Introduction

The philosophy of the early Stoics is all too often interpreted in modern terms: their determinism has been compared to Laplace’s,¹ their views on causality represented as Humean² and their account of freedom and responsibility characterized as soft determinist.³ This tendency may seem innocuous enough, even if one judges as misguided attempts at giving ancient thinkers a coat of modern analytic varnish. But, as we shall see, analytic respectability is only purchased at a price and much that is bizarrely original in the Stoic theories is lost as a consequence.

I am not however suggesting any radical revision of recent interpretations of the Stoic account of causality, in discussing which I merely aim to provide the necessary background for the subsequent discussion of Stoic freedom which is my main concern. On the latter issue, misunderstanding of the Stoic texts is acute and extensive. Remarkably, there is an almost total failure (apparently stretching back to the ancient commentators) to recognize that philosophers who were concerned with both determinism and freedom could treat these topics in virtual isolation from each other. Consequently, interpretations almost invariably reflect some kind of sensed conflict between the two ideas. Some commentators (amongst

¹ S. Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics* (London, 1971), p. 58. All further references to this work are given as Sam: PS.
² R. Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause and Blame* (London, 1980), p. 66. All further references to this work are given as Sor: NCB.
them, St. Augustine, *City of God*, V, 10) held, for instance, that the Stoics simply exempted the act of choice from causal determination. More often, commentators, recognizing the all-inclusive nature of Stoic determinism, disagree as to whether the early Stoics were uncompromising anti-libertarians (Taylor, Aune) or merely soft determinists (Long, Sharples) of a rather lame (Sorabji) or even disingenuous (Alexander of Aphrodisias, Nemesis) kind.

I shall try to show however that the possibility of a conflict between freedom and determinism never clearly occurred to the Stoics since by modern standards (and even by those of ancient commentators, writing only two to four hundred years later) they had a defective conception of freedom. In particular, I shall suggest that they cannot be construed as precursors of soft determinism, either in the version originally associated with Moore, Schlick and Ayer (the most frequent interpretation amongst contemporary commentators) or in its more recent formulation by Davidson. In thus demonstrating that attempts to interpret early Stoic doctrines in terms of modern philosophical categories are for the most part misguided, I hope indirectly to restore to early Stoic thought its strangeness and originality, whilst my analysis may also possibly offer new insights into current accounts of freedom and determinism.

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5 'Possibility', in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, VI, p. 420.
6 *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Fate* (London, 1983), p. 9. Sharples asserts that since 'Chrysippus was concerned to preserve human responsibility in the context of his deterministic system ... his position is one of "soft determinism"'. But the soft determinist typically admits a prima facie incompatibility between freedom/responsibility and determinism and then shows how this can be overcome. No such admission, or subsequent strategy, is, as we shall see, apparent in the work of the early Stoics, with the possible exception of the Dog Tied to Waggon Analogy attributed to them by Hippolytus (cf. section 3).
7 *De Fato*, 14. All further references to this work are given as Alex: DeF.
8 *De Natura Hominis*, 35. All further references to this work are given as Nem: NH.
9 See Alexander in *De Fato* and Plutarch in *De Stoicorum Repugnantius*. All further references to the latter work are given as Pl: deSR.