



Lampe, K. (2017). Review of John Sellars (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*. *Routledge handbooks in philosophy*. London; New York: Routledge, 2016. pp. xx, 407. ISBN 9780415660754. \$240.00. *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2017, [30]. <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2017/2017-06-30.html>

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Bryn Mawr at <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2017/2017-06-30.html> . Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

Sellars, John (ed.), *The Routledge handbook of the Stoic tradition*, London; New York: Routledge, 2016. xx, 407 p. ISBN 9780415660754. \$240.00.

Kurt Lampe. University of Bristol. clkwl@bristol.ac.uk.

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=5ZOPCwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> Preview

As John Sellars writes in the introduction, this volume aims to “map” the widespread and enduring influence of Stoicism. He means “Stoicism” in a capacious sense; already in antiquity, he asks whether we should think in terms of a doctrinal core, family resemblances, or an arborescence that simply happens to be rooted in the Athenian Stoa (3). Subsequent chapters address the reception of various dimensions of that Athenian original, from philosophers’ rigorous engagement with concepts and arguments to poets’, theologians’, and visual artists’ appropriation and polemical redeployment of emotional, interpersonal, political, and cosmological attitudes. Since the authors in this collection have diverse aims and methods, I will group them topically/methodologically rather than prioritizing the volume’s chronological ordering principle. Naturally these groupings are rough-and-ready, and some of the chapters could have been allocated to more than one group.

One series of chapters addresses explicit reactions to Stoic theory by individual philosophers. For instance, Lloyd P. Gerson gives a lucid summary of Plotinus’ detailed criticism of Stoic metaphysics and epistemology, suggesting also that Plotinus was sympathetic to Epictetan positions on moral responsibility and happiness. Matthew D. Walz surveys Boethius’ half-hearted approval of Stoic emotional therapy and wholehearted criticism of their ostensibly selfish axiology and rigid logic and physics. Jacqueline Lagrée elegantly explains how Lipsius’ Christian neo-Stoicism departs from its ancient paradigm. She also provides some of the religious and political contexts that inform Lipsius’ thinking. David Forman regularly cites Leibniz’s explicit commentary on Stoicism, but his focus is as much on comparison as on reception: he puts the two philosophies into dialogue on a series of issues revolving around determinism and freedom, such as the connectedness of causes, the modality of future events, spontaneity and moral responsibility, and the problem of evil.

The studies by Sarah Catherine Byers and Troels Engberg-Pedersen are slightly different than the rest of this group, since neither concerns explicit reactions to Stoicism. Although Augustine engages directly with Stoic theory in many passages, Byers disregards them; instead, she makes a novel argument that the Stoic theory of “appropriation” (οικείωσις) implicitly frames Augustine’s account of his personal development. Troels Engberg-Pedersen’s chapter concerns the Apostle Paul and John the Evangelist, both of whom he treats as philosophers. (For Paul in particular, given the last two decades in continental philosophy, this is hardly controversial.) Engberg-Pedersen argues that we can understand

specific passages in both authors' works better if we read them against the physics and theology of Stoic "spirit" (πνεῦμα). But he does not make any claim about influence; rather, he explains that he views this comparison as a "heuristic" tool for understanding Paul and John better.

A second group of chapters also focuses on individual philosophers, but puts the emphasis more clearly on comparative philosophy than influence or reception. Kevin Guilfooy begins his chapter on Peter Abelard and John of Salisbury with the remark that "The Stoic influence . . . is vast, but identifying specifics is difficult" (85). Abelard's and John's explicit indebtedness to Roman Stoicism on the topics of virtue and natural law is not very philosophically interesting. By contrast, Guilfooy's comparison of Abelard's theories of "consent" and "intention" with Stoic "assent" deserves more space, as does the apparently fortuitous convergence of Stoic and Abelardian logic and metaphysics of language. Jon Miller finds no evidence that the Stoics had much influence on Spinoza (221), and – given the volume of scholarship already existing on this topic, including Miller's own monograph – is surprisingly cursory in comparing some of their major positions. (In fact, this is the shortest chapter in the book.) Daniel Doyle and José M. Torralba are more rigorous and patient in discussing another well-established topic, the comparison of Kant and the Stoics. Included in their discussion are not only Kant's explicit comments on Stoicism, but their respective positions on value, nature, virtue, happiness, and "duty" or "obligations."

Many chapters attempt to survey the reception of Stoicism across an entire period or intellectual movement. It is not obvious that all of these merited inclusion. For instance, Jill Krave begins her short chapter by saying that "Stoicism . . . played only a marginal role in the philosophy of the Italian Renaissance" (133). The highlights are the debate between Politian and Bartolomeo Scala about Epictetus' *Handbook* and Pomponazzi's Stoicizing in *On Fate, Free Will, and Predestination*. But these need further theoretical, biographical, or sociocultural development. Guido Giglioni's chapter on "Medicine of the Mind in Early Modern Philosophy" takes its starting point from the medical metaphor in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, but thereafter has almost nothing to do with Stoicism.

The others in this category were more successful, beginning with Gretchen Reydam-Schils' overview of key figures and thematic emphases in Roman Stoicism. Edward Andrew discusses reactions to Stoicism (especially to Seneca) by Enlightenment French philosophers generally more sympathetic to Epicureanism, including Diderot, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and la Mettrie. Michael Ure gives us a very clear interpretive summary of how Stoicism functioned as a gamepiece in debates with big philosophical stakes among Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Particularly rewarding were the chapters by Christopher Gill and Thomas Bénatouïl. Gill not only summarizes with lucidity and rigor Stoic influences on contemporary Anglo-American ("analytical") ethics; he also comments critically on each major area of reception, returning to ancient

Stoic texts and attempting to take this dialogue further. Bénatouïl provides a synoptic vision of intersecting receptions of Stoicism in twentieth-century (“continental”) Francophone scholarship and philosophy. Especially useful is the division he borrows from Michel Foucault between philosophies of consciousness and philosophies of knowledge and rationality, which allows him to map similarities and filiations in this subfield.

Subtly different from the foregoing are six broadly cultural-historical chapters. Inasmuch as my imperfect grasp of the primary materials allows me to judge, most of these were excellent. Mary Beth Ingham lays out a fascinating and wide-ranging argument about how the influence of Roman Stoic texts about “practical wisdom” (*prudentia*) converged with monastic theories of “discernment” (*discretio*) in order to condition the (mis)understanding of Aristotle’s ethics up until Thomas Aquinas. Barbara Pitkin criticizes an existing dichotomy in the scholarly literature between Erasmus’ “Stoicizing” attitudes and Calvin’s “Augustinian” anti-Stoicism. She offers a far more nuanced portrait of how trends in Christian Stoic reception culminate in the complex attitudes of Erasmus and Calvin. Michael Moriarty contributes a concise, sharp, and far-ranging discussion of early modern French responses to Stoicism, from the systematic neo-Stoicism of Guillaume du Vair to the measured responses of Descartes and Jansenist and other neo-Augustinian anti-Stoic Catholic movements. Christian Maurer’s chapter on the Scottish Enlightenment offers a far-ranging intellectual history of Stoic reception by Frances Hutcheson, Hume, and Adam Smith, which Maurer relates to contemporary thinking by Shaftesbury and the Cambridge Platonists, and situates against the backdrop of controversies in Scottish Christianity. Simon Swift argues that the Romantic reception of Stoic concepts needs to be understood against the backdrop of the emergence of the concepts of “literature” and “criticism,” which became alternatives to traditional philosophical ethics, and provided novel categories like “character” and “sentiment.” He then explains how the reception of Stoicism as a model of character and sentiment was strongly marked by reactions to the French revolution and Napoleon. This is a compelling study in how “sub-philosophical” contexts give meaning to philosophical theory. Heather Ellis discusses the reception of Marcus Aurelius in Victorian England, which she connects to what she calls “social Stoicism”: in other words, a model of character for elite men of the British empire. Finally, Kenneth Sacks’ chapter on American Stoicism must be the most multidisciplinary chapter in the volume. Sacks ranges from the philosophies of the American founders, transcendentalists, and pragmatists, to autobiographical and fictional literature, cinema, painting, and even hip hop. His brief discussion of the amazingly pervasive characterization of Native Americans as “stoic” (especially in visual art) and the recent backlash from activists merits a chapter in its own right.

There remain three chapters that do not fit into the preceding chapters. Ada Palmer gives us a thorough account of the recovery of Stoic texts in the Renaissance, the gradual elimination of forgeries, and a detailed register of printings. Andrew Shifflett touches on William Cornwallis’ Stoicizing, but focuses

on ostensibly Stoic elements in Shakespearean characterization or dialogue, with extensive attention to prior scholarship on this topic. Because the question of Shakespeare's Stoicism revolves around his relation to Senecan tragedy, Shifflett's failure explicitly to reflect on whether Seneca tragedy is Stoic (an ongoing controversy) vitiates this discussion. Finally, Donald J. Robertson surveys Stoic elements in modern psychotherapy, especially the family of therapies grouped under the heading "cognitive-behavioral." Particularly useful here for historians of philosophy will be Robertson's analysis of the history and branching of this type of therapy.

As Sellars rightly claims in the first note to his excellent introduction (which thankfully eschews any attempt to summarize the ensuing chapters), there has never been any attempt in any language to cover Stoic reception so broadly. The nearest competition is Barbara Neymeyr, J. Schmidt, and B. Zimmerman (eds.), *Stoizismus in der europäischen Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst, und Politik*, 2 vols, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008. But at \$349.00, *Stoizismus* has not enjoyed a broad circulation; moreover, the current volume has a much larger and more international authorial team, and wider coverage. Any reader will identify their own "noteworthy omissions"; Jewish (especially Philo) and Byzantine reception occur first to me. But Sellars prudently disclaims any hope of being exhaustive (1), which is clearly impossible.

Other than its comprehensiveness, the book's strengths and weaknesses will to some extent depend on each reader's interests. Those interested in specific authors or movements will find valuable starting points for their research in individual chapters. From this perspective, it is a strength that many provocative observations remain undeveloped. One might mention Erasmus' invocation of Jesus' emotional experience on Gethsemane when debating Stoic wisdom with John Colet (149), or William Hazlitt's claim that the frigid characterization in Wordsworth's *Excursion* was linked to its Stoic sentimentality (315). It is unlikely that many will want to read straight through the 388 pages of rather small print, which is rather a shame. By doing so they would discover that themes repeat with philosophically important variations. Two prominent examples are the problematics of freedom in a deterministic universe and the idealism of the sage (as pride, heroism, or godlikeness). Yet Sellars has considerably facilitated cross-volume searches with a superb, eighteen-page index. All in all, this will be a very useful reference volume for scholars working in a wide range of fields.