# Introduction

Like every academic discipline, philosophy has a history. Unlike the other disciplines, however, philosophy has constantly struggled with and against the fact of its history. In traditional humanistic fields like literature and history, it is well accepted that current understandings are historically specific: today's writers situate themselves against the readings of previous generations, and they openly acknowledge that their own readings are motivated by the specific concerns of their own times. In scientific fields like physics and chemistry, by contrast, it is well accepted that history plays no essential role in contemporary practice: scientists understand their results as independently justified by the natural evidence, regardless of the historical contingencies that may have brought anyone to those results. The two understandings are of course radically opposed, and they may even provoke conflict within the academy. But within the disciplines themselves, there is a broad consensus on the role that the history of the discipline should play.

Philosophy, however, has constantly wavered between these two understandings. For the most part, the dominant view has been the scientific one: philosophical positions exist in the realm of reasons, and those reasons have no essential reference to time and place. But philosophy has never left the humanities, and the history of philosophy has remained a constant part of the field. At times, as in the heyday of logical positivism, it has seemed as if the historians might be banished entirely. But the banishment has never finally happened. The strongly scientific account of philosophy has remained an explicit move within philosophy, not the implicit consensus of the discipline. The logical positivists ultimately needed their historicist opponents: without someone to struggle

against on behalf of science, there could be no need for positivism at all. For every philosopher who has tried to leave history for the pure realm of reasons, there has been a historicist critic to argue against, a critic who seeks to return the rationalist to his or her place and time.

In this sense, the ahistorical philosophers, for all their Platonic dominance, are constantly on the defensive, and may even face a special disadvantage. They must struggle not only to defend their views with reasons, but also to establish that those reasons are valid in some ultimate sense. The latter claim is so bold and sweeping that it inevitably provokes a skeptical and often hostile response. And in this skeptical or hostile mood, it is easy to take a criticism of the claim to ultimate justification as a criticism of the philosophical view in question. If we can show that a self-described ahistorical philosopher is finally grounded in history, we can easily take ourselves to have shown that the ahistorical philosopher's substantive views are in fact mistaken.

But nothing of the kind follows. Even if philosophical positions are essentially grounded in history, there is no reason to assume that any particular philosophical position is incorrect, even if it is standardly understood as aspiring to ahistorical truth. For if all philosophical positions are historical, then the fact of their historicity does not distinguish among them. To assume otherwise is to assume that historicizing can only undermine the traditional practice of philosophy, and this seems as dogmatic as the claim that the traditional practice of philosophy should pay no attention to history at all.

The authors in this book take up, as J. B. Schneewind has done in *The Invention of Autonomy*, the historical context and implications of a piece of philosophy that may seem an obvious and especially controversial attempt to leave history: the Kantian theory of autonomy. We of course know Kant took his views about morality to follow from the necessary structure of rational agency. According to his historicist and communitarian critics, Kant was part of something called the "Enlightenment project," the attempt to provide morality with a stable and secular grounding in human reason. But if we are suspicious of this project on historicist grounds, must we therefore be suspicious of Kant? The substantive criticism follows from the historicist premise only if historicizing Kant reveals him to be doing nothing more than struggling against history. But if Kant's thinking is embedded in history in a much more complex and interesting way, then the force of Kantian autonomy will turn out to be much more complex and interesting than the critics of the Enlightenment have thought. Kant may have been the child of his time, but this undermines his thinking only

if what it meant for him to be the child of his time was to be crude and dogmatic. And that follows not from any historicist premise, but from the crude and dogmatic history that is itself implied in the sweeping notion of the "Enlightenment project."

The historical reality, J. B. Schneewind has labored hard and well to show, was very different. Kantian autonomy, he has argued, sprang not from a simple and dogmatic wish to transcend religion and community, but from a complex engagement with a set of debates about the nature and possibility of moral community with other human beings and with God. If that is so, then it is difficult to fault Kant for taking leave of history, and difficult to criticize Kantian autonomy on those same grounds. The Kant who emerges from this more complex history may not be the familiar Kant, but he may well be a more interesting and even a more appealing Kant.

This last suggestion has two parts, and they correspond to the two parts of this book. In the first part, the authors seek to explore the complex history of Kantian autonomy, and especially its relation to the theological and religious debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Exploring a series of controversies over toleration, theodicy and voluntarism, these papers place Kant in a context far removed from what we may understand as Enlightenment rationalism. In the second part of the book, the authors explore the implications of a Kant freed from this kind of rationalism, a Kant more sympathetic to our empirical nature, to the situated nature of our deliberations, and to the idea of plurality or community of rational agents. In different ways, these papers argue for versions of Kantian autonomy that go beyond the notion of a solitary rational agent, legislating eternally valid laws. Instead they argue for a conception of autonomy consistent with a contextual and historical account of human agency.

The authors in this volume do not always agree with Kant or with one another. They sometimes have very different views about the history that led up to Kant, and about what parts of Kant have survived the history that followed him. But the authors are united in their view that an understanding of Kantian autonomy can only be enhanced by a careful study of its historical context, and by a careful study of what our historical nature means for the idea of Kantian autonomy. Such a study is unlikely to end philosophy's struggle with and against its history, but it may show that struggle to contribute something to philosophy itself.

PART ONE

# AUTONOMY IN CONTEXT

1

# Justus Lipsius and the Revival of Stoicism in Late Sixteenth-Century Europe

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In the history of scholarship and of humanist learning, Justus Lipsius is best known for his editions with annotations of Tacitus and (later) Seneca. Indeed, his was a scholar's and professor's life, devoted primarily to the study and teaching of classical Latin literature and Roman history. He cared about nothing more – or so he repeatedly said – than to live in peace and quiet, devoting himself to his books and his students and the enjoyment of his garden, far away from the bustle of politics – and from the civil disturbances and even wars caused by the passionate religious disputes that were so prominent a feature of Northern Europe, and especially of his own country, the present-day Belgium, during his lifetime (1547–1606). He was born near Leuven into a Catholic household, was a pupil from age thirteen to sixteen at the Jesuit College in Cologne (where he began to learn Greek) and then studied law at the university of Leuven. At nineteen he became Latin secretary to the notorious cardinal Granvelle (archbishop of Malines-Brussels), whom he accompanied to Rome (1567–70), where he began his work on Tacitus. Returning to Belgium briefly, he then went to Vienna, apparently hoping for some imperial academic or scholarly appointment (his first big book of textual studies of Latin classics, *Variae Lectiones*, had been published by Plantin at Antwerp in 1569). In this he was disappointed. On his way back to Belgium through Germany a year or so later, he learned of the confiscation by the Spanish army then occupying Belgium of his family property (on which he had been supporting himself). Thus in need of a source of income, and with the help of some German scholars he had become acquainted with, he was offered by the duke of Saxe-Weimar the chair of History and Eloquence at the newly founded Protestant (i.e.,

Lutheran) University of Jena, which he gladly accepted (along with a shift in religious affiliation).[1]

This was in 1572, when Lipsius was twenty-four years of age. Though he seems to have been a popular teacher, he did not stay long at Jena; his appointment in 1574 as dean of the Faculty of Arts was met with opposition from among his colleagues (on what ground we seem not really to know: suspicion of Catholicism? professional jealousy?), and he felt forced to resign from the University (March 1574). In Cologne, where he repaired for the rest of the calendar year, he married. His wife, a widow, belonged to a Catholic family of Leuven. They returned to Belgium, first to live in Lipsius's home village and then in Leuven itself, presumably supported by her or her family's money. He continued to work on Tacitus and took up Plautus as well, but he also resumed his studies of law at the university, receiving his degree in 1576. The Spanish army interrupted his peaceful life as a private scholar again in 1578, when their advances toward Leuven drove him off to stay with Plantin at Antwerp; when the Spanish took the city of Leuven, soldiers sacked his house and only the intervention of a Jesuit friend resident there (Spanish, to judge by his name), Martin Delrio, saved his books and manuscripts from destruction. Again in need of a livelihood, he looked to Holland. He was offered a professorship of history at the newly founded (Calvinist) University of Leiden in 1579, the year the United Provinces were established, in full revolt from Philip II of Spain – entailing a second switch in religious affiliation away from Catholicism, this time to Calvinism. There he stayed for thirteen years, until his final return to Leuven in 1592 as professor of history and Latin literature in the Catholic University there. He functioned in this position until his death in 1606.

I have related these biographical details because I think they may help us in reading and evaluating Lipsius's works on ancient Stoicism. Even in his earlier years while working largely on Tacitus he had apparently been much taken with Seneca, and with the Stoic philosophy that animates Seneca's *Moral Essays* and *Letters to Lucilius*.[2] His edition of Seneca's *Opera Omnia* was not completed until shortly before his death (it was published by Plantin at Antwerp in 1605). But already while at Leiden, in 1584, Lipsius published what proved to be his most widely read work, his two books *De Constantia (On Constancy)*, in which he presented and defended a Stoic moral and psychological outlook, derived largely from Seneca, upon the civil and religious disorders and the severe and brutally repressive Spanish rule in Belgium of that time; and while working on the Seneca edition he published two works in 1604 offering an introduction

to and survey of Stoic philosophy, the *Manuductio ad Stoicam Philosophiam (Guide to the Stoic Philosophy)* and *Physiologia Stoicorum (The Physical Theory of the Stoics)*.[3] (A third projected work, on Stoic ethical theory, remained unwritten;[4] in fact, however, the *Manuductio* is already largely devoted to questions of ethics, so taken together the two works do amount to an exposition of the whole Stoic system.) As I mentioned, *On Constancy* relies very heavily on Seneca (not necessarily, and indeed not even very notably, on Seneca's treatise of the same name), and otherwise almost entirely on Latin authors (Cicero, Aulus Gellius); it shows little or no knowledge of what are for modern scholarship the principal, or anyhow most highly regarded, Greek sources for our knowledge of classical Stoic theories – book VII of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Plutarch's anti-Stoic treatises *On Stoic Self-contradictions* and *Against the Stoics on Common Notions*, the selections from Stoic authors in Stobaeus's *Eclogae* and Sextus Empiricus.[5] The later two works of 1604, however, show extensive and, in a scholarly sense, responsible and insightful use of these Greek sources (mostly, it seems, in the Latin translations that by that time had appeared of them all – but Lipsius does show that he can consult the Greek text when that is necessary or desirable).[6] Lipsius's account of Stoic philosophy in these later works aspires to, and obviously does, go well beyond Seneca and other Latin sources to discover the original form of the Stoic doctrines in the hands of Zeno and Chrysippus and other 'Old' Stoics of the third century B.C., and to deal with important questions about the evolution of these doctrines over the centuries from then to Roman imperial times. The version of Stoicism that Lipsius left in these two works for his successors in the study of the school is remarkably sophisticated and well-informed – much more so, as it seems, than standards and practices of the time would have led one to expect. It was, however, through *On Constancy* that Lipsius's revival of Stoicism as a framework for life and thought in early modern Europe was mostly effected. Hence in discussing Lipsius's Stoicism in what follows, I will concentrate on this very popular and widely read early writing.[7]

*On Constancy* (in two books) takes the form of a dialogue – like so many works of ancient philosophy. Interestingly, Lipsius's dialogic style in this work is more like that of Plato's dialogues than Cicero's philosophical works (or Seneca's so-called *dialogi*, in which Seneca, as the sole speaker, frequently raises and responds to things that "someone" or an unspecified "he" may say in objection or puzzlement): conversational interchange persists throughout, with no Ciceronian lapse into monologic exposition of doctrine. However, like Cicero, Lipsius is the narrator as well as one

of the interlocutors; he begins by setting the scene for the conversation that is to follow. He reports that "a few years past" he was traveling from Leuven to Vienna (as in fact he had done, as we have seen, around 1570) and stopped in Liege to visit friends, among them Charles Langius, "the leader in virtue and learning among the Flemish" (71). Lipsius tells him he is leaving Belgium for other lands in order to distract his mind from the grievous distress caused him by the constant insolence of government functionaries and soldiers (under the sovereignty of the Spanish king), and by all the dislocations consequent upon the civil wars and seditions the country is beset with. No one, he says, could be of so "hard and flinty" a heart as to endure all these evils with equanimity – certainly, *he* has no "plate of steel about his own heart" (72). In addition to distress caused by his personal victimization, Lipsius reports grave distress simply at the constant sight of what the country and his fellow countrymen in general are enduring: once he is finally away from the country altogether, there will be "less grief to hear reports of evils than to be an eye-witness to them" (73).

In response, Langius sets out, in a conversation over that afternoon and the following morning, to disabuse the young Lipsius of the false "opinions" that Langius maintains lie behind Lipsius's grief and distress, and to put in their place "bright beams of reason," which, he says, will cure Lipsius's mind of the illness that makes it possible for, and indeed causes, him to accept those false opinions and suffer the consequent severely disturbed feelings. Traveling elsewhere will do no good, since the illness of the mind that he suffers from now, while in Belgium, is the cause of his troubles – not the events themselves that he has called "evils." Unless that ill mind is corrected it will simply accompany him to Austria, and ruin his life there just as surely as it has been ruining his life at home. The correction needed is to instill constancy of mind, the stable condition of one's mind that results from knowledge about what really is and what really is not actually good or bad: this constancy will prevent him from ever even momentarily falling for the false opinion, say, that some misbehavior of some soldier has actually *harmed* him or (of itself) *harmed* his life – and, consequently, from feeling grief or distress at what has happened.

Now, one might have thought that, despite what Langius implies, even with a cured mind Lipsius would still have found quite decent reasons to leave Belgium, at least until the Spanish army withdrew and some reliable civic order was restored. He has just reported that when working in the city he is interrupted by "trumpets and rattling of armor," but then is driven