

## **The Race Supremacist Anthropology of Christoph Meiners, its Origins and Reception**

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The following manuscript presents what I believe may be the most detailed biographical examination of Christoph Meiners (1747–1810) that has yet to be compiled. I intend to use this manuscript in a book I am writing on the history of craniology. The primary source for my research is an 1821 biographical sketch of Meiners published by Philipp Albert Stapfer in French as an entry in *Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et Moderne*, Vol. 1. As far as I know, Stapfer’s sketch has never been translated into English. I have never seen it referenced in any English publication about Meiners. Since I do not speak French, I paid for a translation of Stapfer’s sketch. I have included it in the appendices to this manuscript. I view this translation as a first draft, which hopefully will lead other scholars to complete an improved translation. No parts of this manuscript have been peer reviewed.

Most of the current scholarship dealing with Meiners addresses his opposition the philosophy of Kant. Although this is an important topic, the following manuscript does not address it in detail. I claim no expertise when it comes to the philosophy of Kant or his critics. Instead, I have focused on Meiners’ anthropological theories, and how they related to those of J. F. Blumenbach, whose writings I have studied extensively. It is my contention that from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, the scholars who studied Blumenbach did not sufficiently document how he developed his research into human racial variation as a reaction to that of Meiners. Thus, to fully understand the context of Blumenbach’s racial research, one must understand the racial research of Meiners.

Blumenbach and Meiners were professors at Göttingen University, and they both sprang from the same cultural milieu. Yet they held opposing views on many issues. Blumenbach was an abolitionist egalitarian who asserted that racial variation was a spectrum. He held that all ethnicities had the potential to achieve intellectual improvement if placed in a nurturing environment. Conversely, Meiners was a race supremacist who supported slavery. He asserted that humans existed as distinct and separate racial groups, which we would now call “subspecies.” Meiners also claimed that only certain European nations possessed the innate ability for intellectual excellence. My goal in the following paper is to trace the origins of Meiners’ race supremacist anthropology, and to show how it was embraced or rejected by scholars during his lifetime and after his death. I would appreciate any comments on this manuscript.

## PART 1:

### Christoph Meiners: The first scholar to describe Europeans as “Caucasians”

“...the human species consists of two primary stocks (*Hauptstämme*), the Tatar or Caucasian, and the Mongol stock (*Stamm*); the latter of which are not only much weaker in body and intellect (*Geist*), but are also more evil (*viel übel*) and wanting of virtue than the Caucasian; the Caucasian stock is divided into two races (*zwo Racen*), the Celtic and Slavic, the former of which is richer in intelligence (*Geistgaben*) and virtue than the latter. From this observation alone, one can elucidate why... only one continent, and certain nations (*Völkern*) were almost always the ones who ruled, while, conversely, all others were the ones in servitude; [and] why the Goddess of Freedom has lived within such limited [national] borders... European nations have differentiated themselves (*selbst im Zustande*) – even in a state of savagery and barbarism, from the savages and barbarians of other continents – by their higher virtue, by their greater receptivity of Enlightenment, through their mores, their methods of warfare, [and] their treatment of women, slaves, and conquered enemies.”

Christoph Meiners, 1785 (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, [xx–xxii]). [1]

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Christoph Meiners (1747–1810) is one of the most overlooked and, I would argue, significant figures in the history of anthropology and European attitudes about race (Guettel 2012, 49; Golf-French 2019, 945). He was a professor of philosophy at Göttingen at the same time Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) taught there. They were roughly the same age; they were spawned from the same cultural milieu. Yet, they adamantly disagreed as to the basic nature of human racial variation. Gustav Jahoda, the Austrian-born British professor of social psychology, wrote that Blumenbach’s views “were diametrically opposed to those of Meiners... Their personal styles were equally contrasting: Meiners a speculative philosopher with a heavy ideological commitment, Blumenbach a sober scientist concerned with empirical evidence” (Jahoda 1999, 63).

Blumenbach was an ardent monogenist who held that all humans – from Polynesians and Scandinavians to Mohawks and Nigerians – had descended from one original, or “autochthonous,” population. Meiners is best known for having proposed that all the nations of humankind originated from “two primary stocks (*zween Hauptstämmen*)”: a European stock and an extra-European stock consisting of all the non-European peoples of the world (Meiners 1785 *Grundriß*, [xx–xxii]) [2]. The German American historian Michael Carhart described Meiners’ racial theory as not simply “two-part,” but

“binary” with the two primary stocks serving as a pair of almost metaphysically linked opposites: European, intelligent, and beautiful versus extra-European, stupid, and ugly (Carhart 2007, 61). Technically speaking, Meiners’ binary theory was monogenic, in that he regarded both stocks as having shared a common origin at some far distant time. However, Meiners eventually abandoned his binary theory. Late in life, he argued that there were perhaps dozens of different species of human, each with its own unique origin (Carhart 2009, 621; Meiners *Untersuchungen* Vol. 1 1811: 372–373). With this change of heart, Meiners lent his full support to polygeny, the notion that humans were descended from more than just one population. And if that contradicted the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, so be it.

Meiners postulated that European peoples originated the Caucasus Mountains which arise in what is now Georgia and Azerbaijan. Historians now recognize Meiners as the first to describe Europeans using the term “Caucasian” as a racial classification (Jahoda 1999, 65; Baum 2006, 84; Painter 2010, 88). The term “Caucasian,” which first debuted in the works of Meiners, remains in common usage today. The 2010 Census of the United States classified all individuals as belonging to five “statistical races” one of which is “White or Caucasian” (Hixon 2011: 1–2). Yet, historians from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have mistakenly credited Blumenbach with coining the word *Caucasian* (Huxley 1865, 273–274; Scheibinger 1993, 129). In 2020, student activists at Göttingen University called for Blumenbach’s name to be removed to from Johann-Friedrich-Blumenbach Institute for Zoology and Anthropology because they incorrectly claimed he was a race supremacist who “laid the foundations for a branch of anthropology” that justified the oppression of “non-white peoples (*nicht-weißer Menschen*)” (Basisgruppe Göttingen 2020, Web). But like so many others, these students were confusing Blumenbach, who was an egalitarian, with Meiners, an overt race supremacist who sought to justify exploitation of extra-Europeans and Slavs.

In addition to coining the term *Caucasian*, Meiners further asserted that the Caucasian Stock was mentally, physically, and aesthetically superior to the extra-European stock, which he called the “Mongolian Stock.” Meiners believed that all non-Europeans had originated in the Altai Mountains of Mongolia. According to Meiners, people born to the Mongolian Stock were doomed by nature to be stupid (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, [xx]; Meiners *Grundriß* 1793, 5–6). Conversely, Blumenbach asserted that any person from any continent could become educated, if only they were placed in an environment where they had the opportunity to learn (Blumenbach 1821: 55; 1825, 35).

In the following sections, I present a sketch of Meiners’ life and anthropological research, which is no easy task. He was a prolific writer who authored some 180 journal articles and at least 44 books and monographs. His publications addressed history, human origins, aesthetics, and what we would now call

psychology and sociology (Pütter 1788, 176–179; Notermund 1813, 1,242–1,252; Prantl 1885, 224; Wunderlich 2016, 511). And yet, Meiners’ massive literary output is rarely discussed in scholarly literature. There is no book-length biography of him, and prior to the 1980s few historians addressed his work in any detail (Golf-French 2019, 950). For example, in 1855, the German philosopher Carl von Prantl (1820–1888) authored an entry on Meiners in *Universal German Biography* that was little more than a listing of his publications (Prantl 1885, 224–226).

There are only a handful of 19<sup>th</sup> century articles that address Meiners, and they tend to dismiss him as a second-rate scholar. Certain aspects of Meiners’ race supremacist theories influenced French race supremacists, like Julien-Joseph Virey (1775–1846), whose Eurocentric writings were admired by American race supremacists, like Samuel George Morton (Lotter 1987, 71; Virey 1810, 33; Morton 1839, iv, 4). It appears that Meiners’ penchant for lashing out against those who disagreed with him – and that was almost everyone – tarnished his memory for decades after his death. Nowadays, his cold-hearted bigotry is an embarrassment to modern students of cultural anthropology, sociology, and psychology, three fields in which he was unquestionably a pioneer.

Throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Meiners was largely overlooked by historians. During the 1990s, Jehoda noted that “Meiners usually rates only a cursory mention in histories of race.” The German-born American historian Suzanne Zantop wrote that Meiners was “virtually unknown” to scholars who study race (Jehoda 1999, 63; Zantop 1997, 22). As recently as 2013, the German-born American historian Jens-Uwe Guetell noted that Meiners is “barely known today.” American historian Peter Park stated that Meiners “remains a conspicuously understudied” figure due to the “shock and revulsion that historians in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust have felt for his racist ideas... Meiners is not the face of the German enlightenment that historians can countenance” (Guetell 2013, 49; Park 2013, xiii). The few modern historians who have studied Meiners in any depth presented him as an overly eclectic researcher who spread himself too thin. He sought to study such a wide range of topics that he was unable to dig into any one of them with any depth (Vetter 1997, 195; Demel 2012, 78).

Fortunately for researchers like me, Meiners’ life history was addressed as part of an extensive essay about him in the *Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et Moderne* (Stapfer, 1821: 156-165). This entry, which was published in 1821, was authored by Philipp Albert Stapfer (1766–1840), a liberal Swiss politician and intellectual who promoted the philosophy of Kant. Stapfer is now credited with making the French public aware of the writings of Kant and Lichtenberg. Stapfer studied at Göttingen University circa 1789 when Meiners was teaching there (Sommer 2016, 741–742). This time was also when Meiners was publishing papers advocating for slavery (Meiners “Ueber” 1788, 398–416; “Ueber” 1790, 385–456).

To my knowledge, Stapfer's sketch has never previously been cited in any English publications. I may well be the first person to have translated it from the original French.

Although I feel fortunate to have come upon Stapfer's little known essay, I recognize that it is so unabashedly critical of Meiners that it cannot be regarded as a neutral source. For example, Stapfer wrote that Meiners arrogantly cut himself off from others, relying exclusively on "his own personal judgement." Thus, he had a superficial sort of "philosophical independence" which was "more apparent than real" (Stapfer 1821, 157). Like the highly contaminated writings of Tacitus, Stapfer's assessment of Meiners must be viewed with the utmost skepticism; yet it is the only information available. Indeed, Stapfer's biography is authoritative not because it is unassailably trustworthy, but rather because it is the only story we have.

### **Christoph Meiners: The postmaster's son who impressed the Tsar**

Meiners was born in the town of Warstade near Ottendorf in the far northern German State of Bremen-Verden (Wundrelich 2016, 511). His father was an "intelligent farmer and postmaster" who involved his son with his work at the office and on the farm. Meiners' mother was "a woman distinguished by her wit and sound judgement" (Stapfer 1821, 156). Stapfer reported that Meiners was an athletic boy who enjoyed being the center of attention. He engaged his schoolyard pals with tales of his "extraordinary adventures" and "wondrous incidents (*incidents merveilleux*)." Stapfer claimed that Meiners' boyhood talent for spinning yarns with embellishments "of his own invention" continued into his adult life as a "penchant for exaggeration, which is noticed in his best works. He knows neither nuances nor compromise" (Stapfer 1821, 156–157).

In 1763, at the age of 16, Meiners, enrolled in the *Domschule* (Cathedral School) in Bremen. According to the 1857 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Meiners attended secondary school at "Bremen, where he left behind him a reputation for extraordinary ardor [enthusiasm]" (*Enc. Brit.* 1857, 473–474). Prantl wrote that Meiners was "popular as a schoolboy" because of his "storytelling talent," but made "little progress in learning" in the classroom. Instead, he "retired to private study, which consisted only of reading numerous books" (Prantl 1885, 224–226). Stapfer noted that Meiners resolved to "learn the sciences on his own" because he had an "aversion to homework" and was "repulsed by the dryness of elementary education" (Stapfer 1821, 157).

Prantl reported that the teenaged Meiners read some rather heady authors "with Rabener, De la Mettrie, and Rousseau particularly attracting him" (Prantl 1885, 224–226). Gottlieb Wilhelm Rabener (1714–1771) was a German satirist who largely focused on the foibles of the middle class. Rabener was

also a critic of footnoting, which he saw as a superficial means for authors with limited talent to appear scholarly (*Enc. Brit.* 1911: 773; Dolo 2015, 77). Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709–1751) was a French physician and philosopher who promoted mechanistic materialism. An atheist, he asserted that, contra Descartes, mental processes were the result of bodily functions; humans were simply complex animals and not specially endowed by God (Lieber 1994, 1–7). The Swiss philosopher and author Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) is now regarded as a pillar of the Enlightenment. His ideas were highly influential to the development of modern political and economic thought. Meiners was especially impressed with Rousseau’s theory that education should protect a child from the vices and errors inherent in human society (Stapfer 1821, 157; Oelkers 2008, 87–88).

In 1767, at the age of 19, Meiners enrolled at Göttingen University. The 1857 *Encyclopedia Britannica* stated that while he was there, he “despised the lectures of his masters,” preferring to “study alone and by the aid of books” (*Enc. Brit.* 1857, 473–474). Prantl reported that Meiners was a “*eigenthümlichen jungen Manne* (peculiar young man)” who “ignored all lectures” and instead retreated to the library (Prantl 1885, 224). Some sources say Meiners studied law, while others indicate his focus was philosophy and history (Wunderlich 2016, 511; Golf-French 2019, 949). Meiners was, like Blumenbach, one of the few Göttingen students selected to participate in Heyne’s intensive seminar class on the writings of Homer (Golf-French 2019, 949). How often Meiners *actually* showed up for Heyne’s class has not been recorded for posterity.

His father died while Meiners was at university, and he briefly paused his studies. Apparently Meiners returned home and sought to fill his father’s job as a postmaster. When that fell through, he returned to Göttingen to finish his education, albeit with more time spent in the library than in the classroom. As Stapfer wrote, “the immense treasures of the academic library took the place of all other” forms of learning. The library’s “magnificent collection alone was able to provide Meiners with a prodigious variety of quotations drawn from travelers, historians, and philosophers from all time periods and from all nations” which would eventually become evident in “almost every page from the output of his pen” (Stapfer 1821, 158). Later in life, Meiners would himself become a travel writer. Stapfer, who was largely critical of Meiners’ writings, was nonetheless impressed with Meiners’ accounts of his travels in Switzerland: “They place Meiners among the good writers of Germany. The lively descriptions of the political information they offer, and which are generally accurate, make it all the more interesting to read” (Stapfer 1821, 164–165).

Meiners graduated from Göttingen in 1770 at the age of 22. Despite his unorthodox ways, he made an especially good impression on two Göttingen professors: the philosopher Georg Heinrich Feder

(1740–1821) and the historian Ludwig Timotheus Spittler (1752–1810). In 1772, Meiners was hired as a professor of philosophy at Göttingen University. During his tenure there, he would go on to publish what Prantl called the “astonishing, indeed almost appalling amount (*entsetzlichen Menge*) of his literary achievements” (Prantl 1885, 224). It was also in 1772 that Blumenbach began graduate studies at Göttingen. There is no evidence that he took any courses from Meiners. A few years later, Meiners became a leading member of the Bavarian Illuminati, a fraternal society which only lasted ten years. The Bavarian Illuminati was founded in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830), a rationalist Bavarian law professor who promoted an anti-clerical, republican ideology. Weishaupt’s Bavarian Illuminati, which began as an offshoot of the Freemasons, was a collection of intellectuals who sought to promote social change by infiltrating government and influential institutions at the highest levels (Fleming 2020, 379–380). Weishaupt actively promoted Meiners’ ideas (Golf-French 2019, 950).

In 1796, Meiners retired from his teaching duties and was selected to serve as the prorector (or vice president) of Göttingen University. He held this position until just before he died in 1810 (Dougherty 1990, 92). According to the 1857 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Meiners was appointed “vice rector” at the university, and “became one of the most active members of the Royal Society of Göttingen, established a short time before by the illustrious Haller” (*Enc. Brit.* 1857, 473–474). Stapfer reported that Meiners excelled as a prorector and led a “uniform and peaceful life” characteristic of a “scholar occupied solely with his research... the Royal Academy of Sciences of Göttingen did not have a more assiduous and hardworking member” (Stapfer 1821, 159). Meiners also found success in the political realm as a privy councilor to the Hanoverian Court (Golf-French 2019, 949). He was by all accounts a reliable man with a strong work ethic.

One of Meiners’ duties as a privy councilor was to recruit German professors for job openings in Russian universities (Golf-French 2019, 949). The Russian government invited him to undertake “the delicate mission of selecting professors capable of naturalizing science and letters in the empire of Russia” (*Enc. Brit.* 1857, 473–474). At that time, Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) – whose mother and paternal grandmother were both Prussians – was “resolved to create universities in different provinces of his states [and] to improve the old ones” (Stapfer 1821, 160). This task suited Meiners well, such that “The Russian Government put a special glow over the last years of Meiners, giving him a mark of the highest esteem” (Stapfer 1821, 160). In 1803, the Tsar delivered to Meiners a diamond ring as a token of his appreciation (Golf-French 2019, 954). In 1804, Meiners became an honorary member of the University of Moscow (Wunderlich 2016, 511).

In its rather critical assessment of Meiners, the 1857 *Encyclopedia Britannica* noted that he “occupies higher position as a writer than as a philosopher. The intellectual independence of his earlier years was more apparent than real when he attained to maturity.” Although his writing style was “very clear and methodological,” analysis was not his strong suit. “On meeting with a speculative problem” his line of attack was to “discourse about in an easy, popular manner.” Over time, Meiners’ approach to philosophy ceased to deal with the “abstract; it became an agreeable piece of study, not requiring much thought” (*Enc. Brit.* 1857, 473–474). Similarly, Stapfer opined that Meiners was “Judicious and by no means devoid of sagacity when it comes to exposing the ideas of others” yet was “unable to build at his own expense or, above all, raise his own house on solid foundations.” Meiners was skilled at pointing out the weakness of other scholars’ arguments. Yet he had no talent for generating original or compelling arguments by himself due to “the weak scope of his contemplative faculties” (Stapfer 1821, 162).

Although Meiners was well respected for the volume of his scholarly output, it appears he was not well liked on a personal level. As we shall see in a later chapter, Blumenbach, who generally got along with everybody, appears to have discreetly but profoundly despised Meiners. The hatred they shared for each other was one of many caustic relationships Meiners cultivated during his academic career. For indeed, Meiners seemed to go out of his way to rile up intellectual feuds with his university colleagues, which left him with few allies. His obituary, written by his former professor Heyne, was wanting for emotion. It did not include the kind of expressions of sorrowful loss one finds in, for example, the loving eulogy marking Blumenbach’s death. Instead, Heyne simply praised Meiners as a learned man, and then listed his voluminous publications (Heyne 1810, 18). One can only imagine how many friendships Meiners may have forfeited due his well-honed talent for quite correctly identifying the flaws in the writings of his fellow scholars.

There are only a few existing biographical portraits of Meiners, but they all agree he was a driven, industrious individual who began as an enthusiastic young scholar with a rebellious streak. Like a 1960s era radical fed up with the conventional education system, Meiners read books on his own, not willing to blindly follow the lead of the establishment. He was initially hailed by his peers as a bold independent voice who was unusually well informed. Some modern historians have proposed that he read more books than any of his Göttingen colleagues. That would likely make him one of the most well-read people in the entire world during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Carhart 2009, 68). But as we shall see, his need to go his own way eventually isolated him from his fellow academics. His arrogant self-absorption would go on to tarnish his reputation for the next two hundred years.

## **Meiners promoted an exclusionist history of philosophy**

In 1772, the same year he was hired to teach at Göttingen, Meiners published his first major academic work, *Revision der Philosophie (A Revision of Philosophy)*. It so impressed the philosophy department of Göttingen University that they offered him a job. The focus of *A Revision of Philosophy* was philosophy, not race and ethnicity (Wunderlich 2016, 512). Stapfer described this book as a refutation of the philosophy developed by two of Germany's most celebrated intellectuals: the polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Christian Wolff (1679–1754). Leibniz is most famous for developing calculus independently of Newton; Wolff was the most eminent German philosopher prior to Kant (Stapfer 1821, 157; Hettche 2019, web).

In writing *A Revision of Philosophy*, Meiners' objective was to present an entirely new transformation of the study of philosophy. This was a rather bold goal for Meiners, who was all of 24 years old at the time. Meiners' revolutionary vision for the future of philosophy was greatly influenced by the ideas of John Locke (1632–1704), the celebrated British philosopher and civil servant who also inspired the writers of the United States Constitution (Wunderlich 2016, 511). Locke famously postulated that when a human was born, the newborn's mind was a *tabula rasa* or “blank slate.” Thus, everything that a person knows is something they have experienced via their eyes, ears, nose, or other sensory organs. In other words, we are not born with any preexisting knowledge stored in our minds. Knowledge is not inherited from our parents like skin color, but rather absorbed into our brains as we grow from childhood to maturity (Uzgalis 2020, web).

Meiners also admired the key thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment like Adam Smith (1723–1790) and David Hume (Wunderlich 2016, 511). Meiners was also impressed with two other Scottish intellectuals, James Beattie (1735–1803) and Henry Home, better known as Lord Kames (1696–1782) (Golf-French 2019, 949). However, Meiners had little use for the philosophers of Germany, who tended to dwell on metaphysical questions like what did – or *did not* – constitute empirical knowledge (Wunderlich 2016, 511). As Meiners saw it, the main purpose of philosophy was not the esoteric musings of the academic elites. Rather, it ought to be an analysis of what it means to be human. He was mostly interested in the way that humans think and perceive the world, which makes him forerunner in the field we now call *psychology*.

During the 1780s, Meiners authored several books that touched on the history of European philosophy, tracing it back to the philosophers of ancient Greece. Key among these publications were *An Overview of the History of Mankind (Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit)* and *An Overview of the*

*History of Philosophy (Grundriß der Geschichte der Weltweisheit)*. He also published an examination of the culture of the Greco-Roman world in *The History of the Origin, Progress and Decline of [the Arts and] Sciences in Greece and Rome Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls der Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom*). Henceforth, I will refer to this book as *The History of Greece and Rome*.

Park asserts that within all these publications, Meiners argued that western philosophy was pioneered exclusively by the ancient Greeks. Thus, western philosophy was entirely a European invention, not influenced by the ancient intellectual traditions of Egypt or India. Meiners even went as far as to assert that it was only Europeans who had the innate capacity to produce genuine philosophy. For him, the great minds of ancient Egypt and India had only ever achieved a limited level of intellectual sophistication, which never matured into what one could call genuine philosophy (Park 2013, 77–82).

During Meiners' era, most European scholars accepted that the ancient Greeks had absorbed certain concepts from Egypt and India. A diagnostic example was the Greek philosopher Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360 – c. 270 BCE). The 3<sup>rd</sup> century historian Diogenes Laërtius (fl. 3<sup>rd</sup> cent.) reported that Pyrrho had traveled to India with Alexander and while there studied with “naked wise men” or gymnosophists, who were presumably Hindu ascetics (Bet 2018, web). In his usual unconventional way, Meiners rejected the notion that Greek philosophy had ever been influenced by Asian or African intellectuals. Instead, he claimed that the only Indians or Egyptians who traveled to ancient Greece were refugees, not men of great learning. These sad immigrants brought with them only the superstitions and petty gods of their cultures. As Meiners saw it, India and Egypt did not possess a tradition of learning that one could describe as properly structured philosophy (Park 2013, 78). Interestingly, Stapfer observed that Meiners' examination of the Neo-Platonists was “scholarly” but “too unfair to the school of Alexandria” which operated out of Africa (Stapfer 1821, 163).

Meiners asserted that Greeks had an “invincible hatred of foreigners.” The only things that the Greeks got from Asians and Africans were “the beginnings of agriculture,” along with “a completely useless script, and a certain number of words” (Park 2013, 78; Meiners *Geschichte* 1781, 3–4). Although Meiners accepted that the Egyptians excelled when it came to the beauty of their architecture, he ranked their buildings well below those of the Greeks. Meiners further claimed that ancient Egyptian civilization was not an African invention, but rather was introduced to Egypt by the Greeks. He stated that the medicine and mathematics of “the Egyptian priests remained in perennial childhood before their enlightenment [*Aufklärung*] through the Greeks” (Park 2013, 91; Meiners *Grundriß* 1786, 79). This concept, that a nation or race is unable to mentally progress beyond childhood is called “arrested

development.” It has been a common trope among race supremacists, and it was especially popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fallace 2018, 39).

Meiners’ efforts to remove Asia and Africa from the history of philosophy found few supporters among the conservative intelligentsia in Germany. However, Meiners’ outlook was endorsed by another pioneer of psychology, the German philosopher Dietrich Tiedemann (1754–1803). He was a professor at Marburg University who studied the ways in which children acquire knowledge. Tiedemann is still hailed as a founding father of developmental psychology. He was also a boyhood friend of Meiners. They met during primary school at Bremen and attended Göttingen University together. There, they both studied under Heyne (Park 2013:82–83).

From 1791 to 1797, Tiedemann published a series of volumes in which he argued that intellectual traditions of Asia and Africa were not founded on reason or experience (Park 2013, 83). Instead, they were “mere poetry of times still half-brutish.” Tiedemann asserted (with my emphasis) that “We have no right to speak of *the philosophy* of these peoples, nor do we have the right to include such doctrines in the history of philosophy” (Tiedemann 1791: xix). Tiedemann did concede that his fellow historians of philosophy “unanimously” agreed that Asians and Africans did, in fact, influence the Greeks (Quoted in Park 2013, 83; Tiedemann, 1791: xviii). Tiedemann’s public admission testifies to the lack of support which Meiners’ ideas garnered among the literati of Europe.

### **An uncelebrated pioneer of sociology and a populist social critic**

As we saw above, Meiners argued that only one form of philosophy, Greco-Roman, had any substantive merit. He dismissed the philosophies of all other ancient civilizations as inferior pseudo-philosophies, with minimal insights into the human condition. When it came to class relations, Meiners was also exclusionary. He asserted that the middle-class – from which he came – was the best. Meiners expressed this view in *The History of Greece and Rome*, published in two volumes in 1781 and 1782. Stapfer gave a mixed review of this work, writing that it “shed new light on” Greek history and especially the Pythagoreans, but “Unfortunately, he stops at Plato, and moreover he does not judge the doctrine with depth and fairness” (Stapfer 1821, 163). Stapfer also curiously noted that *The History of Greece and Rome* had an influence on “secret associations” in Germany, which was presumably a reference to organizations like the Freemasons and the German Illuminati (Stapfer 1821, 158).

Although Meiners presented *The History of Greece and Rome* as a history of philosophy, it was more than simply a listing of bygone people and events. As Carhart noted, the book was:

“not the traditional philosophical history that traces the handing down of the torch of reason through Western civilization. His approach to philosophy was external rather than internal. Rather than discussing philosophers and their text solely in their own terms, as if abstracted from their broader context, Meiners’ chief interest was the context itself. Philosophy was not external and objective truth, but an expression of a given nation” (Carhart 2007, 199).

For Meiners, the best way to understand the teachings of any given philosopher was not to study the philosopher as an individual, but rather study the “nation” – what we would now call culture or society – to which the philosopher belonged. As Meiners saw it, the ideas generated by an individual philosopher were not actually the result of the philosopher’s personal thought process. Rather, the philosopher was a kind of channel through which the collective wisdom – or societal norms – of his community was expressed. Thus, when studying the history of philosophy, it was essential to study the practices and characteristics of the philosopher’s community. In modern parlance, we would say that *The History of Greece and Rome* was an early attempt to study the nature of “culture” and “society.” However, back then, these words were not commonly used and there were no agreed upon definitions for them, even among the educated elite (Carhart 2007, 2–4, 233–235; Vermeulen 2015, 1–6, 429–430). Nevertheless, Meiners’ analysis of the history of philosophy took a similar approach to that of modern *sociological* and *cultural* studies.

The sociological interpretation of history that Meiners presented in *The History of Greece and Rome* was consistent with his belief in Locke’s “blank slate” theory. If the mind of the newborn child was an empty vessel, then what would fill it as the child grows? For Meiners, the answer was simple: the collective knowledge of the surrounding community. As he saw it, the Greeks did not achieve greatness because Dame Fortune randomly blessed them with individuals of great ability like Alexander and Plato. Rather, it was the other way round. It was the greatness of the Greeks as a people which created fertile ground for great men to arise. Thus, the philosophy promulgated by an ancient Greek philosopher was not simply the fruit of but one especially gifted individual. Instead, the genius of a philosopher was the reflection of the collective wisdom of Greek society as a whole (Golf-French 2019, 946). In a way, Meiners’ analytical approach was akin to modern contextual critiques of literature in which a book is seen to significantly reflect the society of the author.

Meiners approached the study of history as an examination of the fate of entire nations. According to Meiners’ interpretation, Rome did not fall due to military defeats, economic collapse, or the mistakes of any specific politician or general. Instead, Rome declined because it developed an elite class

that controlled too much of the wealth and monopolized political power. He expressed this interpretation in his 1782 book, *The History of the Decay of Morals and National Constitution of the Romans*, (*Geschichte des Verfalls der Sitten und der Staatsverfassung der Römer*) (Carhart 2007, 213–214). In this tome, Meiners decried the “accumulation of more-than-royal riches in the hands of a few mostly unworthy and thievish people” and the “incredible inequality of property among citizens and the nearly unending expansion of estates.” As a result, “damage was done through the destruction of the happiness of innumerable families” of the lower and middling classes [3] (Meiners *Geschichte* 1781, 127–128). Simply put, Meiners was a critic of the aristocratic elites, a feature he shares with Marxists and populist liberal politicians still active today (Golf-French 2019, 946).

In 1785, Meiners authored *Briefe über die Schweiz* (*Letters on Switzerland*), in which he asserted that his own “nation” – the German people – were fortunate to live in a collection of German States without “a single ruler.” The Germans had “no capitol city, no navy, and no possessions [colonies] in the two Indies.” If all Germans were united into just one kingdom or republic, they would have great riches in “silver and gold.” But this wealth would eventually end up in “the hands of a few” which would result in “enormous luxury and depraved morals” (Meiners *Brief* 1785 Vol. 2, 296). He warned that the Germans were “indisputably the most powerful of all nations, capable of conquering the world, if like the Romans they wanted to unify their powers to destroy” (Meiners *Brief* 1785 Vol. 2, 291). But fortunately, said Meiners, the Germans lived in separate small states, whose society was so ideal that “one must needs thank Providence that one was born in Germany, and in this era” (Meiners *Brief* 1785, Vol. 2, 297). For Meiners, Germany was the greatest place on earth, but not because it had great kings or celebrated cultural heroes. It was the collective knowledge of the German peoples, scattered throughout small states, which made Germans superior to all other (Carhart 2007, 221). Clearly, Meiners’ desire for Germany to forever remain a collection of non-unified states was quite different from the imperial aspirations of Germany’s late 18<sup>th</sup> century Prussian generals, or its early 20<sup>th</sup> century National Socialists.

While most of Meiners’ writings found few readers outside Germany, his Eurocentric *The History of Greece and Rome* fared better. It was translated into French, and well received by the Scottish historian John Gillies (1747–1836) as well as Thomas Beddoes (1760–1808), an English physician and Oxford professor. Those who admired *The History of Greece and Rome* were especially impressed that Meiners had read so many primary source documents penned by ancient Greeks and Romans. And yet when I look at Meiners’ footnote-rich writings, I see a man hell bent on justifying the superiority of his own kind: not just Germans, but middle-class Germans. To this end, he cherry-picked an overabundance of citations, not to inform, but to distract the reader from all the other citations which he chose not to mention because they conflicted with or refuted his preferred narrative.

## The unpopular binary racial theory of “Mongol Meiners”

During the first half of his career, Meiners periodically authored papers that addressed human racial variation as an ancillary topic (Golf-French 2019, 951; Zammito 2006, 44). It was not until 1785, however, that he produced his masterwork on race theory, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* (*Overview of the History of Mankind*), which I will call *The History of Mankind*. A second printing was published in 1786. *The History of Mankind* was somewhat unusual in that it was a work of academic research, yet Meiners wrote it in a style that made it accessible to the general public (Golf-French 2019, 953). True to his form, the populist-minded Meiners hoped to engage a broad readership that was not simply university-educated elites.

By writing *The History of Mankind*, Meiners sought to assemble a comprehensive study of human origins and racial variation. Such a goal had already been pursued by Switzerland’s Isaac Iselin (1728–1782), Scotland’s Henry Home (1696–1782), and England’s William Falconer (1744–1824). But unlike them, Meiners was a university professor with access to Göttingen’s rich library and scholarly resources. As a result, Meiners was able to gather and rigorously digest much more information than his predecessors (Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 72–73; Carhart 2017, 241).

Meiners not only visited the Göttingen library for research purposes, he worked there. He had been enlisted by Heyne – who was both Göttingen’s head librarian and the editor of the journal *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (*GGA*) – to review newly published or recently uncovered travel reports. That explains why *The History of Mankind* included a bibliography that was over 50 pages long. Most of the books listed in this bibliography were written in English, French or some language other than German (Carhart 2007, 228–229; Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, [254–308]). When I read through *The History of Mankind*, I was struck with its extensive footnotes. The book covers a range of topics and provides an abundance of information, but it does not offer a single compelling argument. It is as if Meiners were a trial lawyer who laid all his evidence out on a table, but never explained how it was all connected.

As Golf-French described it, *The History of Mankind* was “largely a collection of statements and citations regarding the appearance, behavior, and institutions of different cultures” which Meiners claimed “represented a novel intellectual field” (Golf-French 2019, 925). For Meiners, this was not simply another book about anthropology; he claimed that *The History of Mankind* established the foundation for a whole new field of study, which he called *Geschichte der Menschheit* (Carhart 2007, 229). This term can be translated as “the history of mankind,” or perhaps “history of the human species,” as if it were a kind of specialized subfield of “natural history” focusing only on *Homo sapiens*. As

Meiners envisioned it, this new field dealt with human cultures and human anatomy, along with the very nature and origin of intellect and morality, two phenomena which he asserted were biologically inherited (Golf-French 2019, 953). As with his first book, which he had hoped would be a revolutionary new approach to philosophy, Meiners wrote the *The History of Mankind* with the lofty aim of creating a landmark of western scholarship.

In 1793, Meiners published a second, updated edition of *The History of Mankind*. Like Meiners' other writings on race, this book tended to repeat the same general arguments, with reworded sentences and somewhat different terminology. Personally, I find Meiners' publications on race to be quite readable, with straightforward grammar and a minimum of academic stylistic pretention. Yet he commonly dwells on wild assumptions lacking the sort of scholarly caution one would hope to see in a mature researcher. Contrast this with Blumenbach's discussions on race, which present one cogent argument, even though his grammatically Byzantine paragraphs are difficult to read. I know scholars who are fluent in German and Latin who find reading Blumenbach's texts to be an arduous chore.

Most of the chapters in *The History of Mankind* are rather philosophical in scope. For example, he wrote extensively on the impact of despotism on human society and history (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, 151–161). It is mostly in the introduction to *The History of Mankind* that Meiners spelled out the details of his race theory. He set forth his proposal that all of humanity could be classified as belonging to one of “two primary stocks (*zween Hauptstämmen*)” which he labeled the “*Kaukasischen und dem Mongolischen Stamm* (Caucasian and the Mongolian Stocks)” (Meiners, *Grundriß* 1785, [xx]). It was Meiners who first selected the labels “Caucasian” and “Mongolian” to describe large-scale – or some might say “continental level” – populations in an anthropological context. Prior to Meiners, the word “Mongol” had sometimes been informally used as general descriptor for all East Asians. Europeans were well aware of the existence of Mongols due the 13<sup>th</sup> century incursions into Eastern Europe by the armies of Genghis Khan (c.1162–1227) (Demel 2012, 75; Keevak 2011: 73–75).

The notion that the Caucasus Mountains were a wellspring for humanity predated Meiners' appropriation of the term “Caucasian” (Figal 2014, 175–177; Baum 2006, 59). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, all humans descended from the sons of Noah who disembarked from the Ark after it landed on Mount Ararat just south of the lesser Caucasus Mountains. Similarly, medieval Arabophone scholars reported that a vast number of languages originated in the Caucasus region. According to legend, God's mule was carrying a sack of languages to be distributed through the world; but when the animal came to the winding mountain paths of the Caucasus it tripped, spilling out more than had been intended (Karny 2000, xvii).

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Baghdad-born Arabophone geographer Al-Mas'udi (c. 896–956) labeled the Caucasus the “*djabal al alsun* (the mountain of languages).” Perhaps he had read the Roman historian Pliny the Elder (24–79 CE) who claimed that when the Romans arrived in the Caucasus region, they had to employ 134 interpreters (King 2008, 9). Meiners himself asserted that “Almost all legends, and also the history of the oldest peoples, point to the Caucasus – and the areas that extend out from the Caucasus – as the cradle of the human race” (Baum 2006, 85; Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, 6).

### **The central role of beauty in Meiners' binary race theory**

In 1793, when Meiners jettisoned the terms Caucasian and Mongolian, he re-labelled his Caucasians/Europeans as the “white, or light-colored and beautiful peoples, (*weiße oder hellfarbige und schöne Völker*).” His Mongolians/extra-Europeans became the “dark-colored and ugly (*dunklefarbige und häßliche*)” peoples (Meiners *Grundriß* 1793, 5–6). Meiners' focus on beauty was consistent with his lifelong interest in understanding the very nature of aesthetics. In 1787, he authored both *Grundriß der Aesthetik* (*An Overview of Esthetics*) and *Grundriß der Theorie und Geschichte der schönen Wissenschaften* (*An Overview of the Theory and History of the Fine Arts*) (Meiners *Grundriß der Aesthetik* 1787; Meiners *Grundriß der Theorie* 1787). It is difficult to find any modern commentary regarding Meiners' key publications on aesthetics. All Stapfer said about them was that they had “no particular merit” (Stapfer 1821, 162). In 2016, Wunderlich briefly noted that within *Grundriß der Theorie*, Meiner asserted that there was no commonly accepted notion of beauty, and that in general, beauty was a kind of harmony (*Zusammenstimmung*). Meiners opined that the best examinations of beauty were presented in Kame's *Elements of Criticism* and Beattie's *Essays on Poetry as They Affect the Mind* (Wunderlich 2016, 514; Beattie 1778; Kame 1762). Again, we see Meiners' embrace of British philosophy.

It is curious that in Meiners' writings on general aesthetics, he discusses beauty as a vaguely defined philosophical principle akin to “harmony.” Yet when he writes about human racial variation, he presents beauty as if it were a scientifically observable phenomenon more like the earth's gravitational pull, governed by unseen natural laws. It was this latter interpretation of beauty which Meiners adopted as the central pillar to his race theory. His key racial-aesthetic assertion was that humanity consisted of only two binary opposites: the “beautiful white” with the “ugly dark.” Based on that assumption, which he offered as if it were common sense fact, Meiners argued that there were stark and obvious physical and intellectual differences separating the beautiful-white-Caucasian Stock from the dark-ugly-Mongolian Stock (Baum 2006, 85–86). As he described it, the “white and beautiful peoples” were:

“no longer entirely pure and uncontaminated in the Caucasus [region] itself. Nevertheless, the Caucasian peoples, and especially their women, are the most beautiful in all of Asia. These same peoples and their descendants differ from the nations of eastern, northern, and southern Asia in [that they possess] a larger and more noble formation of the body, a more beautiful shape of the face and all its parts, a thick beard, and [Caucasians differ] due to a more splendid disposition of the mind and heart (*durch herrlichere Anlagen des Geistes und Herzens*)” (Meiners, *Grundriß* 1793, 74–75).

Meiners went as far as to state that, amongst the “ridges and valley of the Altai” Mountains, there arose a primordial dark-ugly-Mongol Stock, which was:

“so different from the inhabitants of the Caucasus and their descendants – in regard to body structure, mental faculties and temperament – that one might perceive it [the Mongol Stock] as the work or remnant of an entirely different creation (*einer ganz andern Schöpfung*) [from the Caucasian Stock]” (Meiners *Grundriß* 1793, 47).

Meiners’ racial theory, with its two separate founding populations, was a bit controversial from the start because it contradicted the Bible. The Book of Genesis set forth that all humans arose from one founding population, the offspring of Adam and Eve. It may be that Meiners was a bit concerned that he might be accused of blasphemy, and so diplomatically noted that “*one could perceive*” that the Caucasian and Mongolian Stocks resulted from different creations. He deferred from stating, *unequivocally*, that there were two separate and unrelated creations.

Meiners asserted that the Mongolian Stock originated in the Altai Mountains of Central Asia. This mountain range forms a “four corners” boundary separating modern China, Russia, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan. According to Meiners, the snowcapped Altai Mountains were not just the ancestral homeland of Siberians, Chinese, and indigenous Americans. The Altai also spawned indigenous Australians, all Polynesians, and all Sub-Saharan Africans (Vermeulen 2015, 384; Mazzolini 2007, 362; Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, 18–30; Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 72). Furthermore, Meiners classified the pale skinned, often-blond Scandinavian Sumi peoples (“*Lappländer*”) as members of the Mongolian Stock (Golf-French 2019, 952; Meiners *Grundriß* 1793, 163). In summary, Meiners asserted that one ancient central Asian population gave rise to the peoples of China, Tahiti, West African, the pale blond people from the Scandinavian Arctic, and the dark-skinned curly-haired Khoi and San people of South Africa. All these diverse peoples, so Meiners postulated, originated in Mongolia.

According to Meiners' binary theory, there were only two "stocks" of humanity. However, each stock was further subdivided into smaller units he often described as *races*. (In modern English, we would use the word "nation" to describe Meiners' small scale "races," so henceforth, I will use the term "nation-race.") By subdividing his two stocks, Meiners was following the lead of zoologists, who describe animals in terms of "genus" and "species." For example, bears (of the genus *Ursus*) are classified into four species: the brown bear, the polar bear, the American black bear, and the Asian black bear. Along those lines, Meiners theorized that "Mongolian Stock," which originated in Mongolia, came to exist as three subgroups who populated east Asia:

1. The "Chinese" who lived in China, Sumatra, the Philippines, and parts of Java;
2. The Tamils who lived in southern Indian and Sri Lanka, but also Polynesia; and
3. The Malays who lived in Indonesia, the South Sea Islands, and lands south of China.

Meiners argued that the diverse nations of Asia were the result of the intermixing of differing amounts the Mongolian and Caucasian Stock. He further speculated that the "Malays" were likely the ancestors of all Indigenous Americans (Carhart 2007, 245–246).

It can be difficult to follow Meiners' racial theory with all its various groups and subgroups. What makes it even more confusing is that some of the terminology he used was inconsistent and vague. For example, Meiners sometimes used the term "Slavs" to describe a collection of ethnic groups who included the Slavic speaking nations of eastern Europe, along with Jewish Europeans, high-caste Indians, and "Arabs" who could belong to any Arabophone nation from Iraq to Morocco (Golf-French 2019, 952). However, in some of his writings about "Slavs," it is quite clear that he is not only talking about eastern Europeans, like Russians, but also Romanians who, from a linguistic perspective, are not Slavic (Meiners "Ueber die Farben" 1792, 668; Meiners "Ueber die grossen" 1787, 224–225). In Meiners' writings, the term Slavic was never consistently defined.

Meiners also made confusing statements about the Tatar people, who are also known as "Tartars." They are a collection of Turkic speaking peoples who originated in the steppes of Central Asia, where they initially lived as nomads. During the Middle Ages, the Tatars established communities on the Crimean Peninsula and along the Volga River, which brought them into contact with Europeans (Waldman and Mason 2006, 795). In 1780, the German geographer Johann Gottlieb Georgi (1729–1802) described the Tatars when he published an account of his travels in the Russian far east. Georgi wrote the homeland of the Tatars was close to that of the Mongols, yet they spoke unrelated languages. Georgi reported (with his emphasis) that the "Tartars go as far as to maintain that *Tartar* and *Mongol*, the fathers

of these twin nations, were twin brothers” (Georgi 1780 Vol. 2, 5).

We know that Meiners read Georgi’s book, because Meiners frequently cited it in *The History of Mankind* (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, 34, 83, 86, 105, 108, 198). Therefore, Meiners should have known that the Tatars regarded themselves as being related to the Mongols. And yet, in 1785 Meiners wrote the “Caucasian Stock” could also be called the “Tatar Stock” (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, xx) [1]. This statement makes no sense. The Tatars were not Europeans, nor were they mountain folk from the Caucasus Mountains. So why did Meiners say that the Caucasian Stock could be called *Tatars*? It would have made more sense for him to have said that the Mongol Stock could be called *Tatars*, since Georgi reported that they and the Mongols were related. Why Meiners decided to equate his Caucasian Stock with Tatars remains a mystery, but a mystery consistent with his habit of cherry-picking sources.

Eventually, the ill-conceived complexities and poorly defined terminology that pervaded Meiners’ racial theory became a problem for him. They confused his readers, a weakness even he came to admit. In 1793, Meiners abandoned both of his binary labels: Mongol and Caucasian. Meiners wrote that he needed to make this revision to clarify that the Mongolian Stock did not live exclusively in Mongolia. He also wanted to emphasize that although the Caucasian Stock originated in the Caucasus Mountains, they ultimately migrated away from there and into Europe (Meiners *Grundriß* 1793, 3–5). For modern readers like myself, who have a hard time trying to fully comprehend Meiners’ racial theory, we can at least take solace in the knowledge that even he recognized the difficulty in understanding his claims and arguments.

## PART 2:

### Meiners' race theory justified race supremacy and slavery

“Meiners espoused a racialized form of bourgeoisie utilitarianism. Just as from his vantage point it was fair and necessary that the ruling nobility in Europe should share political power with the well-educated and capable members of the bourgeoisie, so those who could never be expected to fulfill any higher social and political functions could be oppressed and exploited.”

Jens-Uwe Guetell, 2013 (Guetell 2013, 50)

\* \* \*

In 1785, when Meiners first set forth his racial theory, he stated that the Caucasian Stock was “divided into two races (*zwo Racen*), the Celtic and Slavic, the former of which is richer in intelligence (*Geistgaben*) and virtue than the latter” (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, xx). However, by 1793, Meiners had added a third race who were “Middle Eastern peoples (*Morgenländischer Völker*).” As he described it:

From time immemorial, the stock of the white peoples (*der Stamm der weißen Völker*) was cured [concretized] into three races (*drey Racen*); the Celtic, Sarmatian or Slavonic, and the Middle Eastern peoples. All these white peoples have several common features, but the Slavic and Middle Eastern peoples (*die Slawischen und Morgenländischer Völker*) were much more in tune with one another than with the Germanic and the other Celtic nations combined (*den Germanischen und den übrigen Celtischen Nationen zusammen*). (Meiners *Grundriß* 1793, 75)

As the above quote demonstrates, Meiners was rather loose when defining his ethnological terms. He was prone to use the words “race,” “nation” and “people” interchangeably, which is also evident in his 1785 assertion that:

All peoples on earth make up only one single genus, or one single species (*nur ein einziges Geschlech*), of creatures; but this single human genus must have [within it] two completely different stocks, in each stock several races, in each race, innumerable varieties (*in jedem Stamm mehrere Racen, in jeder Raçe un zählige Varietâte*), and finally a great diversity of [crossbred] types (*eine grosse Mannichfaltigkeit von Spielarten*) that have arisen from the mixture of people from different stocks and races. (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, 17)

Appended to this text, Meiners added a footnote expressing his frustration with the terms describing human diversity:

I wish that the words stock, and race had one specific meaning (*die Wörter Stamm, und Race schon eine bestimmte Bedeutung gehabt hätten*). It may be that many [people] would use “race” where I prefer to use “stock,” and vice versa. (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, 17)

Clearly, Meiners did not define “race” the way it is now defined by the U. S. Census Bureau, as a continental-level population consisting of multiple nations. The vague and problematic nature of Meiners’ terminology is something even he recognized. For example, in 1793 Meiners openly admitted that he was not entirely comfortable with the term “Celtic,” which he had been using for years (Baum 2006, 85). Meiners wrote:

As previously, I envision all the indigenous non-Finnish and non-Sarmatian [Slavic] peoples of Europe as being [elements of] the Celtic nations. If someone could give this noblest branch of peoples (*diesen edelsten Zweig von Völkern*) another, just as short, and even more grandiloquent name (*kurze und noch paffendere Benennung*), I would immediately sacrifice mine. (Meiners *Grundriß*, 1793, 7)

Although Meiners was inconsistent when it came to rigorously defining “stock,” “people,” “nation,” and “race,” he was adamant that the Mongolian Stock was inferior to the Caucasian Stock. Furthermore, he asserted that within the Caucasian Stock, the most superior peoples were the Celts of northern Europe. “The most sublime of all the nations of the earth” he wrote, “are the peoples of Celtic origin” who “alone have invented arts and sciences.” According to Meiners, the Celts consisted of the “the Hispanics, the British, Caledonian and the Nordic peoples of Gothic descent” along with the “ancient Germanic Gauls.” (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 212)

Meiners’ use of the term “ancient Germanic Gauls” indicated that he regarded the German nation-race as a subset of the of the Celts, also known as Gauls. This interpretation was a break with the long-accepted notion, initiated by Julius Caesar, that the Germans were decidedly *not* Celtic, which is to say, they were *not* Gauls. As was his habit, Meiners was brazenly flouting the scholarly norms of his era. He also made a point of explaining that the Celts of northern Europe were ethnically different from the ancient “Greeks and Romans, who were not completely pure or unmixed Celts” (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 212).

Meiners asserted that the German nation-race – whom he sometimes called “Teutonics” – were the most superior form of Celt. Conversely, Slavs and other “Celtic” Europeans held an inferior position. In 1791, Meiners authored an article entitled “On the Nature of Germans and Other Celtic Peoples (*Ueber die Natur der Germanischen und übrigen Celtischen Völker*),” in which he noted that:

[The] Characteristic traits of all Celtic peoples – and especially the Germanic peoples, even when they were in the barbaric state – [are to be] taller, slimmer, more powerful, and [have] more beautiful bodies than all other peoples of the earth have, [they also have] dazzling white skin, blond curly hair, and blue eyes... [They have a] courage and a love of freedom never found among other nations; inexhaustible inventiveness, and an unlimited disposition to arts and sciences of antiquity; [They have] tender compassion for the joys and sorrows of other people, and all moral feelings arising therefrom. (Meiners 1791 “Ueber die Natur,” 119)

When Meiners stated that the Germanic peoples possessed a “love of freedom never found among other nations,” he was not saying that Germans were staunch egalitarians who wanted all of humanity to be free. Quite the opposite, he was asserting that the Germans had an innate passion to live free, which the rest of humankind lacked. Thus, nature had designed Germans to thrive in a state of freedom, while the rest of humanity were inherently well suited to live a bonded lifestyle as slaves or peasants. Applying these assumptions to the globalizing world in which he lived, he concluded that:

Through the predominant advantages [of the Germans], the noble Teutonic nation (*die edle Teutsche Nation*) became the conqueror or the founder, and ruler of all other peoples; and through the nations descended from – or ruled by – the Teutonics, Europe became, and will always be, the conqueror of all other earthly races. (Meiners “Ueber die Natur” 1791, 121)

When Meiners used the phrase “nations descended from – or ruled by – the Teutonics,” he was likely referring to the British, and perhaps the Dutch, the northern French, and the nations of Scandinavia. Thus, we see that Meiners’ viewpoint was akin to Hume’s, who in 1770 reported that the (supposedly) Germanic “Saxons who subdued Britain” were a nation of “fierce and bold liberty” with an “independence they had inherited from their ancestors” (Hume 1770, 218). And like Hume, Meiners was a scholar of Tacitus, who also praised the ancient Germans for their love of liberty (Carhart 2007, 207).

Meiners also authored a collection of articles, published in *Neuen Göttingischen Historischen Magazin*, that addressed the external aspects of human anatomy, namely skin color and overall body size

(Zantop 1997, 28–29). In terms of skin tone, Meiners claimed that:

The whitest, most radiant, and tender-skinned people on earth live in northern Germany, in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, in Holland, Great Britain and the islands belonging to it. By mixing with Moors or other Middle Easterners, the Spaniards and Portuguese, the southern Italians, and French, have [all] reduced the whiteness and blondness... [which characterized] their Celtic ancestors, and assumed the brownish color of the Orientals [of Asia Minor]. Without comparison, Greek women surpass the Wallachian [Romanian] and other Slavic women in the beauty of their structure, and even in the vividness of their color; but seldom if ever do they [Greek women] attain the delicate and white skin, and the rosy cheeks of beautiful English women, or likewise German women and maidens. (Meiners “Ueber die Farben” 1792, 668)

Conversely, there were some nation-races in Europe who did not have light and beautiful skin tones. These peoples consisted of “Jews, Armenians, Turks, and Gypsies” along with “Lapp-Finns” and certain “pastoralists from the Hunnic descent” who lived between the Danube and the Dnieper (Meiners “Ueber die Farben” 1792, 667). Meiners asserted that these dark populations of Europe were not, in fact, indigenous Europeans. Rather, they were nation-races who migrated into Europe after it was originally settled by Germanic Celts (Meiners “Ueber die Verschiedenheit” 1792, 702).

As Meiners saw it, body stature and height were also noticeably different among the nation-races of Europe. He wrote that “The main cause of the characteristic size of the Celtic [northern European] peoples lay in the tribe or blood of these nations.” For him, it was the “blood” or inheritance, which gave northern Europeans their height, not external environmental factors like climate or diet. Meiners further asserted that the “German blood [inherited features] of the other Celtic peoples in other parts of the world remained larger than their original inhabitants” (Meiners “Ueber die Verschiedenheit” 1792, 702). In other words, great height was retained by those Germans who settled in Pennsylvania or the Volga region of Russia, even though indigenous American and indigenous Russians were short. Likewise, tall stature could also be found in the Dutch settlers of Indonesia or Cape Town, or the British in all their far-flung colonies.

Furthermore, Meiners asserted that non-Europeans nation-races who migrated into Europe did not grow tall, even if they had been living there for centuries. As Meiners put it:

The Lapps and Finns have lived in northern Europe longer than the Normans and Swedes, and yet they have remained as small as their brothers in northern Asia. The

Wends, or Slavs, had been settling down in Germany for more than a thousand years without being like the Germans in terms of their tall and slender stature. The same is true of the Jews, Gypsies, and other non-European foreigners. Even amongst the climate and soil of Germany, our ancestors would not have grown as big as they were if they had not been made of genuine German blood. (Meiners “*Ueber die Verschiedenheit*” 1792, 702)

Meiners was confident that inheritance, *not environment*, shaped the distinct characteristics of each nation-race. He was, however, concerned that the Germans of his generation were at risk of squandering their naturally inherited superiority. Meiners noted that the ancient Teutonics (*alten Teutschen*) who lived in the “era of Caesar and Tacitus (*in den Zeiten des Casar und Tacitus*),” were larger than the current German population. This claim was almost certainly inspired by Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. CE 56 – c. 150) who reported that the Germans of the Roman Era developed large muscular limbs due to an inherited robustness and a rough and tumble childhood in which they were brought up free from pampering (Tacitus 1893, 57). Meiners wrote that the Germans of old did not “let their powers and limbs slacken in lazy indolence.” Rather, they “built their bodies through all kinds of exercises” to hone their skills at “hunting and war” (Meiners “*Ueber die Verschiedenheit*” 1792, 703). He bemoaned that such physical conditioning was absent among modern German elites due to their excessive vices.

Meiners feared that the Germans of his era would eventually suffer the same ignominious fate as the once mighty Greco-Romans, who grew weak due to their self-induced slide into decadence (French-Golf 2019, 957). As he saw it:

White and beautiful peoples [*Volker*] can become primitive and die out due to physical and moral factors. Such a possibility is illustrated not only by the history of the Greeks and Romans, but also by that of the present inhabitants of the Caucasus, as well as the history of almost all European settlements in the warm parts of the world. (Meiners *Grundriß* 1793, 122)

Meiners warned that the “white and beautiful peoples” of the Caucasus Mountains had intermixed with lesser races and, as a result, were no longer “entirely pure and uncontaminated.” The original population who founded the Caucasian Stock were, therefore, extinct in their pristine form (Meiners *Grundriß* 1793, 74–75). But Germans, according to Meiners, represented an untarnished population of the original “Caucasian Stock.” The German nation-race retained the full set of superior features their ancient Caucasus Mountain forebears once possessed, while the modern Caucasus Mountain folk had lost many of their original superior characteristics.

As Meiners saw it, the inherited superiority of the German nation-race needed to be protected from threats, one of which was a basic philosophical concept: egalitarianism. For Meiners, the very notion that all humans were equal had the potential to destroy the German nation-race. He argued that over that past few centuries, the ruling elites of the German States had deteriorated into decadence, becoming excessively selfish and uncaring. This lack of compassion, in turn, permitted poverty to run rampant among the lower classes of Germany. These naïve peasants became stunted by “want and misery,” and as a result were primed to be seduced by saccharine calls for human equality. Meiners regarded the concept of human equality as a rose-tinted falsehood that ignored the natural inequality of humans (Meiners “Ueber die Verschiedenheit” 1792, 709).

Meiners’ concern for the plight of the impoverished lower-class Germans reflects his progressive reformist social agenda. But to his way of thinking, such social reforms should extend only to northern mid-peninsular Europeans like the Germans, Scandinavians, Dutch and the (supposedly) Anglo-Saxon British. Such reforms, if attempted with Slavs, West Africans, or Indigenous Americans, would be pointless since these people were too inherently stupid to benefit from them. But in the German States, the removal of entrenched class hierarchies could be of tremendous value. Meiners encouraged the German aristocracy to embrace their peasant underlings as brothers; national glory could be achieved if Germans of all classes would simply recognize their racial superiority over the rest of humanity. Thus we see how, when it came to the people of the German States, Meiners was a liberal reformist demanding equal rights. But when it came to humanity as a whole, he was anything but.

### **The supposed high pain threshold of Slavs, West Africans, and indigenous Americans**

When reading through Meiners’ various writings on race and ethnicity, I have been struck by the frequency with which he discusses pain and the supposed ability of some people to withstand it. Meiners’ overarching claim was that fair skinned nations had a low tolerance for pain relative to the rest of humanity. In 1787, he reported that “intelligent and noble” peoples of northern Europe possess a “delicate, soft body.” In 1791, he described the peoples of Europe as possessing both “a dazzling white skin (*eine blendentweisse Haut*)” and an “unusual sensitivity (*ungewöhnliche Empfindlichkeit*)” (Meiners *Grundriß* Vol. 8 1791, 119). Two years later, he asserted that the “whitest, most radiant, and tender-skinned people on earth” lived in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Great Britain, and “northern Germany” (Meiners “Ueber die Farben” 1792, 668).

Meiners asserted that sensitivity to pain varied among the European races belonging to the Caucasian Stock. He wrote that, when compared with Germans, Slavic peoples were less sensitive to pain

and diseases, and were able to eat spoiled or toxic foodstuff (Jehoda, 1999, 66). “A very credible man,” said Meiners, saw Russians eat poisonous mushrooms “without taking any harm from them.” While Germans suffer exhaustion and illness when they are overworked, Russian laborers easily revitalized themselves by drinking “a good amount of brandy,” then they ate “garlic and rub with it, and finally go into a hot bath and hit each other with rods to expel the bad juices.” Lastly, they would “plunge into the icy river in the coldest winter.” He described Russians sleeping on a hot stove, bathing in icy water and “smearing themselves with thistle and fat” and then rolling in a fire until they were “roasted” (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 219–220).

Meiners reported that Russians can withstand great hunger. As a result, Russian soldiers did not need to eat much, thus saving the Russian army money when it came to provisions. “The Russian soldier,” said Meiners, “is already satisfied when he soaks a piece of his hard biscuit in water, and [he] is extremely happy when he can enjoy his biscuit with a little salt.” He claimed that if German soldiers were fed such meager rations, they would “starve to death in three months” (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 218). As part of Meiners’ discussion on Slavic pain he also added a side note describing how “all Slavic nations” had produced a sparse few “great rulers and writers... military commanders or inventors in the arts and sciences and in all kinds of artistic skills and procurements.” The paltry number of such great men was “quite insignificant compared to the number” of luminaries who sprang from “each of the greater Celtic peoples,” like Germans, Dutch and Britons (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 218).

Meiners described the Wallachians of modern-day Romania as a nation-race that could suffer brutal physical abuse with little pain. He told of a young Wallachian thief who had been shot with three bullets that “not only smashed the bones of his right arm but also pierced his chest bones and his lungs so that a light could be seen at the mouth of the wound.” He recovered in fifteen days on a diet of “nothing more than bread and sour milk.” Another Wallachian thief took a bullet to “the shoulder, which had come out through the chest... all the way through. He stayed in the forest for five days,” but within 42 days had fully recovered. Meiners also claimed that some Wallachians lived to be 158 and 172 years old, ages which no German could ever attain (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 224–225).

Although Meiners held Slavs in low esteem, he regarded Indigenous Americans as “arguably the most depraved of all human or human-like creatures on the whole earth.” He said they were “not only much weaker than the negroes, but also much more inflexible.” Meiners claimed that Indigenous Americans were “so closely related to the unreasonable animals” that the “skulls and other bones of these half-Humans (*dieser Halb Menschen*) are much thicker and harder than those of the Europeans.” He reported the ridiculous claim that the skulls of indigenous Americans were so thick that the swords of

Spanish conquistadors broke when they struck Indigenous Americans on the head (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 229–230). Meiners wrote that the skin of Indigenous Americans was thick and:

must be thicker than an ox skin because they ride for days without a saddle, and [they] ride the horses sore without feeling the slightest discomfort. They take off their upper clothes and then their arms, chest and shoulders are covered with swarms of poisonous flies, wasps, horseflies and other vermin. (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 229–230)

According to Meiners, indigenous Americans “ride for days in the scorching sun without feeling the slightest discomfort” and without suffering the “terrible sunstroke” that would quickly kill any European (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 229–230). For him, the indigenous Americans “resemble wild animals in that they sleep very little and spend the nights mostly awake.” They also have no difficulty eating “stinking or raw meat” and can easily drink polluted water. They suffered no ill effects from imbibing great amounts of brandy or “*Chica*,” a corn liquor from the Andean region. (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 233)

Meiners’ description of Indigenous American often paralleled his descriptions of Slavs who, he claimed, could eat poisons, tolerate mutilation, and live to be a ripe old age. “The Americans,” said Meiners, “not only live much longer than the Europeans, but they also live almost without any diseases.” He claimed that Indigenous American men “very seldom go bald” and are long lived. They “remain just as agile and lively in their highest age as they were in their youth, old men a hundred years or more are often seen among them.” There were “hundred-year-old old men” who could climb “nimble up the highest trees” and “jump on the wildest horses just as easily” as youngsters could (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 235). The Indigenous Americans gladly subjected themselves to ritual mutilation. “During their drinking bouts (*An ihren Trinkgelagen*)” said Meiners, they rip their own flesh:

by using either pointed thorns or sharp crocodile bones, breasts, hands, tongue, yes, even those parts that are not to be named – torn, and covering half of the body with bleeding wounds. Seven-year-old boys imitate their fathers in these voluntary wounds, and boys and girls often tie their hands together and put a glowing coal between the two to try who can endure the pain longest. (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 236)

The supposed pain tolerance of West Africans was also addressed in Meiners’ essays in a way that echoed his descriptions of Slav and Indigenous Americans. He asserted that the “skin of the negroes in Africa, as well as in the East Indies is much thicker” than that of Europeans. “If ten blows are enough to tear the skin of a European,” said Meiners, “scarcely fifty or sixty are capable of producing the same

effect in a negro.” He wrote that West Africans who were subjected to torture such as “slow burning” or “tearing with red-hot pincers” tolerated it “not only without complaints and yelling, but with a laugh that, as it were, mocks the impotence of the torturers.” Meiners related the outrageously incredulous story of one West African “who was burned in a slow fire... his back was half-roasted” yet he “asked for a pipe of tobacco and smoked it with the greatest serenity” (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 228–230).

West Africans could also, so Meiners claimed, digest “lions, snakes, and tigers, and raw and stinking meat, as the monsters of the Libyan deserts do.” And while European travelers deteriorate in “the burning deserts, or the pestilential swamps of Africa... the negroes become astonishingly strong” in such “unhealthy and deadly regions.” Similarly, those Europeans who engage in heavy labor in the West Indies eventually succumbed to “madness or inevitable death” in sharp contrast to “the negroes [who] work all day in the scorching sun and go dancing with other negroes... until the morning” (Meiners “Ueber die grossen” 1787, 229).

Meiners’ conclusions regarding the ethnically-based ability to withstand pain had a practical application to one of the 18<sup>th</sup> century’s major economic drivers: slavery. Simply put, Meiners’ findings were that Slavs, Indigenous Americans, West Africans, and various other people all had extremely high pain thresholds. Thus, he asserted, that when these peoples were enslaved (and keep in mind that Slavs were sometimes enslaved in Turkey) it was necessary for their masters to subject them to extreme physical punishments and torture. After all, more modest treatment would have no impact (Wilson 2009, 80–81). As we shall see below, Meiners did not regard his research on pain and ethnicity as a purely academic study. For indeed, he used it to justify his support for slavery, which he regarded as a benefit to humanity, without which the march of civilization could not advance.

### **Meiners supported slavery and European colonization through the world**

According to the 1857 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Meiners’ writings promoting “the physical and moral inferiority of the Negro race” were “triumphantly quoted in the British Parliament by the defenders of the slave trade.” (*Enc. Brit.* 1857, 473). Similarly, Stapfer of Meiners that his “views on the physical and moral inferiority of the Negro race have been cited in debates in the British Parliament by the defendants of that infamous trafficking which has for so long brought the disgrace of the peoples of Europe and the shame of the Christian nations” (Stapfer 1821, 158). These two reports testify to the influence that Meiners’ pro-slavery publications had on the early 19<sup>th</sup> century global debate over abolition. And indeed, he was not shy about publicly expressing his pro-slavery arguments.

In 1788, Meiners wrote a paper entitled “*Ueber die Rechtmäßigkeit des Neger-Handels*,” which can be translated as “On the Lawfulness [or Legitimacy] of the Negro Trade.” The basic premise of this essay was that slavery – and more specifically transatlantic slavery – was justifiable because of the many benefits it provided to the overall advancement of global civilization (Meiners “*Ueber die Rechtmäßigkeit*” 1788, 398–416). Two years later, Meiners published “On the Nature of African Negroes and the Liberation or Restriction of Blacks (*Ueber die Natur der Afrikanischen Neger, und die davon abhängende Befrenung oder Einschränkung der Schwarzen*).” Therein, he argued that the inferiority of West Africans was so obvious that any right-minded person, or government, would conclude that enslaving them was appropriate:

I ask everyone with expertise regarding humankind, and advocates for [human] rights whether they believe that individuals as [mentally] insensitive, emotional and slothful (*daß man so gefühllosen, so reißbaren und schlaffen*) – such stupid and evil people as the Negroes – should be given such rights and such liberty; [or] for their own good, have them kept under threat of punishment from doing evil? And that one could impose the same duties [responsibilities] on them as upon Europeans? I would be surprised if there was even one among my readers who would answer this question differently from the way it has been answered by all European nations who possess slaves, and the [current] existing laws. (Meiners “*Ueber der Natur*” 1790, 456)

Meiners’ advocacy for slavery as presented above is rife with the sort of bogus arguments which scholars of rhetoric categorize as “material fallacies.” For example, he proposed that West Africans should either be enslaved or given the same rights as Northern Europeans, as if those were the only two options. Meiners offered up a material fallacy known as a “false dilemma” because he incorrectly claimed that the only two options for West Africans were either complete enslavement or the exercise of full rights. He ignored a third option, which would be to treat West Africans the same way most European women were treated at the time: as inherently inferior individuals who were not property yet had some, albeit limited, rights.

When Meiners claimed that most of European nations accepted slavery, he committed the “ad populum” fallacy which held that if a conclusion is accepted by the majority, it must be true. He invoked the “post hoc” fallacy, also called “therefore; because of this,” when he argued that existing laws permitting slavery were proof that slavery was part of the natural order of things. His implication was that transatlantic slavery was adopted by legal codes only after scholars had verified that West Africans were biologically incapable of being anything but slaves. However, the origins of transatlantic slavery emerged

from a merger of the traditional slave practices of certain West African and Southern European nations (Thornton 1998, 72–97). The slavers, be they Europeans or West Africans, did not hunt slaves due to any rational argument, but rather because they sought pecuniary gain. (For more on fallacies, see Bennett 2012, 49, 71, 308)

When Meiners set forth his argument in favor of slavery, he rather stumbled when it came to employing the sort of logic-centered arguments that were so valued by Enlightenment Era intellectuals. The foundation of his case was his unwavering personal conviction that that human equality was a naïve myth. As he saw it, the incompetent aristocrats of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe had so oppressed their subjects that the European general public was now driven by hatred of their rulers to demand equality for all. But such equality simply could never occur because nature had blessed some nations with superior abilities, and cursed others to eternal stupidity (Meiners “Ueber der Natur” 1790, 386).

Unlike the Swiss philosophers Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui (1694–1748) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), who regarded human equality as a natural phenomenon, Meiners held that *inequality* was nature’s plan (Golf-French 2019, 955). As Meiners saw it, nature created children to be simple minded until they grew up. Children were unequal to fully matured and mentally complex adults. In that same way, different nation-races were destined to be unequal, but not on just a temporary basis. He argued that the “better classes” and higher-ranking ethnic groups automatically asserted the “privileges they deserve, due to their superior qualities” (Meiners “Ueber der Natur” 1790, 387).

“If it is unjust to impose inequality among equals,” said Meiners, then it is equally unjust to “attempt to make equal those whom nature, or other insurmountable causes, has made unequal” (Meiners “Ueber der Natur” 1790, 386–387). “So called equality,” wrote Meiners, “has never convinced non-Slavic Europeans to grant Wends [Slavs] and Jews the same privileges as them” (Meiners, “Ueber der Natur” 1790, 400–401). Based on his read of history – mostly European history – only selected nations could benefit society by living in freedom. The inferior nations like Slavs and Jews lacked the innate desire to be free, and so were better off being ruled by those with an inborn love of freedom (Golf-French 2019, 956). And like Hume, Meiners held that the Germanic peoples of northwestern Europe were unique in that they possessed such an intense, innate love of liberty. All other nations had neither the desire nor the capacity to live free and properly govern themselves (Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 75–76). Allowing Slavs, Jews, or West Africans to attempt a life of liberty would simply be a waste of time.

As a well-informed European man of letters, Meiners was keenly aware that abolitionist intellectuals accused slave holders of being immoral, violently cruel, and inhumanly heartless. In the face

of such charges, he was willing to admit that transatlantic slavery caused suffering to West Africans. However, he proposed that such suffering was an acceptable price to pay for the benefits which slavery provided to Europeans and their Euro-American kin in the New World. For Meiners, the ongoing progress of global civilization required the enslavement of West Africans. He wrote that slavery was beneficial to humanity as a whole. It would be so even if “in the American possessions of the Europeans, a hundred thousand more negroes died annually than were born.” Furthermore:

All sugar plantings could not exist without negroes, for neither Americans nor Europeans can endure the hard work involved in planting, maintaining, and pressing the sugarcane; and without negroes, most coffee, sugar, rice, and tobacco plantations would perish. Negro hands are therefore the only ones who give us the sugar [supply]; It is they [the Negroes] who give us [Europeans] the rest of the precious goods [like tobacco, cotton, etc.] of the new world, and who create sustenance and wealth for all the millions of white and nobler people.... [as well as] the immeasurable sum of pleasant sensations which the consumption of American products produces. (Meiners “Ueber die Rechtmäßigkeit” 1788, 409–410)

Meiners argued that, if the advantages of slavery were compared to its disadvantages, “one must confess that the Negro trade, regardless of the cruelty that it causes, has hitherto been more fruitful than pernicious for the human race.” He also made a point of emphasizing that whenever any colony is established – by people of *any race* – there is always suffering and a high mortality. Thus, he sought to downplay the significance of the that pain and high death experienced by West African slaves by asserting that the free European pioneers establishing colonies in a new land also suffered pain and the loss of life (Meiners “Ueber die Rechtmäßigkeit” 1788, 409–410).

Meiners, a man undeniably skilled at marshaling a plethora of arguments in support of his theories, further asserted that transatlantic slavery was beneficial to the slaves, whose life in West Africa was a train of horrors. He wrote that West Africa was a land of endless bloody internecine wars waged by tyrants who offered human sacrifices to the “bloodthirsty gods” they worshipped. “Before the arrival of the Europeans,” said Meiners, “Most Negro nations [*Völker*] obeyed absolute kings who often killed and tortured their innocent subjects; and stole not only their possessions but also their children.” He claimed that West Africans who became slaves in the New World were not innocent kidnapped civilians, but rather criminals and irresponsible debtors. They were enslaved as punishment for their crimes, which Meiners claimed was a better alternative to the brutal treatment they would have experienced had they stayed in Africa. He even reported that African-born slaves who lived in the New World freely admitted

that if they had the option to return to Africa, they would turn it down rather than face the terrors of their native land (Sutherland 2016, 36–38; Meiners “Ueber die Rechtmäßigkeit” 1788, 399–400).

Meiners also argued that the reportedly cruel treatment of West African slaves was greatly overblown. As noted above, he claimed that West Africans had an extremely high threshold for pain. Thus, whipping them was not nearly as painful to them as an equivalent whipping would be for a German or an Englishman (Wilson 2009, 80–81). For him, it was totally acceptable that West Africans, a pain resistant nation, should be enslaved by their racial superiors, the British, who were supposedly of Saxon-German heritage.

I find it fascinating that Meiners described West Africans as an ethnic group with a high pain threshold which was *currently* enslaved by their superiors (the British), while often describing the Slavs as an ethnic group with a high pain threshold which was *historically* enslaved by their superiors (the ancient Germans). One gets the feeling that Meiners was trying to convince the German public that the British slave trade was little different from the traditional subjugation of Slavic people by Germans. Given that Meiners was such an ardent Anglophile, it would not be out of character for him to defend the British, and the labor system that was the cornerstone of their booming economy: slavery.

Meiners also had a personal motive for presenting the British slave industry in a positive light. His publications on slavery relied heavily on texts authored by English plantation owners. In Meiners’ paper, “Other Considerations on the Slave Trade and the Liberation of Negroes (*Fortgesetzte Betrachtungen über den Sclavenhandel, und die Freylassung der Neger*),” he quoted the pro-slavery writings of William Beckford (1744–1799), a white Jamaican plantation owner, (Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 77; Meiners “Fortgesetzte” 1793, 29). If plantation owners like Beckford were mistaken about slavery, then the evidence Meiners relied upon would collapse. Thus, he had a vested interest in validating the credibility of pro-slavery authors.

Meiners was also highly influenced by the writings of Edward Long (1734–1813), a white Jamaican plantation owner and lawyer (Sutherland, 2016 :37). Long’s three-volume *History of Jamaica* (1774) included a chapter entitled “Negroes” in which he wrote that they were “void of any progress in civility and science” with “no moral sensations; no taste but for women; gormandizing [gorging on food]; and drinking to excess” (Long 1774, 353). Long asserted that there was a gradation of intellect from the “monkey mind, to the more advanced stages” as found in apes, and from there to the “Guiney Negroes,” ultimately ascending to the “utmost limit of perfection in the pure white.” In his view, the “Devine Fabricator” had created Negroes substantially different from the “rest of men, not in kind, but in species”

(Long 1774, 375). Meiners was especially impressed with the pamphlets penned by the English member of parliament, Samuel Estwick (c.1736–1795), who owned vast slave plantations on Barbados. Estwick argued the concept of liberty, which was so foundational to the laws of Britain, simply did not apply to peoples of West African heritage (Greene 2010, 65; Davis 1999, 367).

Meiners' support for the enslavement of West Africans was part of his grander vision of a world in which Europeans, preferable Germanic race-nations, colonized the Americas, Africa, and the islands of the Pacific. In a posthumous publication, Meiners openly celebrated the possibility that the exploration of the Pacific and Australia might lead to new wave of Europeans colonizing those lands:

Should the colonization of the Austral countries proceed as it started or as the population of the new world has proceeded; for example, it may bring about even greater changes in trade than America's discovery made. No philanthropist can leave these happy pictures of the future without at the same time wishing that the most beautiful countries and islands on our part of the world may be cleaned of the barbarians who have so far devastated them, and that both may be ruled and occupied by better people. (Meiners *Untersuchungen über die* Vol. 1 1811, 479)

Meiners vision of lands that are “cleaned of barbarism” is chillingly similar to the sort of “ethnic cleansing” that left so many murdered in 20<sup>th</sup> century Rwanda and the Balkans (Simon 2001, 99). Ethnic cleansing, in which people of a given ethnic groups are killed, is a form of lethal genocide. Genocide can also be non-lethal, using sterilization, concubinage, or what the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court calls “Forcefully Transferring Children” for enslavement or adoption (Werle and Jessberger 2020, 353). Meiners proposed that West Africans and their New World descendants should be subjected to form of non-lethal genocide. He encouraged European men living in Africa or American slave states to impregnate the West African or Afro-American women whom they controlled as slaves or underlings (Mikkelsen 2013, 195–196). Meiners wrote that the “Negro race is ennobled by European blood,” and thus he was looking forward to “the pleasant prospect that the Europeans can and will contribute to the perfection and happiness of less noble peoples, not only through their rule and enlightenment, and even especially by means of interbreeding with them” (Meiners “Von den Varietäten” 1790, 642–643).

### **Meiners the historian versus Forster the explorer and Blumenbach the anatomist**

As we have seen, Meiners regarded slavery as a morally justifiable benefit to slaves, slave masters, and the advancement of human civilization. Such a viewpoint, however, was rather unique

among the largely abolitionist German scholars of his era. As Guettel described it,

There can be no question that Meiners' extreme racism and advocacy for colonialism and race-based slavery made him an outlier within the German intellectual and political context. His closest intellectual peers were not his German colleagues but those English slaveholders, such as Samuel Estwick and Edward Long, who attempted to justify their plantation businesses by publishing pro-colonialist and pro-slavery tracts. (Guettel 2012, 53)

But what really upset Meiners's critics was not so much his vexatious views on race, slavery, or philosophy. His fellow scholars were irked by the bias, misrepresentations, and twisted reasoning that pervaded his publications. For example, one of Meiners' most vocal academic foes was George Forster, the German-born South Sea explorer who was opposed slavery even though he openly supported polygeny, the notion that different races had different origins (Lode 1995, 212). Forster faulted Meiners' race theories as a poorly formulated "labyrinth of contradictions," fatally flawed by "partiality" that unfairly denigrated most of the world's population as "the dredges of the human species" (Quoted in Carhart, 2007, 261).

In a private letter to Herder, Forster described Meiners' book *The History of Mankind* as so much "Göttingen erudition applied to an untenable hypothesis" (Quoted in Carhart 2007, 261). Despite being impressed with the depth of Meiners' research, Forster was dismayed at the errors committed by a "man of such knowledge and talent." More importantly, Forster – who had actually traveled to Africa, India, and Polynesia – noted that he had personally observed "men who came from other countries, and whole peoples in faraway lands, and I do not recognize them in the author's [Meiners'] descriptions" (Quoted in Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 76–77).

Forster's critique of Meiners echoed those published in 1789, when the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (*General Literature-News*) also offered a poor review of *The History of Mankind*. The anonymous reviewer found misattributed footnotes and faulted Meiners' reliance on travel reports of questionable validity. Meiners was further accused of overloading the reader with too many examples. In 1791, the *General Literature-News* again reviewed Meiners' writings on race, and once again, they lambasted Meiners' binary theory. Historians strongly suspect that this second anonymously written critique was in fact written by Forster (Carhart 2007, 263). Forster certainly had the motive; in 1778, Meiners wrote a bad review of Forster's book *A Voyage Round the World*. Meiners said that Forster's travel narrative was offensive because it praised some non-European nations as having attributes that

were preferable to Europeans (Carhart 2007, 265).

Forster and Meiners eventually engaged in a prolonged literary duel in which they published attacks and counterattacks fueled by the one personality character they both shared: over-sized egos (Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 76–77). Over time, they crossed swords on a wide range of issues, even though they were both reading the very same books and reports. As Carhart noted:

their conflict ranged from ethnology to politics, from Jewish emancipation to the Atlantic Slave trade. On every level their science was virtually identical. They read the same authors, addressed the same topics, and employed the same logic. But they reached opposite conclusions. (Carhart 2007, 255)

The poor reception of Meiners by his academic colleagues eventually became known to the general public. In 1795, the popular German author August Heinrich Julius Lafontaine (1758–1831) mocked Meiners’ racial theories in what would be a four-volume novel called *Life and Deeds of Baron Quinctius Heymeran von Flaming*. In this satire, a foolhardy nobleman attempts to segregate the residents of his village based on a preposterous system of racial classification. His efforts lead to mayhem until the nobleman’s misguided views are set straight by a West African-born former slave (Golf-French 2019, 954). Thus, the dark-skinned African proved to be more intellectually gifted than the light-skinned German. Golf-French notes that Lafontaine’s parody of Meiners’ racial theory, presented in a book marketed to a general audience, demonstrates that Meiners’ ideas must have been prevalent enough for a broad spectrum of readers to “get the joke” (Golf-French 2019, 953–954).

Modern historians have also documented significant inconsistencies in Meiners’ research. Carhart and Demel independently examined the original source documents which Meiners cited to back up his claims. They both found that Meiners cherry picked only those pieces of evidence that supported his arguments (Carhart 2009, 68–72; Demel 2012, 79). Carhart extensively backchecked the source documents which Meiners cited in his three volume *Investigations into the Differences of Human Natures* (*Untersuchungen über die Verschiedenheiten der Menschennaturen*) published posthumously between 1811 and 1815. Carhart determined that Meiners claimed to have been guided by the multitude of primary source documents he read, yet he at times drew conclusions the were “just the opposite of what the author intended” (Carhart 2009, 68–72).

In the study of rhetoric, cherry picking the facts is called a “Drunkard’s Search,” as when a drunken person walks the street and reaches out for the first thing that will steady him or her, and then searches no more. Similarly, Meiners ignored readily available information that refuted his thesis. If a

report contracted his findings, he dismissed it as being mistaken. A more technical term for a Drunkard's Search is "confirmation bias," in which a researcher only chooses to present evidence which confirms the researcher's preconceived hypothesis (Wastell and White 2017, 223).

In 1999, Jahoda wrote that Meiners' "reading was wide but quite uncritical; furthermore he was apt to select from the mass of material which he perused those aspects that fitted in with his thesis." (Jahoda; 1999, 68). In 1997, Zantop wrote:

Under the guise of science, Meiners reintroduces and reaffirms handed-down observations (often taken out of context) into a system of mutually reinforcing stereotypes. With rhetorical tricks he manipulated his readers into accepting this construction as truth. The many footnotes and seeming openness to debate led scientific credibility and legitimacy to the enterprise. (Zantop 1997, 25)

When Zantop examined Meiners' paper entitled "On the Nature of the African Negro (*Ueber die Natur der Afrikanischen Neger*)" she found ample rhetorical errors and inconsistencies. For example, he stated that Africans fear death, yet a few pages later claimed that they have no fear of death. Meiners wrote that African women have no love for their children and at times will eat them. But he also asserted that the motherly love of West African women is a feature which proved they are akin to subhuman animals (Zantop 2013, 24).

### **A conflict with Blumenbach: Cranial nerves and the Chinese negroes of Germany**

One of Meiners' less well-known conflicts was with Blumenbach. Like so many of Meiners' academic tussles, it did not end well for Meiners. The origins of their dispute can be traced to 1784, when Blumenbach's old college chum Samuel Thomas Sömmerring published *On the Comparative Anatomy of the Moor and the European (Über die Körperliche Verschiedenheit des Mohren vom Europäer)* (Sömmerring 1784, 4–31). In this publication, he reported the findings of his dissection of at least four "Moors" who were either West Africans who had been shipped to Europe or were Afro-American slaves who ended up in Germany. Sömmerring conducted this dissection as part of his overall research program into neurology. When Sömmerring was only 23 years old, he published his Göttingen University medical dissertation in which he was the first to document the physiology of the twelve cranial nerves. His findings remain valid today. During his career, he made numerous discoveries about the structure of the nervous system. He was also hailed for his excellent dissection skills and accurate medical illustrations (Hintzche 1975, 509–511).

After Sömmerring dissected his four “Moors,” he concluded that West Africans had very thick nerves which led to the nose, eyes, and jaws, while the corresponding nerves in white Europeans were notably thinner. Sömmerring did not actually measure these nerves with a scale or calipers. Rather, he dissected the brains in the presence of a few other anatomists. Back then, it was acceptable for a “Man of Science” to make conclusions based on his own visual assessment rather than empirical measurements. So if Sömmerring, as an expert, asserted that West Africans had remarkably large eye nerves, then so be it. Based in his observations, Sömmerring further claimed that “we [can] infer, by analogy that his [the Moor’s] brain is smaller than that of the European” (Quoted in Meijer 1999, 173). To reiterate, Sömmerring did not measure the West African’s brains, but rather *inferred* they were of small size based on the size of their eye nerves, which he also did not measure.

Sömmerring also argued that West Africans had a larger face than all other ethnic groups. As he saw it, West Africans had larger eyes and a larger nose because they needed to rely on the raw sensory perceptions of sight and smell, like animals. White Europeans, he reasoned, had smaller facial features because they used their more powerful brains to process information. As a result, they did not need to rely on sense organs like eyes and ears. For Sömmerring, a big nose indicated a small brain. Sömmerring also concluded that the skulls of West African “Moors” gave them a facial shape that was the antipathy of the facial shape found in ancient Greek statues, which he viewed as the apex of human beauty, both female and male (Meijer 1999, 173).

Although it is easily to fault Sömmerring for concluding all West Africans were small brained based on the dissection of just four corpses, we should keep in mind that modern anthropologists have proffered grand theories about the intellectual, behavioral, and verbal abilities of Neanderthals based on a quite limited sample of bones (Klein 2009, 510). For Sömmerring, dissecting not just one, but *four* West Africans would have been as rare an opportunity as a modern biologist being able to dissect three Panda bears. Although there were some ethnic West Africans in Germany at the time – mostly domestic slaves or freed slaves employed as butlers and maids – finding four fresh corpses was quite unusual.

The story behind the West African whom Sömmerring dissected is both tragic and indicative of how little German anatomists knew about non-Europeans. Most, if not all, of the “Moors” who were dissected by Sömmerring were West African slaves who lived in Germany on the estate of Duke Frederick II of Hessen-Cassel (1720–1785). The Duke made his fortune by training and renting out mercenaries, including the so-called Hessians who fought against the Continental Army of George Washington (1732–1799). On the grounds of his estate, Frederick constructed extensive gardens to entertain and impress his aristocratic friends and business associates. Inspired by the chinoiserie craze, a

fascination with all things Chinese, Frederick built an entire faux Chinese village in his garden. He called it “Moulang” and tried to find some actual Chinese people to live there. However, he could find none and instead purchased some West African slaves who, presumably, would pretend to be Chinese. The reality was that they lived much like animals in a zoo. Tragically, many of them died from tuberculosis, probably because they came from isolated rural communities in Africa and had no immunities to the diseases of urbanized Europe. Others committed suicide, an understandable response to being imprisoned in a surrealist nightmare of architectural beauty and slow wasting death. The duke donated their bodies to Sömmerring (Meijer 1999, 59).

It is also possible that some of Sömmerring’s West African corpses were mercenary soldiers. During the Revolutionary War, when Frederick’s Hessian officers were stationed in the colonies of British North America, they purchased or employed Afro-Americans as butlers, mistresses, housekeepers, and drummer boys. When the Duke’s Hessian officers returned to Germany, some of them brought along their valued Afro-American servants. In time, a small community of Afro-Americans was eventually established in Kassel. They came to be known as the “Kassel Moors.” Some of them may have ended up on Sömmerring’s dissection table (Meijer 1999, 59, 173).

Sömmerring was an outspoken supporter of Meiners’ racial theories. In Sömmerring’s 1785 book, *Ueber die Körperliche Verschiedenheit des Negers vom Europäer*, (*On the Comparative Anatomy of the Negro and the European*), he referred to Meiners as the “beloved philosopher of our fatherland” (Sömmerring 1785, xiii). Two years later, in 1787, Meiners returned the favor. He praised Sömmerring in an article entitled “On the great variety of flexibility and inflexibility; the hardness and softness of the different stocks and the races of people (*Ueber die grossen Verschiedenheit der Biegsamkeit und Unbiegsamkeit, der Härte und Weichheit der verschiedenen Stämme, und racen der Menschen*).” In this paper, Meiners focused on the extent to which different stocks and races could adapt to changes in their surroundings. He argued that “intelligent and noble” peoples, like the northern European “Celts,” were highly adaptable (Meiners *Ueber die grossen* 1787, 221–222). Conversely, Indigenous Americans were so incapable of adapting to new situations that they would die off en masse when exposed to the new foods and lifeways of Europeans. The Americans, so said Meiners, lacked adaptability and so lapsed into a deadly melancholy because they were “almost as little able to get used to a new environment as wild beasts” (Meiners *Ueber die grossen* 1787, 264). So as Meiners saw it, the astounding mortality rate of indigenous Americans in areas colonized by European powers was the result of a proclivity for mental illness, not epidemic diseases, starvation, or abuse.

Meiners viewed Sömmerring’s paper – in which he detailed his dissection of West African

corpses – as conformation of the historical research Meiners himself conducted:

As far as I know Mr. Sömmerring is the first of the currently much celebrated anatomists, who – in his excellent work on the physical differences between negroes and whites through the dissection of the former – has documented what I have documented from observing... [the] culture, abilities, and dispositions of negroes (*der ganzen Bildung, der Fähigkeiten, und Anlagen von Negern*), and their distinctive way of feeling, thinking, acting, and living; And he has [documented] that the negroes differ from the Europeans not only in color but in the whole organization of their nature, and that they [negroes] are many degrees closer to animals than they [whites] are. (Meiners *Ueber die grossen* 1787, 227)

While Meiners appreciated Sömmerring's research, Blumenbach did not. In 1785, Blumenbach published a brief but uncomplimentary review of Sömmerring's *On the Comparative Anatomy of the Moor and the European*. In this publication, Sömmerring had asserted that West Africans should be regarded as more apelike than Europeans. Sömmerring came to this conclusion because he reported that West Africans shared certain superficial features with apes which were not found in Europeans. Blumenbach, who was adamant that all humans were quite unlike apes, refuted Sömmerring's conclusion. Blumenbach charged that Sömmerring was egregiously exaggerating the importance of trivial anatomical traits, while ignoring the obvious fact that West Africans, like all humans, walk upright rather than down on all fours like apes (Blumenbach 1785, 109–111). While Blumenbach himself accepted that the Khoi and San peoples of southern Africa had a head form that possessed an “unbelievably great similarity with apes (*unglaublich viel Aehnlichkeit mit Affen*),” he consistently argued that superficial traits were of no real meaningful importance (Blumenbach 1802, 672).

Blumenbach mocked Sömmerring for suggesting West Africans were more apelike than Europeans. Employing his dry sarcastic sense of humor, Blumenbach wrote that Sömmerring foolishly concluded that “the African Moors are a little closer to the monkey family than the Europeans. But only in the same way that one can say that Angora cats are a little closer to Bolognese dogs than other breeds of cats” (Blumenbach 1785, 110). The implication is that no one in their right mind would assert that a small Bolognese hound and an Angora cat were meaningfully similar simply because they were about the same size and both had long white hair. Thus, no rational person should view certain apes and certain men as being related just because they possessed a few similar superficial traits (Dougherty 1985, 41).

The Canadian historian Frank Dougherty, who comprehensively studied Blumenbach's

voluminous correspondences, found a passage in which Sömmerring expressed his disappointment that his old college chum Blumenbach did not support his findings. In a 1786 letter that Sömmerring wrote to Heyne – who was Blumenbach’s brother-in-law – Sömmerring wrote:

*“Ich weies nicht aber auch aus de Anzeige meiner Abh[andlung] v[om] Neger in den Got[tingischen] Anz[eigen] scheint mirs dass ehrliche Blumenbach von dem ichs mir doch nie vorstelle, undrs ganz unzufreiden ist, ohne es doch sagen zu wollen. (I don’t know [what to think], but from the review of my treatise on the Negro in the Göttingen journal, it seems to me that honest Blumenbach is completely unfavorable [to my article] without wanting to say it, which I never would have imagined.” (Dougherty 1985, 36–37)*

Dougherty’s interpretation was that Sömmerring and Blumenbach maintained their warm personal friendship over a period of 60 years while simultaneously engaging in a “silent conflict” about the anatomy of West Africans (Dougherty 1985, 55). One can only imagine how the relationship between Blumenbach and Sömmerring, who were such close friends during their university days, became strained when, as middle-aged professors, they advocated such opposing views as to the very nature of human equality.

The conflict between Blumenbach and Sömmerring always remained a private affair. The dispute between Meiners and Blumenbach, however, eventually entered the public sphere. This occurred in 1790, when Meiners penned a critique squarely aimed at scholars who collected and studied skulls. In it, Meiners opined that was best to put one’s faith in the “observations from witnesses who have studied hundreds and thousands” of people from all over the world, rather than the study of “one or even several skulls of uncertain origin” (Meiners *Ueber* 1790, 407; Rupp-Eisenreich, 2014, 78–79). Of course, by saying this, Meiners was being hypocritical, since he was happy to praise the research of Sömmerring, who had dissected only a few West African corpses.

Although Meiners’ critique of skull collectors did not mention Blumenbach by name, Blumenbach was clearly the target, and everyone at Göttingen knew it. In response, Blumenbach formally published a rebuttal, saying “My esteemed colleague Mr. Hofr. Meiners has seen many things differently that I do, which I must not withhold from my readers” (Blumenbach 1790, 62). With that opening remark, Blumenbach commenced to fault Meiners for relying too heavily on travel narratives, while incautiously failing to consider any other evidence (Vetter 1996, 226; Dougherty 1990, 98, 100–10; see also Blumenbach 1790, 62–78). Blumenbach’s public critique of Meiners was not as explosive or sustained as Forster’s. Yet, one wonders if it was more damaging to Meiners’ reputation, since Blumenbach was so

highly respected and rarely took his colleagues to task.

### PART 3:

#### Meiners' reputation collapses after he wages a campaign against Kant

“Meiners exhibits his hypothesis on the two races of men who are descended from Caucasia and the Altai and one of which the Tartar or Caucasian race, according to him, offers the type of beautiful physical and moral courage and intelligence, the happiest qualities of heart and mind and of which the other Mongolian race is also misshapen and weak than depraved, stupid, and abject. This hypothesis is developed in a large number of [Meiners'] Dissertations... [but] it is completely refuted by Blumenbach.”

Philipp Albert Stapfer, 1821 (Stapfer 1821, 163–164).

\* \* \*

Throughout his career, Meiners was critiqued for many things: his poor scholarship, his binary race theory, his support of slavery, and his overall arrogance. But the thing that sent his academic career into a free fall was his sustained public attack on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who is now widely celebrated as perhaps the most significant philosopher since the end of the Renaissance (Rohlf 2010, web; Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 74–75). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* describes Kant as:

the central figure in modern philosophy. He synthesized early modern rationalism and empiricism, set the terms for much of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy, and continues to exercise a significant influence today in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and other fields. (Rohlf 2010, web)

Although Kant achieved a lofty reputation, he was, like Meiners, a man of modest origins. His father was a harness-maker (Rohlf 2010, web). Kant's paternal grandfather was one of an estimated 2,500 Scots-Irish families who, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, immigrated to northern Poland (then under Prussian rule), mostly to work as mercenaries (Leyburn 1962, 34). As young man, Kant became a tutor and unsalaried professor, which meant he was paid directly by his students. Kant went on to write about a wide range of topics including human racial variation (Guetel 2012, 48). When Kant was in his 40s, he spent 10 years in partial seclusion, focusing on his philosophical interests (Larrimore 2009, 9). Historians call this period Kant's “silent decade.” It ended in 1781 when he wrote *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Seven years later he produced a sequel of sorts entitled *The Critique of Practical Reason*. These two books served as the foundation for “Kantian” philosophy, which revolutionized the entire field of philosophy throughout Europe and beyond (Allison 2015, 85; Rohlf 2010, web).

Kant developed his new philosophy after extensively examining the writings of Locke and other like-minded philosophers who argued that all the things which humans perceived to be true and valid were phenomena which existed out in the universe. Under this scenario, the truth would exist even if there were no humans to perceive it. As they saw it, human eyes and ears perceived things, which the human mind would then process. But Kant made a convincing argument that certain concepts – which are undeniably true – are generated entirely by the human mind. Thus, not all true concepts were external; some were generated, in part, *within* the human mind. This argument was a departure from many of the most highly respected philosophers of Kant’s era, including Locke, whom Meiners so revered. (Rohlf 2010, web)

For Meiners, who was dedicated to the “common sense” philosophy of Locke and Hume, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* was needlessly complex, academic mumbo-jumbo. As an advocate for academic writing that was accessible to the general public, Meiners was enamored with Locke’s philosophy and its straightforward arguments. One can understand Meiners’ distaste for Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is difficult to read. Kant used a set of unique terms like “a priori knowledge” and “transcendental idealism,” which he defined using his own particular – and sometimes tortuously complicated – definitions. Thus, anyone who wants to read and understand *Critique of Pure Reason* must learn a new set of vocabulary created by Kant. I am quite comfortable in asserting that Kant’s philosophy can fairly be characterized as “esoteric” rather than “elegant” or easily understood (Rohlf 2010, web).

One can imagine that Meiners may have also harbored some personal jealousy towards Kant. As an ambitious young professor at Göttingen university, Meiners had unsuccessfully tried to revolutionize philosophy by adopting the overall outlook of Locke. Conversely, Kant succeeded in instigating such a revolution by revealing the very weaknesses in Locke’s ideas. This was all too much for Meiners to bear. In numerous books and articles, he ardently expressed his opposition to Kant. The 1857 *Encyclopedia Britannica* reported that Meiners “waged a perpetual war upon... the partisans of Kant, denouncing them as unintelligible scholastics and dreaming mystics” (*Enc. Brit.* 1857, 473). Stapfer wrote that Meiners “attacked and even denounced (*attaquée et même dénoncée*)” Kant’s philosophy (Stapfer 1821, 161).

Meiners’ attacks on Kant were conducted in coordination with one of Meiners’ few collaborators, Johann Georg Heinrich Feder (1740–1821). He was a pastor’s son who went on to teach metaphysics, Hebrew, and logic at the Casimirianum in Coburg. After that, Feder took a job at Göttingen University. He taught philosophy there from 1768 to 1797. From 1797 to 1822, Feder served as the director of the Royal Library in Hannover. Feder authored two successful textbooks, edited the journal *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (*GGA*), and helped introduce Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776) to a German

audience (Thiel 2016, 204–208; Müller 1961, web).

For historians who study Kant, Feder is remembered as one of the founders of the “popular philosophy” movement known as *Popularphilosophie*. This school of intellectuals was opposed to the highly conceptual sort of philosophy that was a hallmark of Kant’s theories. Meiners was a vocal supporter of this movement (Golf-French, 2019, 949). As the American political theorist Bruce Baum described it, *Popularphilosophie* was a “philosophy for the people” which, “rejected metaphysical speculation in favor of observation-based inquiry into human existence” (Baum 2006, 85). Given Meiners’ middle class roots and disdain for what he saw as the decadent aristocracy, the “popular philosophy” movement was consistent with his general worldview (Thiel 2016, 204–208).

During the 1780s, Meiners and Feder engaged in a literary dispute with Kant. Both sides published books and papers refuting their opponents’ viewpoints. The dispute began in 1782, when Feder permitted one of his colleagues to publish a negative review of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in *GGA*. Kant responded by publishing a refutation of the review. Feder then defended the review in his 1787 book, *On Space and Causality*. One year after that, Feder and Meiners jointly founded an anti-Kantian journal they called *Philosophische Bibliothek (Philosophical Library)*. From 1788 through 1791, their journal published numerous articles in which they and their allies opposed Kant’s metaphysical philosophy (Thiel 2016, 204–208; Müller 1961, web).

Ultimately, Meiners’ drive to overthrow mainstream philosophers and their Kantian ideas was a flop. Similarly, Meiners never garnered wide acceptance for his binary racial theory, or his assertion that Greek philosophy developed free from Asian and African influence. During his later years, Meiners’ failures finally caught up with him. With his reputation as a researcher besmirched, he was unable to attract new followers. He even lost the support of some of his old friends, like Ludwig Timotheus Spittler (1752–1810). From 1787 to 1794, Spittler and Meiners had co-edited a history journal. After the magazine folded, Spittler wrote to his brother that he would never again partner with Meiners because of all the criticism Meiners attracted (Lotter 1978, 35).

Meiners also earned the ire of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799), the renowned Göttingen physicist and social commentator. Lichtenberg, who had initially admired Meiners, came to grow tired of what he called Meiners’ “unlimited arrogance” (quoted in Niekirk 2019, 32–33). Lichtenberg felt that Kant’s opponents should have the opportunity to make their case, and so refrained from publicly haranguing Meiners. But in private letters, Lichtenberg savaged the anti-Kantians as “skillfully awful” followers of “Mongol Meiners,” who “hawk” beliefs rather than science (quoted in

Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 75; see also Wunderlich 2016, 511). The insulting nickname “Mongol Meiners” also showed up in the private writings of Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), the celebrated German poet and writer (Zantop 1997, 31).

Meiners’ colleagues showed him due respect in public, while expressing their distaste for him and his ideas in private. In a personal letter, the German philosopher and literary critic Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) advised Forster that “unendurable Meiners” was not likely ever to change his mind; thus “what one cannot change, one must tolerate.” Zantop has reported that intellectuals like Herder, Wieland, Heyne, Sömmerring, Kant and Lichtenberg all produced “flippant asides against Meiners in private.” But in public, they treated him “with deference, as an authority, a scholar” (Zantop 1997, 33).

Even Meiners’ obituary, as published in the proceedings of the Göttingen Royal Academy of Sciences, did not present him as an affable man who would be greatly missed. The obituary was a remarkably unimpassioned recounting of Meiners’ publications and achievements. Its author was the celebrated Heyne, who summarized Meiners’ racial theory in paragraph that was less than glowing [<sup>3</sup>]:

He [Meiners] was drawn towards certain types of human beings who were established by nature with certain individual strengths of spirit and bodies and limits, where, by law of nature, they had to confine themselves; he placed the Negroes in the lowest place from which there was no possibility of rising. Although he could be easily led in some matters of investigation, he never allowed himself to be led from *this* judgement; no doubt he would have moved on to a truer estimation of things if he had considered the Negroes later in life. (Original emphasis; Translation by Phyllis Katz; Quoted in Zantop 1997, 31).

Heyne’s diplomatic assertion that Meiners would have “no doubt” eventually acquired a “truer estimation” of Negroes’ mental abilities demonstrates the way that Meiners’ colleagues could be quite muted or indirect when critiquing him. This deference to Meiners may have had something to do with the fact that he was well-connected among academic circles. Meiners held the valued professorial rank of “Hofrath,” which is the equivalent of a tenured professor. Thus, he was unlikely to ever be fired. Furthermore, from 1796 until 1810, Meiners served as the pro-rector (or vice president) of University of Göttingen, whose financial benefactor was no less than the king of Britain. Meiners may have been an egotistical gadfly, but he was trusted as a competent administrator by those in positions of power (Dougherty 1990, 92).

During his years as a university administrator, Meiners stopped teaching. He also curtailed his publishing activities, which was quite a departure from the way he had lived before. Why he chose to

pursue a new career is a bit of a mystery. It could be that he simply wanted a change. Perhaps he needed a better salary? But given how he was scorned by so many of his colleagues, it seems plausible that he simply grew tired of being shouted down all the time. It may have been that his fellow professors at Göttingen's department of philosophy got fed up with all the drama he generated, and quietly forced him out.

In 1799, the German Romantic poet Friedrich von Matthisson (1761–1831) wrote that once, while in Göttingen, he paid a visit to Meiners “Not because he is visited and admired by all literati who resort hither, but because my heart and judgement urged me to it.” But even Matthisson, who found much to admire in Meiners' writings, had to admit that Meiners' publications were not “totally free from inaccuracy, or trifling errors of judgment” (Matthisson 1799, 400–401). This vision of Meiners as a technically gifted scholar prone to inaccuracies and poor judgment is how Meiners came to be remembered throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **By defending his research, was Meiners also defending his “academic dynasty?”**

As noted previously, Blumenbach belonged to an academic dynasty, the Beddies family of scholars. Although Blumenbach's father was a man of modest origins, he “married up,” wedding a woman whose father and grandfather were well-regarded intellectuals. Christoph Meiners, the son of a humble postmaster, also married into a multi-generational family of learned men. Meiners' wife was Luise Friederike Achenwall (1756–1826). She was the daughter of the Göttingen Law professor Gottfried Achenwall (1719–1772), who is credited as one of the founders of the field of statistics. Genealogical records show that she was also the granddaughter of the self-educated legal scholar Johann Jakob Moser (1701–1785), who was celebrated as the “The Father of German Constitutional Law” (Liebel 1965, 304–306; Aretin 1997, web; Stapfer 1821, 159; see also Schulze 1869, 1–35).

According to Stapfer, Luise was a formidable intellect who grounded Meiners when his theoretical musings got the better of him. She was:

worthy of him due to her excellent qualities and her education which was very useful to him, sometimes gently bringing him back to calmer dispositions and influencing the direction of his work. She was considered to have made Meiners' journeys more interesting by the tact and finesse with which she knew how to focus her attention on truly remarkable objects... ; the device on the telescope called “the finder” which, attached to the side of a telescope, helps the observer to more easily find that portion of the sky whose details he wants to examine. (Stapfer 1821, 159)

Luise's father and grandfather – Moser and Achenwall – were prolific authors whose writings are of interest because they presented arguments that were quite similar to those central to Meiners' sociological and anthropological theories. Moser was a critic of the aristocracy, while Achenwall regarded slavery and the domination of Indigenous Americans as an acceptable component of global economic progress. Thus, when Meiners defended his own theories, he was also defending those of his family relations. For him, admitting that he was in error would have been tantamount to declaring that two generations of his wife's family were also wrong.

Luise's grandfather, J. J. Moser, rose to fame during the 1730s and 1740s, when he wrote *Deutsches Staatsrecht (German Constitutional Law)*, a 53-volume analysis of German laws. However, Moser had a rocky career due to his outspoken support for progressive causes. He was an ardent pietist Protestant who was fired from his post as a law professor at the University of Frankfurt-Oder due to his liberal views. In 1751, he was hired by Charles Eugene, Duke of Württemberg (1728–1793) to address land reform in what is now the German state of Baden-Württemberg, adjacent to Switzerland and France. In 1759, the Duke imprisoned Moser in solitary confinement without trial for authoring subversive writings. While incarcerated, he composed hymns on the wall of his cell. Five years later, the 63-year-old Moser was released and restored to his position, in part due to the actions of Frederick the Great of Prussia (1712–1786). (Lieber 1965, 304–306; Aretin 1997, web; see also Schulze 1869, 1–35.)

Moser's daughter Wilhelmine Louise Moser (1726–1762) married Gottfried Achenwall (1719–1772), who was born in Poland and educated in Jena and Leipzig. In 1748, he found employment as a professor at Göttingen University teaching philosophy, law, and natural law. Gottfried Achenwall has been hailed by some as the “Father of statistics.” He is best known as the author of *The Constitution of Nations in the European Realm in Overview (Staatsverfassung der Europäischen Reiche im Grundriße)* published in 1752. This book, rich with statistics, described various countries based on their commerce, industry, agriculture, and legal codes (Zahn and Meier 1953, 32–33).

In 1766, Achenwall met with Benjamin Franklin, who was visiting Göttingen because he had previously been made an external member of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences. The following year Achenwall published a series of articles under the heading *Some Observations on North America, and the Colonies of Great Britain therein, from Dr. Franklin's Verbal Reporting (Einige Anmerkungen über Nordamerika, und über dasige Grosbritannische Colonien, us mündlichen Nachrichten des Hrn. Dr. Franklins).*” In 1903, it was translated into English and published as “Achenwall's observations on North America” (Rosengarten 1903, 1). It provides a fascinating account of how an Enlightenment era German scholar (Achenwall) interpreted the ethnographic perceptions of a well-informed British American

(Franklin).

Most of *Achenwall's Observations* deals with the geography, economy, and settlement of the British Colonies. However, topics of ethnicity and demographics are also discussed. When describing indigenous nations of North America, Achenwall wrote that they:

consist of many small nations, each with its own language, quite different from that of their neighbors. But all these tribes, from Davis Strait to Florida, are of one appearance. They are as if descended from a common ancestor, all brown in color, with straight black hair, eyes all of one color, and all beardless. They call Europeans the bearded nations. We are all brothers, they say to one another, when two of different tribes meet and compare themselves with Europeans. (Rosengarten 1903, 2)

When it came to Afro-Americans in British North America, Achenwall noted:

Blacks are found in Virginia, Maryland, and the two Carolinas in large numbers, but very few in Pennsylvania and further north. In Pennsylvania, on principle they were prevented coming as much as possible, partly because there was no such hard work as they were fitted for in raising tobacco, rice, and indigo. (Rosengarten 1903, 6)

Regarding slavery, Achenwall painted a rather rosy picture:

These Negro slaves enjoy, as subjects of the state, in all the colonies, the protection of the laws as much as the free inhabitants. A colonist, even if he is the owner, who kills a black man, is also sentenced to death. If he overworks or ill treats his slave, the latter can complain to the judge. Then in their own interest the masters are obliged not to give their slaves excessive tasks or insufficient food, for their death is a loss. The Negro slaves have all, in short, the general rights of humanity except freedom and property, neither of which they possess. (Rosengarten 1903, 6)

It is entirely plausible that Franklin may have discussed slavery when visiting Göttingen. As a young businessman in Philadelphia, Franklin had owned a few slaves. But he eventually grew to oppose slavery, and in 1787, became the president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (Isaacson 2004, 152, 505). Franklin's support for abolition can be traced to 1763, when he visited a school for free black children operated by one of his colleagues. He was so impressed with the children he observed that he noted, "from what I then saw, I have conceived a higher opinion of the natural

capacities of the black race, than I had ever before entertained.” Soon after, Franklin donated funds to help keep the school in operation (quoted in Isaacson 2004, 152). Three years after that, he visited Göttingen, which suggests that he had begun to feel uncomfortable about slavery by the time he met with Achenwall. It therefore is likely that Achenwall’s favorable description of American slavery was his own personal embellishment of Franklin’s words.

When Meiners’ professional colleagues were accusing him of being overly reliant on travel narratives that reported half-truths or outright falsehoods, they were (coincidentally or not) also finding fault with his wife’s father. And when Meiners stubbornly dug in his heels, lashing out as his critics rather than engaging with them in dialogue, he was following the playbook of his wife’s grandfather, a commoner’s son who doggedly stuck to his principles and – after years spent suffering as a political prisoner – was redeemed and hailed as a great intellect.

Historians of science and philosophy often tend to view bygone scholars as essentially beings of pure thought, whose influences can be revealed simply by examining the books they read and professional colleagues with whom they collaborated. But people, even heady theoreticians, all possess emotional ties that can direct their views and actions. Was Meiners a cold-hearted man who lacked empathy for the both the wealthy elites who outranked him, and the slaves at lowest rungs of society? Or was he fiercely loyal to his wife’s family, who had accepted him into their fold despite his humble origins? Of course, this is a false dichotomy, since both questions can easily be answered in the affirmative. Inconsistent behavior is inherent within the human condition. The notion that Meiners could be compassionate with his family and callous to the bulk of humanity is entirely plausible.

### **Faulting Father Grégoire: Meiners’ race supremacist swan song**

In 1809, just one year before Meiners died, he authored a brief but scathing critique of the 1808 book *De la littérature des nègres (On the Literature of Negroes)* (Grégoire 1808). Its author was a French Jesuit priest, Father Henri Jean-Baptiste Grégoire (1750–1831) who was a crusading abolitionist and outspoken egalitarian. He was a correspondent of Blumenbach’s and, on at least one occasion, he met Meiners (Grégoire 1810, 41). Grégoire was such an emphatic advocate for equal rights that his outlook has been described as not simply as egalitarian, but “pro-Negro” (Curtin 1964, 241; Dain 2002, 115). The full title of Grégoire’s work was *De la littérature des nègres, ou Recherches sur leurs facultés intellectuelles, leurs qualités morales et leur littérature*. In 1810, it was published in English as *An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties, and Literature of Negroes: Followed with an Account of the Life and Works of Fifteen Negroes & Mulattoes, Distinguished in Science, Literature and*

*the Arts*. In this book, Grégoire conducted a review of publications authored by Indigenous West Africans and Afro-Americans, many of whom were former slaves. Its conclusion was that West Africans were intellectually and morally equal to Europeans. He wrote:

I have taken upon myself the task of proving that the negroes are capable of virtues and talents; this I have established by reasoning, and still more by facts: these facts do not announce sublime discoveries: these works are not *chef d' oeuvres* [masterpieces], but they furnish irrefutable arguments against the enemies of negroes. (Grégoire 1810, 248)

Grégoire, the son of a tailor from a small town near Lunéville, France, was a Jesuit who served as the bishop of Blois from 1791 to 1801. He was an advocate for the rights of Jewish Frenchmen and was an ardent Republican. Yet, during the Reign of Terror, Grégoire refused to renounce his religion and courageously held daily mass in his house. Grégoire supported the Haitian revolution. During Napoleon's reign, he opposed the establishment of the French Empire and the restoration of the nobility. In his later years, Grégoire corresponded with European intellectuals and toured England and Germany. In retirement, he supported himself by selling his library. Although Grégoire's funeral was largely unattended by clergymen, a crowd of 20,000 students and workers honored him by unyoking the horses from his hearse and pulling it through the streets by themselves (Burton 2007, 214–212; Leduc 2013, 128–132, See also Sepinwall 2005).

We know that Blumenbach aided Grégoire when he was preparing *On the Literature of Negroes*. Blumenbach had previously hailed the intellectual achievements of West Africans as far back as 1784, when he declared, “the negroes, in regards to their mental facilities and capacity (*natürlichen Geistesanlagen und Fähigkeiten*), are not inferior to the rest of the human race” (Blumenbach 1787, 4). Blumenbach came to the same conclusion in his 1799 paper, which was translated into English and published as “Observations on the Bodily Conformation and Mental Capacities of the Negroes” (Blumenbach “Observations” 1794, 141). Blumenbach even achieved some notoriety for collecting books written by indigenous West Africans or Afro-Americans to document the high mental capabilities inherent in people of West African ancestry (Blumenbach 1806, 88–91). This collection included the poetry of Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784), a Bostonian former slave born in West Africa. Blumenbach lent Grégoire a book of Wheatley's poems, some of which were published in *On the Literature of Negroes* (Shields 2008, 52; Gregoire 1810, 238–241). Blumenbach also corresponded with West African born Britons, including the author and world traveler Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797), a former slave in Virginia turned transatlantic sailor whom Blumenbach eventually met (Blumenbach 1806, 90).

Grégoire dedicated his book to a long list of “all those men who have had the courage to plead the cause of the unhappy blacks and mulattoes whether by the publication of their works or by discussions in national assemblies &c.” Blumenbach and Equiano were both included on this roster, as well as Franklin, whose portrait was honorifically printed in the English edition. Grégoire noted that he had “had the opportunity of conversating with... Blumenbach, who perhaps has the richest [collection] of human skulls.” Conversely, Meiners’ research is only mentioned once in *On the Literature of Negros*, and not with approbation. Grégoire wrote that Meiners was “of the opinion that we owe little to the Egyptian,” an assertion that was refuted by Blumenbach who “has observed in the craniums of mummies, that which characterizes the negro race.” Furthermore, Blumenbach regarded the face of an Egyptian sphinx statue as “that of the negro” (Grégoire 1810, i–iii, 22–24).

Meiners’ critique of *On the Literature of Negros* was published in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (*General Literature News*), and he pulled no punches. Meiners began by complaining that *On the Literature of Negros* failed to cite his many publications. Why, asked Meiners, did Grégoire fail to read Meiners’ own “fine treatises on the nature of the African Negroes... as well as on the true nature of the slave trade and servitude the negro in the West Indies” (Meiners “Bemerkungen” 1809, 946). Meiners accused Grégoire of having a poor grasp of history and confusing the facts. Meiners asserted that many of the intelligent West Africans whom Grégoire praised were, in reality, dark-skinned “beautiful black peoples (*schönen schwarzen Völkern*)” like Moors, Arabs, or Abyssinians. Meiners wrote that some of the dark-skinned intellectuals that Grégoire celebrated were not “real Negroes.” He stated that in “the West Indies, all [of the] slaves who are from beautiful black peoples, or peoples strongly mixed with Moors... have kept themselves separate from the real Negroes (*sich von den eigentlichen Negern abgesondert halten*).” He even claimed that Equiano, who was born in Nigeria, was not a real Negro, but rather was born to a “Mohammedan people (*mahomedanischen Volke*)” (Meiners “Bemerkungen” 1809, 947–948).

Meiners refuted those authors who claimed that Europeans and West Africans were intrinsically that same. He dismissed the argument that during the Roman era, Europeans were just as much “brutal barbarians” as the current day West Africans. Furthermore:

Even as barbarians, the old Germanic Gauls differed fundamentally from the negroes in their whole way of feeling and thinking, living and acting... these [Germanic] barbarians more deeply grasped [an] understanding of the fine and practical arts (*Kenntnisse schöne und nützliche Künste*)... [which have] so far, not produced the slightest noticeable and lasting effect among the Negroes. In his zeal for a supposed good cause, Mr. G [Grégoire] makes dissenting reproaches, which one should not expect from a quiet

researcher, much less from an elegant and pious clergyman. (Meiners “Bemerkungen” 1809, 948)

Meiners then accused Grégoire of misrepresenting the slave trade and exaggerating the suffering of slaves. Meiners found it “almost incomprehensible” that Grégoire portrayed “the state of the Negro peoples in Africa, that of the Negro slaves in the West Indies, and the relationship between both, so incorrectly.” Meiners asserted that New World slaves led lives far better than their cousins in the interior of Africa, whose population was cursed by “the ugliness of stupidity, and tiger-like savagery.” Meiners reported that “according to the assurances of the most credible men... the poor peasants in Europe, and the lower classes of workers in European cities” would envy the lifestyle of most “Negro slaves in the West Indies” (Meiners “Bemerkungen” 1809, 949–950).

Meiners’ conclusion was that Grégoire was deluded: “He believes himself, and would like to make others believe, that the negroes are equal to the whites. Regardless of this [belief], one of the most undeniable facts [is] that the majority of the races of men [*die Mehrheit von Menschenrassen*] do not support [such] a hypothesis, but speak of a *race noire*, a *race blanche*, etc. [and so on].” Furthermore, Grégoire was biased. He “sometimes expressed himself a little too strongly against those who did not agree with him” and “certainly did not read those writings in which the equality of Negroes and Europeans was most disputed” (Meiners “Bemerkungen” 1809, 951–952). Meiners was quite correct that Grégoire was extremely biased. And yet, by leveling this charge, Meiners – who was also tremendously biased – was demonstrating his own highly profound hypocrisy and lack of self-awareness.

When Meiners published his critique of *On the Literature of Negroes*, he was a vice president of a leading German university, while Grégoire was just a radical priest and political activist from France. Because they were of such asymmetrical rank, Meiners had nothing to lose by finding fault with Grégoire. If Meiners had refuted the writings of a respected Göttingen professor, or an associate of Napoleon or monarchs of Britain or Russia, it could have hurt his career. But Grégoire was an easy target. The criticisms Meiners levied against Grégoire, however, often seem to be a by-proxy critique of Blumenbach and some of the other leading German intellectuals who found fault with Meiners. It is as if, at the end of his career, Meiners wanted to find a safe way take one last stab at his numerous enemies.

### **Meiners tries to get the last word... from beyond the grave**

As a young man, Meiners decided he did not care for the lessons his teachers and professors were offering; and so he set out on his own, reading books that would inform him as well as the lectures he was so loathe to attend. Meiners was always an academic loner who never depended on validation from

others. He was also never one to give up. It is therefore not surprising that once Meiners finally retired from teaching, he did not stop his investigations into human racial variation; he simply pursued his studies on his own, out of the public eye.

We know that Meiners was still intensely researching race toward the end of his life, because soon after he died, his colleagues posthumously published Meiners' final book entitled *Investigations into the Differences of Human Natures* (*Untersuchungen über die Verschiedenheiten der Menschennaturen*). This weighty tome appeared in three volumes released between 1811 and 1815. It was edited by Feder, his old friend and anti-Kantian partisan. The royalties went to Meiners' widow Luise, the daughter of Achenwall and the granddaughter of Moser (Carhart 2009, 68). She and Meiners had no children, and after his death she needed financial support. In some respects, the publication of *Investigations* was an example of how the fraternity of German academics looked out for each other.

Within the pages of *Investigations*, Meiners' abandoned his binary theory of human racial variation which, technically speaking, was monogenist, since it assumed both stocks split off from one distant, autochthonous population. He broke with the monogenist Biblical narrative and adopted outright polygeny, arguing that each nation of humanity had its own unique origin. What led him to this conclusion were the travel reports flowing from the pens of South Sea explorers. Meiners had read about the various nations of people who lived on the islands scattered throughout the Pacific (Carhart 2009, 62). And indeed, the diversity of Pacific people is most extensive: dark skinned Indigenous Australians, blond Solomon Islanders, curly haired Papuans, straight haired New Zealanders, broad-chested Tongans, and the lean Aeta pygmies of the Philippines.

Citing the observations of South Sea mariners, Meiners' conclusion was:

No other part of the earth presents with such incontrovertible evidence as the lands and islands of the South Sea, not only that mankind is not of one common origin, but rather that even the most similar human groups have developed in different, widely separated locations, whose inhabitants never had nor ever could have had the least commerce with each other. This statement is of such importance that we may not repent of it even if we were to arrive at it directly only through such tiresome and exhaustive research as this has cost us. (Meiners *Untersuchungen* 1811, 372–373; Carhart 2009, 68)

It was only late in life, after he had become quite secure in his career, that Meiners publicly announced that his binary monogenism was in error. Yet his newfound support for polygenism was entirely consistent with the exclusionary outlook he unabashedly expressed for decades. Meiners simply

could not stomach the notion that South Sea islanders had the technology to sail long distances. He could not accept that they might have the desire to seek out and construct commercial or intellectual exchanges with anyone outside their own community. While Meiners accepted that the oar driven, rudderless trading ships of ancient Greece and Rome sailed east to Crimea and west to Britain, he could not imagine that Pacific peoples ever had the mental capacity for grand oceanic voyages.

### **Meiners' binary racial theory withers in Germany, but hangs on by a thread in France**

Although Meiners was unpopular among his fellow professors, some German radicals supported his call for ending class-based inequalities. They supported Meiners' calls to strip the aristocracy of their control of the peasantry and give the middle-class bourgeoisie access to high-ranking positions in the government, the military, and the Church (Golf-French 2019, 962). Throughout the 1790s, German social reformers like Friedrich Georg August Schmidt (fl. late 18th cent) cited Meiners. In 1794, Meiners' texts were used to critique aristocratic institutions in the anonymously written *Open-minded Proposals regarding the Paramount Matters facing Germany (Freymüthige Gedanken Über die Allerwichtigste Angelegenheit Deutschland)* (Golf-French 2019, 944–945).

Although Meiners held a low opinion of Jews, his reformist ideas were referenced by Johann Ludwig Ewald (c1748–1822), a German progressive, who advocated for the rights of Jewish Germans. Meiners' criticism of the German aristocracy also appealed to Saul Ascher (1767–1882), a Jewish German bookseller and philosopher who lobbied for religious reform. In 1799, Ascher authored a book that, following Meiners' lead, was anti-aristocratic. It was banned by Prussian censors who deemed it “an open call to revolution” (Golf-French 2019, 945).

American historian Susan Zantop has described Meiners' writings as “anti-revolutionary colonialist discourse” (Zantop 1993, 23). I must diverge from her interpretation. After all, Meiners' critiques of the aristocratic elite were clearly revolutionary enough to be cited by social reformers like Ascher, Ewald, and Schmidt. It can be fraught to describe Meiners as a “conservative,” at least in the modern sense of the word (Golf-French 2019, 946); even by 18<sup>th</sup> century standards, Meiners was more of a nonconformist than a conservative (Golf-French 2019, 952). Above all, Meiners was an autodidact and an intellectual loner. As a result, he came up with his own unique theories regarding philosophy, history, and race. Viewing him as a “typical racist,” a “typical German scholar,” or a “typical Enlightenment” thinker overlooks the overriding fact that he was fundamentally atypical.

While Meiners was scorned by many leading intellectuals in Germany, some of his books found a warm reception among certain French scholars. After all, the anti-monarchists of the French Revolution

could appreciate Meiners' assertion that ancient Greece and Rome declined due to the decadence of their aristocratic elites (Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 70). Several dozen of Meiners' papers were translated into French by Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison (1759–1818) and Louis-François Jauffre (1773–1840). Today, Jauffre is credited with founding the study of anthropology in France. He served as the secretary of the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme, a Paris-based anthropological society which operated from 1799 to 1810 (Carhart 2009, 60). In fact, when Jauffre gave public presentations, he sometimes used French translations of Meiners' papers as his lecture notes. It is therefore safe to assume that Meiners' ideas were disseminated among the first generation of French anthropologists. However, Jauffre never made it clear that he was quoting Meiners. Jauffre's notes, which were housed in the library of the French Academy of Medicine, listed Jauffre – not Meiners – as the author. It is only recently that historians have recognized that these lecture notes were in fact translations of Meiners' works (Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 70).

Historians Friedrich Lotter of Germany and Leon Poliakov of France have both argued that Meiners' writings influenced the French race theorist Julien-Joseph Virey (1791–1862). Poliakov even described Virey as an “apostle of the teachings of Meiners” (Poliakov 1974, 180; Lotter: 1978, 71). Virey's seminal book on race, *A Natural History of the Human Race (Histoire naturelle du genre humain)* (1801) cites Meiners' texts. Like Meiners, Virey proposed that the “human races... may be divided broadly into those which are fair and white, and those which are ugly and black,” (quoted in Poliakov 1974, 180). Virey, who earned his living as a pharmacist, was also a member of the French Academy of Medicine, and so had access to the very library where Jauffre's translation of Meiners' texts were stored (Rupp Eisenreich, 2014, 70).

Meiners was mentioned in the English translation of Virey's studies on race, which were jointly published in 1837 as *Natural History of the Negro Race*. This book was published in the American slave state of South Carolina and began with a series of statements disparaging “the negro species,” noting that “the negro has more feelings than thoughts, his intellect is not generally so extensive as that of the white man; his shape even bears some resemblance to the Orang-Outang” (Virey 1837, 1–2). Virey (who wrote about himself in the third person) also referenced Meiners' assertion that West Africans were mentally inferior due to a small brain:

Although it appears unjust in some respects to trace out the limits of the mind yet it is the duty of a naturalist to examine thoroughly so important a question. Hume, Meiners, Soemmering (*sic*) and many others have maintained that the negro race was very inferior to the white as to the mind. Their opinions agree with the observations of the

distinguished anatomists Cuvier, Gall, Spurzheim and Dr Virey, since the cerebral capacity of all negroes who have been examined is generally smaller than that of whites. (Virey 1837, 33)

Although Virey agreed with Meiners on many issues, they disagreed with on certain key points. For example, while Meiners held that Germans were superior to Slavs, Virey asserted that all Europeans, including Slavs, were equals. He wrote that the humanity could be “divided mainly into beautiful and white, or ugly, brown and black. The Celtic lineages, and even Sarmatians or Slavonians, indeed present an oval face, pleasant, very symmetrical” (Virey 1801, 145–146). Thus, we see how Virey was combining the Celts and Slavs together into one “race.” Furthermore, he argued that the European continental-race was superior to all non-European peoples. He wrote that Europeans as a unit were:

... noble and proud forms, a generous soul, a character of frank activity, beauty, valor, intelligence, perfection and social virtues raise this race of men (*cette race d’hommes*) above the servile herd of other mortals, that crawling, sadly attached to the earth in a base uniformity. Without Europeans what would our world be? (Virey 1801, 146)

And while Meiners promoted slavery, Virey wanted to see it abolished. Virey argued that intellectually superior Europeans should not enslave the supposedly inferior extra-European races, but help them to reach their full, albeit limited, potential (Staum 2003, 40–43).

Meiners’ writings went on to influence French scholars during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but only in a limited fashion. For example, Meiners’ race theory was appreciated by the French diplomat and social critic Jean-Arthur Gobineau (1816–1882) (Golf-French 2019, 654). In 1837, Gobineau published his masterwork of class and race bigotry, *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (*Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*). Within this unabashedly race-supremacist book Gobineau cited Meiners, but only once, and only in a brief footnote:

Meiners was so struck with the repulsive appearance of the greater part of humanity that he imagined a very simple system of classification, containing only two categories – the beautiful, namely the white race, and the ugly, which included all the others... The reader will see that I have not thought it necessary to go through all the ethnological theories. I only mention the most important. (Gobineau 1853, 179; Gobineau 1915, 107.)

It may be that Gobineau hardly mentions Meiners’ book because Gobineau supported the aristocracy, and so did not wish to celebrate such a bold-faced populist as Meiners (Brace 2005, 120–121).

There is no question that Gobineau's footnote represented but a minor mention of Meiners. And yet in 1940, the pro-Nazi German anthropologist Egon von Eickstedt (1892–1965) celebrated Meiners' work as a key inspiration for Gobineau. Eickstedt lauded Meiners as the “founder of raciology” who had unfairly suffered centuries' worth of undeserved ridicule. Eickstedt also credited Meiners with influencing the race supremacist Scotsman Robert Knox (1791–1862), along with a generation of similarly minded bigots in France and Italy (Rupp-Eisenreich 2015, 69). However, Knox's 1850 book *The Races of Men: A Fragment* – a paranoid grand meditation on racial inequity – does not mention Meiners at all (Knox 1850).

At first glance, Eickstedt's unjustified praise for Meiners seems rather curious. Why would a Nazi apologist make the effort to grossly overstate the importance of Meiners in a book written by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Frenchman? The answer to this question likely has to do with propaganda. The Third Reich embraced an Aryanist race supremacist ideology. But that ideology had been most extensively developed by Gobineau, who was French, rather effete, and *not* a square jawed German superman. This created a problem for Eickstedt, which he solved by bogusly crediting Meiners with establishing an innovative race supremacist framework which Gobineau later embellished. Eickstedt made it appear that a German (Meiners) was the innovative founder of the core ideas upon which later non-German race theorists (like Gobineau and Knox) merely elaborated. Eickstedt conveniently failed to mention that Meiners ardently opposed uniting all Germans into one nation, which was a fundamental pillar of the Nazi movement (Meiners *Briefe* 1785 Vol. 2, 297).

Like Eickstedt, the pro-Nazi German historian Hermann Blome (fl. early 20<sup>th</sup> cent.) also hailed Meiners' contributions to race theory (Mikkelsen 2013, 197). So did the young Nazi-era German sociologist Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann (1904–1988), who wrote that Meiners expressed an “extremely modern vision” which “prefigured Gobineau's theory” (Quoted in Rupp-Eisenreich 2014, 68; See also Golf-French 2019, 945). In 1986, a much older and presumably de-Nazified Mühlmann praised Meiners as being resourceful for using “ethnological travel narratives of that time” to develop theories addressing the development of cultures (Mühlmann: 1986, 59). Largely glossing over Meiners' brazen racial bigotry, Mühlmann simply noted that Meiners was “weak” when it came to linking his cultural theories with “race theory” (Mühlmann 1986, 61).

The unpublished notebooks of the German philologist Victor Klemperer (1881–1960) indicate that Nazi state historians were not entirely comfortable with promoting Meiners as one of their cultural heroes. They sought without success to find another, preferably more respected, German-born race supremacist scholar to designate as their ideological precursor (Mikkelsen 2013, 197). This bit of

intelligence may explain why, in 1937, a less than salutatory assessment of Meiners was offered by Hans Plischke (1890–1972). He was a Göttingen professor of anthropology and an SS officer who admired Blumenbach for his skepticism. Plischke asserted that Meiners was “rightly reprimanded” by Blumenbach for relying too heavily on travel narratives of questionable accuracy (Plischke 1937, 4). Meiners’ reputation was so tarnished, even the Nazis wanted to distance themselves from him.

Nazi historians were never able to find a German champion of Nazi-style race supremacy who predated Meiners (Mikkleson 2013, 197). Neither have I. As far as I can tell, Meiners’ race supremacist inspiration largely came from the philosophers of Scotland like Hume, whose bigoted narratives can be traced to the propagandist court historians of Britain’s King Henry VIII (Horsman 1981, 10). Given all this evidence, one might be tempted to view Meiners as a kind of conduit of a pan-European race supremacist anthropological theory that:

1. originated in the court of Tudor Britain,
2. traveled via Scotland to Enlightenment Era Germany, and then,
3. hid out in Victorian France, until,
4. it again resurfaced among the academic quislings of Nazi Germany.

Under this scenario, Meiners adopted the Anglo-Saxonist race supremacy of Hume, which was then modified by Virey and Gobineau, before being resuscitated by Eickstedt. However, attempting to monocausally draw a single line connecting Hume’s bigotry with that of Hitler, *via Meiners*, is overly simplistic. In reality, Meiners’ influences included Tacitus, the race supremacist works of Meiners’ father-in-law, and the myriad books Meiners pulled from the shelves of Göttingen’s library.

From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until today, historians from all sides of the political spectrum have been guilty of selectively citing evidence to support their interpretations of Meiners. However, cherry picking is quite common in historical studies past and present. It should come as no surprise that it occurs in discussions of Meiners. As Golf-French put it, “The fact that Meiners’ ideas could be appropriated by a radical German Jewish intellectual like Ascher and leading National Socialist thinkers highlights the interpretive challenges that scholars confront when dealing with his thought” (Golf-French 2019, 945). Having researched Meiners (more than I ever intended to), I can testify that he is a difficult man to study. But if we in the modern world want a full understanding of the origin of Eurocentric race theory and present-day racism, somebody – ideally a German who can fully absorb all the finer points of Meiners’ voluminous writings – needs to grab the bull by the horns and write a rigorously researched biography of him.

## ENDNOTES

[1] Meiners' original text reads: Unter allen in diesem Grundriße enthaltenen Beobachtungen; die ich als die meinigen anzusehen das Recht zu haben glaube, scheint mir keine andere auf so viele Zeugnisse und Facta gegründet und so reich an wichtigen Folgerungen für viele Wissenschaften zu seyn, als diese: daß das gegenwärtige Menschengeschlecht aus zween Hauptstämmen bestehe, dem Tatarischen oder Kaukasischen, und dem Mongolischen Stamm; daß der letztere nicht nur viel schwächer von Körper und Geist, sondern auch viel übel gearteter und tugendleerer, als der Kaukasische sey: daß endlich der Kaukasische Stamm wiederum in zwei Racen zerfalle, in die Celtische und Slawische, un unter welchen wiederum die erstere am reichsten an Geistesgaben und Tugenden sey. Aus dieser Beobachtung allein, worauf mich gerade die Facta hinführten, womit ich sie im Buche vargethan habe und die ohne solche Facta schwerlich jemals dem kühnsten Träumer eingefallen wären aus dieser Beobachtung allein kann man es erklären wie sich das menschliche Geschlecht allmählich über die Erde verbreitet hat und wie die verschiedenen Nationen von einander entsprungen und mit einander verwandt sind: serner warum grosse Gefeßgeber, Weise, und Helden, warum Künste und Wissenschaften nur unter gewissen Völkern entstanden und ausgebildet, warum die letztern von andern Nationen zwar aufgenommen, aufgenommen, aber mehr verschlimmert als vervollkommt wurden, und warum sie endlich unter an dem Völkern aller Bemühungen ungeachtet keinen Eingang finden; konnten Warum ein einziger Erdtheil und gewisse Völker fast immer die herrschenden, und alle übrigen hingegen die dienenden waren: warum von jeher die Göttinn der Freiheit nur innerhalb enger Gränzen wohnte, und der schrecklichste Despotismus hingegen seinen unerschütterlichen Thron unter den meisten Völkern der Erde aufschlug; warum um endlich die Europäischen Nationen selbst im Zufande der Wildheit und Barbaren sich so sehr von den Bilden und Barbaren der übrigen Erdtheile durch ihre höhern Tugenden durch ihre grössere Empfänglichkeit gegen Aufklärung, durch ihre Verfassung Gesetze, und Art zu kriegen, durch ihre Betragen gegen Weiber, Slaven, und überswundene Feinde auszeichneten. Diese für die ganze Philosophie nicht weniger als für die Geschichte wichtigen Resultate werden alsdann erst recht einleuchtend werden, wenn ich meine Untersuchungen ausführlicher werde mitgetheilt haben. (Meiners *Grundriß* 1785, [xx–xxii]).

[2] The German word *Hauptstämmen* does not translate well into English, but my German colleagues inform me that, in the context of Meiners' writings, it is best translated as "stock." *Hauptstämmen* is a compound word that begins with *Haupt*, which can mean "head" (as in the head of a person or the leader of an organization), "peak" (as in the top of a mountain), or "major" (as in the largest or highest ranking). The word *Stämme* can mean "stem," "root", or "trunk" (as in the stems, roots, or trunk of a tree) or a strain (like the breeds of a domesticated animal or plant). It can refer to a tribe or clan

of people, but can also describe a troop of soldiers, the staff of an office, the workforce of a business, or the usual members of a team. In the jargon of the biological sciences, *Stämme* is a synonym of “phylum,” as in the phylum Anthropoda, which includes all insects and crustaceans, or the phylum Mollusca, which includes all mollusks.

[3] Heyne’s original text reads: Deductus ad ingenii et indolis diuersitatem diuersorum populorum cum, ea a multis caussis partim cognitiss partim incognitis, naturalibus et ethicis et politicis, proficisci videatur progressus ille seu deductus erat ad certas humani generis species a natura constitutas, certis virium animi corporisque finibus circumscriptas, intra quas se continere eas naturae lege necesse sit; in quibus infimum locum e quo emergendi nullam ipsis facultatem impertiit, assignabat Nigritis. Cum nonnulla inde alia, de quibus quaeritur, commode duci posse viderentur, ab eo iudicio se deduci nunquam passus est; ad veriora nunc haud dubie adductus, vbi in altera vita quam ingressus est, ad Nigritarum coetus peruenerit. (Heyne 1810, 18).

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## APPENDIX A

### The Life of Christopher Meiners

Transliterated from the 1821 Biographic Sketch published by Philipp Albert Stapfer in

*Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et Modern, Vol. 1.*

by

John S. Michael

Christophe Meiners was a German historian and literary writer. He was born in 1747, in the town of Warstade near Otterndorf in the Hanoverian municipality of Hadeln. His father was a highly intelligent farmer and postmaster. Early on, Meiners' father involved him with maintaining and managing the finances of his business activities as a farmer and a government employee. Meiners' mother was distinguished by her wit and sound judgement. From Meiners' earliest days, both his parents imbued him with an appreciation for moral principles and religious devotion, which he always cherished. Young Meiners had a talent for all forms of athletics, and he developed a sort of pushy dominance over his fellow schoolboys. However, they were willing to overlook his bossiness, because of his talent for entertaining them with stories full of action and adventure. These stories were quite popular among his classmates. Over time Meiners would embellish and expand upon them, adding new plot elements he pulled from his imagination. His young audience became increasingly drawn to his yarns as he added ever more wild and fanciful embellishments.

Young Meiners became comfortable taking on the role of a storyteller to the small circle of friends in his village. This aptitude for telling tales gave him a taste for history, which is a kind of storytelling. It led him to develop what he regarded as his talent for describing things. One cannot help but recognize that Meiners' youthful [p. 157] penchant for exaggeration remained as an element in the publications for which he later gained fame. When he was adult, his publications were devoid of both nuance and compromise. Meiners was consumed with reporting a plethora of details. However, such details never fit in well with his casual style of writing, which was more popular than scholarly. He also presented inconsequential facts as if they were incredibly important. Furthermore, Meiners made grand sweeping conclusions that were unjustified given the facts he presented.

## Meiners' Education

For his primary education, Meiners attended the Otterndorf school. He spent his high school years at the *gymnasium* in Bremen. As a schoolboy, he developed the habit of approaching everything with an impassioned drive. He made himself the center of attention, which made him look good. He enjoyed acting as a kind of social arbiter, controlling any conversation by ramping things up or calming things down. At the same time, he was repulsed by the dryness of elementary education. Meiners became profoundly cognizant that his classmates, who were more patient and more docile than he was, admired him for his passion and independent streak. Thus, he resolved to learn the arts and sciences all by himself rather than relying on teachers.

It was Meiners' intention to become self-educated. He wished to be independent from any external instruction, or any classwork that was guided by an educational institution. He stopped accepting advice from anyone, instead relying entirely on his own personal judgment. Meiners expected nothing from others, learning only what he could learn by his own efforts. This explains why his publications never presented the opinions of well-established schools of thought. He never built upon the research initiated by his teachers. Similarly, the unique viewpoints of his teachers never surfaced in his writings. It was as if they had no influence on him.

Meiners' books were tremendously eclectic and wide ranging in scope. His approach to scholarship, which can fairly be called "eclectic," had both advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, Meiners became a prime example of how the overgeneralized, eclectic approach is simply inadequate for conducting serious investigations into the truth, or for generating solid and irrefutable results. He was vehemently opposed to the kind of systematic approach to philosophy embraced by his more illustrious colleagues: the Wolfians, Kant, and the Kantians. Like all eclectics, Meiners' philosophical independence from the mainstream – or at least the independence he *claimed* to have possessed – was more of a superficial affection than a genuine innovation.

Meiners lacked the strength of mind and depth of intellect necessary to dig deep to the foundations of metaphysical and moral doctrines. He repeatedly fell back upon views he already shared with other authors. Such authors might be writers with great talent, writers who were in vogue, or writers whose books simply fell into his hands by chance. Meiners would defer to authors with a respected name, especially those that were recommended to him during his early or advanced education. He would fall into in the grip, so to speak, of the very first author to addresses a topic that was of interest to him. In Meiners' subsequent research efforts, he would only accept the findings of authors who confirmed – or further developed – the ideas postulated by the first author whose book he initially read and admired. Thus, Meiners' overall outlook became permeated with certain opinions that he would cling to regardless

of anything else he would subsequently read. Furthermore, he would regularly claim to have found proof for his worldview springing forth from the pages of every celebrated book he chanced to open.

While attending secondary school in Bremen, Meiners' aversion to homework and regular classwork only increased. This aversion was a reaction to the school's principal, who was quite strict. The principal assigned one of his colleagues to be a tutor and mentor to Meiners. As it happened, Meiners grew to despise his assigned mentor, and the whole episode filled Meiners with indignation. He became angry with the success of his fellow classmates, while perceiving himself to have been the subject of undeserved ill treatment. He resolved more than ever to compensate for this perceived ill treatment and show them all. In solitude, Meiners diligently pursued his own self-improvement. He read the satires of Rabener, a poet as pious as he was playful, whose writings led Meiners to oppose materialist philosophy. Rousseau's *Emile* also made a profound impression on his intellectual worldview.

While Meiners was still at school, his father died. Young Meiners returned to his hometown and underwent the training he would need to fill the post that his late father had held. However, when it became clear that he would not get the job, Meiners returned to finish his education. He went on to enroll as a student at Göttingen University, where he continued to disdain conventional learning. The talented professors at that illustrious university had no more control over Meiners than did the teachers of his adolescence. And instead of seeking wisdom from his teachers, Meiners immersed himself in the immense treasures of Göttingen's academic library. Although scores of inspired scholars had long exploited this library's riches, none succeeded with more zeal and productivity than Meiners. The great library collection provided Meiners with a massive variety of publications authored by historians, world travelers, and philosophers of all eras and nations. Almost every page eventually generated by Meiners' pen offered a thorough compilation of these documents. Yet, all of Meiners' efforts failed to generate any innovative results. Instead, his writings were at best, intriguing and engaging.

### **Meiners' Intellectual Strengths and Shortcomings**

It is remarkable that Meiners could have been so mistaken in almost all his postulations, given that he was so learned. Like any good free thinker, he maintained an absolute independence from even the slightest hint of a rigid system. He would not be swayed by the rank or standing of other scholars. Endowed with an unusually great intellect, Meiners was fully confident in his own judgment. He was always inclined to call into question even generally admitted facts. When he made any unique assumptions, including those which he regarded as especially significant, he supported his contention with an abundance of historical evidence and the writings of highly respected experts.

There is no question that Meiners' works possessed both an elegance of style and a rigorous scholarly methodology. And yet, the dominant character of his writings were their clarity and readability. This latter quality made them especially unique, and quite unlike the sort of dry academic discussions one usually reads. He collected a prodigious mass of facts, and then synthesized them with familiarity and imagination rather than with genuine criticism and impartiality. His enthusiasm for his work at times took the form of impassioned advocacy. This passion for research partly explains why his writings were quite different from what one would usually expect to find in the genre of scholarly literature. One cannot deny that he had an impressive ability to influence the outlook of his readers.

It is widely known that Meiners' opinions on the physical and moral inferiority of the Negro race were quoted when the British Parliament debated the abolition of slavery. His views were hailed by the defenders of that infamous traffic which has for so long been the opprobrium of the peoples of Europe, and the shame of the Christian nations. It is also quite likely that the highly learned research conducted by Meiners had an influence on certain secretive fraternal organizations like the Freemasons and the German Illuminati. His finest work, *The History of the Origin and Progress of Philosophy in the Greeks* (1781) addressed the Institute of Pythagoras. Yet, it came to provide both a model and a kind of nourishment for those secretive associations which have exercised such a great standing in Germany for nearly half a century. Writing in praise of Meiners, Heyne once stated that he was aware of credible witnesses who reported that many of these mysterious and patriotic societies learned much about the Greek philosophers from reading Meiners works. It was Meiners, the learned historian of the Greek philosophers, whose publications introduced them to the maxims and aphorisms which elucidated the esoteric and exoteric teachings of the Pythagoreans.

Meiners' writings contained abundant errors. It is indeed unfortunate that some of these falsehoods were used to justify the fatal abuses of slavery. Nevertheless, one must recognize the excellent scholarship present in his writings. The central theme manifested in all his works was to prove – through the study of ancient and modern peoples – that public prosperity and individual happiness are the inseparable companions of enlightenment and virtue. [p. 159] Meiners asserted that the historic record could be used to reveal how educational instruction is the key mechanism for generating moral betterment and increasing of all kinds of well-being. To support this assertion, he assembled an overwhelming mass of facts and other evidence. Based on these facts, he detailed his assertion in a way that could be appreciated by anyone with an open mind willing to consider arguments that establish the truth through simple observation. Meiners also presented an analysis of basic human nature by presenting examples.

## **Meiners' Personal Life**

The personal life of Meiners was uniform and peaceful, like that of any serious scholar occupied solely with his research. The key events of this life included trips to a few parts of Germany and Switzerland. These sojourns were undertaken during his vacations from the university where he was employed as a professor in the faculty of philosophy beginning in 1771. In time, Meiners came to serve as a vice president (or “pro-rector”) of the university. He fulfilled his duties with great success. No member of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Göttingen was more assiduous and hardworking than Meiners.

The government of Hanover conferred upon Meiners the position of Court Advisor (or “Conseil Aulique Court”). This title was also bestowed upon some of his most distinguished colleagues and special friends, namely Professor Spittler and Professor Feder. Only death could break the bonds which united him to these two celebrated men, even though they sometimes had a divergence of opinions regarding certain points of history or philosophical doctrines. They remained friends despite the obstinacy and passion with which Meiners sometimes supported his own assertions. Meiners' friendship with Spittler and Feder was especially fruitful to the fields of study they all shared, even though each zealously cultivated different viewpoints. From 1788 to 1791, Meiners published four volumes of a journal called *Philosophical Library* in association with Feder. Meiners and Spittler collaborated in publishing the *Historical Magazine* from 1791 to 1794. Both these journals were well received.

Meiners was also fortunate enough to win the hand of the daughter of the famous professor Achenwall. It was Achenwall who first conceived of a branch of geographical-political sciences, to which he gave the name “statistics,” a term still used by Schlötzer. The woman Meiners married was worthy of him because of her excellent talents and education. She was quite useful to him, sometimes gently bringing him back to calmer dispositions. She had a positive influence on the direction of his work. She was considered to have made Meiners' travels more interesting. She was tactful and possessed an intellectual finesse which granted her the ability to focus her attention on truly remarkable objects, and then thoughtfully reconsider her initial impressions. It was said that she had a wide scope of vision, which she employed when traveling beside her husband. Her relationship to Meiners was such that she functioned rather like the finderscope attached to the side of a telescope; the finderscope helps the astronomer to more easily focus on just that part of the sky whose details need to be examined.

## **Meiners' Career as an Administrator**

During Meiners's final years, his life was brightened by his service to the leaders of the Russian imperial government. They bestowed upon Meiners a position of the highest esteem, which was both beneficial and flattering to him. He was asked to recruit German scholars to teach in Russian Universities.

This task gave Meiners the opportunity to influence the civilization of the greatest empire the earth has seen since the days of the Romans. This turn of events occurred when the Russian emperor Alexander resolved to create universities throughout the different provinces of his realm. Alexander made pains to improve Russia's existing universities, and to place everywhere professors educated in the universities of Germany, Meiners' base of operations. Russia's Count Muravjeff was entrusted with this great initiative, and he invited Meiners to assist him in choosing candidates to fulfill the emperor's educational mandate.

Every one of Meiners' academic appointments was welcomed by the Russians. As a result, Meiners was fortunate enough to provide a plethora of highly qualified men with an enjoyable and productive career. In so doing, Meiners' helped to extend over vast areas of Russia the reach of the language and the literature of Meiners' German homeland. This spread of German scholarship will no doubt continue to exercise an influence that is beneficial to the Germany, the land from which these expatriate professors originated. Meiners success ultimately came to fruition as the result of his numerous writings, which also gave rise to his general fame and some modest fortune. Conversely, Meiners' career as a lecturer brought him no success. Göttingen's young students avoided him, assiduously. Thus, they followed the example Meiners established during his university days, when he shunned the lecture halls.

### **Meiners was a Prolific Author**

Meiners was forced to stop working toward the end of his life due to illness, even though he had long possessed a robust constitution. He was always careful to maintain his health. He ate a sober diet and regularly exercised. Nonetheless, during his 62<sup>nd</sup> year, an ailment of the liver suddenly overtook him with unexpected force. On May 1, 1810, this disease took him away from the sciences, his friends, and the luminaries of Germanic literature, of whom he was one of the foremost. No doubt, his days were shorted in part because of the pain he suffered by witnessing the misfortunes and subjugation of his country under foreign domination by the Emperor Napoleon. Indeed, Meiners succumbed to a disease which afflicts mortal men, which he was despite his super-human talent for authoring such as massive variety of publications. Furthermore, many of his books were revised and re-published as updated editions.

I am not able to enumerate all Meiners' writings in this essay. I can, however, refer readers to the German bibliographies that have listed his remarkably prolific output. Nonetheless, in the following sections, I shall discuss, in a limited fashion, the general topics that Meiners addressed in his writings. I shall also summarize the distinctive merits of the principal works that best represent each of the key topics upon which he focused.

As I noted previously, Meiners' works were quite endearing and seductive (an Englishman would say *impressive*), due to their style. Indeed, one could see in his publications his ardent enthusiasm for his

research. I think it is fair to say that the success of Meiners' writings was largely due to style of his writing, along with the fact that there was popular interest in the topics he addressed.

Meiners' writings had unique and distinctive qualities. He always reduced complex metaphysical, literary, or political discourse into discussions addressing key questions of morality and the commonsense applications of human knowledge. As he saw it, metaphysical discourse was most alien to the public good, and did little to improve the happiness of individuals. Thus, he sought to steer his colleagues away from highly subtle philosophical investigations. Above all, he waged a war – as energetic as it was persistent – on abstract philosophical theories postulated by intellectuals who wished to diminish (or reconfigure) all the scientific fields that dealt with practical applications. He was critical of tyrannical scholars who would force the public and individual people to adopt an overly narrow, highly intellectual worldview that explained all the needs of the heart and of society. Meiners opposed the rise of bizarre or controversial theories formulated by the most imposing authors of his day.

For the most part, Meiners' intellectual weapons were 1) an appeal to common sense and 2) an unwavering faith in the traditional opinions commonly espoused in the classics of western literature. His unparalleled ability to recall details of his prodigious scholarship greatly aided him in this effort. Even those great intellects and speculative minds who disagreed with him had to be impressed with [p. 161] his good faith effort. Meiner always had good intentions. From his youth onward, he possessed a desire to prevent the needless sacrifice of his time to useless nitpicking or research, which he regarded as sterile or dangerous. This desire explains why Meiners' book, *Philosophy Review* (1770) included a complaint levied against the school of Wolff, the last remaining adherents of Leibnizianism.

In Meiners' *Research on the Understanding and the Wills of Man* (1806, vol. 2), he opposed the writings of the proponents of animal magnetism as well as the works of the now forgotten miracle worker, Schroepfer. Meiners came out against the practice of phrenology developed by Dr. Gall in *Universal History of Moral Doctrines or of the Science of Life (der Ethik)* (*Histoire universelle des doctrines morales, ou de la science de la vie (der Ethik)*) (vol. 2, 1801 and 1802, 2 vols.). Meiners was also hostile to Kant's philosophy. In the preface of Meiners' *Psychology* (1786), he not only attacked Kant, but went as far as to publicly denounce Kant's philosophy. In this latter dispute Meiners took a great risk by presuming he could defeat an intellectual athlete of such outstanding abilities as Kant. Meiners' fight against Kant was the most unpleasant and unfruitful of the many battles he waged attempting to topple the learned idols of his day.

I will now present a second set of general remarks which I believe are useful to understanding the output of Meiners' fertile pen. I shall focus on how well or poorly his ideas could be applied to today's society. Meiners was always ready to offer to his modern readers, examples of moral or political

phenomena belonging to long gone times and far off climates. For him, the examination of the past was almost an infatuation. Yet, he was eager to contribute to the debates of his own century. He felt compelled to address pressing issues such as the inequality of conditions among the different peoples of the globe, and the conflicts that arose from it. The ways in which inequality has changed throughout human history was the central topic he addressed in his *History of the Inequality of the Different Classes of Society among the Nations of Europe* (1792).

Meiners also examined the great question of the usefulness of the education of people, and its advantages and disadvantages. He published his findings in *Comparative Survey of Mores and Social Organization, Laws and Industry, Commerce and Religion, Science and Educational Establishments; from the Centuries of the Middle Ages and our Own; to Help Assess the Good and Bad Results of the Progress of Enlightenment, and to get a Fair Idea of its Usefulness or its Dangers* (1793). This work, rich with a prodigious number of facts and examples, was translated into Dutch by Professor Hermann Bosch.

Meiners also wrote about the organization of German universities, their merits, and the potential for reforming them. These observations were published from 1802 to 1805 in his four volume *History of the Universities of Europe*. In 1803 and 1805, Meiners contributed two memoirs to the journal of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Göttingen. He also published in the *Academic Annals of Göttingen* (1804). Meiners' *Brief Account of the Origin and Progressive Growth of Protestant Universities in Germany and that of Göttingen in Particular* (1808) was translated into French by M. Artaud. It was Meiners's publications on the leading universities of Europe, and more particularly of Germany, that impressed the Emperor Alexander. It was the quality of these books that inspired the Russian Emperor to insist on consulting with Meiners regarding establishing or improving the institutions of higher education throughout the Russian Empire's territories in Europe and Asia.

In the following section, I shall complete my discussion on the contributions that Meiners provided to the study of humanities and philosophy. Therein, I shall address the most important of his publications – including his works on religion, and his writings on the moral and political sciences – save the ones I have already discussed. By way of organization, I shall classify all of his works based the various fields he studies. These texts can be generally classified under five headings: 1. *Strictly Stated Philosophy*; 2. *The History of Philosophy*; 3. *Physical, Moral, and Political Anthropology*; 4. *Educational Institutions and Teaching Methods*; and 5. *Travel*.

Meiners was blessed with an intellect that was so observant and penetrating that he was able to comprehend, through study, the complex ideas of speculative philosophers. He was one of those men of great intellect, who believed themselves to have full knowledge of the facts, and so was authorized – or even compelled – to critique the philosophical systems created by speculative philosophers. Indeed, men

such as Meiners perceive themselves to be fully capable of building new and improved doctrines upon the ruins of others' philosophical systems. Yet, this was not the case. Undeniably, Meiners was astute and by no means devoid of intelligence when it came to exposing the weak points in the ideas proposed others.

Metaphorically speaking, Meiners had a talent for entering a palace constructed by a great architect, and quickly discovering which of its walls were weak and poorly built. Yet, he himself never built any impressive structures. Furthermore, the foundation of Meiners' own house was built using bricks he had salvaged from the diverse grand edifices that his predecessors erected. Thus, the foundation he himself laid down was not especially strong. And so it came to pass that whenever Meiners found he was unable to walk supported by genuine facts, he would lean upon a crutch of excessively bold claims, bundled together by his weak analytical abilities.

### **Category I. Strictly Stated Philosophy**

The least deficient of Meiners' philosophical treatises was an essay he wrote in 1766. He submitted to the Berlin Academy contest for essays addressing the philosophical question: "*If it is possible to destroy natural inclinations or awaken some of what nature has not given us, what would be the best ways to weaken bad inclinations and strengthen good ones?*" His paper competed for the prize along with those submitted by L. Cochius and Ch. Garve. The dissertation Meiners submitted was awarded the 2<sup>nd</sup> honorable mention. It was printed in 1769, following the publication of the the award-winning essays of three of his competitors.

Meiners later authored a psychological treatise concerning the different states of the innermost consciousness, which was printed at the beginning of the second volume of his *Amalgamation of Philosophy* (1775). I can hardly pass judgment on this publication. It offered some interesting research on the genius of Socrates, as well as the philosophical systems of Plato of Epicurus and the Stoics. It also addressed the cult of animal worship among the Egyptians, the mysteries of these ancients, and the rituals they used to ward off the terror of death. Meiners' works on the principles of beauty included *History and Theory of Fine Arts* (1787) and *Elements of Aesthetics* (1787). These books, like his *Principles of Morality* (1801), have no particular merit. The field he examined with most success was his research into the history of civilization and of the viewpoints of the peoples of the world, both civilized and barbarian.

### **Category II. The History of Philosophy**

Meiners published an *Outline of the History of Philosophy* (1786), a second edition of which (1789) appeared in *The Journal of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Göttingen*. In his *Commentary on Zoroaster's Life, Theory and Works* (1777), Meiners put forth a hypothesis that was later reproduced by M. Erskine in the *Journal of the Society of Mumbai* (1819). Meiners also authored *The Various Religious*

*Upheavals of Persia* (1780), and *The Origin and Development of Authentic Nominalism* (1793). Meiners' *The History of the Opinions and Beliefs which Prevalled in the First Centuries of Our Era Especially Among the Neo-Platonists* (1782) was a curious and scholarly work. But it was too unfair to the philosophical school of Alexandria.

Meiners' *History of the Origin of Progress and Decline of Science Among the Greeks and the Romans* (1781) was translated into French 1799 by Laveaux and Chardon-la-Rochette. Most of this publication – at least its best parts – shed new light on points of Greek history, mainly the sect of the Pythagoreans and their political plans. Unfortunately, Meiners stopped his evaluation at Plato, and moreover he did not judge the doctrine with depth and fairness. This work was a precursor to most of what Meiners presented in his *The History of the Doctrine of God of All Things* (1780). In this book, he described the steps by which the Greeks, prior to Anaxagore, achieved the highest understanding of the universe's unknown phenomena.

In the above book, Meiners asserted that, in order for a system of popular beliefs to be accepted by everyone in a community, it is first necessary that there are, within said community, minds who have received advanced instruction, and so are already prepared to accept it. Thus, Meiners explained why the Hebrews relapsed so easily – and for so long – into the crudest idolatry, even after being blessed by the arbiter of human destinies [or “God”] with a revelation as sublime as it was unexpected.

There are three more of Meiners' books that I must include into this category: *History of All Religions* (1806); the short *Outline of History* (1787); and his *Essay on the History of the Religions of the Oldest Peoples, Particularly the Egyptians* (1775). This latter work was an extremely unique treatise. In it, Meiners discussed the proposition that within the beliefs of the modern peoples of Asia (namely India) and Africa (namely Egypt), there exists the remains of an ancient system of truly enlightened religion which subsequently became distorted and corrupted by subversions. Meiners did not accept this proposition and presented compelling arguments that were diametrically opposed to it. Meiners also authored *The Origin and Status of Forgery Religions* (1784-1785); *On the Book Recording the Mysteries of Egypt* (1781); and *The Socratic Legacy* (1782).

In Meiners' writings, he refuted the authenticity of the works which Aeschines, the disciple of Socrates, attributed to Iamblichus. Meiners also refuted the authenticity of the alleged letters of Socrates, Plato, and other ancient philosophers. In his history of Greek philosophy, Meiners raised the same doubts about the authenticity of the majority of writings which were attributed to the ancient Pythagoreans. Finally, Meiners authored two volumes about the *Life of Famous Men of the Era of the Restoration of the Sciences* (1795 and 1796). These biographical collections are of great merit, but they cannot possibly be classified along with any of the other genres of Meiners' writings. I must also mention that Meiners

authored a eulogy for Marc Antonin, entitled *De M. Antonini moribus* in the 1783 edition of the *Communications of the Royal Society of Sciences of Göttingen*.

### **Category III. Physical, Moral and Political Anthropology**

In addition to the above books, Meiners authored books addressing the fields of physical, moral, and historical anthropology. He published the four volume *The History of Women* (1788, 1798–99, 1800). In his *The History of Humanity* (1786), Meiners set forth his hypothesis that there were two races of men who originated from either the Caucasus Mountains or the Altai Mountains. One of these races was the Tartar or Caucasian race, which according to him, possesses a type of physical and moral beauty, courage and intelligence. This race has the happiest qualities of heart and mind. The other one of these two races was the Mongolian race, which is as deformed and weak as it is abject, depraved, and stupid. This hypothesis was developed in an extensive number of papers which [p. 164] became the majority of the articles published in the eleven volumes of *Göttingen Historical Magazine*.

Meiners later addressed his race theory in his four volume *History of Human Progress* (1811 and 1812). It was printed in Tübingen after his death. Meiners' race theory was also presented in his *Research on the Diversity of Human Races in Asia, in the Southern Lands, in the Islands of the Great Ocean, Etc.* (1812). However, Meiners' race theory was completely refuted by Blumenbach in his *On the Natural Varieties of Human Kind*. Meiners' race theory also provided Mr. Augustin Lafontaine the framework for a novel that is as pleasant as it is witty: *The Life and Exploits of Baron Quinctius Heymeran de Flaming* (1798).

Under this third heading, I also need to mention some of Meiners' publications: *The History of Luxury among the Athenians* (1781) published in the *Journal of the Royal Academy of Cassel* (1781) and *The Greek School's Utility and Damage* (1791-1792) published in *New Communications of the Göttingen Royal Society of Science*. He also authored *On Cannibalism* (1786); *On Human Sacrifice* (1786–1788); *The Origin of Ancient Egypt* (1789–90); *The Origin of the Caste System in Ancient Egypt and India* (1789–1790); *A Comparative Survey of Fertility and Sterility in the Ancient and Present States of the Main Regions of Asia* (1795–1796); and, *Descriptions of the Monuments Spread over the Entire Surface of the Globe, the Authors of which and the Time of Erection are Unknown or Uncertain* (1796).

Meiners' *History of the Decadence of Manners and Political Institutions among the Romans* (1782) was translated into French by Binet and Breton for the *Historical Library* (1796), a publication for young people. This was one of the Meiners' most commendable works. It was later revised by Meiners to serve as an introduction and supplement to the last part of the German translation of Gibbon's *History of the Fall of Rome*. In this book, Gibbon neglected to address the important consideration of manners, and

the dilapidated finances under the emperors. In my opinion, both Meiners and Hegewisch possessed the expertise needed to fill the gaps which the Scottish historian Gibbon omitted his analysis. The revised edition of Meiners's book provided additional improvements to the German translation of Gibbon. The French translators of Gibbon should have taken Meiners' research into consideration when preparing their French language edition.

#### **Category VI. Educational Institutions and Teaching Methods**

In addition to Meiners' writings on universities, I must add his fine research into the careers of celebrated university chancellors which he published in *The Duties of Chancellors in Scholastic Universities* (1803 and 1805). He also authored numerous articles on the state of teaching in different countries of Europe, which were published in the *Göttingen Historical Magazine*, and elsewhere. Meiners had a prodigious facility for analyzing the multitude of authors he cited in his publications, as well as presenting the substance of the authors he quoted. This skill inspired him to author a book for young people that gave guidance on the most effective way of reading and researching documents with the goal of composing notes and organizing them. In 1789, he published another quite successful guidebook on research methods.

#### **Category V: Travel**

Meiners authored multiple travel reports, but I shall only discuss the *Letters on Switzerland* (1784), which he published in two volumes. A second edition, published in 1788, was expanded by two additional volumes. This work placed Meiners among the leading authors of Germany. It offered lively and generally accurate descriptions of the political climate in Switzerland. This travel narrative was all the more interesting because it reported on Switzerland as it was before the revolution.

Mr. Meusel has compiled a quite complete list of the works of the highly prolific Meiners. A meticulous listing of Meiners' dissertations was also published by Mr. Reuss in the *Communications of the Academy of Sciences of Göttingen* (See vol. 14, page 14). Meiners' obituary was formally recited by Heyne, and later published in 1810. Meiners left no posterity. A portrait of him now hangs above Section 81 in the German University Library. However, the 1792 engraving of Meiners by Schwenterley is a better representation of how Meiners actually appeared.

S. R.

## APPENDIX B

### **Christoph Meiners [Biographical Sketch]**

by Philipp Albert Stapfer (1766–1840) in  
*Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, Vol. 1  
(Paris, Chez L. G. Michaud:1821), 156–165.

and

### **An English Translation of Stapfer's Biographical Sketch of Christoph Meiners**

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I would like to thank Emily Mei Cott Stollman  
for her significant assistance with this translation.

MEINERS (CHRISTOPHE), historien et littérateur allemande, naquit en 1747, à Warstade, pres d' Otterndorf, dans le pays hanoverien de Hadeln. Son père, fermier intelligent et maître de poste, lui confia de bonne heure les soins et le maniement de fonds qu'exigeaient ses occupations d'agriculteur et d'employé de l'administration. Sa mère était une femme distinguée par son esprit et son grand sens. L'un et l'autre lui inspirèrent de bonne heure les sentiments de probité et de piété dont étaient animés. Adroit à tous les exercices du corps, le jeune Meiners avait acquis une espèce de primauté sur ses camarades, qui la lui pardonnaient volontiers à cause de son talent pour conter des aventures extraordinaires. Le plaisir avec le quels récits étaient écoutés, le portait à les varier, à les embellir de circonstances de son invention, et à frapper de plus en plus d'admiration ses jeunes auditeurs, par des incidens merveilleux.

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Meiners (Christophe), German historian and literary writer, was born in 1747 in Warstadt near Otterndorf, in the Hanoverian realm of Hadeln. His father, [who was] an intelligent farmer and postmaster, early on entrusted him with the care and handling of funds required by his work as both a farmer and as a government employee. His mother was a woman distinguished by her wit and sound judgement. Early on, they both inspired in him with feelings of moral principle and religious devotion, which he cherished. Skillful at all athletic exercises, young Meiners had acquired a sort of primacy over [domineering attitude toward] his comrades, who readily forgave him because of his talent for recounting extraordinary adventures. The pleasure with which the stories were received, led him to vary them and embellish them with circumstances of his own invention; [he added] wondrous incidents that affected more and more admiration from his young listeners.

Si le rôle qu'il s'était accoutumé à jouer dans ce cercle de petits villageois, fit naître en lui le goût de l'histoire et développa son talent descriptif, comme il le pensait lui-même, on ne peut s'empêcher de reconnaître les traces de cette habitude [p. 157] dans le penchant pour l'exagération qui se fait remarquer dans ses meilleurs ouvrages. Il ne connaît ni nuances ni ménagements; il se passionne pour des détails qui ne répondent nullement à la vivacité de son style; et il en tire des conséquences ou leur attribue une importance qui sont hors de proportion avec le sujet. Il fit ses premières études à l'école d'Otterndorf et au gymnase de Brême. Accoutumé à tout traiter avec passion et à être le centre d'une action qui le flattait, et l'arbitre de mouvements qu'il excitait ou calmait à plaisir, il fut rebuté de l'aridité de l'enseignement élémentaire; et, comme il était profondément affecté de se voir préférer un grand nombre de ses condisciples, plus patients et plus dociles que lui, il résolut d'apprendre les sciences par ses propres efforts.

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Whereas the role he had become accustomed to – playing to this circle of small villagers – gave rise [in him] a taste for history; [it] also developed what he himself thought of as his descriptive talent; one cannot help but recognize how the traces of that [youthful] habit [p. 157] [which was] a penchant for exaggeration, remain noticeable on his best works. He knows neither nuances nor compromise; he is passionate about details which do not correspond at all to the liveliness of his style; also he draws conclusions from them [these details], or gives them an importance which are out of proportion to the field of study [he is examining]. He received his primary education at the Otterndorf school, and then at the Bremen gymnasium. He was accustomed to treating everything with passion and to being the center of attention, which made him look good [and allowed him to be] an arbiter, [controlling the conversation by] ramping things up or calming things down, which he enjoyed; he was repulsed by the dryness of elementary education; he was also deeply impacted by the realization that he was admired by his many classmates, who were more patient and more docile than he was; [thus] he resolved to learn the [arts and] sciences by his own efforts [all by himself].

Ne voulant devoir ses progrès qu'à son travail, indépendamment de toute direction étrangère, de toute institution scolastique, il ne prit plus conseil que de son jugement privé, et n'attendit rien que de son industrie particulière. On ne trouve, en conséquence, dans ses ouvrages, ni opinions d'écoles, ni suite de recherches commencées par ses maîtres ni empreintes de leurs idées individuelles. Franchement éclectique d'intention, les ouvrages de Meiners offrent tous les avantages et tous les inconvénients de la méthode de ce nom; ce qui fournit une nouvelle preuve de son insuffisance pour les grandes fins de l'investigation de la vérité et de l'établissement solide de résultats incontestables. En garde contre l'esprit systématique des plus illustres de ses compatriotes, des Wolfiens, de Kant et de ses disciples, l'indépendance philosophique de l'auteur est, comme celle de tous les éclectiques plus apparente que réelle.

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He wanted to owe his [educational] advancement from only his [own] work, [and be] independent from any external instruction, or any scholastic institution; [so] he no longer accepted advice [from anyone], except from his own private judgment; he expected nothing except [for what he learned from] his own industry. Consequently, in his [later written] works, we find neither the opinions of [established] schools [of thought]; he did not [further] build upon the research initiated by his teachers; nor [do his writings bear] the imprint of [his teachers' unique] individual viewpoints. Meiners' books, which were unabashedly eclectic in scope, offer all the advantages and all the inconveniences of the method that we call ["eclectic"]; [his eclectic style of research] provides further evidence of the inadequacy [of the use of eclectic research as a way to succeed in the] grand purpose of investigation the truth, and the establishment of solidly irrefutable results. He is vigilant in his opposition to the systematic mindset of the most illustrious of his [philosophical] colleagues, the Wolfians, and Kant and his disciples; [yet] the author's [Meiners'] philosophical independence [from the mainstream] is, like that of all eclectics, more apparent than real.

N'ayant pas la force de tête et la profondeur d'esprit nécessaires pour creuser jusqu'aux fondements des doctrines métaphysiques et morales, il se livre successivement aux vues que lui ont fait partager les écrivains à grands talents ou en grande vogue, que le hasard a placés sous sa main, ou dont la renommée lui a plus particulièrement conseillé la lecture dans le temps de ses premières ou de ses plus sérieuses études. En proie, pour ainsi dire, au premier occupant, il ne trouve, dans ses recherches subséquentes, que la confirmation ou le développement, des idées qu'il a puisées dans les livres qui l'ont le plus frappé. Imbu des opinions qu'il ont captives, il en verra désormais le reflet, la preuve, l'excellence, comme jaillissant de toutes les observations, de toutes les lectures auxquelles il sera conduit.

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He lacks the strength of mind and the depth of intellect necessary to dig deep to the foundations of metaphysical and moral doctrines; he repeatedly surrenders to the views he [already] shared with other writers; writers with great talent; writers who are in vogue; writers whose [books] chance has placed into his hands; or [writers with a respected] name, especially, those that were recommended to him during his early or advanced education. He remains in the grip, so to speak, of the first [author] to occupy his attention; [then] in his subsequent research, he accepts only the confirmation – or the [further] development of ideas – which he [first] obtained from the books that had [initially] struck him the most. [His outlook becomes] permeated with [certain] opinions that he then holds captive [and clings onto]. Subsequently, [he will then claim that these opinions] spring forth from observations in every text he subsequently reads; [thus he claims that his favored opinions] reflects the quality and forecasts [found in every book he reads.]

Son aversion pour les devoirs et les études régulières de classes s'était accrue à Brème, par la sévérité du recteur du gymnase, qui lui avait donné pour tuteur et pour guide un de ses camarades, gène qui le remplit d'indignation. Ce mentor lui devint tout à fait odieux; et les succès de ses condisciples, joints à ses dégoûts personnels, qui lui paraissaient, les uns comme les autres, peu mérités, lui firent chercher plus que jamais un dédommagement et un moyen de noble vengeance dans la solitude, et dans l'application la plus soutenue. Les satires de Rabener, poète aussi religieux qu'enjoué, l'armèrent contre les systèmes materialists; et l'*Emile* de Rousseau fit une profonde impression sur son esprit.

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His aversion to homework and regular class studies had increased in Bremen due to the severity of the principal of the school. The principal assigned one of his colleagues to be a tutor and mentor to Meiners, [thus planting a] seed which filled Meiners with indignation. This mentor became completely odious to him; also, the successes of his classmates combined with his personal dislikes – all of which he regarded as undeserved – made him seek more than ever to compensate [for this perceived ill treatment], and [seek] a means for noble vengeance. Thus, in solitude, [he pursued] a most diligent and sustained application [of his scholarly talents]. The satires of Rabener, a poet as religious as he was playful, armed Meiners against materialist systems; additionally, the *Emile* of Rousseau made a profound impression on his mind.

La mort de son père l'ayant rappelé dans ses foyers, il pour suivit le même plan d'études; mais [p. 158] ayant perdu l'espoir de lui succéder dans le petit emploi qu'il occupait, il se rendit à Göttingue pour terminer son instruction, et ce fut toujours sur le même plan; car les habiles professeurs de cette illustre université n'eurent pas plus de prise sur Meiners, que les instituteurs de son adolescence; les trésors immenses de la bibliothèque académique lui tinrent lieu de tout autre secours littéraire; et jamais aucun des infatigables érudits qui en ont exploité les richesses, ne les mit à profit avec plus d'ardeur et de fruit. Cette magnifique collection a pu seule fournir à Meiners la prodigieuse variété de citations, tirées de voyageurs, d'historiens, de philosophes de tous les temps et de toutes les nations, dont presque chaque page des productions de sa plume offer le rapprochement instructif, mais souvent plus curieux et piquant que fécond en résultats certains.

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With the death of his father, Meiners was recalled to his hometown, he went on to follow the same training as his father [had received]; but [after] having lost hope of succeeding his father in the modest job he held, Meiners returned to finish his education to Göttingen; where he continued on the same trajectory as before; [which is to say] the able professors of that illustrious university held no more sway on Meiners than the teachers of his adolescence; [instead] the immense treasures of [Göttingen's] academic library took the place of all other literary aid; [although] indefatigable scholars who have [long] exploited [this library's] riches, none succeeded with more zeal and productivity that did Meiners. The magnificent [library] collection alone was able to provide Meiners with the prodigious variety of quotations, drawn from travelers, historians, and philosophers of all times and of all nations; Almost every page generated by Meiners' pen offers an instructive comparison [of these quotations]. Yet [Meiners use of these quotations was] often more curious and pungent than fertile in [generating] focused results.

Il est remarquable qu'un homme aussi savant, affichant une indépendance aussi absolue de tout esprit de système, de tout préjugé de classe ou de situation, plein de confiance en son jugement, doué d'une sagacité peu commune, et très-disposé à révoquer en doute les faits généralement admis, se soit trompé presque dans toutes les conjectures, toutes les hypothèses qui lui étaient propres, même dans celles qu'il a étayées avec le plus de soin, en les appuyant sur le plus formidable appareil de preuves historiques et d'autorités imposantes. Ses ouvrages de Meiners ne sont dépourvus ni d'élégance, ni de méthode; toutefois la clarté et la chaleur en sont le caractère dominant; cette dernière qualité surtout fait un singulier contraste avec l'aridité des discussions, et l'essrayante accumulation des extraits rassemblés avec plus de savoir et d'imagination que de véritable critique et d'impartialité. Cette chaleur qui prend quelquefois presque le caractère de la passion, explique en partie un phénomène auquel on ne s'attendrait guère d'après le genre des écrits de Meiners. Qui dirait qu'ils aient pu influencer sur les destinées des peuples?

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It is remarkable that so learned a man [Meiners] was mistaken in almost in all [his] postulations. He displayed such absolute independence from any spirit of [a rigid] system, [and was free from] from any prejudice, class, or situation; he was full of confidence in his judgment, endowed with an unusual sagacity, and was very inclined to call into question [even] generally admitted facts. All of the assumptions that were unique to him, even in those which he supported with care, were based on the most formidable foundation of historical evidence and [the views of] impressive authorities. [Indeed], the works of Meiners are neither devoid of elegance nor method. However, the dominant character of his writings were clarity and warmth [or readability]; this last quality especially makes [them] uniquely in contrast to the aridity of the discussions [one usually reads]. Additionally, the appalling accumulation of extracts collected [by Meiners were synthesized] with more knowledge and imagination than with true criticism and impartiality. His warmth [or readability], which sometimes almost takes on the character of passion, partly explains a phenomenon which one would hardly expect from the genre of Meiners' writings. Who would say they could have influenced the destinies of peoples?

Il est cependant certain que ses opinions sur l'infériorité physique et morale de la race nègre ont été citées dans les débats du parlement britannique, par les défenseurs de cet infâme trafic qui a fait si long temps l'opprobre des peuples de l'Europe, et la honte des nations chrétiennes. Il est fort probable aussi que les recherches très-savantes de Meiners, publiées, en 1781, dans son plus bel ouvrage (*l'Histoire de l'origine et des progrès de la philosophie chez les Grecs*) sur l'institut de Pythagore, ont fourni à-la-fois un modèle et un aliment à ces associations secrètes qui ont exercé un si grand empire en Allemagne, depuis près d'un demi-siècle. Heyne a dit, dans son éloge de Meiners, qu'il tenait de témoins dignes de foi, que plusieurs de ces sociétés mystérieuses et patriotiques avaient puisé des maximes et des exemples l'exposé que le savant historien des philosophes grecs avait fait du régime ésotérique et exotérique des Pythagoriciens.

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It is, however, certain that Meiners' opinions on the physical and moral inferiority of the Negro race have been quoted in the debates of the British Parliament, [most notably] by the defenders of that infamous traffic which has for so long been the opprobrium of the peoples of Europe, and the shame of the Christian nations. It is also very probable that the very learned research of Meiners, published in 1781 – in his finest work (*The History of the Origin and Progress of Philosophy in the Greeks*) [which focused] on the Institute of Pythagoras – provided both a model and nourishment for those secret associations [like Freemasons and the Illuminati] which, for nearly half a century, have exercised such a great standing in Germany. Heyne once wrote in praise of Meiners, saying that Heyne knew of credible witnesses [who testified that] many of these mysterious and patriotic societies had cited maxims and examples which the learned historian of Greek philosophers [that Meiners] had published regarding the esoteric theories [of the Greeks philosophers] and exoteric [teachings] of the Pythagoreans.

Mais, ce qui expie bien des erreurs et compense le malheur d'avoir autorisé de funestes abus par quelques uns de ses écrits, c'est leur excellente tendance en general. Prouver, par l'histoire des peuples anciens et modernes, que la prospérité publique et le bonheur individuel sont les compagnes inséparables des lumières et de la vertu; [p. 159] que l'amélioration morale et l'accroissement de tous les genres de bien-être ont constamment suivi les progrès de l'instruction, tel est le but que Meiners a manifesté dans tous ses ouvrages. Il a rassemblé dans cette intention une masse de faits, tellement accablante par le nombre et par l'évidence du resultat, qu'il en jaillit la conviction la plus intime pour tout esprit accessible aux preuves qui établissent une vérité d'observation, et qui sont le complément de la démonstration *à priori* tirée de l'analyse de notre nature elle même. La vie de Meiners, uniforme et paisible, comme celle d'un savant uniquement occupé de ses recherches, n'offre pour tout événement que des voyages dans quelques parties de l'Allemagne et de la Suisse, entrepris pendant les vacances de l'université à laquelle il était attaché, depuis 1771, en qualité de professeur dans la faculté de philosophie.

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But, what makes up for many errors, and compensates for the misfortune of having authorized fatal abuses by some of his writings, is their excellent tendency in general. The aim which Meiners has manifested in all his works was: to prove that – through the [study of the] history of ancient and modern peoples – that public prosperity and individual happiness are the inseparable companions of enlightenment and virtue; [p. 159] and [to prove] that moral betterment and the increase of all kinds of well-being have constantly resulted from the progress of [educational] instruction. [To support] this assertion, he has assembled a mass of facts, [that are] overwhelming by the number and by the evidence of the resulting [assertion]. From these [facts] there springs forth the most intimate position that [can be appreciated by] any mind open to proofs which establish the truth through observation. [These facts] and the complement of the *a priori* demonstration [or theory] developed through from the analysis of [human] nature itself. The [personal] life of Meiners was uniform and peaceful, like that of a scholar occupied solely with his research. [Its key events] included trips to a few parts of Germany and Switzerland, undertaken during the vacations of the university where he was employed as a professor in the faculty of philosophy beginning in 1771.

Il remplit à son tour, et avec beaucoup de succès, les fonctions de pro-recteur; et l'académie royale des sciences de Göttingue n'eut pas de membre plus assidu et plus laborieux. Le gouvernement d'Hanovre lui conféra, ainsi qu'à quelques-uns de ses collègues les plus distingués, qui étaient en même temps ses amis particuliers, MM. Spittler et Feder, le titre de conseiller aulique. Malgré la divergence de leurs opinions points d'histoire ou de doctrines philosophiques, et malgré l'obstination, quelquefois même l'emportement qu'il mettait à soutenir les siennes, la mort seule put rompre les liens qui l'unirent à ces deux hommes célèbres. Les fruits de cette intimité ne furent point étrangers aux sciences qu'ils cultivaient dans des vues diverses, mais avec un zèle égal; et nous lui devons deux recueils estimables: le *Magasin historique* que Meiners publia conjointement avec Spittler (1791–94), et la *Bibliothèque philosophique*, pour laquelle il associa son travail à celui de Feder (1788–91, 4 vol.).

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In time, he served as a pro-rector [or vice president of the university] and fulfilled his duties with great success. The Royal Academy of Sciences of Göttingen had no more assiduous and hardworking member [than Meiners]. The government of Hanover conferred on him, adviser to the Conseil Aulique Court [or court advisor]. This title was also bestowed upon some of his most distinguished colleagues and special friends, Mr. Spittler and [Mr.] Feder. Only death could break the bonds which united him to these two celebrated men, even though they [sometimes] had a divergence of opinions [regarding] points of history or philosophical doctrines. [They remained friends] in spite of the obstinacy, sometimes even the passion which [Meiners] exhibited in supporting his own [assertions.] The fruits of Meiners friendship [with Spittler and Feder] addressed the fields of study which they cultivated with different viewpoints, but with equal zeal. We can credit Meiners with two esteemed collections: *The Historical Magazine* which Meiners published jointly with Spittler (1791–94), and the *Philosophical Library*, a work [he produced] in association with Feder (1788–91, 4 vols.).

Il eut le bonheur d'obtenir la main de la fille du prof. Achenwall, si connu eu la première idée d'une branche des sciences géographico-polotiques, à laquelle il donna le nom de Statistique, conservé par Schløetzer. Cette femme, digne de lui par ses qualités excellentes, et par son instruction, lui fut très-utile, en le ramenant parfois avec douceur à des dispositions plus calmes, et en influant sur la direction de ses travaux. Elle passait pour avoir rendu les voyages de Meiners plus intéressants par le tact et la finesse avec lesquels elle savait porter son attention sur les objets vraiment remarquables, et rectifier ses premiers aperçus: on disait d'elle que ses yeux remplissaient, en voyage, à côté des de son mari, les fonctions de la lunette appelée le *chercheur*, qui, fixée sur le côté d'un telescope, aide l'observateur à trouver plus facilement la plage du ciel dont il veut examiner les details.

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[Furthermore] Meiners was fortunate enough to win the hand daughter of the well-known professor Achenwall. [It was Achenwall] who first conceived of a branch of geographical-political sciences, to which he gave the name of "statistics," still used by Schlötzer. The woman [who Meiners married], was worthy of him due to her excellent qualities and her education. She was very useful to him, sometimes gently bringing him back to calmer dispositions, and influencing the direction of his work. She was considered to have made Meiners' travels more interesting by the tact and finesse with which she knew how to focus her attention on truly remarkable objects, and [thoughtfully] reconsider her initial impressions: It was said of her that her eyes filled, when traveling, beside her husband. [She] functioned like the finderscope attached to the side of a telescope, which helps the observer to more easily focus on just that part of the sky whose details are to be examined.

Le gouvernement russe répandit sur les dernières années de Meiners un lustre tout particulier, en lui donnant une marque de la plus haute estime, et les moyens d'influer d'une manière aussi bienfaisante que flatteuse sur la civilisation du plus grand empire que la terre ait vu depuis celui des Romains. L'empereur Alexandre, ayant résolu de créer, dans différentes provinces de ses états, des universités, de perfectionner les anciennes, et de placer partout des professeurs formés à celles d'Allemagne, Meiners [p. 160] fut invité par le comte Muravjeff, qui était chargé de cette grande tâche, à le seconder dans le choix de sujets propres à remplir les intentions de l'empereur. Toutes ses désignations furent accueillies; et il eut le bonheur, en procurant à une foule d'hommes recommandables, une existence heureuse et utile, d'étendre le règne de la langue et de la littérature de sa patrie sur de vastes régions, où l'un et l'autre exerceront une influence utile à la contrée qui les a vues naître. Cette distinction, et, en général, sa renommée, et la modeste fortune que lui valut son travail, Meiners ne les dut qu'à ses nombreux écrits. Dans la carrière de l'enseignement oral, il n'eut aucun succès; et la jeunesse studieuse de Göttingue imita, à son égard, l'exemple qu'il avait lui-même donné, en se tenant, durant le cours de ses études, constamment éloignée des auditoires académiques.

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The Russian government spread a luster over Meiners's final years. They gave him a mark of the highest esteem, as well as the means to influence – in a way that was both beneficial and flattering to Meiners – the civilization of the greatest empire the earth has seen since that of the Romans. The emperor Alexander had resolved to create universities in different provinces of his states; to improve the old ones; and to place everywhere professors educated in the [universities] of Meiners' Germany. Meiners was invited by Count Muravjeff, who was entrusted with this great task, to assist him in choosing candidates to fulfill the mandate of the emperor. All Meiners' appointments were welcomed. Meiners was fortunate enough to provide a host of commendable men with a happy and useful existence. [In so doing,] Meiners helped to extend the reach of the German language and the literature of his homeland over vast areas [of Russia]. [This spread of German scholarship] will [no doubt] exercise an influence useful to the country [of Germany] from which the originated. This success [ultimately came to fruition as the result of] Meiners his numerous writings, which, in general, also led to his fame and the modest fortune. [Conversely], his career as a lecturer brought him no success; Göttingen's young students [avoided him. Thus, the were] following the example he [Meiners] himself had established, by keeping himself away from lecture halls during the course of his [university] studies.

Il ne poussa pas cette carrière jusqu'au terme que semblaient lui assigner sa robuste constitution, les soins qu'il donnait à sa santé, un régime sobre, et l'habitude d'un exercice régulier. Des affections de foie se développèrent tout-à-coup avec une force inattendue, et l'enlevèrent, le 1er mai 1810, aux sciences, à ses amis, et aux lettres germaniques, dont il était un des principaux ornements. La douleur d'avoir été témoin des malheurs et de l'asservissement de son pays sous une domination étrangère, contribua sans doute à abrégier ses jours; mais on ne peut s'étonner de voir qu'il ait succombé à une maladie qui est attachée aux hommes lorsque l'on considère le nombre, la variété, l'étendue de ses écrits, l'immensité des travaux qu'ils surpassent. Ne pouvant les énumérer, tous nous devons renvoyer aux bibliographies allemandes, et nous borner, en indiquant les classes dans lesquelles ils se distribuent naturellement, à dire deux mots du mérite distinctif des principaux ouvrages de chacune de ces divisions.

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He did not continue with his career until his final days, even though he possessed a robust constitution, was careful to maintain his health, ate a sober diet, and had a habit of regular exercise. Ailments of the liver suddenly developed with unexpected force, and on May 1, 1810, took him away from the sciences, his friends, and the luminaries of Germanic literature, of whom he was one of the foremost. The pain of having witnessed the misfortunes and enslavement of his country under foreign domination, no doubt contributed to shorten his days; but one cannot be surprised to see that he succumbed to a disease which afflicts [mortal] men, when one considers the number, the variety, and the extent of his writings, as well as the immense [body] of the works which he updated. Not being able to enumerate them [all Meiners' writings], we must refer all [readers] to German bibliographies. [Instead we shall] limit ourselves [to] indicating the classes into which they [his writings] are naturally grouped, and then saying a few words about the distinctive merits of the principal works [that best represent] each of these divisions.

En renonçant à développer ce que nous avons dit des qualités d'ame et de style qui en rendent la lecture attachante et séductrice (un Anglais dirait *impressive*) nous ne croyons pas nous tromper en affirmant que leur tendance générale et l'à-propos de leur apparition ont été pour beaucoup dans leur succès. Meiners n'a cessé de ramener toutes les discussions métaphysiques ou littéraires et politiques aux grands intérêts de la morale et de l'application usuelle des connaissances humaines les plus étrangères en apparence au bien public et au bonheur des particuliers. Il a cherché à détourner ses contemporains des investigations trop subtiles, et a surtout fait une guerre aussi vive que perseverante aux systèmes abstraits, par lesquels leurs auteurs prétendent subjuguier ou refondre toutes les sciences d'application et soumettre, l'emploi des forces publiques et individuelles, à la tyrannie des méthodes scolastiques, qui tendent à jeter dans leur moule étroit tous les besoins du cœur et de la société; à l'ascendant d'opinions bizarres ou hardies, mises à la mode par des écrivains imposants.

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In confirming what we have said about the qualities of spirit and style which make reading [Meiners' works] so endearing and seductive (an Englishman would say *impressive*), we do not believe we are mistaken in asserting that their general tendency and the appropriateness of their appearance was responsible for much of their success. Meiners has never ceased to reduce all metaphysical, literary, or political discussions to the great interests of morality and the common application of human knowledge, which is apparently the most alien to the public good and the happiness of individuals. He sought to divert his contemporaries from highly subtle investigations. Above all, he waged a war – as lively as it was persistent – on abstract systems, created by authors who claim to subjugate (or recast) all the sciences of application, and [who claim] to subdue the employment of public forces and individual [forces], to the tyranny of scholastic methods which tend to cast into their narrow mold all the needs of the heart and of society; in the ascendance of bizarre or daring opinions [that are] fashioned by imposing authors.

Quoique ses armes fussent plutôt le gros bon-sens, et son l'opinion commune et traditionnelle des beaux siècles de la littérature, aidés l'un et l'autre des souvenirs d'une prodigieuse erudition, il y avait, même pour les têtes fortes et les esprits spéculatifs, quelque chose [p. 161] d'entraînant dans sa bonne foi dans ses excellentes intentions en faveur d'une jeunesse qu'il voulait empêcher de sacrifier son temps à de vaines arguties ou à des recherches, selon lui, stériles ou dangereuses. C'est ainsi que, dans sa *Revision de la philosophie* (1770), il s'éleva contre es derniers adhérents du Léibnitzianisme et de l'école de Wolf; dans des écrits particuliers, contre les partisans du magnétisme animal, et de Schroepfer, thaumaturge maintenant oublié; dans ses *Recherches sur l'entendement et les volontés de l'homme* (1806, 2 vol.); contre la crânescopie du docteur Gall; dans son *Histoire universelle des doc trines morales ou de la science de la vie* (der Ethik) (2 vol., 1801 et 2) contre la philosophie de Kant, philosophie qu'il avait déjà attaquée et même dénoncée à ses contemporains, dans la préface de sa *Psychologie* en 1786.

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Meiners' weapons were basically common sense and his traditional opinions common to the heyday of literature, both of which were aided by [his] recall of [his] prodigious scholarship. [Yet], even among great intellects and speculative minds, there was [p. 161] something inspiring about his good faith [effort]. His admirable intentions – which appealed to him as a youth – was a desire to prevent the [needless] sacrifice of his time to vain nitpicking or to research, [which was] according to him, sterile, or dangerous. Thus in his *Philosophy Review* (*Révision de la philosophie*) (1770) he protested against the last [remaining] adherents of Leibnitzianism and the school of Wolf; in particular, he opposed the writings of the proponents of animal magnetism and the works of the now forgotten miracle worker, Schroepfer [as presented] in his *Research on the Understanding and the Wills of Man* (1806, vol. 2). Meiners was against the phrenology of Dr. Gall; In Meiners' *Universal History of Moral Doctrines or of the Science of Life* (*der Ethik*) (vol. 2, 1801 and 2), Meiners opposed Kant's philosophy, which he had already attacked and even denounced to his contemporaries in the preface of his *Psychology* in 1786.

Cette dernière lutte, hasardée contre un athlète de trop haute stature, fut à-la-fois le moins heureux et le moins fructueux de ses combats contre les idoles du jour. La deuxième des remarques générales que nous croyons utile de présenter sur les productions de la plume fertile de Meiners, est relative à l'opportunité de leur publication. Toujours prêt à offrir à la génération contemporaine, sur les objets de son attention ou de son engouement, le tableau de phénomènes moraux ou politiques, appartenant à d'autres temps et à d'autres climats, nous le voyons appeler les méditations de son siècle, tour à tour, sur l'inégalité des conditions chez les différents peuples du globe, et les querelles qu'elle a suscitées ou les phases qu'elle a subies (*Hist. de l'inégalité des différentes classes de la société chez les nations de l'Europe*, 2 vol. 1792);

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This last fight – [in which Meiners] risked opposing an athlete of too high stature [Kant] – was at the same time the least pleasant and the [least] fruitful half of his battles against the idols of the day. The second of the general remarks which we believe are useful to present regarding the productions of Meiners' fertile pen, relates to the appropriateness of their publication. [He was] always ready to offer to [his] contemporary generation, a picture of moral or political phenomena belonging to other times and other climates, [derived from] topics [that were the focus] of his attention or of his infatuation. In turn, we see him contribute to the debates of his century, [his views] on the inequality of conditions among the different peoples of the globe, and the conflict that arose from it; and the phases that [this inequality] underwent [which he addressed in] (*History of the Inequality of the Different Classes of Society among the Nations of Europe*, 2 vols. 1792);

sur la grande question de l'utilité de l'instruction du peuple, ses avantages et ses inconvénients (*Tableau comparatif des mœurs et de l'organisation sociale, des lois et de l'industrie du commerce et de la religion, des sciences et des établissements d'instruction, des siècles du moyen âge et du nôtre, pour aider à apprécier les résultats bons et mauvais du progrès des lumières, et pour se faire une juste idée de son utilité ou de ses dangers*, 3 vol., 1793); cet ouvrage, riche d'un nombre prodigieux de faits et de parallèles, a été traduit en hollandais par le professeur Hermann Bosch; – sur l'organisation des universités allemandes, leur mérite et les réformes dont elles paraissaient susceptibles (1<sup>st</sup> *Histoire des universités de l'Europe*, 4 vol., 1802–1805; *De munere cancellariorum in universitatibus litterariis*, deux mémoires insérés dans ceux de l'académie royale des sciences de Gottingue, 1803 et 1805; 2<sup>nd</sup> *Exposé succinct de l'origine et de l'accroissement progressif des universités protestantes de l'Allemagne et de celle de Göttingue en particulier*, 1808, trad. en français par M. Artaud; 3<sup>rd</sup> *Annales académiques de Göttingue*, 1804.

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[Meiners examined] the great question of the usefulness of the education of people, its advantages and its disadvantages [in] (*Comparative table of mores and social organization, laws and industry, commerce and religion, science and educational establishments; from the centuries of the Middle Ages and our own; to help assess the good and bad results of the progress of enlightenment, and to get a fair idea of its usefulness or its dangers*, 3 vol., 1793); this work, rich with a prodigious number of facts and parallels, was translated into Dutch by Professor Hermann Bosch; – [Meiners] wrote about the organization of German universities, their merits, and the reforms to which they seemed susceptible [in] (1<sup>st</sup>. *History of the Universities of Europe: The Duties of Chancellors in Scholastic Universities*, vol. 4, 1802-1805) two memoirs contributed to the Royal Academy of Sciences of Göttingen [journal] in 1803 and 1805; 2<sup>nd</sup> *Brief Account of the Origin and Progressive Growth of Protestant Universities in Germany and that of Göttingen in Particular*, 1808, [which was] translated into French by M. Artaud; 3<sup>rd</sup>. *Academic Annals of Göttingen*, 1804.

Ce sont ces recherches sur les écoles supérieures de l'Europe en general, et plus particulièrement de l'Allemagne, qui déterminèrent l'empereur Alexandre à consulter Meiners sur les établissements qu'il voulait fonder ou perfectionner dans ses états d'Europe et d'Asie. Pour compléter l'idée que nous avons à donner des services que Meiners a rendus aux lettres et à la philosophie, en comprenant sous ce dernier titre la religion aussi bien [p. 162] que les sciences morales et politiques, il ne nous reste qu'à classer ses ouvrages, et indiquer spécialement les plus importants de ceux dont nous n'avons pas encore eu occasion de parler. Ils peuvent se ranger sous quatre à cinq chefs: 1<sup>st</sup> Philosophie proprement dite; 2<sup>nd</sup>. Histoire et la philosophie; 3<sup>rd</sup>. Anthropologie physique morale et politique; 4<sup>th</sup>. Établissements d'instruction et méthodes d'enseignement; 5<sup>th</sup>. Voyages.

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It was this [latter] research on the leading universities of Europe in general, and more particularly of Germany, that made the Emperor Alexander determined to consult Meiners on the institutions [of higher education] he wanted to found or improve in his territories in Europe and Asia. To complete the discussion which we have given regarding the services which Meiners provided to the [study of] humanities and philosophy, we must including under the latter [study] religion, as well as the moral and political sciences. [And so,] it only remains for us to classify his works, and especially to indicate the most important of those [that] we have not yet had a chance to talk about. They can be classified under four to five headings: 1. Strictly Stated Philosophy, 2. History of Philosophy, 3. Physical, Moral and Political Anthropology, 4. Educational Institutions and Teaching Methods, 5. Travel.

Meiners a été un de ces hommes qui, doués d'un esprit observateur et assez pénétrant pour suivre à force d'étude les méditations des philosophes spéculatifs, se sont crus autorisés ou même appelés à juger leurs systèmes en connaissance de cause, et capables d'établir sur leurs ruines des doctrines plus satisfaisantes: cependant il n'en est rien. Judicieux et nullement dépourvu de sagacité, lorsqu'il s'agit d'exposer les idées d'autrui et les côtés faibles d'édifices construits par de grands architectes, il n'est en état ni de bâtir à ses propres frais, ni surtout d'élever sa propre habitation sur des fondements solides, avec les matériaux qu'il a tirés des différentes constructions de ses devanciers. Quand il ne marche plus appuyé sur des faits positifs, il trahit à chaque pas son impuissance et la faible portée de ses facultés contemplatives.

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Meiners was endowed with an intellect that was observant and penetrating enough to comprehend, through study, the [complex] ideas of speculative philosophers. [As a result, he was] was one of those men who believed themselves [to have] full knowledge of the facts, [and so, was] authorized – or even compelled – to critique the systems [created by speculative philosophers]. [Men such as Meiners see themselves as] capable of establishing more satisfactory doctrines on the ruins [of others philosophical systems]: yet, this is not the case. [Meiners is] judicious and by no means devoid of intelligence when it comes to exposing the ideas of others. [Metaphorically speaking, he uncovers] the weak sides of buildings constructed by great architects; [yet,] he is neither in a position to build at his own expense, nor especially to build his own home on solid foundation, using the materials he salvages from the various constructions of his predecessors. When he no longer walks supported by positive facts, he betrays at every step his excessive boldness, and the weak scope of his contemplative faculties.

I. Le moins mauvais de ses Traités philosophiques est un Mémoire qui concourut avec ceux de L. Cochius et de Ch. Garve, pour le prix proposé, en 1766, par l'académie de Berlin, sur la question de savoir; *S'il est possible de détruire les inclinations naturelles ou d'en réveiller que la nature ne nous a pas données? et quels seraient les meilleurs moyens d'affaiblir les mauvais penchants et de fortifier les bons?* La dissertation de Meiners, qui obtint le 2<sup>nd</sup> accessit, a été imprimée en 1769, in 4<sup>th</sup>, à la suite de celles de ses concurrents. On ne peut guère porter un jugement plus sur un Traité psychologique concernant les *différents états de la conscience intime*, imprimé en tête du deuxième vol. de ses *Mélanges de philosophie* (1775–76, 3 vol.) Ce recueil offre d'ailleurs des recherches intéressantes sur les systèmes de Platon, d'Épicure et des Stoiciens; sur le génie de Socrate, le culte des animaux chez les Égyptiens, les mystères des anciens, leurs ressources contre les terreurs de la mort. Ses ouvrages sur les principes du beau *Histoire et Théorie des beaux arts*, 1787; *Eléments d'aesthétique* même année, et ses *Principes de morale* (1801), n'ont aucun mérite particulier. L'histoire des opinions et de la civilisation des peuples tant policés que barbares, est le domaine qu'il a cultivé avec le plus de succès. –

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I. The least deficient of [Meiners'] philosophical treatises is an essay which, in 1766, competed against the those of L. Cochius and Ch. Garve for the Berlin Academy prize [for essays addressing the] philosophical question: "*If it is possible to destroy natural inclinations or awaken some of what nature has not given us, what would be the best ways to weaken bad inclinations and strengthen good ones?*" The dissertation Meiners [submitted] was awarded the 2<sup>nd</sup> honorable mention, and was printed in 1769, [being the 4<sup>th</sup> published] following those of his competitors. We can hardly pass additional judgment on [Meiners'] psychological treatise concerning the different states of the intimate consciousness, [which was] printed at the beginning of the second volume *Amalgam of Philosophy*, 1775, vol. 3. This collection also offers interesting research on the systems of Plato of Epicurus and the Stoics, on the genius of Socrates, [on the] the cult of animals among the Egyptians, [on] the mysteries of the ancients and the means [they used] against the terror of death. His works on the principles of beauty [included]: *History and Theory of Fine Arts*, 1787 and, in the same year, *Elements of Aesthetics* These and his *Principles of Morality*, 1801, have no particular merit. The history of the world views and civilization of both civilized and barbarian peoples is the field which he cultivated the most success.

II. Il a donné une *Esquisse de l'histoire de la philosophie* (1786, et deuxième éd. en 1789) dans les *Mém.* de l'académie royale des sciences de Göttingue; – *Commentat. tres de Zoroastris vita, doctrinae et libris*, 1777 (où il a émis une hypothèse reproduite dans les Mémoires de la société de Bombay, de 1819, par M. Erskine); – *De variis religionis Persarum conversionibus* (1780); – *De realium et nominalium initiis et progressu* (ib., 1793); – *L'Histoire des opinions et des croyances qui prévalurent dans les premiers siècles de notre ère, surtout parmi les Néo-Platoniciens* (1782); ouvrage curieux et savant, mais trop injuste pour l'école d'Alexandrie; – *L'Histoire de l'origine, des [p. 163] progrès et de la décadence sciences chez les Grecs et les Romains* (1781, 2 vol., trad. en français 1799, par Laveaux et Chardon-la-Rochette. Cet écrit, le plus et peut-être le meilleur de a jeté un nouveau jour sur points de l'histoire de la grecque principalement la secte et les plans politiques Pythagoriciens. Malheureusement il s'arrête à Platon, dent, au surplus, il ne juge pas la doctrine avec profondeur et s'équite. Cet ouvrage avait été précédé de la plus de toutes les productions de Meiners, de son *Historia de Deo omnium rerum auctore rectore* (1780) où il a exposé degrés par lesquels les grecs se sont élevés jusqu'à l' une intelligence suprême de l'univers idée inconnue Anaxagore.

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II. He published an *Outline of the History of Philosophy* (1786), with a second edition (1789) in the *Journal of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Göttingen*; [In his] *Comments on Zoroaster's Life, Theory, and Works* (1777), Meiners put forward a hypothesis [that was] reproduced by M. Erskine in the *Journal of the Society of Mumbai* of 1819; [Meiners also authored] *The Various Religious Upheavals of Persia* (1780), and *The Origins and Development of Genuine Nominalism* (ibid., 1793); [Meiners'] *The History of the Opinions and Beliefs which Prevailed in the First Centuries of Our Era Especially Among the Neo-Platonists* (1782) was curious and scholarly work, but too unfair to the [philosophical] school of Alexandria; [His] *History of the Origin of Progress and Decline of Science Among the Greeks and the Romans* (1781, vol. 2) was translated into French 1799 by Laveaux and Chardon-la-Rochette. Most of this publication – at least its best parts – has shed new light on points in Greek history, mainly the sect of the Pythagoreans and their political plans. Unfortunately, he stops at Plato, and moreover he does not judge the doctrine with depth and fairness. This work was a precursor to most of what Meiners' produced in his *The History of the Doctrine of the God of All Things* (1780). [In this book] he describes the steps by which the Greeks achieved a the highest understanding of the universe's unknown phenomena prior to Anaxagore.

Il montre que, être admise selon toute sa dans le système des croyances populaires, il faut qu'elle trouve des esprits préparés par une instruction déjà avancée; et il explique ainsi pourquoi les Hébreux retombèrent si facilement et si long-temps dans la plus grossière idolâtrie, en de la révéation aussi sublime que surprenante dont l'arbitre des destinées humaines les avait favorisés. – Il faut enfin ranger dans cette classe des écrits de Meiners, son *Histoire de toutes les religions* (2 vol. 1806), et une courte Esquisse de cette histoire (1787); – un *Essai sur l'histoire de la religion des plus anciens peuples, particulièrement des Egyptiens* (1775); traité extrêmement remarquable, où Meiners soutient, avec des raisons bien fortes, une opinion diamétralement opposée à celle qui voit dans les croyances des peuples de l'Asie et de l'Afrique, les débris d'un ancien système de religion éclairée, dénaturé et corrompu par les revolutions. –

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[The above book] shows that, [in order for a] system of popular beliefs to be accepted by everyone [in a community], it is [first] necessary that there are minds already prepared by advanced instruction [to accept it]; Thus, Meiners explains why the Hebrews relapsed so easily and for so long into the crudest idolatry, [after] being blessed by the arbiter of human destinies [or God] with a revelation as sublime as it was unexpected. – Finally, we must include in this category of Meiners' writings, his *History of All Religions* (2 vol. 1806), his short *Outline of History* (1787), and his *Essay on the History of the Religion of the Oldest Peoples, Particularly the Egyptians* (1775); [This latter work is an] extremely remarkable treatise. In it, Meiners presents very strong arguments that are diametrically opposed to the proposition that, within the beliefs of the peoples of Asia [or India] and Africa [or Egypt], there exist the remains of an ancient system of enlightened religion, [which has become] distorted and corrupted by subversions. –

*De falsarum religionum origine ac differentia* (Nov. Com. soc reg. sc. Götting. Ann. (1784, 5); *De libro qui inscribitur de mysteriis Egyptiorum* (ib. per ann. 1781); *De Socraticorum reliquiis* (ibid. ann. 1782); – Contre l’authenticité des ouvrages attribués à Jamblique, à Eschine, disciple de Socrate; Contre celle des prétendues lettres de Socrate, de Platon, etc. Dans son histoire de la philos. Grecque, il élève les mêmes doutes sur la plus grande partie des écrits qui portent le nom d’anciens Pythagoriciens. On ne saurait enfin rapporter à une autre classe d’écrits les deux volumes qu’il a donnés sur la Vie d’hommes célèbres de l’époque de la restauration des sciences (1795 et 1796), recueil biographique d’un mérite eminent. Nous devons encore faire mention d’un mémoire sur Marc-Antonin (*De M. Antonini moribus*) (Com. Götting. per annum 1783). –

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*De falsarum religionum origin ac differentia* (Nov. Com. soc. reg. sc. Götting year 1784-85); *De libro qui inscribitur de mysteriis Egyptiorum* (ibid. for the year 1781); *De Socraticorum reliquiis* (ibid. for the year 1782); Meiners refuted the authenticity of the works attributed by Iamblichus to Aeschines, disciple of Socrates; [Meiners also refuted the authenticity] of the alleged letters of Socrates, of Plato, etc. In his history of Greek philosophy, Meiners raises the same doubts about [the authenticity] of the greater part of the writings which bear the name of the ancient Pythagoreans. Finally, Meiners authored two volumes about the *Life of Famous Men of the Era of the Restoration of the Sciences* (1795 and 1796). These biographical collections are of eminent merit, but they cannot possibly be classified along with any of the other genres of Meiners’ writings. We must also mention [that Meiners authored] a eulogy for Marc Antonin, *De M. Antonini moribus* in the *Com. Göttingen* for the year 1783.

III. A la division d'anthropologie physique, morale, historique, appartiennent, outre quelques-uns des livres que nous avons déjà cités: 1<sup>st</sup>, Histoire des femmes (*Des weiblichen Geschlechts*) 4 vol in 4<sup>ths</sup>, 1788, 1798–99, 1800. – 2<sup>nd</sup>. Histoire de l'humanité (1786), où Meiners expose son hypothèse sur les deux races d'hommes qui sont descendues du Caucase et de l'Altaï, et dont l'une la race tartare ou caucasienne; offre selon lui le type du beau physique et moral, du courage et de l'intelligence, les plus heureuses qualités du cœur et de l'esprit; et dont l'autre la race mongole, est aussi difforme et faible qu'abjecte dépravée et stupide. Cette hypothèse est développée dans un grand nombre de Mémoires qui [p. 164] forment la majeure partie des onze volumes du *Mag. Historique*, déjà indiqué dans son *Cours d'histoire de l'humanité* (1811 et 1812, 4 vol.) imprimé à Tubingue, après sa mort; et dans ses *Recherches sur la diversité des races humaines en Asie, dans les terres australes, dans les îles du Grand Océan*. etc (1812, 2 vol., ib.); elle est complètement réfutée par Blumenbach (*De generis humani varietata nativa*), et a fourni à M. Aug. Lafontaine le canevas d'un roman aussi plaisant que spirituel (*Vie et exploits du baron Quinctius Heymeran de Flaming*, deuxième édit., 4 vol., 1798). –

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III. In addition to some of the books that we have already cited, [Meiners also authored books] addressing the fields of physical, moral, and historical anthropology: 1<sup>st</sup>, *The History of Women (Des weiblichen Geschlechts)* 4 vols., 1788, 1798–99, 1800. – 2<sup>nd</sup> *The History of Humanity* (1786) in which Meiners sets out his hypothesis on the two races of men who descended from the Caucasus and the Altai. One of [these races is] the Tartar or Caucasian race, which according to him, possesses a type of physical and moral beauty, courage and intelligence, [as well as] the happiest qualities of heart and mind; One of [these two races is the] the Mongolian race, which is as deformed and weak as it is abject, depraved, and stupid. This hypothesis is developed in a large number of publications which [p. 164] form the major part of the eleven volumes of *Mag. History*, which he had already addressed in his *History of Human Progress* (1811 and 1812, 4 vols.) which was printed in Tubingen after his death; [His race hypothesis, which was also presented] in his *Research on the Diversity of Human Races in Asia, in the Southern Lands, in the Islands of the Great Ocean*, etc. (1812, 2 vol., ibid.) is completely refuted by Blumenbach [in his] *De generis humani varietata nativa*. [Meiners' race hypothesis also] provided to Mr. Augustin Lafontaine the framework for a novel as pleasant as it is witty (*The Life and Exploits of Baron Quinctius Heymeran de Flaming*, second ed., 4 vols., 1798).

Nous avons encore, sous ce troisième titre, à citer *l'Histoire du luxe chez les Athéniens*, mémoire. couronné par l'acad. de Cassel (1781); – *De graecorum gymnasiorum utilitate et damnis* (N. Comm. Soc. scient. Gotting. per ann. 1791 et 1792); – *De anthropophagis* (1786) – *De sacrificiis humanis* (ib. 1786–88); – *De origine veterum Aegyptiorum* (ib., 1789–90); *De causis ordinum seu castarum in veteri Aegypto atque in India* (ib.); – *Tableau comparatif de la fertilité ou stérilité de l'état ancien et présent des principales contrées de l'Asie* (2 vol. 1795, 1796); – *Description des monumens répandus sur toute la surface du globe dont les auteurs et l'époque d'érection sont inconnus ou incertains* (Nuremberg, 1796); – *Histoire de la décadence des mœurs et des institutions politiques chez les Romains* (Leipzig, 1782; trad. en français par Binet 1796, et par M. Breton pour la Bibl. Hist. à l'usage desjeunes gens, dont elle les vol 31 et 32).

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Under this third heading, we also need to cite the *History of Luxury among the Athenians*, in the Journal of the Royal Academy of Cassel (1781); – The Greek School's Utility and Damage in *New Communications of the Society of Science of Göttingen* for the years 1791 and 1792; – *On Cannibalism* (1786); – *On Human Sacrifice* (ibid. 1786–88); – *The Origin of Ancient Egypt* (ibid., 1789–90); *The Origin of the Caste System in Ancient Egypt and India* (ibid.); – *A Comparative Survey of Fertility and Sterility in the Ancient and Present States of the Main Regions of Asia* (2 vols. 1795, 1796); – *Descriptions of the Monuments Spread over the Entire Surface of the Globe, the Authors of which and the Time of Erection are Unknown or Uncertain* (Nuremberg, 1796); *History of the Decadence of Manners and Political Institutions among the Romans* (Leipzig, 1782) which was translated into French by Binet 1796, and by Mr. Breton for the *Historical Library* for the use of young people, [two of] which form vols. 31 and 32).

Cet ouvrage, un des plus recommandables de Meiners, a été retouché par son auteur, pour servir d'introduction et de supplément à la dernière partie de la traduction allemande de Gibbon, qui a trop négligé l'importante considération des mœurs, ainsi que celle du délabrement des finances sous les empereurs, et qui a trouvé dans Meiners et dans Hegewisch des maîtres dignes de remplir les lacunes que l'historien écossais avait laissées. Les traducteurs français auraient dû prendre base de leur travail, le traité de Meiners remanié tel qu'il avait amélioré pour le Gibbon allemande.

IV. Aux écrits de Meiners sur les universités, il faut ajouter ses belles recherches sur la dignité de chancelier dans ces établissements (*De munere cancellariorum in universitatibus litterariis*) (Comm. Götting. 1803 et 1805), et de nombreux articles sur l'état de l'enseignement dans différents pays de l'Europe, insérés dans le *Magas hist.*, etc. La prodigieuse facilité avec laquelle il analysait la foule d'auteurs qu'il consultait, et en présentait la substance dans ses propres compositions, faisait desirer qu'il donnât aux jeunes gens quelques directions *sur la manière la plus fructueuse de lire, de faire et de classer des extraits*: il publia sous ce titre, en 1789 un, traité méthodique, qui eut beaucoup de succès. –

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This work was one of the most commendable of Meiners and has been revised by its author to serve as an introduction and supplement to the last part of the German translation of Gibbon's [history], which neglected the important consideration of manners, and the dilapidated finances under the emperors. [We] found in Meiners, and in Hegewisch, worthy masters to fill in the gaps which the Scottish historian [Gibbon] had left. The French translators [of Gibbon] should have taken, as a foundation for their work, the revised edition of Meiners since it provided [additional] improvements on the German [translation of] Gibbon.

IV. [In addition] to Meiners' writings on universities, we must add his fine research on the dignified chancellors of these institutions (*The Duties of Chancellors in Scholastic Universities*) (Comm. Göttingen 1803 and 1805), as well as [his] numerous articles on the state of teaching in different countries of Europe, as published in the *Hist. Magazine*, etc. He has a prodigious facility for analyzing the multitude of authors he cited in his publication, and for presenting the substance of [said authors]. This [skill] inspired him to provide young people with [a book] that gave some guidance on *the most effective way of reading [and researching documents with the goal of] composing notes and organizing [them]*: In 1789, he published a guidebook on research methods which was very successful. –

V. Parmi les relations de voyages qu'il a mises au jour, nous ne citerons que ses *Lettres sur la Suisse* (2 vol. 1784: la deuxième édition, de 1788, est augmentée de 2 vol.); elles placent Meiners au rang des bons écrivains de l'Allemagne. Les descriptions animées, les renseignements politiques qu'elles offrent et qui sont généralement exacts, en font une lecture d'autant plus intéressante, qu'on y trouve la Suisse, telle qu'elle était [p. 165] avant la révolution. – On peut voir dans Meusel une liste plus complète des ouvrages de ce fécond écrivain: celle des Mémoires imprimés dans la Collection de l'Académie des sciences de Göttingue, y a été insérée, p. 79 et suiv. du xvi-th vol. par les soins de M. Reuss. Son Éloge a été prononcé par Heyne et publié en 1810. Meiners n'a pas laissé de postérité. Son portrait se voit en tête du 81<sup>st</sup> tome de la Bibl. Germ. Univ.; mais la gravure par Schwenterley, de 1792, est plus ressemblante.

S–R.

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V. Among the travel reports that he authored, we will only cite his *Letters about Switzerland* (2 vols. 1784; the second edition of 1788 was extended by 2 volumes); These [publications] place Meiners among the lead authors of Germany. They offer lively and generally accurate descriptions of the political information which are all the more interesting to read, since Switzerland is described therein as it was before the revolution. One can see in Meusel a more complete list of the works of this fertile writer [Meiners]; Due to the meticulousness of Mr. Reuss, [a listing] of Meiners' dissertations are printed in the Collection of the Academy of Sciences of Göttingen on p. 79 of the 14<sup>th</sup> Volume. Meiners obituary was recited by Heyne, and [later] published in 1810. Meiners left no posterity. His portrait is hung atop volume 81 of the German University Library. However, the 1792 engraving by Schwenterley is more similar [to how Meiners actually appeared].

S. R.

## APPENDIX C

### A Bibliography of Christoph Meiners' Publications on Anthropology, Culture, and Racial Variation

Below are listed the two primary sources for this bibliography. These sources provide an exhaustive compilation of Meiners' works, from which I extracted selected publications presented herein:

Notermund, H. W. ed. 1813. *Fortsetzung und Ergänzungen zu Chritain Gottlieb Jöchers allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexico*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Bremen: J. G. Heyse. pp. 1,242–1,252.

Pütter, J. 1788. "Christoph Meiners," in *Versuch einer academischen Gelehrten-Geschichte von der Georg Augustus-Universität zu Göttingen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprechtischen Verlag. pp. 176–179.

#### Books and Book Chapters Authored by Christoph Meiners

Meiners, C. 1769. "Untersuchung der Frage: Ob die Neigungen der Menschen natürlich sind und folglich vertilget werden können oder nicht?" in L. Cochius. *Untersuchungen uber Neigugen*. Berlin: Haude und Spener. pp. 187–331.

Meiners, C. 1772. *Revision der Philosophie*. Göttingen: Johann Christian Dieterich.

Meiners, C. 1773. *Kurzer Abriß der Psychologie zum Gebrauche seiner Vorlesungen*. Göttingen and Gotha: Dieterich.

Meiners, C. 1775. *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften*, Vol. 1. Leipzig: Weygandschen Buchhandlung.

Meiners, C. 1775. *Versuch über die Religionsgeschichte der ältesten Völker besonders der Egyptier*. Göttingen: Johann Christian Dieterich.

Meiners, C. 1775–1776. *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften*, 3 Vols. Leipzig: Weygandschen Buchhandlung.

Meiners, C. 1779–1780. "Vorrede zur Uebersetzung," in *James Beattie's (Professor der Moral und Logik in Aberdeen) Neue Philosophische Versuche*, 2 Vols. Leipzig: Weygandschen Buchhandlung.

Meiners, C. 1780. *Historia doctrinae de vero Deo omnium rerum auctore atque rectore*. Lemgo; Meyerschen Buchhandlung.

- Meiners, C. 1781. *Geschichte des Luxus der Athenienser von den ältesten Zeiten an bis auf den Tod Philipps von Makedonien*. Cassel: Ph. O. Hapme.
- Meiners, C. 1781–1782. *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls der Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom*, Vol. 2. Lemgo: Meyerschen Buchhandlung.
- Meiners, C. 1782. *Beytrag zur Geschichte der Denkart der ersten Jahrhunderte nach Christi Geburt, in einigen Betrachtungen über die Neu-Platonische Philosophie*. Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich.
- Meiners, C. 1782. *Gedichte des Verfalls der Sitten und der Staatsverfassung der Römer*. Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich.
- Meiners, C. 1782. *Geschichte des Luxus der Athenienser von den ältesten Zeiten an bis auf den Tod Philipps von Makedonien*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Lemgo: Meyerschen Buchhandlung.
- Meiners, C. 1785, 1793. *Grundriß der Geschichte aller Religionen*. Lemgo: Meyerschen Buchhandlung.
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### Articles and Papers Authored by Christoph Meiners

Christoph Meiners was a prolific author of papers, many of which were published in the following four periodicals:

- From 1787 to 1791, Meiners and Ludwig Timotheus Spittler were co-editors of eight volumes of the *Göttingisches Historisches Magazin* published in Hannover by Gebrüder Helwing.
- From 1788–1799 Meiners and Johann Georg Heinrich Feder were co-editors of *Philosophische Bibliothek, von J. G. H. Feder und Chr. Meiners* published in Göttingen by Johann Christian Dieterich.
- From 1792 to 1794, Meiners and Spittler were co-editors of three volumes of the *Neues Göttingisches Historisches Magazin*, also published in Hannover by Gebrüder Helwing.
- Meiners also published extensively in *Commentationes Societatis Regiae Scientiarum Gottingensis*, which was the Latin language journal of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Göttingen (*Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*).

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