I. Abstract

From his day to ours, commentators have been struck by the Stoic currents flowing through Spinoza's philosophy. Leibniz branded him the leader of a "sect of new Stoics" which held that "things act because of [the universe's] power and not due to a rational choice." Around the same time Bayle wrote in his Dictionary, "The doctrine of the soul of the world, which was... the principal part of the system of the Stoics, is at bottom the same as that of Spinoza." More recently scholars such as Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and Susan James – hailing Spinoza as "the best of Stoics" – have written articles with titles like "Spinoza the Stoic" in which they argue that he matched or even surpassed the Stoicism of the ancient Stoics in all respects: metaphysically/physically, methodologically/logically, and ethically. The similarities between Spinoza and the Stoics are fascinating, especially since Spinoza knew little about Stoicism and largely formulated his views independently of it. In this book, I want to determine how deep the similarities go, as I think such an investigation will teach us much about Stoics and Spinoza, their contemporaries, and philosophy itself. Utilizing recent successes in reconstructing Stoic ethics, I undertake an analytical comparison of it with Spinoza's moral theory.

Before getting to the contents of my book, let me say a few words about its structure and method. Richard Rorty has argued that historians of philosophy often "attempt to impose a problematic on a canon drawn up without reference to that problematic, or, conversely, to impose a canon on a problematic constructed without reference to that canon." This way of doing the history of philosophy (which Rorty calls "doxography") presupposes that all figures across the history of philosophy (or, at least, across the historical spectrum under consideration) are interested in the same set of issues and responded in comparable ways to those issues. This may or may not be true (Rorty doubts that it is, because he doesn't think philosophy is a natural kind). But regardless, it certainly should not be taken for granted that philosophers such as the Stoics and Spinoza, living in two vastly different eras, shared similar concerns.

Now, my comparison cannot get around the problem of the canon: Spinoza and the Stoics are my canon. But I can avoid imposing a "problematic" on the canon; this I can do by discovering problematics in the canon and using them to guide my comparison. It was my desire to do just this – to let Spinoza and the Stoics tell me how to compare them – that led me to structure my book around case studies. I thought that a narrow focus would enable me to dig deeply enough to arrive at ideas both parties did hold (not ideas I thought they held); once these were uncovered, a broader comparison could proceed.

Not just any case study would do. So far as I could determine, they had to meet two conditions: first, they had to be on issues which both parties conceived in sufficiently similar terms that questions about shared concepts and hence the problem of doxography will not arise; second, they had to be sufficiently rich in substance, so as to lead me to the fundamental ideas and arguments to which I wanted to devote the bulk of my comparison. Many topics might have met these conditions; I chose several in ethics, starting in Chapter One with suicide.

Suicide is a problem for both systems. This is evident in Stoicism by a rupture between the early and late Stoa: while all Stoics agree that the ideal moral agent (the "sage") can commit suicide appropriately, early Stoics do not think ordinary agents ("fools") know enough to know when they should kill themselves. Late Stoics do not change the conditions for moral action, they just interpret them differently; this interpretative (not doctrinal) change allows them to argue that fools can rationally and hence morally kill themselves. By contrast for Spinoza, the first question to be asked about suicide is whether it is even possible. Because all action is ultimately directed to the preservation of the self, the answer must be that it is not, certainly not in any realizable circumstances.

In the course of this study of suicide, it becomes clear that what Stoics and Spinoza have to say about suicide is derived from their views on basic metaphysical and ethical matters. For the rest of my
book, I probe their views on these matters, introducing related views of ancient and early modern philosophers where the argument requires and trying to determine the extent of their similarity. The four issues that I examine are: self-preservation; action; naturalism; and finally reason.

Chapter Two deals with self-preservation or, more accurately, Spinoza's *conatus* and the Stoics' *oikeiosis*. Both Stoics and Spinoza believe that the first impulse of humans is their own preservation. This agreement, however, obscures disagreements over the scope of self-preservation (is it an impulse of all beings, as Spinoza believed, or only some, as the Stoics argued?), the nature of the self-preservation impulse (is it an efficient or a final cause?), the nature of the self being preserved, and most importantly, whether self-preservation can ever yield to another cause or end. In the course of unpacking these differences, I begin to advance an interpretation of Spinoza's naturalism that will set him apart from the Stoics (this issue is taken up again in Chapter Four).

Action is addressed in Chapter Three. I begin with the Stoics. Though our understanding of the Stoical view is clearer now than ever before, some deep mysteries continue to surround both impressions and assent, and my account lays special emphasis on these problems. Perhaps ironically, since he explicitly defines action in the *Ethics*, our understanding of Spinoza's concept of action is even less well-developed. My reconstruction of it suggests some intriguing parallels with Stoicism. In the comparative part of the chapter, I discuss these parallels, including Spinoza's insistence that the conditions of an action be located in the agent in order for her to be considered as acting and the Stoics' insistence that an action is completed when an agent gives "assent" to an impulse. Here, both parties are struggling with a problem that determinism poses to morality and I conclude with their part of their respective solutions to this problem.

Both Stoicism and Spinozism are eminently naturalistic, both in their methods and in the contents of their theories. Chapter Four examines their respective naturalisms. First its meaning is examined, both the meaning of nature (whose nature should we conform to – our own, universal nature's or something else's altogether?) and that of conformity (do we conform to nature merely by intending to do so or must our intentions be successfully realized in action?). After that, the injunction's validity is considered. Both Stoics and Spinoza argue for naturalistic ethics: are they therefore guilty of the naturalistic fallacy, of trying to derive prescriptions about how we ought to act from mere descriptions of how we and our universe are? I argue that they aren't but I also argue that they avoid the fallacy in different ways and I conclude the Chapter by showing their different solutions.

Finally, reason is the subject of Chapter Five. I begin with some obvious yet important contrasts between the two parties' conceptions of reason, such as the materiality of reason in Stoicism and its immateriality in Spinozism. The bulk of my analysis, however, is on the relationship between reason and action. Here one of the themes of my study – that Spinoza's ethics is often as Socratic as it is Stoic – is sounded most forcefully. Socrates refused to recognize a distinction between practical and theoretical reason: he thought that reason always issues in action, regardless of the objects at which it is being directed. Although his view was much criticized in the history of philosophy, it found strong supporters in Stoics and Spinoza (one difference between the two being that the Stoics consciously tied themselves to Socrates while Spinoza did not). Deploying the resources of their new logic, Stoics defended the view that thoughts are actions, to which Spinoza added that we *act* when we are rational and are acted upon otherwise.

In the course of those five chapters, Epictetus emerges as the Stoic with the greatest affinity to Spinoza. In my Appendix, I take up the task of comparing them directly. Upon investigation, many of their views – on determinism, on the theory of *phantasi*/ideas, on the nature of rationality, on suicide – do prove surprisingly similar. The key difference is methodological: Epictetus' manner of philosophizing, with its emphasis on dialectic, is totally unlike Spinoza's, with its emphasis on contemplation.
II. Table of Contents

Preface – Untitled (Approximately 9,700 Words)
1. The Apparent Similarities of Stoicism and Spinozism
2. The Challenges of Systematically Comparing the Two Systems
3. My Approach: The Case Study
4. Historical Background: Stoicism in Spinoza’s Day and What He Knew of It

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   b. Early versus Late Stoics on the Morality of Suicide by Fools
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1. Self-Preservation
2. From Self-Preservation to… (?)
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4. Assessment of the Relative Importance of Conatus and Oikeiosis to Each System

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2. Stoic Naturalism
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4. On the Meaning of the Injunction to Conform to Nature
5. Spinoza’s versus the Stoics’ Solution to the Naturalistic Fallacy

Chapter Five – Reason (11,500 Words)
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2. Reason and Action: Three Positions
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Appendix – Epictetus and Spinoza (3,700 Words)
1. Substantive Similarities
2. Methodological Differences

Bibliography
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