ABSTRACT
Based on similarity of theory, I argue that the deterministic view of human agency of the early Stoic school was significantly influenced by certain Aristotelian views. Both explain human action in terms of a psychological and a physiological dimension. Regarding the former, there are striking similarities between their theories of action and responsibility. Regarding the latter, they share a peculiar theory in which the soul moves the body by the expansion and contraction of πνεῦμα. Aristotle occasionally affirms a sort of determinism, and if the Stoics coupled Aristotle’s physiological account of action with the view that sufficient conditions necessitate their effects, the result would be a physical determinism. If this determinism were coupled with Aristotle’s thesis in De Generatione et Corruptione II 11 that whatever is necessary is eternal and cyclical, the result would be the infamous Stoic doctrine of eternal recurrence.

I am working on a book on the Aristotelian origins of Stoic determinism, and here I will sketch my larger argument. My thesis is that the deterministic view of human agency of the early Stoic school, and particularly of its third leader, Chrysippus, was significantly influenced by their adoption of certain Aristotelian views. I have argued for elements of this thesis in earlier papers (Sakezles 1998 and 2007). I am partly motivated by F.H. Sandbach’s claim in Aristotle and the Stoics that the early Stoics probably knew nothing about Aristotle’s views. He bases this conclusion on the lack of direct evidence of influence, such as specific references to Aristotle and his works. Sandbach is correct about the lack of direct evidence, and so claims of influence must rest on the strength of indirect evidence, namely similarity of theory. My goal here is to establish such similarities.

The origins of Stoic determinism are worth investigating because it is an interesting and well-known fact about the history of philosophy that the so-called “free will problem”1 was not even recognized as a problem until the Hellenistic period, and then all of the sudden it was a central issue in the

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1 Bobzien (1998, esp. 133-37) argues that there was no single “free-will problem” in ancient times, but rather a variety of ways to deal with the apparent conflict between some sort of agent autonomy and some sort of determinism.
philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism. Stoic determinism is important because it is not only the first but also the most extreme version of determinism in the history of Western philosophy. The Stoics believed that absolutely everything that happens, down to the details of one’s actions and thoughts, is the inevitable consequence of prior causes and cannot be otherwise. Yet they also insisted that we are responsible for our actions, making them the first compatibilists. I think one must wonder what prompted such an extreme theory, what accounts for the sudden conviction that we cannot do otherwise, although we are still responsible? This is the question I hope to illuminate. I am not making the stronger claim that Stoic determinism can be wholly explained as an outgrowth of Aristotle’s philosophy—they were influenced by others as well, and no doubt original in many ways. My project involves illuminating the Aristotelian thread of this influence.

Let me now briefly sketch the major elements of my larger argument. There is one glaring difference between the Aristotelian and Stoic theories of human action and responsibility: Aristotle is (at least in some places, I shall argue) a libertarian and the Stoics are determinists. In *De Interpretatione* 9 Aristotle declares it an “absurdity” to think that everything happens of necessity, because he thinks the contingency of the future, and the efficacy of human deliberation, is obvious (18b26-33 and 19a7-11). The Stoics are just as confident that the future is fated. However, there are deeper structural similarities between the two. Both explain human action in terms of two dimensions: the psychological and the physiological. The psychological aspect concerns what occurs in the mind or ψυχή when we do something intentional, and it is what happens here that justifies moral responsibility. The physiological aspect concerns what occurs in the body.

In section I, I will compare Aristotle and the Stoics on the psychological dimension of action. Their terminology is different, but I will argue that their action theories are similar, the Stoic and Aristotelian classes of what one is responsible for are coextensive, and their criteria defining responsible actions are nearly identical. The most significant difference is that Aristotle claims such actions are in our power to do or not to do while the Stoics say that such actions are fated. However, the final analysis will show that even this difference is not as great as it seems.

In section II, I will compare Aristotle and the Stoics on the physiological dimension of action. For Aristotle, the soul moves the body by a sequence of events starting with the agent’s desire for some object, which causes a heating or chilling in the heart region, which causes the expansion or contraction of πνεῦμα or “breath,” which then pushes or pulls the muscles and bones to result in bodily movement. A Stoic physiological theory explain-