

## Causes and Fate

(1) For Zeno, a cause (*αἴτιον*, *aition*) is ‘that because of which’ (LS55A), or literally ‘thing responsible’: what brings about an effect, and what also explains it. Only bodies can be causes, but effects are not other bodies, but predicates (incorporeal *lekta*). So, fate is a chain of causes, *not* a chain of causes and effects.

(2) Least confusing is Cicero’s twofold approach. He (probably) cites Chrysippus: “Some causes are complete and principal, and others are auxiliary and proximate. So, when we say that everything happens by fate through antecedent causes, we do not refer to the complete and principal causes, but to the auxiliary and proximate ones” (LS62C 5).

(3) *Antecedent causes are external.* Some causes are decisive, initiating, or triggering, and look most like Aristotle’s ‘efficient’ causes (*προκαταρκτικά*, *prokatarktika*). Other causes keep things together and sustain them (*συνεκτικά*, *sunektika*); they maintain a thing’s pneumatic tension or tenor (*ἕξις*, *hexis*). Still others are contributing or co-causes (*συναίτια*, *sunaitia*). To explicate LS55I 4: a football team lacks tenor, and hence a sustaining cause. The team ontologically depends on its members, and hence each individual player is the co-cause of the team’s win.

(4) *Principal causes are internal.*<sup>1</sup> Nothing in the world exists or happens without a cause or reason (cf. LS55N 2). (It is tempting to interpret this as an early version of the principle of sufficient reason, made famous by Leibniz.) So, internal causes are up to us, or depend on us, or are in our power, yet still they are determined, or perhaps self-determined or conditioned by ourselves. If the impulse to act (*ὄρμηξ*, *hormé*; a central moral concept) were not ‘up to us’, learning and moral progress (*προκοπή*, *prokôpe*) would be impossible (LS62C 6).

(5) This seems to be Chrysippus’ aim in reply to Diodorus’ *Master Argument* (see LS38A, Readings for 3 May 2016). The rough idea: there are three inconsistent propositions: (a) truths about the past are necessary, (b) nothing impossible follows from what is possible, and (c) there is something possible that does not, and will not, happen. For consistency, Diodorus rejects (c): Nothing is possible that neither is nor will be. Chrysippus seems to hold that it is important that there are unrealised possibilities, so that some things that are ‘up to us’ (*ἐφ’ ἡμῶν*, *eph’ hêmin*); so that some of our actions and decision are not *necessitated*, even though they are determined.<sup>2</sup> For consistency, Chrysippus rejects (b) (see LS38A).

(6) Here is another way to see this. Determinism is the view that whatever happens now, happens because of whatever happened earlier; so that given the past, the present could not be different. Things could be different now if the past had been different too. Although there was no such notion in ancient philosophy, it helps to think of the Stoics as *compatibilists*, trying to reconcile determinism with

1 See Frede, D. (2003). Stoic Determinism. In B. Inwood (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, pp. 179–205. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2 For analysis, see Bobzien, S. (2011). Dialectical School, in E. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dialectical-school/#5>.

free will.<sup>3</sup> The challenge for any compatibilist is to make the will part of the cause, or to integrate our minds into the causal sequence: hence principal internal causes.

(7) Fate (*είμαρμένη*, *heimarmenē*) is the inescapable sequence of inter-connected causes or reasons (LS55J). So, fate is the unbroken cosmic flow of causes.

(8) Is fate providential? Perhaps not. Providence (*προνοία*, *pronoia*) is not due to a wise and pre-destined divine plan (as it would be in theism). The divine ‘plan’ or *logos* is immanent in every bit of matter that is blended with *pneuma*, and thus dispersed throughout the cosmos. The world ‘worlds’, and that evolving coming-about is nothing but the divine reason that plays out as it goes, or ‘reasons’ and ‘bodies’ its way, through time. So, things happen just as they do, or must, because the emerging cosmic causal economy is optimally rational. Instead of being ‘merely’ fated to realise no pre-ordained plan (like cogs in a machine), we are fated to go with that cosmic flow. And insofar as we ‘gel’ with that flow, we can be happy and truly free. (This sounds like Spinoza.)

(9) So, we are not like rolling cylinders (LS62C, D, G). Using the external–internal distinction, we can say that *impressions* are not up to us, but our *assent* to them is (see Readings 19 April 2016; also LS62C). And that is determined by the kind of person (*πρόσωπον*, *prosōpon*) we are, or the quality of our character (see Readings 26 April 2016), and thus ultimately by our pneumatic tension: our soul, or inner nature. This is why the stone keeps falling, the cylinder keeps rolling. We act according to our nature too: if I am a tidy person, I do the dishes when I see the pile in the kitchen. So, there is a sense in which I could not ‘have done otherwise’, as the now common phrase associated with freedom suggests (called ‘freedom of indifference’, e.g., by Descartes). I do not *have* to do them (it is not necessary for me), but given the person I am, not doing the dishes is unreasonable and not optimal.

(10) Not knowing the overall causal structure and cosmic reasons, i.e. in spite of our (severe) epistemic limitations, we do what we think is best: the only guarantee that some of our actions are successes is the fact that we are, each of us, portions of the divine mind. Most events are thus ‘co-fated’ (*confatalis*) by our decisions; our actions are conditions for the occurrence of ‘fated’ events. Fate needs our contribution.

(11) Are the Stoics fatalists? No and yes. No, because fatalism (today) includes the idea that what happens now is bound to happen ‘anyway’: present things are unrelated to the past, and thus uncaused by prior things. Yes, because whatever happens is bound to happen just as it does; it could not be any different. The only possible world is the actual one, which is in the process of coming about. And this is fate.

**G Cicero, *On fate* 20–1**

Chrysippus uses the following argument: ‘If there is motion without a cause, not every proposition (what the dialecticians call *axiōma*) will be either true or false, since anything lacking efficient causes will be neither true nor false. But every proposition is either true or false. Therefore there is no motion without a cause. If this is so, everything that happens happens through antecedent causes – in which case, everything happens through fate. The result is that everything that happens happens through fate. [continued at 20E]

3 Incompatibilists think either that determinism is true and so there is no free will, or that there is free will and so determinism is false.

