Introduction

From his day to ours, commentators have talked about the remarkable similarities between Spinoza and the Stoics. Possibly writing while Spinoza was still alive, Leibniz branded him a 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'.[1] Much later in his life he said,

> Certain ancient and more recent thinkers have asserted ... that God is a spirit diffuse throughout the whole universe, which animates organic bodies wherever it meets them, just as the wind produces music in organ pipes. The Stoics were probably not averse to this opinion ... In another way Spinoza tends towards the same view.[2]

This particular commonality also impressed Pierre Bayle, who attached even more importance to it than Leibniz. Bayle said in his *Dictionary*, 'The doctrine of the world-soul, which was ... the principal part of the system of the Stoics, is at bottom the same as Spinoza's.'[3]

Around the same time, the Lutheran theologian–philosopher Johann Franz Buddeus (1667–1729) wrote a dissertation called 'Spinozism before Spinoza'.[4] In this treatise and elsewhere, he closely linked Spinozism with Stoicism. For him as for Leibniz and Bayle, what makes the two systems so similar is that both make God immanent in the world.[5] The same is true for Giambattista Vico. In the third edition of his *New Science*, he said that because they made 'God an infinite mind, subject to fate, in an infinite body', the Stoics were 'the Spinozists of their day'.[6]

During the nineteenth century Hegel argued that, although they belonged to different dialectical stages in the 'progress of Philosophy',

[1] The excerpt comes from an untitled paper thought to be written by Leibniz between 1677 and 1680 (trans. Arlew and Garber, in Leibniz (1989), 281 ff.).
[2] Leibniz to Hansch, 25 July 1707 (trans. Loemker, in Leibniz (1969), 594).
[3] Bayle (1740), article on Spinoza, entry 'A' (my translation).
[4] Buddeus (1701).
[5] For more on Buddeus' interpretation of the Stoics as proto-Spinozists, see the excellent discussion in Brooke (2012), 141 ff.
[6] Vico (1948), §335 (p. 87).

Stoics and Spinoza should be seen as contributing in their own ways to the articulation of an idealistic metaphysics, one which dogmatically asserts what he called the metaphysics of the understanding.[7] A few generations later, Wilhelm Dilthey expressed an analogous thesis, holding that 'rigorous Stoicism' and Spinozism marked successive phases in the unfolding of 'objective idealism', one of the three principle types of worldview that have been articulated through the course of history.[8]

In our own day, many commentators have argued that Spinozism matched or even surpassed the Stoicism of the ancient Stoics in all respects: metaphysically/physically, methodologically/logically, and normatively/ethically. Thus Susan James has published an article called 'Spinoza the Stoic'[9] while Amélie Oksenberg Rorty asserts, without argument, that Spinoza's 'indebtedness to ancient Stoicism is apparent'.[10] Even those who are more cautious see profound connections between Spinoza and the Stoics. For example, even as he acknowledges other 'influences', Andreas Graeser says that Stoicism plays 'a special role' in the formulation of Spinoza's thought.[11] Similarly, A. A. Long writes, 'Spinoza's striking affinity to Stoicism coexists with striking differences between them.'[12]

Augustine often marvelled on the congruence of Plato's views with those of his devoted follower Plotinus. At one point he went so far as to write, 'one might think them contemporaries if the length of time between them did not compel us to say that in Plotinus Plato was reborn'.[13] For all differences between the two cases, it seems that much the same could be said of Spinoza and the Stoics. Or could it?[14]

[7] Hegel (1896), vol. III, 358–9.
[8] Dilthey (1924), 402 (my translation). See also Dilthey (1957), ch. 5.
[9] James (1993).
[10] Rorty (1996), 338. To be fair to Rorty, she surely could muster an argument if pressed. My point is rather that she does not feel the need to advance one, since she takes Spinoza's borrowings from the Stoics to be totally obvious.
[11] Graeser (1991), 336 (my translation).
[12] Long (2003), 10. Bidney (1962), Matheron (1994), and Lloyd (2008), 200–14, are others who see Spinoza as arguing for Stoical ideas without identifying him as a Stoic.
[13] *Contra academicos* III.18.41.
[14] As is appropriate for a philosophical work, I will deal with apparent similarities in the ideas and arguments put forward by Spinoza and the Stoics. For what it is worth, however, I would note that Spinoza was also said to have a Stoic personality in what is regarded as the earliest known biography of Spinoza, that by Johannes Colerus. Towards the end of his book, where he is describing how Spinoza endured his last days, Colerus says that Spinoza 'always exprest, in all his sufferings, a truly *Stoical* constancy' (Colerus (1706), 87).

1 The apparent similarities between Spinozism and Stoicism

To decide the answer to that question, at least provisionally, let me offer a survey of many core philosophical beliefs held by Spinoza and the Stoics. Both identified God and Nature, taking God/Nature to be eternal and the immanent cause of all things.[15] They contended that God/Nature is the only true substance, relegating all other members of the universe to the status of non-substances.[16] They held that all beings belong to a causal network in which causes are necessarily connected to their effects. In Stoicism, 'nothing exists in the world or happens causelessly';[17] in Spinozism,[18] 'nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow'.[19] They both based this causal network on God/Nature. As the Stoics argued, 'the world would be wrenched apart and divided, and no longer remain a unity, for ever governed in accordance with a single order and management, if an uncaused motion were introduced'.[20] In Spinoza's words, 'In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.'[21]

Regarding the relation of human beings to God/Nature and the eternal exceptionless causal series which it instantiates, Stoics and Spinoza both stressed that we are just as much a part of, and governed by, the world-system as all other discrete individuals. Stoics were reported to hold that 'Our natures are parts of the nature of the universe',[22] while Spinoza flatly stated, 'It is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature.'[23] Free will in the sense of choosing between two (or more) equally available options is ruled out by the causal series: 'for they [the Stoics] deny that man has the freedom to choose between opposite actions',[24] and 'The will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary one.'[25] The ideal human condition is found by melding with the determinations of God/Nature. For Stoics,

[15] For Stoics, see *ND* 1.39 and *AM* IX.75–6. For Spinoza, IP15 and IP18. I will address the difference between 'Nature' and 'nature' on p. 28.
[16] For Stoics, see DL VII.148. For Spinoza, IP16.
[17] Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De fato* 192 (L-S 55N2).
[18] Here and throughout I use 'Spinozism' (and its cognates) because it is the only unstrained pairing of 'Stoicism'. It should be understood, however, that 'Spinozism' refers to Spinoza's own thought and not that of his followers. In this respect, Spinozism differs from Cartesianism, which can invoke the ideas of Descartes' followers as much as it does the thought of Descartes himself.
[19] IP36. [20] Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De fato* 192 (L-S 55N2). [21] IP29.
[22] DL VII.88 (I-G 191). [23] IVP4.
[24] Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De fato* 181 (L-S 62G1). [25] IP32.

> [T]he goal [of life] becomes 'to live consistently with nature', i.e., according to one's own nature and that of the universe ... And this itself is the virtue of the happy man and a smooth flow of life, whenever all things are done according to the harmony of the daimon in each of us with the will of the administrator of the universe.[26]

On Spinoza's view, 'perfect' human nature consists in 'the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature'.[27]

The list of overlapping commitments goes on and on. For example, the main features of each party's philosophical psychology are practically identical. *Pace* Plato, the mind has no parts but rather is comprised of a single entity with diverse powers.[28] The single entity comprising the mind, both parties agree, is reason.[29] Because they think of the matter of the mind as constituted by reason, Spinoza and the Stoics explained all mental conflicts as conflicts internal to reason and nothing else.[30] To cite a different example, this time from the moral domain, both parties defined virtue in terms of utility or benefit, so that some good is a virtue only in the case that it is necessarily useful or beneficial to its possessor.[31] Now, they thought that a good could be useful or beneficial to its possessor only insofar as it agrees with its possessor's nature.[32] Since our natures are essentially rational, they concluded that reason is the greatest virtue.[33] Or, to be more precise, reason is the *only* virtue.[34]

Even apparent differences of opinion seem to mask comity on a more basic level. For instance, Spinoza singled out the Stoics for criticism in the Preface to Part V of the *Ethics*: 'The mind does not have an absolute dominion over [the passions]. Nevertheless, the Stoics thought that they depend entirely on our will, and that we can command them absolutely.'[35] Now, even if Spinoza correctly read the Stoic position on whether and to

[26] DL VII.88 (I-G 191–2). Cf. Epictetus: '[The philosopher] should bring his own will into harmony with what happens, so that neither anything that happens happens against our will, nor anything that fails to happen fails to happen when we wish it to happen' (II.14.7, trans. Oldfather; Epictetus (1928)).
[27] *TdIE* §13. Cf. IVApp32.
[28] For Stoics, see Aetius 4.21 or Galen, *PHP*, V.6.37. Note that I am ignoring those Stoic dissidents, such as Posidonius, who partitioned the soul. An argument is required to clarify Spinoza's psychological monism but I think it is shown well-enough by IVP36Sch.
[29] For Stoics, see Stobaeus II.88 ff. For Spinoza, see VPref (at G II, 280: 22).
[30] For Stoics, see Plutarch, *On Moral Virtue*, 446 ff., together with discussion by Graver (2007), 69. For Spinoza, see his definition of 'vacillation of mind' in IIIP17Sch.
[31] For Stoics, Sextus Empiricus, *AM* 11.22 ff. For Spinoza, IVP18Sch (at G II, 222: 24–5).
[32] For Stoics, DL VII.101–2. For Spinoza, IVP31 and IVP31Cor.
[33] For Stoics, Seneca, *Ep.* 76.10. For Spinoza, IVApp4.
[34] For Stoics, Stobaeus II.77 or, more poetically, Epictetus, *Discourses* IV.8.12. For Spinoza, IVP26.
[35] G II, 277: 20 ff.

what extent we can control our emotions,[36] and even if there is a genuine difference here between his views and those of the Stoics,[37] the importance of the whole business becomes nugatory when other elements in each party's theory of emotions are factored in. Both Spinoza and the Stoics took the emotions to be cognitive – they thought that emotions have propositional contents which are believed or endorsed as true by those having the emotions.[38] However, the propositional content found in emotions is not actually veridical, for the states of affairs that they represent are not accurate.[39] And this leads to a problem. Given that emotions are false beliefs, they prevent us from reaching our ultimate objective of becoming fully rational beings.[40] Here we learn why both Spinoza and the Stoics regarded most[41] emotions as moral hazards that ought to be extirpated. Fortunately, the very feature of emotions that makes them morally repugnant also provides the means by which we may correct them. Once their falsity is recognized, Spinoza and the Stoics thought the emotions themselves would dissipate, leaving us more rational than before.[42]

So far I have spoken of places where Spinoza and the Stoics agree on major issues. But the remarkable similarity of the two systems is perhaps even better demonstrated by the many smaller points of convergence. These are present in many areas of the systems but since I have just been talking about the theory of emotions, let me cite a pair of examples from there. While Spinoza and the Stoics argue for the extirpation of negative emotions, they simultaneously identified a small set of positive emotions that could be part of the ideal life.[43] The Stoics called these 'good feelings'

[36] Long (2003), n. 14, argues that Spinoza conflates two Stoic theses: (1) passions are judgments of the rational mind; and (2) the will is free, at least in principle, from antecedent causation.

[37] Stoics were well-aware of the difficulty of controlling emotions (see Graver (2007), ch. 3 for discussion). For his part, Spinoza offered an argument only a few pages after the passage of VPref that I just quoted, to the effect that any passion whatsoever can be controlled by the mind (see VP3–4 together with the discussion in Pereboom (1994), 611–15).

[38] For Stoics, see Galen, *PHP*, IV.3.2 and V.2.49 ff. (SVF I.209 and II.841). For Spinoza, see especially the analysis on the origins of the passions in *Ethics* III, where they are shown to be ideas (especially IIIP9 and P11).

[39] For Stoics, see Stobaeus II.88 ff. (SVF 3.378 and III.389). For Spinoza, IIIP3.

[40] For Stoics, see Galen, *PHP*, IV.2.9–18 (SVF 3.462). For Spinoza, IVAppIV–V.

[41] The need for this qualification is given in the next paragraph.

[42] For Stoics, see Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, 5. For Spinoza, VP3.

[43] So Martha Nussbaum is mistaken when she writes, 'The Stoics and Spinoza dislike the emotions intensely' (Nussbaum (2000), 73). Stoics and Spinoza dislike emotions which interfere with our ability to lead a life according to nature. They like all emotions which augment the life according to nature. Nussbaum explores Spinoza's views more fully in Nussbaum (2001), 500–10.

(*eupatheiai*); Spinoza labelled them 'active affects'.[44] Additionally, Spinoza and the Stoics held similar views on specific emotions. To offer but one example,[45] Seneca wrote, '[H]ope and fear, dissimilar as they are, keep step together ... [T]he chief cause of both these ills is that we do not adapt ourselves to the present, but send our thoughts a long way ahead.'[46] Echoing this thesis almost verbatim, Spinoza argued that there is no hope without fear and neither will have any part in the healthy mind for they burden it with inconstancy.[47]

There is a passage in Spinoza that has understandably been called 'transparently and profoundly Stoic'.[48] To finish making the case for his Stoicalness, I can do no better than to quote it at length:

> Human power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes. So we do not have an absolute power to adapt things outside us to our use. Nevertheless, we shall bear calmly those things which happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty, that the power we have could not have extended itself to the point where we could have avoided those things, and that we are a part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow. If we understand this clearly and distinctly, that part of us which is defined by understanding, i.e. the better part of us, will be entirely satisfied with this and will strive to persevere in that satisfaction. For insofar as we understand, we can want nothing except what is necessary, nor absolutely be satisfied with anything except what is true. Hence, insofar as we understand these things rightly, the striving of the better part of us agrees with the order of the whole of nature.[49]

2 Why study Spinoza and the Stoics?

As that survey suggests, there is much to be said for the scholarly tradition linking Spinoza and the Stoics. This makes all the more conspicuous the one thing that cannot be found in it: namely, there is not a single published book-length study that takes into account all of the main parts of

[44] For Stoics, see DL V.116 and Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1037f–38a, together with Graver (2007), 51–3. In Spinoza, the transition to active affects begins at the end of the Scholium to IIIP57.

[45] Others include anger (*orgê, ira*; compare Stobaeus *Ecl.* II.91.10 (SVF III.395) and Seneca *De ira* I.12.2–5 with IIIP40Cor2Sch), hatred (*misos, odium*; compare Cicero *TD* IV.21 and DL VII.113 with IIIP13Sc), and distress or grief (*lupê, tristitia*), which both parties omit from the mental life of the wise person (compare DL VII.116 with IIIP59).

[46] *Ep.* V.7–8 (trans. Gummere in Seneca (1925)).

[47] IIIP50 and IIIDefAffXIIIexp.

[48] Long (2003), 14. Others who have singled out this passage include Matheron (1994) and Rutherford (1999), 457.

[49] IVApp32.

the two systems.[50] For at least three reasons – one comparatively small and two larger – this gap in the scholarly literature is problematic. The small reason is that we cannot be sure how deep apparent similarities of the sort that I have just enumerated really run without the prolonged and meticulous study only possible in a monograph. A reply to this is that it is not clear whether we should attach any philosophical significance to whether those apparent similarities are real. As a matter of history, one might want to know whether Spinoza was truly a Stoic but what does that teach us about his system or that of the Stoics?

This leads me to the other reasons for my undertaking. I believe that much can be learned about the two systems, as well as larger philosophical issues, by methodically aligning Spinoza's views to those of the Stoics. Certain features of Spinoza's system are best discernible against the backdrop of Stoicism. In particular, we can see Spinoza's conceptions of value and happiness, and see them in a new way, by contrasting him to the Stoics. This emerges especially in Chapters 4–5 below.

The last reason for the importance of this project takes us beyond just Spinoza and the Stoics. Spinoza is a transitional figure who also retains important linkages to his ancient predecessors. Just which core commitments of the ancient Stoics can be maintained by Spinoza, and which ones must be dropped, and why they must be dropped – answers to these questions would illuminate not just Spinoza or the Stoics but also what is happening more broadly in early modern philosophy.

With the present volume, I aim to fill the gap in the scholarly literature that I just mentioned. By the end of my book, I hope to have provided convincing point-by-point comparisons of Spinoza's and the Stoics' views on major issues in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophical psychology, and ethics (both meta-ethics and normative ethics). To be sure, the ground that I cover will only be partially turned and much other terrain will be completely untouched. Nevertheless, I aspire to put us in a much better position to decide the exact extent of the similarities – and differences – between Spinoza and the Stoics.

[50] There is one – but so far as I am aware, only one – published monograph on Spinoza and the Stoics (see DeBrabander (2007)). While I shall have more to say about DeBrabander in the main part of my book, here I will just note that the scope of his project is much smaller than mine, for he focuses on ethics and political philosophy, completely ignoring metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophical psychology. Besides DeBrabander, I have found one unpublished book-length manuscript on Spinoza and the Stoics (Heller (1932)).

3 Methodological notes

There are many ways in which one could compare Spinoza and the Stoics. For the next few pages of my Introduction, I will explain how and why I have chosen to conduct my study. Let me start by describing my comparison in the broadest of terms. I have chosen to concentrate on the conceptual affinities – and lack thereof – between Spinoza's system and that of the Stoics. I will identify a number of important philosophical concepts in Spinozism, align them to their Stoic counterparts, and determine the ways in which they resemble each other. My overarching objective will be to state as fully and precisely as possible just how Spinoza's substantive philosophical theses – and the arguments that he provides for these theses – relate to analogous theses and arguments found in Stoicism.

As that may imply, neither *Rezeptionsgeschichte* nor *Quellenforschung* are part of my project. To be clear, it is not that I do not find *Rezeptionsgeschichte* and *Quellenforschung* interesting or important.[51] Rather, it is out of respect for them that I have decided they are best excluded from my project. Properly done, *Rezeptionsgeschichte* and *Quellenforschung* require painstaking study of the transmission and circulation of texts, thorough exploration of possible presence of the texts in the works of the individuals in question, and then careful application of the results of these investigations to illuminate the ideas of those individuals. I could not accomplish all of that while simultaneously striving towards my main goal of determining the conceptual affinity of Spinozism to Stoicism.

My decision to concentrate on conceptual affinity sets my approach apart from a number of others that can be found in the recent literature. For example, P. O. Kristeller has argued that Spinoza was 'strongly influenced by Stoic ... concepts, either in their original ancient form, or in the transformation they had undergone during the Renaissance'.[52] Susan James goes even further, claiming that 'much of the substance and structure of the *Ethics* – its central doctrines and the connections between them – constitute ... a reworking of Stoicism'.[53] Alexandre Matheron speculates about a different connection between Spinoza and the Stoics: '[W]hoever tries to establish a causal link [*parenté entre*] between the two doctrines runs

[51] Indeed, I have undertaken *Rezeptionsgeschichte* in Miller (2009), where I show how Stobaeus was received by Grotius.
[52] Kristeller (1984), 1–2.
[53] James (1993), 291. In defence of both Kristeller and James, they were reacting against the scholarly tendency at the time they were writing to emphasize other sources and 'influences' on Spinoza, including Descartes or various Scholastic and medieval Jewish philosophers, without simultaneously taking into account the Stoics. Given such a context, it is understandable that they should have stated so forcefully the importance of the Stoics for Spinoza.

the risk of facing an objector saying that his comparison is but superficial and covers a very deep opposition. But the objector in turn runs the risk of not having seen that this opposition covers up an even deeper causal connection, etc.'[54] For Matheron, the direction of causation runs not from the Stoics to Spinoza but from a single non-historical source to both parties. In any event, whatever the differences in how they theorize that bond, Kristeller, James, Matheron, and many others have posited that a causal bond ties Spinoza to the Stoics.

Not me, at least not in this book. Unlike Kristeller, James, and Matheron, I will generally not speak about any lines of influence between the Stoics and Spinoza.[55] It is true that I can find claims of Stoic influence on Spinoza to be problematic. If we want to look for influences on Spinoza, it seems to me that we should start with more proximate figures such as Descartes or medieval Jewish philosophers, whom we know played major roles in his intellectual development, before getting to the Stoics, where the evidence is much thinner. Indeed, the textual evidence for Stoic influence is hardly compelling. Even for someone known to be parsimonious in his references to others, Spinoza mentions the Stoics very seldom – once in the *TdIE,* once in the *Ethics*, not at all in the correspondence, *TTP*, or *TP*. From a different front, we do have a record of the books in Spinoza's library on his death,[56] and it did contain some Stoic works, the details of which I shall convey below. For now, I just want to say that even though we know about those books, we do not know *all* the books he read; or, of the books he read, which ones he read carefully; or, of the ones he read carefully, which ones affected his philosophical views. For these reasons, then, we ought to be cautious about drawing inferences regarding the influence of an author or school on Spinoza just from the mere presence of their texts in his library.

We can abstract from specific texts to more general atmospherics. Stoicism was enjoying a renaissance in seventeenth-century Europe; it and the other Hellenistic schools became part of the mental framework of

[54] Matheron (1994), 148 (my translation).

[55] Though this is true in general, I will sometimes raise the possibility of influence. See, e.g., the end of Section 2.2 in Chapter 2, where I discuss Spinoza's reception of an edition of Simplicius' commentary on the *Enchiridion*. Other examples can be found in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2–3, where I relate Grotius' understanding of *oikeiosis* to Spinoza's formulation of *conatus*, and Chapter 4, Section 4.2, where I note the similarity of Epictetus' talk about 'what is up to us' (*eph' hēmin*) to what Spinoza's statement that 'human power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes. So we do not have an absolute power to adapt things outside us to our use. Nevertheless, we shall bear calmly those things that happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty' (IVAppXXXII).

[56] See Alter (1965).

the period.[57] In a way, though, the flourishing of Stoicism makes it harder to determine Stoicism's influence on Spinoza. Because it was so widely diffused, it is difficult to know exactly which Stoic themes Spinoza may have encountered by being attuned to the philosophical scene. Even if we could determine the answer to that question, we still would not know whether Spinoza would have recognized those ideas *as Stoic*. These and other problems[58] make me suspicious of claims of influence.[59]

At this point in my presentation of my work, I am sometimes accused of setting the bar too high. To determine influence, the charge goes, it is not necessary to provide precise historical linkages such as Stoic texts that Spinoza relied on or citations Spinoza made. There could have been Stoic conduits through Descartes or Hobbes. Moreover, I might seem to be engaged in a rearguard action, according to which my Spinoza went into his study and deduced his views entirely from his own mind, in the way that Descartes says he does in the *Meditations*. Scholarship on Descartes over the past several decades has thoroughly debunked the story Descartes tells by illustrating the many debts he owes to his philosophical predecessors. Surely it is naïve to suppose that Spinoza is any less reliant on his philosophical forebears, some of whom are undoubtedly Stoic.

To this I will make a twofold reply. First and more simply, I want to stress that while I think we ought to be careful when making claims of influence, I am not positively *denying* that Spinoza may have been influenced by the Stoics in various ways. Very likely he was. Whether he was or

[57] There is a large and growing body of scholarship on the reception of Hellenistic philosophy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Many of these works are cited in my Bibliography. See, for example, Barbour (1998), Barker and Goldstein (1984), Bridoux (1966), Brooke (2012), Buys (2010), D'Angers (1976), Kulstad (2008), Miller and Inwood (2003), ch. 9 of Schneewind (1998), some of the chapters in Strange and Zupko (2004), and Wilson (2008).

[58] Another problem: what is influence? What is it for one person or persons to influence another? Since (as seems likely) there are a number of kinds of influence, how are these kinds related to one another? Which kind (or kinds) is most applicable to the transmission and adoption of philosophical views, such as allegedly occurs when one philosopher (say, Chrysippus) influences another (Spinoza)? When a commentator casually speaks of Philosopher X being influenced by another Philosopher or Philosophy Y, I think we should treat such talk with caution unless we are told the sense in which X is supposed to have been influenced.

[59] Yitzhak Melamed identifies a quite different problem with the attempt to locate Spinoza in some 'proper historical context' (Melamed (2013a), xiv). Melamed writes, 'scholars of Jewish philosophy ... regard the medieval Jewish context as decisive; Dutch scholars choose the political and intellectual climate of seventeenth-century Netherlands as the appropriate context; and most other scholars ... stress the influence of Descartes. Obviously, this is just another example of the old story about the three blind zoologists who were examining different limbs of an elephant and concluded decisively that the animal in question was 'just a snake', 'clearly a hippopotamus', and 'undoubtedly a rhino' (xiv–xv).