THE STOICS ON FATE AND FREEDOM

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Introduction and Overview

Stoicism was one of the most influential philosophical schools of the Hellenistic era, the centuries following the death of Alexander of Great in 323 BCE (and of Aristotle in 322 BCE). The Stoics made pioneering contributions to logic, in their invention of propositional logic, to ethics, in their championing of virtue as the sole intrinsic good and vice as the sole intrinsic evil, and to many other fields. They are also responsible for devising a sophisticated compatibilist theory of free will, the first clearly compatibilist theory that we know of. Earlier philosophers like Aristotle also had influential and thoughtful discussions of issues concerning moral responsibility and causal determinism. But even though Aristotle's theory of moral responsibility may be best understood as compatible with compatibilism about free will and determinism (see Meyer 2011 for a excellent interpretation of Aristotle along these lines), Aristotle does not squarely address the issue of whether free will and causal determinism are compatible, and some interpreters have thought that Aristotle's position entails incompatibilism, although he does not explicitly state that free will and determinism are incompatible.

A quick overview of what will follow: the Stoics are the first unambiguous compatibilists in part because they are also one of the first unambiguous proponents of causal determinism, with everything that occurs having sufficient causal conditions for occurring exactly as it does and not otherwise. (The atomist Democritus is an earlier possible proponent of determinism but did not address what implications determinism

might have on our freedom.) But the Stoics' causal determinism is in turn rooted in their pantheistic theology. God is the world, with his mind pervading the cosmos, and he orders the world in accordance with his providential plan. This providential plan is enacted through an everlasting series of causes that ensures that things occur as god wills them to. And so, the Stoics usually advance arguments to show that freedom and *fate* are compatible. One prominent objection to the Stoic notion of fate is the "lazy argument." If what is going to happen is already preordained, why should I now bother deliberating and acting to bring about one outcome rather than another? The Stoics reply that some events are "co-fated," with God fating both the future outcome and my causally effective action that will bring about that outcome, and that this suffices to show that action and deliberation are not futile.

The Stoics' reply to the "lazy argument" depends only on showing that causally determined actions can still be causally effective, but their arguments for why fate is compatible with moral responsibility bring in their analysis of human action. According to the Stoics, because we possess reason, it is up to us whether to assent to impressions about how to act. So how we act depends on us, and this suffices for our actions to be "up to us" in a way that justifies praise, blame, reward, and punishment. They reject the notion that we must have an ability to choose among alternate actions in order for our actions to be "up to us," because such an ability would be incompatible with being virtuous and would introduce uncaused events. Despite their compatibilism, the Stoics reject negative reactive attitudes such as anger and retributive punishment, on ethical grounds. And even though both virtuous and vicious people are equally responsible for what they do, in another sense, only the virtuous person is truly free, because he is free

from destructive emotions and beliefs that would alienate him from himself. The virtuous person also willingly submits himself to god's will, and this submission helps bring him tranquility.

The Stoics are a large cast of people, stretching from the founder of school, Zeno of Citium (334-262 BCE) to Roman Stoics like Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE) and Epictetus (c. 55-135 CE). For the sake of this chapter, I will be presenting the Stoics as putting forward a unified position, especially as represented by Chrysippus (c. 280-206 BCE), who was the third head of the Stoa and is usually regarded as its greatest philosopher. But readers should be aware that this is not entirely accurate: some later Stoics explicitly dissent from Chrysippus, while others who mostly agree with him (such as Epictetus) may have subtle differences from him in their exact positions.

God and Fate

The Stoics believe that God is wise, good, perfectly happy, and creator of the world. (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 7.147, L&S 54A)[1] However, unlike in Judeo-Christian theology, God is not an immaterial entity separate from the world who created it *ex nihilo*. Instead, according to the Stoic Chrysippus, god *is* the world. His mind pervades and organizes all things. (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.39, L&S 54B; Alexander, *On Mixture* 225, 1-2, L&S 54H) The Stoics believe that only bodies can act and be acted upon (Cicero, *Academica* 1.39, L&S 45A), and God does act upon the world, so God is something bodily. In particular, he is "a designing fire which methodically proceeds towards creation of the world" and "a breath pervading the whole world." (Aetius, 1.7.33, L&S 46A) This picture of the world as a blessed living being with its own mind is indebted to the creation myth in Plato's *Timaeus*, although the Stoics

dispense with Plato's immaterial Craftsman who brings the world into existence using the Forms as his model.

Because God is good, he wishes to benefit everything. (Clement, *The teacher* 1.8.63 1-2, L&S 60I) So God's providential will is to make the world the best he can. God is extremely powerful but not omnipotent, as he is limited not only by what is metaphysically possible but also by what is physically possible. (For instance, god supposedly made human skulls as thin as they are, even though thicker skulls would have been better for the purpose of protecting our brains, as a byproduct of wanting to make us rational—animals with thicker skulls would have been stupider. [Gellius, 7.1.1-13, L&S 54Q2]) Within these physical limits, the way God realizes his providential will is through setting up the casual order of the world to bring it about. Fate is an everlasting "ordering and sequence of causes" which brings about every single thing that has happened, is happening, and is going to happen. This is "not the 'fate' of superstition, but that of physics." (Cicero, *On divination* 1.125-6, L&S 55L) So for example, if God has it as part of his providential plan that I will recover from a deadly snakebite that I will suffer on 12:02 p.m. June 24, 2025, God will fate my recovery by building that future event into the overall organization of the cosmos from its foundation, so that the fated recovery will necessarily arise as the series of causes unspools itself over time.

The Lazy Argument

The "problem of free will and determinism," as it is usually discussed in the current philosophical literature, concerns whether casual determinism is compatible with the sort of freedom (or alternatively, with the sort of control over your actions) that is necessary for moral responsibility. But the Stoic notion of fate faced an even more serious charge:

that it would render what will happen inevitable, thus making deliberation, and action more broadly, futile. The "lazy argument," which attempts to establish this conclusion, goes as follows.[2]

Imagine that you've been bitten by a venomous snake, and you're trying to decide whether or not to rush to the hospital for anti-venom. However, if you accept that the outcome of the snakebite is fated, then either it's fated (and has always been fated) that you're going to recover from the snakebite, or it's fated (and has always been fated) that you won't recover and will die. (Cicero, *On Fate* 29, L&S 55S1) But if either of two alternatives has been fated from all eternity, that alternative is also necessary (Cicero, *On Fate* 21, L&S 20E1), because the past is immutable. And because there is no point in deliberating about what is necessary, it's pointless for me to worry now about whether or not to go to the hospital, as if my present actions could change the outcome one way or the other (Cicero, *De Fato* 28-29, L&S 55S1). A slightly different way of making the point: deliberating about what to do makes sense only if what will occur in the future is not already settled. But on the Stoic picture, the future *is* settled, via the causal sequences of fate that god built into the foundations of the world, so deliberating about *whether or not* to bring about X is pointless.

Chrysippus replies to the "Lazy Argument" as follows: just because it is fated that you will recover from the snakebite does not make your going to the hospital to get the anti-venom pointless. Chrysippus says that certain events are "co-fated": for instance, it is fated (and causally determined) *both* that I will recover from the snakebite *and* that I will go to the hospital; it is through my fated action of going to the hospital that my fated recovery will occur. As long as my action of going to the hospital is causally efficacious

in bringing about its purpose, it isn't pointless, and causally determined actions can be causally efficacious. Furthermore, even if it's causally determined that I will recover, counterfactuals like "if I don't go to the hospital, I will die from the snakebite" can still be true. (Cicero *De Fato* 30, L&S 55S2-3)

Similar considerations establish the rationality of deliberation. Some might worry that deliberating about whether or not to perform some action is somehow a "sham" or not genuine deliberation if what I am going to decide to do has already been predetermined. But going through the process of weighing the pros and cons of various courses of action to assess which one is best is itself an action that can be effective for coming to a more rational decision about what to do than I would come to if I didn't deliberate, even if the outcome of that deliberative process has itself been casually determined. For instance, if I am offered a job, it makes sense to think things through before making a decision rather than flipping a coin, even if god has made it part of his providential plan that I am going to accept the job. Just because it is fated that I will accept the job, it isn't fated that I will accept the job whether or not I think things through before making a decision, any more than it's fated I will recover from the snakebite whether or not I go to the hospital.

Some texts appear to undercut the story sketched above, where god brings about fated outcomes through the fated actions of humans. For instance, Zeno and Chrysippus give the following analogy to describe fate: "When a dog is tied to a cart, if it wants to follow it is pulled and follows, making its spontaneous act coincide with necessity, but if it does not want to follow it will be compelled in any case. So it is with men too: even if they do not want to, they will be compelled in any case to follow what is destined."

(Hippolytus, *Refutation of all heresies* 1.21, L&S 62A) This suggests that god has preordained certain outcomes that will happen no matter what decisions people make, with our decisions affecting only the *manner* in which this fated outcome occurs. God will bypass and override any efforts to defy him. (Perhaps if I irrationally decide not to go to the hospital after the snakebite, god implements a contingency plan he has ready to hand that ensures my recovery, albeit in a way that involves far more trouble and pain for me.)

This interpretation of the dog and cart metaphor should be resisted, as it is inconsistent with the overall Stoic picture, as least as put forward by Chrysippus. Instead, Chrysippus can be making the more general point that it is impossible to resist god's providential plan and the edicts of fate, because god's providential plan encompasses everything whatsoever that occurs in the cosmos, which would include even vicious actions. (Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradiction*, L&S 54T) The Stoics also share the Greek ethical commonplace that vice is a kind is psychic disharmony and disorder that causes agitation and distress. (Cicero, *Tusculan disputations* 4.29, 34-5, L&S 61O) And so, vicious people who try to defy the will of god fail in their plan, as even their attempted defiance has been fated by god, but through their foolish actions they do "succeed" in bringing about their own misery, just like the dog being dragged along the path.

Action and what is up to us

While the Stoic response to the lazy argument might show why action and deliberation still make sense in a deterministic universe, they need to say more in order to counter the suspicion that human beings, on their theory, are merely passive puppets who cannot

rightly be held accountable for what they do. They develop a theory of animal behavior generally and human action in particular that tries to counter this suspicion.

According to the Stoics, inanimate objects like logs and stones are moved around from the outside. But organisms, which are animated by their psyches, have the cause of movement in themselves. (That organisms move themselves, of course, is compatible with the manner in which they move themselves being itself causally determined. And an organism's psyche, because it is causally effective and moves around the rest of the body, must itself be something bodily.) Animals move themselves when an impression occurs which arouses an impulse. For instance, a hungry dog may see a hunk of meat, and this arouses an impulse to run up to the meat and gobble it down. The impulse is triggered by the impression, but this is still a case of the dog moving itself toward the meat, not merely being passively pushed around by the impression.

In the case of rational animals, like humans, there is a crucial additional step. We have "reason, which passes judgment on impressions, rejecting some of these and accepting others, in order that the animal may be guided accordingly." (Origin, *On principles* 3.1.2-3, L&S 53A) For instance, I may see a basket of chicken nuggets in front of me when I am hungry. But instead of saying, "Mmmm, looks good," and straightaway gobbling them down, I think "Eating meat produced by factory farms would be wrong" and refrain. On the other hand, Chrysippus believes that animals are made for the sake for human beings—for instance, that appetizing pigs have no purpose other than slaughter and that god created them as part of our cuisine. (Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 3.20.1, 3, L&S 54P) And so, given his foolish and vicious views about the moral status of animals, Chrysippus gladly decides to chow down. (Impressions may include both both non-

normative and normative propositional content, e.g., “there are some chicken nuggets in front of me” and “eating those chicken nuggets would be good for me.”)

Any action proper will include this step of assent to an impression that leads to an impulse, and it is this additional step that distinguishes human action from mere animal behavior. The Stoic doctrine allows for there to be involuntary bodily reactions to stimuli, such as one’s heart speeding up as a truck careens towards you. (See Seneca, *On Anger* 2.3.I-2.4, L&S 65X.) And “assent” need not be the result of a self-conscious, extended deliberative process. If you insult my hipster sideburns and I straightaway get angry and punch you in the face, I have assented to the impression that you have wronged me and it would be good to retaliate and cause you pain, even though I haven’t thought it over carefully.

Chrysippus uses the analogy of a stone cylinder rolling down a slope to illustrate the Stoic doctrine. The cylinder’s rolling down the slope may require an initial shove. But that initial shove only triggers the motion, and the primary cause of the motion is the cylinder’s own shape and “rollability.” Likewise, human action may require an initial impression as its trigger, but how a person acts depends on the person himself, on the sort of person he is and how he responds to his impressions. (Cicero, *On Fate* 39-43, L&S 62C)

Determinism and Moral Responsibility

The Stoic doctrine of assent is the linchpin of their defense of moral responsibility. Assent is up to us and under our control, and assents are the causes of our actions. And so, our actions are attributable to us, and we are rightly held responsible for them. In fact, says Epictetus, the one thing that god has placed under our control is the correct use of

impressions. (Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.1.7-12, L&S 62K) I do not control whether I am healthy, although I can aim at maintaining my health, and I do not control whether other people hurl insults at me. But it is up to me whether I react angrily when I am insulted.

Chrysippus says that what we do is controlled by our will and intellect, and the misdeeds of bad people can rightly be attributed to their own vice. And because of this, he asserts, "the Pythagoreans are right to say "You will learn that men have chosen their own troubles," meaning that the harm that they suffer lies in each individual's own hands, and that it is in accordance with their impulse and their own mentality and character that they go wrong and are harmed." (Gellius, 7.2-6-13, L&S 62D)

Many people, however, may find this sense of assent being "up to us," that it causally depends on my present character, inadequate. Cicero expresses the reservation well. He approves of Chrysippus' distinction between a triggering cause and a primary cause of an action, saying that it is a promising route for keeping things up to us. But if it turns out that it's not in our power to make things turn out otherwise than they do turn out, then everything is still fated in a way that renders all of our actions involuntary, and hence not really up to us. (Cicero, *On Fate* 45) That is, once an impression has occurred as a trigger to action, do I *then* have the ability to make results turn out otherwise, or not? Once the chicken-nuggets impression has struck me, do I have the ability either to eat the nuggets or not to do so? If I have this ability to do otherwise than I do, then my action is under my control. But if how I respond is "up to me" merely in the Chrysippean sense that it causally depends on my present character, which is itself "co-fated" and the way in which fate works god's will through the animal, then my action is both fated and not truly in my power, so that praise, blame, and punishment would not be justified.

In contemporary discussions of free will, this sort of condition on moral responsibility is called the Principle of Alternate Possibilities, or PAP. PAP states that a person is morally responsible for what they have done only if they could have done otherwise. Aristotle, for one, seems to endorse our possession of such an ability. He says that, when acting is up to us, so to is not acting, and if it's up to us to act nobly by performing some action, it's equally up to us to act shamefully by refraining from performing it. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 3.5 1113b5-14) (It's a further question, of course, whether for Aristotle the possession of such an ability to do otherwise is compatible with causal determinism.)

Rather than trying to accommodate an ability to do otherwise within a deterministic world-view, the Stoics reject PAP. We don't have "the freedom to choose between opposite actions ... [instead], it is what comes about *through* us that is up to us." (Alexander *On fate* 181,13, L&S 62G1) The Stoics give both ethical and metaphysical arguments against PAP.

What is up to us? Let us presume that we are rightly praised or blamed, and rewarded or punished, only for things that are up to us. And if we accept PAP, then the actions of the virtuous person will be praiseworthy only if she is capable of acting in a way other than how she does act, and the virtuous person does act virtuously. But the truly virtuous person is incapable of acting viciously, of doing anything wrong. And so if we accept PAP, we would have to accept the absurd result that we should not praise virtuous people for acting virtuously. And so, we should reject PAP. (Alexander, *On fate* 196,24-197,3, L&S 61M). (The Stoics also likewise claim that vicious people are incapable of acting other than viciously, at least during the time when they are vicious,

but are still rightly criticized for their vicious actions. However, I will concentrate on the case of virtue here.)

We may wish to reject instead the premise that a truly virtuous person is incapable of acting viciously. But the Stoics have good reasons for accepting that premise. Imagine that I am a virtuous person, and that I have promised my young daughter a piece of cake if she finishes her dinner. She finishes her dinner and asks for the cake. What will I do? Assuming that nothing odd has happened in the meantime—for instance, a fire has broken out and I have to leave the house with her—there is only one thing I will do in that particular situation: give her the cake as promised. Let us suppose that there *were* some small chance that I would not keep my promise—that I'd pretend to look for the cake and not find it, and lie to her about its being missing, so that I could have it for myself later. If I were capable of depriving my daughter of her promised cake so that I could chow down on it later, then I would not really be a virtuous person. There would have to be something wrong with me.

Someone may wish to assert that the virtuous person *will* not break his promise to his daughter, but that he is *capable* of doing so. The Stoics reject this response. Virtue is a reliable disposition to do what one should. I am not *forced* to get the cake for my daughter, but given the type of person I am, I am incapable of doing otherwise. As Seneca puts it, "the good man cannot not do what he does; for he would not be good unless he did it...there is a big difference between saying 'he cannot not do this' because he is forced and saying 'he cannot not want to.'" (Seneca *On Benefits* 6.21.2-3, quoted in Inwood 1985: 110) The Stoics conceive of virtue as a kind as practical skill that allows a person to live well, and the wise person will consistently exercise this skill, so that

everything he does he does well. (Stobaeus 2.66,14-67,4, L&S 61G) So an "ability" to break my promise to my daughter is something I do not want to have, as it would be a defect, a form of folly, and a *disability*. And likewise with any other ability to act otherwise than I should.

A second reason the Stoics want to deny that we have the power to choose between opposite actions is that "if in identical circumstances someone will act differently on different occasions, an uncaused motion is introduced." (Alexander, *On Fate* 185,7-11, L&S 62H) For example, imagine that on one occasion I refrain from eating the chicken nuggets in front of me. And on another occasion, with every single thing being *exactly the same* as far as my beliefs, desires, the precise content of the chicken nugget impression, etc., are concerned, I eat the nuggets. Then, say the Stoics, my actions would not have a cause.

This may appear too hasty. In his criticisms of Chrysippus, the academic skeptic Carneades denies the Stoic doctrine that human actions have past causes built into nature that inevitably bring them about. (Cicero, *On Fate* 33, L&S 70G11-15) It does not follow that they have no cause whatsoever. Instead, he proposes that there is a "voluntary motion of the mind" that has "as its own intrinsic nature that it should be in our power to obey us." (Cicero, *On Fate* 25, L&S 20E7) If I decide to eat the nuggets, my action has a cause (me), and if I refrain, that also has a cause (me), but how I exercise this power, deciding whether to eat the nuggets or to refrain, is up to me. The Stoics, presumably, would find this inadequate. On Carneades' theory, my action may have a cause in some weak sense, but there would be no explanation at all for why I choose to refrain from eating the

nuggets *rather than* eating them, so that much of human action would be fundamentally mysterious and inexplicable.

And so, the Stoics defend a picture of our actions being up to us that does not require any ability to do otherwise than one does. They believe that their doctrine of fate is compatible with all of our ordinary moral practices. Even if every action is fated, right reason still commands right actions and prohibits wrong ones. (That is, we can still give the reasons why breaking my promise to my daughter is irrational and wrong, and keeping my promise is rational and right. Fate does nothing to negate these reasons.) And if there are right and wrong actions, there are also virtue and vice, which are character traits that dispose us to act rightly and wrongly, respectively. But virtue is noble, and thus commendable, whereas vice is shameful, and thus reprehensible. And commendable things deserve honor, whereas reprehensible things deserve punishment. (Alexander *On Fate* 207,5-21, L&S 62J)

Responsibility, Retribution, and the Reactive Attitudes

In contemporary discussions of free will and moral responsibility, especially those inspired by Peter Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment," a common theme is that retribution and the negative reactive attitudes, such as resentment and indignation, are essential to genuinely holding others morally responsible for their misdeeds. If my dog urinates on my rug, I will be unhappy that he ruined the rug, and I may scold him and otherwise punish him with an eye to preventing him from doing it again. But this sort of "blaming" and punishing of my dog for consequentialist reasons is not the same phenomenon as holding my dog morally responsible for what he does. On the other hand, if my friend were to get tipsy and urinate on my rug, I'd feel highly indignant toward

him, and when I criticize him, it's because I feel that he hasn't shown me proper good will, with my criticism being an expression of my (backward-looking) indignation, not merely a (forward-looking) attempt to modify his behavior. And punishments, when they're a matter of holding the wrongdoer morally responsible for his misdeeds, likewise involve satisfying a desire for retribution, of giving somebody what they deserve.

Although it would be anachronistic to call him a Strawsonian, in the ancient world Aristotle says some things that (broadly speaking) fall along these lines. Anger is a desire to return pain for pain. (*On the Soul* 1.1, 403a25-403b3) In particular, it is a desire for revenge against somebody who you think has wronged you by treating you disrespectfully. (*Rhetoric* 2.2, 1378a30-32) Sometimes, it is appropriate to feel anger and desire revenge, and hence there is a virtue of character (good temper) concerned with anger. The good-tempered person gets angry at the right things, at the right time, and to the right extent, and he is praiseworthy. Aristotle says that the person who is deficient with respect to anger, who does not get angry when shown disrespect, is unlikely to defend himself, and that putting up with insults to oneself and one's friends is slavish. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 4.5, 1125b27-1126a8)

For Aristotle, retributive attitudes are not confined to wrongs against oneself. Righteous indignation is praiseworthy, and righteous indignation is (in part) a matter of feeling pleasure when people who deserve misfortune suffer misfortune. (*Eudemian Ethics* 3.3, 1233b23-27) Although righteous indignation is not itself a virtue of character (because it does not involve choice), it does tend toward the virtue of justice. (*Eudemian Ethics* 3.3, 1234a24-33)

The Stoics sharply dissent from this picture—they think that even though wrongdoing merits censure and punishment, the wise person will never experience the negative reactive attitudes or engage in retribution. However, their grounds for rejecting the negative reactive attitudes and retribution differ from those typically given by contemporary skeptics about free will; i.e., that determinism is incompatible with the sort of control over one's actions needed for genuine moral responsibility, and hence for justifiable resentment, indignation, and retribution. (Pereboom 2001 is an influential and representative example of such skepticism, and Pereboom 2014 an updated presentation of the position.)

Instead, the Stoics give *moral* arguments against such attitudes and actions. The Stoics think that virtue is both necessary and sufficient for happiness. The happy life will be utterly tranquil, and the wise person will suffer from no disturbing emotions (Seneca, *Letters* 92.3, L&S 63F), which would include all negative reactive attitudes. Anger, for example, is a disturbing and irrational appetite to harm another person because you believe they have wronged you, based on the false judgment that harming them would be good. (Andronicus, *On passions* I, L&S 65B; Stobaeus 2.90,19, L&S 65E1)

The virtuous person, by contrast, wishes to harm none but to benefit all. (In this respect, as in many others, the Stoics pick up elements of Socrates' ethics as presented in dialogues like the *Gorgias*.) As noted above, god is good, and the nature of what is good is to benefit all unconditionally and harm none. We should seek to perfect ourselves and make ourselves like god—and the Stoics even say that the wise person is as virtuous as god. (Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1076A, L&S 61J) We should regard ourselves as akin to all human beings, and we should seek to benefit as many people as we can.

(Cicero *On Ends* 3.62-8, L&S 57F) Punishment is a fitting response to wrongdoing, but right punishment is a *correction* of the person punished. (Alexander, *On fate* 207,5-21, L&S 62J)

It does not follow from this that my attitude towards my tipsy friend is no different than my attitude towards my inadequately trained dog. Because we have reason, we are capable of wrongdoing and vice, which are shameful and reprehensible, not merely unfortunate like my dog's accident. But our reason also gives us a capacity for right action and virtue, which are noble and praiseworthy. What is truly good exists only in what has reason, in humans and god, and not in plants and non-human animals. (Seneca, *Letters* 124.13-14, L&S 60H)

The freedom of the wise person and his conformity to god's will

Both the wise person and the fool are responsible for their actions, because the actions of each of them are equally a result of the agent's assent, and what we assent to is "up to us" and under our control. Nonetheless, in another sense, only the wise person is truly free. Epictetus often compares the foolish person to a slave, under the yolk of vicious and damaging desires (for instance, *Handbook* 14 and *Discourses* 2.2). Similarly, the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE) likens the fool to a puppet who is jerked here and there by irrational impulses (for instance, *Meditations* 2.2, 6.16). We need to be careful in interpreting these metaphors: for Epictetus, the slavery of the fool is a *willing* slavery. And Marcus' puppet is not pulled about by a puppeteer against his will, but is more like a little windup toy, acting automatically and unthinkingly. (See Berryman (2010) for further discussion of the puppet metaphor.) The fool is dominated by desires and beliefs that are alien to his nature as a rational being, because right reason commands

all virtuous actions and forbids all vicious actions. (This doctrine is echoed later by Thomas Aquinas, who says that the commands of the natural law are rooted in right reason and God's eternal law; see *Summa Theologica* I-II Q. 91 Art. 2, I-II Q. 94 Art. 3.) Only the wise person is free from these alienating and disturbing desires and beliefs; only the wise person has mastered himself and is in harmony with himself.

As explained above, that all events are fated is compatible with engaging in ordinary goal-directed action. Nonetheless, acknowledging fate is supposed to have an important practical impact on how the wise person seeks things. It's up to me to seek the anti-venom, or to endeavor to get my daughter the promised slice of cake. But it's not entirely up to me whether my action achieves its aim. The hospital may not have anti-venom, or I might accidentally trip and fall on the way back to the table, ruining the last remaining slice of cake. In such cases, because all events are fated by God, it is God's will that my efforts fail. And because the wise person willingly conforms himself to the will of god, who is wise and orders all things for the best, he says to god without resentment, "your will be done."

This conformity to god's will means that even prospectively, the impulses toward action of wise people differ from those of the rest of us. The ordinary person, for example, simply seeks to be healthy when he is sick. But the wise person acts with "reservation," which involves adding the clause that he seeks to be healthy *unless god wills otherwise*. Seneca claims that acting with such reservation helps the wise person adapt to unforeseen events and ensures that nothing happens contrary to his expectations. (*On Benefits* 4.34.4, referred to in Inwood 1985: 120. My discussion of reservation is indebted to his treatment of the topic on pp. 119-126.) As Epictetus advises, to do well in

life, you shouldn't seek for things to happen as you wish them to; instead, you should wish for them to happen as they do happen. (*Handbook* 8) Reservation allows the wise person to act on Epictetus' advice even in cases where what will happen is unclear. It is appropriate to seek to keep my promise to my daughter, and doing so is up to me. But if the world trips me up, I am not thwarted, and my tranquility is not disturbed.

[5768 words]

Notes

1. Most of the texts I refer to are collected in Long and Sedley 1987. In these cases, I provide the text number in their volume (and sometimes subsection numbers) as "L&S <text number>." Unless otherwise noted, translations are from Long and Sedley, modified to meet United States conventions of spelling and punctuation, and paraphrases of ancient texts are based on their translations. I have made a few changes from Long and Sedley: I translate *eph' hêmin* with the more literal "up to us" rather than "in our power," and I translate *to kalon* and *aischron* using "the noble" and "the disgraceful" (or related terms) rather than "moral rectitude" and "turpitude."
2. I have changed the example from the one Cicero uses. I also specify the argument in terms of fate operating via causal determinism, to fit the Stoic position, whereas the initial version of the argument Cicero considers is via the Principle of Bivalence, with statements about the future eternally having truth-values, although Cicero later recasts the argument in terms of causes.

Related Topics

Aristotle, Strawsonian Views, Hard Incompatibilism and Skepticism, Deliberation, The Luck and Mind Arguments, Free Will and Theological Fatalism, Free Will and Theological Determinism, Free Will and Providence

References

Berryman, S. (2010) "The Puppet and the Sage: Images of the Self in Marcus Aurelius." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 38: 187-209.

Inwood, B. (1985) *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meyer, S. (2011) *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pereboom, D. (2001) *Living Without Free Will*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pereboom, D. (2014) *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Strawson, P. F. (1962) "Freedom and resentment." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48:1-25.

Further Reading

S. Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) is the definitive work on its subject: rigorous, thorough, and groundbreaking. B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) is slightly broader in its focus and less technical than Bobzien. It contains excellent discussions of Stoic action-theory, how their action-theory shapes their ethics, "reservation," and the passions. T. Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) is an accessible survey of Stoics' views on action-theory, ethics, and fate, that usefully dissents from Bobzien and Inwood on certain points. Unfortunately, we possess no complete texts from the early Stoics, and reports on their views are widely scattered among later authors. For this reason, A. Long and D. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) is an essential compendium of ancient texts regarding the Stoics, as well as the Epicureans and Academic skeptics. Volume 1 contains translations of the texts, organized by subject, along with an excellent commentary, while volume 2 contains the Greek and Latin texts with notes.