

Causation and Fate

The Stoic ideas about determinism follow almost naturally from logical and physical concerns, i.e. about what is possible and necessary (Readings for 3 May), and the nature of the cosmic logos (Readings for 10 May). Potential tensions between fate and moral responsibility will lead us into the exploration of the final part of Stoic philosophy: ethics.

- 55A 1. Why is it impossible for a prudent person not to be prudent? (You can try to analyse this with a view to the ‘categories’, in particular to qualities and predicates; see handout 2 and Readings for 26 April.)
- 55 2. Analyse one of the examples in extract B.
- 55C 3.* In the ship example a new body is being generated. But not so in the ‘being cut’ case. Is this a significant difference?
- 55E 4.* What is it for causes to ‘shape matter’ (*materiam format*)?
- 55I 5. Compile a rough and ready list of Clement’s list of different causes. (In N 3, Alexander calls this a ‘swarm of causes’.)
- 55J–O 6.* Why is there fate?
- 55S 7. What does the ‘Lazy Argument’ suggest?
8. How does Chrysippus respond? (See also 62F.)
- 62 9.* According to Cicero (extract C), Chrysippus aims for a position between fatalism/determinism and libertarianism. Do you agree that the Stoics are compatibilists?
- 62 10. Explain the stone cylinder analogy.
- 62G 11.* Alexander says that an event is brought about ‘by fate through’ something, such as a stone (*ὑπο τῆς εἰμαρμένης διὰ τοῦ λίθου, hupo tês heimarmenês dia tou lithou*). What does this mean?

Background Information. (a) The word for ‘cause’ (*αἴτιον, aition*) can mean both cause and reason, it is roughly ‘the thing responsible’. A cause is the thing that brings about an effect, and also explains the effect’s presence. See LS55A 5 for the tight connection between causation and explanation. (b) Divination was common in Greek culture: think of the oracle in Delphi, say, or Socrates’s ‘daimonion’. It is the attempt to foretell future or unknown events by reading signs. The idea is that this involves a sort of divine revelation. We can only have *impressions* of the present; but insofar as the future is ‘fixed’, it is possible in principle to learn about it, albeit not by standard perceptual processes. (c) The phrase ‘up to us’ or ‘within our power’ (*ἐφ’ ἡμῶν, eph’ hêmin*, see 62G 7) is central to Stoic ethics. It also opens Epictetus’ *Handbook*. (d) Leibniz makes a distinction between events that are determined but not necessary, and hence tries to develop a complex view of freedom that looks distinctly Stoic: while it is determined (or ‘fated’), say, that Caesar crosses the Rubicon, it is not necessary that he does (it is not impossible for him not to do so); yet, given his nature, he does cross the Rubicon; not crossing it would be against his nature, so to speak. (See *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §13.)