

# Alexander of Aphrodisias' Lazy Arguments against Stoic Determinism

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Scholars generally agree that Alexander of Aphrodisias' objections to Stoic determinism in *De fato* are unconvincing. I show that there is one argument, however, that is more successful than Alexander's other arguments. This argument is an innovative version of the so-called "Lazy Argument". Traditional versions of the Lazy Argument claim that actions and deliberations would not matter in a deterministic world and that for this reason Stoic determinism cannot be true. By contrast, Alexander's new version asserts that it is too risky to believe in Stoic determinism because it can give average rational agents good reasons to be lazy. Since we cannot know whether Stoic determinism is true, it is safer not to believe it.

*Keywords:* Alexander, *De fato*, Lazy Argument, Stoic determinism, fate

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## 1. Introduction

Famously, Stoic philosophers believe in universal causal determinism: they believe that fate is a causal nexus that determines everything that happens in the cosmos. This theory was subject to severe criticism in Antiquity, including by Alexander of Aphrodisias. In his *De fato*, Alexander ventures to refute Stoic<sup>1</sup> determinism based on the Aristotelian concepts of necessity, possibility, chance, and moral responsibility. Yet, scholars such as Long, Sharples, Frede and Hahmann believe that many, if not all, of Alexander's objections fall short when compared to the subtle account of Stoic determinism worked out by Chrysippus (Long 1970, Long 1971, Sharples 1975,

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander does not mention the Stoics by name. There is nevertheless general agreement that Alexander's criticism is directed against the Stoics. This is because the beliefs of Alexander's opponent and the beliefs of the Stoics overlap to a great extent. For a list of correspondences, see (Long 1970, 247 n. 3) and (Sharples 1983, 19).

Frede 1982, Hahmann 2007). Long, for example, writes: “[F]ar from giving careful consideration to what his opponents meant, or may have meant, Alexander often leaps to conclusions which involve such gross misrepresentation that Chrysippus, for one, could scarcely have accepted some of his allegation as even relevant to Stoic theory” (Long 1970, 247–248). I agree with these scholars’ general verdict: many of the arguments in Alexander’s *De fato* are unconvincing because Alexander falsely believes that Stoic determinism is incompatible with the Aristotelian notions he uses to oppose them. There is one argument, however, that I believe does not miss its target. This is a version of the Lazy Argument (ἀργὸς λόγος, also sometimes called “the Idle Argument”).

Traditional versions of the Lazy Argument claim that, if Stoic determinism were true, we could comfortably let the world run its course while we lean back and do nothing.<sup>2</sup> Since everything is predetermined, our actions do not matter: they do not change the course of fate. A belief in Stoic determinism thus leads to inaction and, since this is too high a price to pay, we should reject it. Such traditional versions of the Lazy Argument are generally considered to be unconvincing.<sup>3</sup> Stoic philosophers can argue, and have argued, that our decisions and actions do matter because they are part of the causal structure of the cosmos. We should not be inactive because we are causes of what happens in the cosmos and therefore morally responsible for our actions and their consequences.

In this paper, I explore a new version of the Lazy Argument that Alexander proposes in *De fato* XXI and that, if expanded upon, escapes the Stoic response. This version of the Lazy Argument does not claim that our actions do not matter, but that from a pragmatic point of view it is better for us not to believe in Stoic determinism since its truth is uncertain. If Stoic determinism should be false, but we believe it to be true, we and others might suffer: some of us might become lazy and refrain from doing good things in the belief that what is necessary<sup>4</sup> should be correct, but we believe it to be

<sup>2</sup> The traditional version of the argument is transmitted in Cicero, *Fat.*, 28–29 and Origen, *Against Celsus* II.20, 342.62–71 (Borret). We find traces of the argument also in Eusebius, *Evangelical preparation* VI.8, 25–29. A precursor of the argument appears in Aristotle’s *Int.* IX, 18b30–33.

<sup>3</sup> See, however, (Brennan 2005, 270–287), and (Lockie 2018, 153–176), for attempts to defend versions of the argument.

<sup>4</sup> I use the terms “(pre)determined”, “fated” and “necessary” interchangeably. When the Stoics sometimes argue that everything is (pre)determined or fated but that not everything is necessary, they use a different sense of “necessary” than I do here, namely the necessity of external force. See Cicero, *Fat.* 42, and my footnote 27; (Long 1970, 248–249), (Sharples 1975, 255 n. 20) will happen anyway. Yet, if Stoic determinism, (Hankinson 1999b, 527–528).

false, we and others will not suffer for it: determinism will still work through us, and we will do what was necessary all along.

To see the merits of this new version of the Lazy Argument, I first give two examples that show how most of Alexander's arguments against Stoic determinism fail (section 2) and discuss how traditional versions of the Lazy Argument trope were rebutted by Chrysippus (section 3). I then come back to Alexander's new version of the Lazy Argument and show how it can escape Chrysippus' response (section 4).

## 2. Alexander's Objections to Stoic Determinism

Alexander's *De fato* is divided into two sections: In the first, he gives a brief account of his own peripatetic position on fate and determinism (chapters III–VI). By far the larger part is taken up by his polemic against Stoic determinism (chapters VII–XXXVIII). To understand the usual negative judgment concerning the persuasiveness of Alexander's polemic, I discuss two instructive examples.

The first example is Alexander's argument that Stoic determinism is incompatible with the existence of contingent properties (τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον) (IX, 174,30–175,7). The argument runs as follows. According to Stoic determinism, all things are necessary (ἀναγκαῖον). Thus, if we could show that there are properties that are contingent, we would have a counterexample to Stoic determinism. Alexander claims that contingent properties indeed exist and lists a couple of examples: a person's turning the neck, their blinking of an eye, their sitting and standing, or the warmth or coldness of water. These properties are contingent according to Alexander because things could have been otherwise: a person could not have turned their neck, blinked with their eye, sat, or stood, and the water in my glass could have been warm rather than cold. Contingent properties contrast with necessary properties: fire, for example, must be warm and cannot be cold; and snow must be cold and cannot be hot. So, wherever something has an inherent capacity of assuming opposite properties, these properties are contingent; but where something can only have one of two opposite properties, this property is necessary.

Alexander uses a sense of “non-necessary” or “contingent” that goes back to a distinction between necessary and contingent or accidental (συμβεβηκός) properties in Aristotle (*An. pr.* I.13, 32a16–b14; *An. post.* I.4, 73a34–b5, 73b16–b21). Aristotle claims that properties are necessary if they are determined by their subject's essence.<sup>5</sup> The hotness of fire and the coldness of

<sup>5</sup> This includes so called “per se accidents” that are not part of their subject's essence but determined by it (*Metaph.* V.30, 1025a30–34). Per se accidents are not contingent or ac-

snow, for example, are necessary because they are determined by the essence of fire and snow: fire and snow cannot lose these properties without ceasing to be what they are. Contingent properties, by contrast, are not determined by their subject's essence: people can sit *or* stand without ceasing to be what they are, and water can be hot *or* cold without ceasing to be water, because their essence does not determine those states.

Yet, Alexander's argument fails because the existence of non-necessary properties so defined—that is, properties that are not determined by their subject's essence—is not a counterexample to Stoic determinism. Alexander is misled by, or knowingly exploits, the homonymy of the term “contingent”, which he and the Stoics use in different senses.<sup>6</sup> Alexander uses “contingent” in the sense of “not determined by the subject's essence”. But when the Stoics claim that everything is necessary and nothing contingent, they do not claim that there are no properties that, given the essence of their subjects, cannot be otherwise. They claim that there is nothing that, given the current state of the cosmos, could possess properties other than the properties it has at any specific time.<sup>7</sup> Note that Stoic determinism arises from the following two claims:

- A. Everything has a cause.<sup>8</sup>
- B. Each set of causes and other causal factors<sup>9</sup> can only have one specific effect.<sup>10</sup>

If everything in the cosmos has a cause (A) and each set of causal factors at any time of the cosmos can only have one specific effect (B), then the current sets of causal factors in the cosmos determine their effects as well as all future sets of causal factors. For the Stoics, everything is made necessary by past and present sets of causal factors. Fate is thus an inescapable sequence

cidental in the Aristotelian sense I describe here; they are accidents or accidental in the sense of “not being part of their subject's essence”.

<sup>6</sup> Both senses of “contingent” go back to a core sense, namely “can be otherwise”. This is analogous to how Aristotle thinks that all senses of “necessary” go back to the core sense of “cannot be otherwise” (*Metaph.* V.5, 1015a20–b15).

<sup>7</sup> See also (Long 1970, 252–254), (Sharples 1975, 250).

<sup>8</sup> Cicero, *Div.* II.61; Cicero, *Fat.* 20–21, 34; Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1045c; Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 4.4.35–6. For a commentary on claim A, see (Bobzien 2004, 39–40). According to Cicero, Chrysippus justifies claim A by means of the principle of bivalence; cf. (Hankinson 1999a, 516–519), (Bobzien 2004, 59–86).

<sup>9</sup> By “causal factors” I mean all causally relevant necessary conditions without which the effect would not have come about; these causal factors include causes, but not all causal factors need to be (active) causes for the Stoics. Cf. (Hankinson 1999b, 494–497).

<sup>10</sup> Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1045c–d; Alexander, *De fato* XV, 185,7–11, XXII, 192,21–25. For an analysis of claim B, see (Bobzien 2004, 40–44).

of causal factors that always has and always will determine everything that happens in the cosmos.<sup>11</sup> “Consequently”, as Cicero surmises the Stoic position on fate, “nothing has happened which was not going to be, and likewise nothing is going to be of which nature does not contain causes working to bring that very thing about” (*Div.* I, 125–126).

So, for the Stoics, a property would be non-necessary or contingent in the relevant sense if it was not determined by past and present causal factors. But Alexander does not show that there are contingent properties in this sense but rather that there are contingent properties in the Aristotelian sense. The problem with this strategy, however, is that properties can be contingent in the Aristotelian sense *and* at the same time necessary in the Stoic sense. The temperature of the Mediterranean, for example, is not determined by its essence, and is thus contingent in the Aristotelian sense, but it could still be determined by past and present causal factors and thus necessary in the Stoic sense. By using an irrelevant sense of “contingent”, Alexander misses his target.

The second example of Alexander’s objections against Stoic determinism fails in a similar fashion. Alexander claims that Stoic determinism conflicts with the existence of effects that come to be “from chance” (ἀπὸ τυχή) since those effects are contingent rather than necessary (171,18–175,28). Using Aristotle’s notion of “chance”, Alexander claims that effects come to be from chance when they are brought about by activities that have a different end (172,17–19; cf. *Arist., Ph.* II,5, 196b29–a8; *Metaph.* V,20, 1025a14–34). To use a variation of Aristotle’s example, if I dig a hole in the garden to plant a rose bush and thereby find a buried treasure, finding the treasure came about from chance because finding the treasure was not the end of my digging. Another way of putting it is that things that come to be from chance only have accidental (κατὰ συμβεβηκός) causes, not per se (καθ’ αὐτό) causes; and accidental causes, Alexander believes, cause contingent effects. Digging a hole for the sake of planting a rose bush, for example, does not necessitate finding a treasure.

Again, Alexander is misled by, or knowingly exploits, the homonymy of the term “contingent” as applied to chance effects. Alexander uses the term in the sense of “only has accidental causes”. But when the Stoics claim that every effect is made necessary by its set of causal factors and that there are thus no contingent effects, they use “contingent” in a different sense: as “not determined by past and present causal factors”. The Stoics do not deny that there are effects that were brought about by accidental causes, i.e., causes that did not have this effect as their end. They deny that there are effects that had no cause at all and that there are effects that, given their sets of causal

<sup>11</sup> See also Aëtius I.28; Gellius, *NA* VII.2, 3.

factors, could have been otherwise. Alexander believes that Stoic determinism is incompatible with the existence of things that happen by chance in the Aristotelian sense of the term, but it is not.<sup>12</sup> The finding of the treasure may not have been the end of my digging the whole, but it could still have been determined by past and present causal factors. As before, Alexander's argument misses its target.

To give an appropriate counterexample to Stoic determinism Alexander would have to show that there are things that have no cause or that there are sets of causal factors that can have either of (at least) two effects. Alexander does not even attempt to give such a counterexample and, if he tried, he would have run into further difficulties. For, whatever example one comes up with of a thing that has no cause or is that not made necessary by present sets of causal factors, the Stoics can always claim that our restricted epistemic situation is at fault. We might simply not know the complete set of causal factors yet since causal factors can be hard to grasp. This means that as long as we do not know all causal factors in the cosmos criticizing Stoic determinism by way of searching for counterexamples seems ineffective.

### 3. Traditional Versions of the Lazy Argument and Chrysippus' Response

Another way of attacking Stoic determinism is to argue that it has untenable practical consequences for important human practices such as praise, blame and punishment. Alexander addresses this possibility in several chapters of *De fato*. I only discuss three of the arguments that he mentions; all three are versions of the Lazy Argument. In this part of the paper, I show how Alexander's first two versions are unconvincing.

Alexander's first version of the Lazy Argument goes as follows. If Stoic determinism were true, deliberating about the best course of action would be in vain:

But if we should do everything we do through some causes laid down beforehand, so as to have no power to do this particular thing or not, but [only] to do precisely each of the things that we do, in the same way as the fire that heats and the stone that is carried downwards and the cylinder that rolls down the slope—what advantage comes to us, as far as action is concerned, from deliberating about what will be done? For [on this view] it is necessary for us, even after deliberating, to do what we would have done if we had not deliberated, so that no

<sup>12</sup> See, for a similar conclusion, (Long 1970, 250–252).

advantage comes to us from the deliberating beyond the fact of having deliberated itself. (XI, 179,12–20, trans. Sharples)<sup>13</sup>

Alexander's second version is that, if Stoic determinism were true, exerting any effort would be in vain:

What else will happen other than that all men, on account of such a belief [i.e. that Stoic determinism is true], will say goodbye to all the things that come about with any toil and concern, and choose the pleasures that are accompanied by ease, on the grounds that the things that must come about will certainly come about, even if they themselves do nothing noble concerning them? (XVI, 186,30–187,2)

Alexander's arguments have an older precedent. Cicero, in his own *De fato*, reports that the Stoics faced the following objection: our actions are in vain because they do not matter (28–29). It does not matter, for example, whether we call the doctor when we are ill; our recovery does not depend on whether we see a doctor but on what fate dictates. In general, then, we can be lazy knowing that whatever happens was always bound to happen.<sup>14</sup> This, the critics reportedly conclude, “will lead to the entire abolition of action from life” (29, trans. H. Rackham).

In both of his arguments, Alexander gives the core idea of Cicero's Lazy Argument his own spin. His first version is not about the uselessness of *actions* but about the uselessness of *deliberations*.<sup>15</sup> His second version does not claim that we would *stop acting* if we believed Stoic determinism to be true, but that we would *stop choosing the more difficult but noble actions*. Still, like Cicero's Lazy Argument, Alexander's arguments claim that, if Stoic determinism were true, activities that we usually deem integral to a human life (deliberations, actions, noble actions) would become useless, so that laziness (either choosing inaction or choosing easier but ignoble actions) would seem permissible.

Lazy Arguments would have no force against the Stoics if the Stoics accepted that laziness is an acceptable choice in all circumstances. We must

<sup>13</sup> εἰ δὲ εἶημεν πάντα ἃ πράττομεν πράττοντες διὰ τινος αἰτίας προκαταβεβλημένας ὡς μηδεμίαν ἔχειν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ πράξει τὸδε τι καὶ μή, ἀλλ' ἀφωρισμένως ἕκαστον πράττειν ὧν πράττομεν, παραπλησίως τῷ θερμαίνοντι πυρὶ καὶ τῷ λίθῳ τῷ κάτω φερομένῳ καὶ τῷ κατὰ τοῦ πρᾶνουῦς κυλιόμενῳ κυλίνδρῳ, τί πλέον ἡμῖν εἰς τὸ πράττειν ἐκ τοῦ βουλευσασθαι περὶ τοῦ πραχθησομένου γίνεται ὃ γὰρ ἂν ἐπράχαμεν μὴ βουλευσάμενοι, τοῦτο καὶ μετὰ τὸ βουλευσασθαι πράττειν ἀνάγκη, ὥστ' οὐδὲν ἡμῖν πλέον ἐκ τοῦ βουλευσασθαι αὐτοῦ τοῦ βουλευσασθαι περιγίνεται. All translations from Alexander's *De fato* are from Sharples' 1983 edition.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed analysis of traditional Lazy Arguments, see (Bobzien 2004, 180–198).

<sup>15</sup> Alexander also adds an Aristotelian twist to this version of the argument: he claims that deliberations cannot be in vain because nature does nothing in vain (*De fato* XI, 179,23–180,2).

thus presume that the Stoics would rather avoid holding a theory that makes laziness an acceptable choice that they cannot reprimand. They do so for good reasons. Imagine your daughter decided that she wants to spend her life on the sofa, sleeping and daydreaming all day. You would probably prefer to believe a philosophical theory that provides some means of convincing her that she is wasting her life. Or imagine that a child fell into a pond and that you have the option of saving it with little risk to yourself. We can assume that most philosophers, even Stoics, would prefer a theory that allows them to reprimand the choice to let the child drown.

Cicero reports that this version of the Lazy Argument was met by Chrysippus (*Fat*, 30),<sup>16</sup> who responded that our actions (and presumably also our deliberations about these actions) are not in vain because they are co-fated with the effects they bring about.<sup>17</sup> In other words, our deliberations and actions matter because, without them, fate would be different. This is not because our actions and deliberations have the power to change fate, but because fate works through them: our actions and deliberations were necessary, but if some other actions and deliberations had been necessary, then the cosmos would have taken a different course. If you decide to save the child, the child lives—not because the child would have lived even if you had decided otherwise, but because your decision and the survival of the child were co-fated. Thus, the traditional version of the Lazy Argument goes wrong because it treats fate as a series of milestones in a person's life, not as a nexus of all causal factors and effects in the cosmos—a nexus that includes our deliberations and actions.

Chrysippus' response would probably be enough to satisfy someone who (because she believes in the Aristotelian doctrine that nature does nothing in vain) wants to find some purpose for deliberation and action.<sup>18</sup> How-

<sup>16</sup> Incomplete versions of this response are also transmitted in Origin, *Against Celsus* II.20, 342,71–82; Seneca, *QNat* II.37,3–38,4; Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* VI.8, 25–29.

<sup>17</sup> Cicero gives two examples for co-fatedness: (1) Laius having intercourse with a woman and him being killed by his son; (2) Milo wrestling at Olympia and having a wrestling opponent. From these examples, it might initially seem that only those causal factors are co-fated with their effect that are *universally* necessary for this effect to happen: in whichever way fate plays out, Laius can only be killed by his son (at the time), if he had intercourse with a woman first; likewise, Milo can only wrestle at Olympia if he has an opponent. But note that no such universally necessary relation holds between the recovery of a patient and calling the doctor in the initial example of the Lazy Argument: patients can recover without having seen a doctor. Thus, Chrysippus' point must be that *all* necessary causal factors are co-fated with the effect they necessitate. Bobzien's detailed analysis of Chrysippus' response in Cicero and other sources confirms this; see (Bobzien 2004, 199–233, esp. 221–226). For a different interpretation, see (Brennan 2005, 274–277).

<sup>18</sup> Brennan (2005, 283–285) objects that Chrysippus' response does not show that deliberation has a point. Brennan claims (just like Alexander in *De fato* XI) that we cannot make sense



ever, this response does not address a worry that appears to underlie the Lazy Argument. The worry is this: even if the Stoics can show that our deliberations and actions are not in vain, one can still argue that laziness is always an acceptable choice in a world in which our deliberations and actions are necessary. For, if our actions and deliberations are necessary, they do not seem to be up to us (ἐφ' ἡμῖν); and if they are not up to us, we cannot be morally responsible for them or be reprimanded for their consequences (Alexander, *De fato* XVI, 187,8–188,1).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, if fate works through me, then making the choice to be lazy seems like being pushed. Imagine somebody pushes me onto a busy street: that I step onto the street is not up to me, and I am neither morally responsible for the accident that ensues, nor should I be reprimanded for having caused it. So, if Stoic determinism is true, who can blame me for spending my life on the sofa or letting the child drown?

To make the Stoic answer to the traditional version of the Lazy Argument trope more powerful, we should add another of Chrysippus' arguments: his famous argument for the compatibility of Stoic determinism with moral responsibility.<sup>20</sup> The upshot of the argument is that fate does not work through us like a person that pushes us onto a street but through our individual nature. It is, in some sense, up to us how we deliberate and act. To argue for this claim, Chrysippus uses his famous analogy of a rolling cylinder, transmitted in both Cicero's *De fato* (42–43) and Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* (VII.2, 11–13). Here is Gellius' more detailed report:

“For instance,” he [Chrysippus] says, “if you roll a cylindrical stone over a sloping, steep piece of ground, you do indeed furnish the beginning and cause of its rapid descent, yet soon its speeds onward, not because you make it do so, but because of its peculiar form and natural tendency to roll; just so the order, the law, and the inevitable quality of fate set in motion the various classes of things and the beginnings of causes, but the carrying out of our designs and thoughts,

of deliberation if deliberators cannot choose between at least two options. To counter this objection Chrysippus can distinguish between the internal experience of the deliberator and the perspective of fate. To the deliberator the choice is open in the sense that it is her that chooses an action; two options are “possible” to her in the sense that nothing except her own nature prevents her from choosing one of the options. If we take on the perspective of fate, however, it was always predetermined what she would choose. On the Stoic account of possibility, see Alexander, *De fato* X, 176,14–16; Diog. Laert. VII.75; (Frede 1982, 287).

<sup>19</sup> This is on the assumption that moral indignation is only appropriate towards a choice that somebody was morally responsible for. In the ancient debate about moral responsibility, this was never questioned.

<sup>20</sup> The argument has been the object of countless interpretations, see for example (Hankinson 1999b, 387–490), (Bobzien 2004, 234–329).

and even our actions, are regulated by each individual's own will and the characteristics of his mind." (VII.2, 11, trans. John C. Rolfe)<sup>21</sup>

Let us first talk about the causation that makes the cylindrical stone roll, and then about the conclusion Chrysippus draws from it for the causation of human actions and a person's moral responsibility for these actions.

What causes the rolling of the cylindrical stone in this example? Stoics and their interpreters have much to say about this, but for now, let us focus on two causal factors.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, it is a person who gives the stone a push. Without some push from the outside, the stone would not have started to roll. (We can assume that it is too heavy and/or the ground not steep enough for the stone to roll on its own.) On the other hand, it is the individual shape of the stone: its cylindrical form. If the stone had been square, a push might not have been enough to make it roll. Thus, we can differentiate the following two<sup>23</sup> factors in the stone's rolling:

- a. The external impetus (here: the person pushing the stone)
- b. The individual nature of the thing affected by the external impetus (here: the shape of the stone)

According to a distinction of Stoic causes we find in Plutarch, Chrysippus seems to have called (a) the preceding cause and (b) the complete cause.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> "Sicut," inquit, "lapidem cylindrum si per spatia terrae prona atque derupta iacias, causam quidem ei et initium praecipitantiæ feceris, mox tamen ille praeceps volvitur, non quia tu id iam facis, sed quoniam ita sese modus eius et formae volubilitas habet: sic ordo et ratio et necessitas fati genera ipsa et principia causarum movet, impetus vero consiliorum mentiumque nostrarum actionesque ipsas voluntas cuiusque propria et animorum ingenia moderantur."

<sup>22</sup> There are many interesting details about Stoic causation present in the analogy. For instance, notice that the causes (the person that pushes the stone, the shape of the stone) are bodies, while the effect (the cylinder's descent) is not a body but happens to a body. The Stoics believe that only bodies can act on bodies, but that effects are not bodies themselves but predicates like "rolling down a hill" or "being cut". See Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* IX.211; (Bobzien 2004, 258–261).

<sup>23</sup> We might insist that there is a third causal factor in Chrysippus' example, namely the terrain the stone is on. If the terrain had been flat or sloped upwards, the stone might not have rolled. In Chrysippus' analysis, however, this factor is not emphasized. Clement reports a name that Stoics might have given this kind of cause: the helping cause, i.e., a cause that intensifies or hampers the effect (Clement, *Strom.* VIII.9.25). On the other hand, the terrain might not be a cause at all (and rather a causal factor) for the Stoics because it does not seem to be active.

<sup>24</sup> Plutarch, *Stoic. rep.* 1056a–c. On the preceding cause, see also Clement, *Strom.* VIII.9.33.1–9; Cicero, *Fat.* 24–25; Galen, *De causis continentibus* I.1–II.4. It is possible that the complete cause is the same as the so called "cohesive cause", see Clement, *Strom.* VIII.9.33.1–9; but see (Bobzien 2004, 268), for reservations about this identification. On the Pre-Stoic history of cohesive causes, see (Coughlin 2020).

Now, according to Cicero, Chrysippus recognized the same two causal factors in the causation of action (*Fat.* 41–45).<sup>25</sup> For Chrysippus, an action is caused when an object of perception imprints its representation as desirable or undesirable in us and we assent to this representation. Thus, my action to eat the chocolate cake on the buffet arises because I see the chocolate cake and I assent to its desirable nature. The impression of the perceptible object is the preceding cause: the external impetus. The complete cause is that which determines whether I assent, and this is my individual nature, which includes my character.<sup>26</sup> If, for example, I hate chocolate cake or if I believe that eating chocolate cake would damage my health, I may very well not assent. But if I love chocolate cake or if I am not disciplined enough to refrain from eating the unhealthy dessert, then I will assent.

Chrysippus follows from this that our actions are up to us because the external impetus (my seeing the chocolate cake on the buffet) does not directly lead to the action (me eating the chocolate cake). Even though I see a cake on the buffet, it is me who decides for or against its consumption. So, while there would not have been an action without the external impetus, it is the assent—determined by my individual nature—that directly leads to the action. But this means that our actions are determined by our individual natures: if our natures were different, our actions would be different. So, actions are up to us not because we could have chosen otherwise; they are up to us because we are free from external coercion and determined primarily by factors internal to us.<sup>27</sup>

At this point, more recent philosophers would object that, if our individual natures are determined by external causal factors, then our actions cannot be up to us since we are not their ultimate source.<sup>28</sup> Stoic determin-

<sup>25</sup> See also Philo, *Legum allegoriae* I.30; Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1057a. For discussions of Chrysippus' theory of mind, see (Inwood 1985) and (Annas 1992, 89–102).

<sup>26</sup> On the Stoic concept of someone's individual nature, see (Sharples 1983, 9–10), (Bobzien 2004, 267).

<sup>27</sup> In Cicero's report, it can seem as if Chrysippus limited fate to the preceding cause and exempted our assent from the causal nexus of fate. This would appear to be in contradiction with Chrysippus' claim that everything in the world is predetermined through fate. There are two ways to avoid the contradiction. Either Chrysippus is claiming that fate does not include all causes but that it still necessitates everything together with other causes (Hankinson 1999a, 530–553); or Chrysippus uses the term "fate" here as his opponent do, namely as "the external force of necessity" that is like an external push (Cicero, *Fat.* 39–42). Against these opponents, Chrysippus responds that in the causation of an action only the impression of the perceptible object is like an external push; but this impression is only a proximate preceding cause, not the main preceding cause, which is the assent—and the assent is up to us. The second alternative seems more likely to me. See also (Bobzien 2004, 143, 255–258). For a discussion of the plausibility of the Stoic view, see (Frede 1982, 289–292).

<sup>28</sup> More recent debates about the compatibility of free will and determinism turn on the question of whether actions can be up to us when agents are not their ultimate source. Critics

ism indeed implies that our individual natures are determined by external causal factors, which could be biological, educational, or circumstantial.<sup>29</sup> Whether this excludes the possibility that our actions are up to us is a matter of philosophical controversy to this day and it would go beyond the scope of this paper to defend Chrysippus' position within this debate. A brief<sup>30</sup> argument for Chrysippus' thesis must suffice. Consider what we mean by saying that an action is up to us. Usually, we mean that someone was able to deliberate about her choice of action and that she chose her action based on her preferences. Imagine I chose to eat a piece of chocolate cake because I love the taste of chocolate. Now, also imagine I would excuse my eating the piece of cake by saying that eating it was not up to me because my parents had instilled a love of chocolate in me. Most people would not accept this excuse, and neither would Chrysippus. He would insist that I made my choice because of who I am and that this is the relevant sense in which the action was up to me.

Chrysippus believes that having chosen an action based on our individual natures is enough to make us morally responsible for those actions and the proper subject of moral indignation. Gellius reports that Chrysippus took the analogy of the cylindrical stone to show that problematic behaviour cannot be excused by recourse to fate:

Therefore he [Chrysippus] says that wicked, slothful, sinful and reckless men ought not to be endured or listened to, who, when they are caught fast in guilt and sin, take refuge in the inevitable nature of fate, as if in the asylum of some shrine, declaring that their outrageous actions must be charged, not to their own heedlessness, but to fate. (*NA VII.2, 13*, trans. J. C. Rolfe)<sup>31</sup>

We cannot excuse bad behaviour because “harm”, as Chrysippus is reported to have said, “comes to each of them through themselves, and they go astray through their own impulse and are harmed by their own purpose and determination.” (Gellius, *NA VII.2, 12*)

have argued that many or all compatibilists' arguments cannot show that actions are up to us in the relevant sense. See, among many others, Velleman (1992), Pereboom (2001) and Mele (2019) against compatibilists' accounts by Frankfurt (1969), Watson (1975), Wolf (1990) and Fischer and Ravizza (1998).

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Gellius, *NA VII.2, 6–10*; see also (Sedley 2009) on Chrysippus' view concerning the influence of air and stars on human psychology.

<sup>30</sup> For a similar but longer and more nuanced response to this objection, see (Brennan 2005, 257–262).

<sup>31</sup> *Propterea negat oportere ferri audirique homines aut nequam aut ignavos et nocentes et audaces, qui, cum in culpa et in maleficio revicti sunt, perfugiunt ad fati necessitatem tamquam in aliquod fani asylum et, quae pessime fecerunt, ea non suae temeritati, sed fato esse attribuenda dicunt.*

Let us come back to how this helps Chrysippus to respond to the traditional version of Lazy Arguments. When critics suggests that Stoic determinism leaves us no way of reprimanding the lazy Chrysippus can argue that they are mistaken. Not being lazy, deliberating and acting, matters because it is through deliberation and action that fate takes shape. If I decide not to save a child, it may very well die. And I would be morally responsible for the child's death because it was my individual nature, my character, that led me to make the decision to stay on the couch and continue daydreaming instead.

Against someone like Alexander, this is an apt argument. As an Aristotelian, Alexander should notice that Chrysippus' account is compatible with Aristotle's notion of moral responsibility (which, however, Aristotle did not develop against the backdrop of complete causal determinism). Aristotle believes that we should receive praise and blame for our actions when we did them voluntarily, and our actions are voluntary if *we* are their source (ἀρχή) rather than something external like the wind or someone who pushes us, and if we are aware of the particular details of what we are doing (*Eth. Nic.* III.1, 110a15–18, 110b18–111a19). More specifically, the source of our voluntary actions is that which moves the relevant parts of our body (*Eth. Nic.* III.1, 110a15–17), which is a person's desire for an end (*Eth. Nic.* VII.5, 1147a33–35; *De motu an.* 8, 701b33–34). As far as Aristotle specifies what it means for us to be the source of our actions, his account of moral responsibility seems compatible with Chrysippus' account of moral responsibility. Purely from the standpoint of what Aristotle says, then, an Aristotelian like Alexander has nothing to object to Chrysippus' account of moral responsibility.

Alexander could of course go beyond Aristotle's account of moral responsibility. He could object that we are not really the source of our actions if our desires are not up to us because our individual nature, which determines our desires, is not up to us. But Alexander does not do so, and so it is worth looking for alternative objections to Stoic determinism in Alexander's *De fato*. Such an objection is a new version of the Lazy Argument trope that Alexander presents at a later point of *De fato*.

#### 4. A New Version of the Lazy Argument Trope

In chapter XXI, Alexander suggests a new version of the Lazy Argument (191,2–25). This argument urges us to consider the risks of falsely believing that Stoic determinism is true and weigh them against the risks of falsely believing that Stoic determinism is wrong.

Suppose, Alexander claims, we could not decide whether Stoic determinism were true or false:

[W]hich belief would be safer and less dangerous for men to obey, and which false [judgment] would be preferable; [i] to suppose, if all things do come to be in accordance with fate, that that is not the case but that we too are in control of doing something or not doing it; or [ii], if there is something that depends on us in the way that we have previously stated, to be persuaded that this is false and that even all the things that are done by us in accordance with our power come about compulsorily? (191,6–12)<sup>32</sup>

Alexander wants us to compare the risk of two options:<sup>33</sup>

- i. Stoic determinism is true, but we believe it to be false.
- ii. Stoic determinism is false, but we believe it to be true.

In the first situation, Alexander believes, we do not risk much:

[I]f all things came to be in accordance with fate, those who persuaded themselves that they have power over certain things both to do them and not would not at all go wrong in what they do by this belief, because they would not even be in control of any of the things that are brought about by them in the first place; so that the danger from erring in *this* way extends only to words [and not to deeds]. (191,13–17)<sup>34</sup>

We do not risk much in this situation because we would only go wrong in words, not in deeds. Let us contextualize this. Imagine you believe that Stoic determinism is wrong and that the opposite, some form of indeterminism, is true. You will deliberate about what to do and act accordingly, thinking

<sup>32</sup> ποτέρα δόξη πείθεσθαι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀσφαλέστερόν τε καὶ ἀκινδυνότερον, καὶ ποῖον ψεῦδος αἰρετώτερον, πότερον τὸ πάντων γινομένων καθ' εἰμαρμένην [ἢ] μὴ οὕτως ἔχειν ὑπολαμβάνειν, ἀλλ' εἶναι καὶ ἡμᾶς τοῦ τι πράξει ἢ μὴ πράξει κυρίου, ἢ ὄντος τινὸς καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῖν οὕτως, ὡς προειρήκαμεν, πεπεισθαι τὸ τοῦτο μὲν ψεῦδος εἶναι, πάντα δὲ καὶ τὰ ὑφ' ἡμῶν πραττόμενα κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν ἐξουσίαν γίνεσθαι κατηναγκασμένως.

<sup>33</sup> Weidemann (1999) claims that Alexander's argument has the form of Pascal's Wager. It only presents half of a Pascal's Wager, however, since Alexander only weighs the risks of believing in Stoic determinism with the risk of believing in his indeterminism, not the risks *and* the possible advantages. It seems to me that considering the advantages does not tip the balance in favor of either the Stoics or Alexander. The Stoics, on the one hand, could argue that the risk of believing in Stoic determinism is outweighed by the possible advantage of becoming happy, or happier, when we learn that we should only desire what indeed happens (cf. Hahmann 2007, 373 n. 57). Alexander, on the other hand, could likewise argue that believing that we are not completely determined can provide us with a sense of freedom and agency that is conducive to happiness.

<sup>34</sup> οἱ μὲν ἀπάντων γινομένων καθ' εἰμαρμένην αὐτοὺς πείθοντες ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχοντάς τινων τοῦ τε πράττειν αὐτὰ καὶ μὴ οὐδὲν ἂν παρὰ τήνδε τὴν πίστιν ἐν τοῖς πραττομένοις ἀμάρτοιεν, τῷ μὴδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν γινομένων τινὸς ὑφ' αὐτῶν εἶναι κύριοι, ὥσθ' ὁ κίνδυνος τῆς κατὰ τοῦτο διαμαρτίας πρόεισιν μέχρι ῥημάτων.

that you are free—in the sense of not being fully determined by external or internal causal factors—to choose between at least two options. Since you believe that you have this power, you might even take deliberation very seriously; you will reflect on your choices, determine what to do and thereby change the course of the cosmos in potentially consequential ways. Now, add to this image that, in fact, you were mistaken about Stoic determinism: everything you deliberate and do was predetermined. Did your deliberations and actions go wrong because you falsely believed Stoic determinism to be incorrect? No, Alexander claims: your deliberations and actions were predetermined, and so you did what you were always destined to do.

In the second instance, however, we risk going seriously wrong not just in words but also in actions:

But if, when there is something that depends on us and all things do not come to be of necessity, we are going to be persuaded that we are not in control of anything, [then] we will leave aside many of the things that ought to be done by us both on account of having deliberated about them and on account of eagerly undertaking the efforts involved in what is done; we will have become lazy with regard to doing anything of our own accord, on account of the belief that what ought to be come about would come about, even if we did not exert ourselves about what needed to be done. (191,17–23)<sup>35</sup>

Imagine you believed that Stoic determinism is correct. This belief, Alexander claims, can lead you to abstain from deliberations and actions. There are several reasons one might give for why this might happen, which I will explain below. But if we accept for the moment that believing in Stoic determinism can lead to laziness, then we must see that it is risky to believe in Stoic determinism. For, in case Stoic determinism is wrong, we might have turned down the opportunity to deliberate and act, or to deliberate and act *well*; we will have spent our days lazily on the sofa and let the child drown—all on account of a false belief.

The plausibility of this argument depends on whether it is true that promoting Stoic determinism risks making people lazy. Notice, first, that Alexander's question here is not, or at least does not have to be, whether the *perfect* rational agent could become lazy. The perfect rational agent (the Stoic sage for example) may have access to a form of understanding of determinism, human agency and moral responsibility that is unavailable to most.

<sup>35</sup> εἰ δέ γε, ὄντος τινὸς καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῶν καὶ μὴ πάντων γινομένων ἐξ ἀνάγκης, πείθεσθαι μὲν μηδενὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι κυρίου, πολλὰ παραλείψομεν τῶν δεόντων ἂν πραχθέντων ὑφ' ἡμῶν καὶ διὰ τὸ βουλευσασθαι περὶ αὐτῶν καὶ διὰ τὸ τοὺς ἐπὶ τοῖς πραττομένοις καμάτων προθύμως ὑφίστασθαι, ἀργότεροι γένομενοι πρὸς τὸ δι' αὐτῶν τι ποιεῖν διὰ τὴν πίστιν τοῦ, καὶ μηδὲν ἡμῶν πραγματευομένων περὶ τῶν πρακτέων, τὸ ὀφείλον <ἀν> γενέσθαι.

Alexander's question could instead be whether the *average* rational agent could become lazy if they believed in Stoic determinism. Crucially, for this risk to occur, the Stoics do not need to be wrong about determinism, human agency, and moral responsibility; their views only need to be controversial given the average agent's limited epistemic position. Thus, Alexander does not need to provide irrefutable objections against the Stoics; he only needs to give average rational agents good reasons to be lazy.

Are there any good reasons for average rational agents to become lazy when they believe in Stoic determinism? The only reason Alexander himself presents is that people could come to believe that their deliberations and actions do not matter: from the assumption that everything is determined they would conclude that the outcome of their actions will be the same whatever they decide to do. Although it is possible that a small minority of agents would come to this conclusion, it seems unlikely that many people would. Stoics could argue that most average rational agents will understand and accept Chrysippus' objection that the conclusion rests on a misunderstanding of Stoic determinism: our deliberations and actions matter in a deterministic world because they are part of the causal nexus; fate is not like an outside push, it is a decision you make yourself.

There are, however, two more reasons why an average rational agent could become lazy, reasons that go beyond what Alexander himself says in the passage. First, agents could doubt whether they are in control of their deliberations and actions in a way that motivates them to exert any effort. Deliberations and actions matter, Chrysippus has argued, but he has also claimed that deliberations and actions are only up to us in the sense that they are based on our individual nature. Our individual nature, however, is not up to us. It is formed by external causal factors when we are children, and even our deliberations about how we want to change our characters are caused by our given characters and the external circumstances we encounter. The ultimate source of deliberation and action is thus not the agent but the causal factors that shaped the agent's individual nature. As mentioned, there is still no consensus among philosophers about whether deliberations and actions are only up to us when we are their ultimate source.<sup>36</sup> So, while some rational agents may become convinced that their actions are up to them in a way that motivates them to act, others have good reasons to resist the Stoic argument. And, if they do, they also have good reasons to believe that they are not morally responsible for their actions. For those agents, staying on the couch would seem like a good option: they can excuse their behaviour with the claim that their individual nature did not allow them to do otherwise.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 28.



Second, agents could doubt whether their deliberations and actions matter in a way that can motivate them to exert any effort. Brennan has pointed out that an agent cannot know which deliberations and actions are co-fated with a desired outcome and so also cannot know which deliberation and action will matter for the occurrence of this outcome.<sup>37</sup> Consider the case of saving a child from drowning. Perhaps the child will drown if you do not make the decision to save it. But it is also possible that someone else saves the child or that the child grabs onto a log and manages to swim to shore. This means that, in many cases, agents cannot know whether exerting effort is necessary for a desired outcome or whether the outcome will come about even with them being lazy. In a deterministic setting, Brennan argues, this is a problem. For, if Stoic determinism is true, it does not make sense to choose the action that most likely leads to the desired outcome: the outcome is already set and so agents cannot change the likelihood of the outcome; in this way, Brennan argues, laziness becomes a rational choice. Perhaps there is some recourse to Brennan's argument available to the Stoics.<sup>38</sup> Yet, for the risk to occur that Alexander is envisioning, Brennan's argument does not need to be irrefutable. It needs to be a good reason for epistemically limited agents in a contested area of philosophical debate.

Alexander does not mention these two reasons to become lazy himself, but his turn to the question of the risks involved in believing in Stoic determinism is nevertheless important. It allows us to turn away from questions about the truth of Stoic determinism and of Chrysippus' compatibilism, and it invites us to weigh the risks caused by the belief in Stoic determinism, including risks Alexander does not mention.

Before I close, I would like to note another consideration that Alexander does not mention: the risk of making people lazy does not only occur if Stoic determinism is false but also if Stoic determinism is true. Alexander notes that if Stoic determinism is false but agents believe it to be true, agents have good reasons to refrain from doing good but strenuous deeds when in fact this was not permissible. But if Stoic determinism is true and agents correctly believe in it, the same reasons that convinced agents about the permissibility of laziness in the first case could also convince them in the second case. Those agents could refrain from good but strenuous deeds

<sup>37</sup> (Brennan 2005, 275–277). There are some cases where we can know that an action is co-fated with an outcome if the outcome is to occur, namely in cases of universally necessary causes: Laios cannot be killed by his son if he does not father a child, for example, and Milo cannot win at Olympia without fighting an opponent at the games (see footnote 17).

<sup>38</sup> For example, they could argue that in the perspective of the agent what is most rational to do is to choose the action that usually leads to a desired outcome—not to increase the likelihood of the outcome but to express their desire for an outcome or, in other words, to make sense of their behavior in light of their desires and their characters.

when, according to the Stoics, to do so was not permissible. The laziness of these agents would have been predetermined, but it would nevertheless have been better if they had not believed in Stoic determinism. So, in either case, believing in Stoic determinism seems dangerous for average rational agents.

It is unclear what the Stoics would say about Alexander's new version of the Lazy Argument; no response has been transmitted. The Stoics could downplay the risk of making average agents lazy. They could argue, for example, that people have an inherent drive to act morally even when good reasons speak in favour of laziness.<sup>39</sup> Or they could argue that the risk of making some people lazy is outweighed by the possible benefits of believing in Stoic determinism.<sup>40</sup> But it is worth considering whether any response can be so convincing as to outweigh the dangers of promoting Stoic determinism on a large scale. Alexander at least would advise caution: "[I]t is clear", he surmises, "that it is preferable for those who engage in philosophy both to choose the less dangerous road themselves and to lead others on it." (191,24–26).

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<sup>39</sup> The Stoics argue that human beings tend to care about other human beings by nature (see Hierokles 9,3–10, 11,14–18; Cicero, *Fin.* III.62–68). Yet, such a tendency does not exclude the possibility that people act against this tendency (based on a firm belief that Stoic determinism is true for example), or that people only care about very few other people.

<sup>40</sup> See footnote 35.

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