarian in fact makes an exception of themselves and takes the moral law into their own hands. Analogously, the Stoic rationalizes the neglect of legitimate self-regarding ends, "turn[ing] government of virtue into tyranny" (MS 6:409). For Kant this is not just an impoverished view of human happiness (although it is that, too; VM-Mrongovius 29:623-624); it is a disfigurement of the moral law in the name of a personal, albeit noble end. We see this in the Stoics' disregard for the strictness of the moral law, as in the case of Cato, who in the name of *integritas* justified his violation of a perfect duty against suicide. We see this in the Stoics' "impure" ideal of moral perfection, which was retrofitted to human weakness so as to be attainable in this life by our own natural powers (VM-Collins 27:251-252). And again, in the Stoics' vast expansion of the scope of moral demands—rather than carve out a space for morally-sanctioned non-moral prerogatives, the Stoic "allows *nothing to be morally indifferent* (*adiaphora*) and strews all his steps with duties" (MS 6:409). In other words, in zealous pursuit of "fantastic virtue," the Stoic loses sight of the notion of *deserved* satisfaction and *merited* enjoyment of non-moral goods. The Stoic justifies this defacement of the moral law in the logical and consistent way characteristic of all rationalizers. Furthermore, the *basis* for Stoic rationalization is the stable and lasting form of contentment that follows from obedience to the moral law—the very feeling Seneca was at pains to articulate to his readers, and which I have argued here that Kant identifies as the Stoic's unique form of eudaimonist error.

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[49] As Sticker has recently emphasized, the Stoics are the primary target of Kant's moral over-demandingness objections. See Sticker 2021a and 2021b (esp. 295-299).

Finally, we arrive at the crucial point on which the Stoics and Garve differ. Garve could not fully embrace the Stoics' confidence in the earthly rewards of virtue. He was willing to admit that not every virtuous action benefits and pleases us in a proximate sense; every virtue has is "difficult cases" ("*schweren Fälle*") and every vice its "more favorable" ("*günstiger*") moments (1783c: 260). This is especially true for the crowning virtue of justice ("*Gerechtigkeit*"), which, because of our social nature, faces "the most temptations" ("*die meisten Versuchungen*") and "the most dilemmas" ("*die meisten Collisionen*") (1783c: 261). Despite these challenges, Garve followed the Stoics (via Cicero) in defending the intrinsic value of virtue ("*das was die Tugend zu einem Gute macht, in ihr selbst liegt*"; 1783c:261). He argues that there is no situation, even in this life, in which virtue loses its normative dominance, since virtue is perfection, and perfection contains the "seed" of all happiness ("*Glückseligkeit*") and of all pleasures ("*Vergnügens*") (1783c: 261). Virtue, in the final analysis, grants what even the most selfish and hedonistic among us seek (Garve 1783c: 262). Even so, Garve worried that we would not be sufficiently motivated to pursue virtue's cause. For one, he subscribed to the opacity of moral self-knowledge: "Virtue is its own reward ("*eigene Belohnung*"): it is true. But only to the extent that a person is conscious of it ("*Bewußtsein davon hat*"); insofar as they can say to themselves with conviction ("*mit Ueberzeugung*"), 'I am virtuous'" ("*ich bin tugendhaft*") (1783b: 52).[50] More importantly, he worried about the distance we often experience between virtue and happiness in this life. In one of his most un-Stoic moments, Garve draws a strict separation between the orderliness of our moral aspirations and projects on the one hand, and the blind, mechanistic laws of nature that thwart them on the other (see Garve 1783b: 49-50). For Garve, only belief in God and immortality can assure us that virtue and happiness will one day be fully united in a state of affairs in which virtue's rewards (well-being and self-satisfaction) outweigh the "sacrifices" ("*Opferungen*") it requires (1783b: 64).[51] In other words, God and immortality play a crucial function in shoring up the analytic connection between virtue and happiness. So even if Garve ultimately should be classified as a proponent of the analytic view alongside the ancients, he modified the account in ways that place him somewhere between the ancient Stoics and Kant. This provides yet more reason, I think, to read Kant's anti-Stoic argument in the Dialectic as primarily a form of engagement with the ancient Stoic tradition, in contrast to his other forays against eudaimonism, as in the earlier *Groundwork* and in the later response to Garve in "Theory and Practice." The foregoing also suggests that Kant's understanding of the ancient Stoic tradition was

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[50] For Garve, self-opacity makes it rational to believe in a God who knows our true characters, in addition to believing in the immortality of our souls. I have argued elsewhere that the Stoics grappled with opacity in their own way, with significant ethical implications (Vazquez 2021).

[51] See also Garve 1783b: 24, where Garve explains why belief in God gives us the motivational assurance we need that something will come of our virtue.

more substantive than he gets credit for, and his rejection of Stoic eudaimonism has an intelligible place within his broader anti-eudaimonist agenda.[52]

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Kant Abbreviations

G = *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) - Ak. 4
KpV = *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788) - Ak. 5
KrV = *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781/1787) - Ak. 3/Ak. 4
MS = *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797) - Ak. 6
RPT = "Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie." *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (May 1796), pp. 387-426. [AA 8: 389-406]
RMet = *Reflexionen zur Metaphysik* - Ak. 17–18

Ancient Abbreviations

*Constant.* = Seneca, *De Constantia Sapientis*
D.L. = Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*
*EN* = Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*
*Ep.* = Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*
*Fin.* = Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*
*Off.* = Cicero, *De Officiis*
*Tusc.* = Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*
*VB* = Seneca, *De Vita Beata*

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