

STOIC RATIONALISM

Dr. Henry Dyson

Dr. Daniel Hooley, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The prevailing scholarly opinion is that the Stoics are empiricists rather than rationalists. Empiricism is a branch of epistemology that gives priority to sense-perception whereas rationalism gives priority to reason's grasp of necessary truths. One should distinguish, however, between psychological theories of concept-formation and epistemological theories of justification. The Stoics are both epistemological rationalists and psychological empiricists. I support this claim by criticizing various empiricist readings of Stoic epistemology. I argue that these readings do not adequately account for the Stoics' doctrine of rational comprehension. I provide further support by explaining how a particular type of conception, called 'prolepsis,' is both derived from sense-perception and grounds reason's *a priori* comprehension of necessary truths. I conclude by exploring the historical implications of this reading of Stoic epistemology. I argue that, contrary to the prevailing opinion, the Stoics see themselves as belonging to the same rationalist tradition in epistemology as Plato.