

Review of: "Unfettered Compatibilism"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

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Review of Joe Campbell's 'Unfettered Compatibilism'

Campbell puts forth a variant of Compatibilism - a view that free will may be reconciled with determinism. His 'Unfettered Compatibilism' is meant to revive the late Stoic notion of 'self-rule', attributed to Epictetus, with reference to M Frede's [posthumous] *A Free Will* (2011). Frede focuses at Epictetus' notion of *prohairesis*, rather than *boulēsis*, to mark that it is an ability to make choices' (p. 46). The reliance on *prohairesis* seems to set Epictetus apart from other Stoics. But how this disposition 'to choose how to assent to impulsive impressions' (p. 46) may be differ from the orthodox Stoic theory of assent to impressions? Or put it other way, would *prohairesis* mean that a wise man could fail to assent to any rational impression?

Epictetus provided some examples, where he contrasted things that were subject to *prohairesis* and not [In text adjective προαιρετικός (or ἀπροαίρετος) was used].

Caesar has condemned him. This is inevitable [not subject to prohairesis], and so not an evil. He has been afflicted by it. This is subject to prohairesis; it is an evil. He has supported it bravely. This is subject to prohairesis; it is a good. (Discourses 3.8 [2-3])

Hence a wise man would see that certain events are beyond his power and assent to them (rather than becoming afflicted). For the Stoics generally, as I have argued elsewhere, the sage could not fail to assent to rational impressions.^[1] If so, in what sense this might be understood as a free will? Neither a sage nor a fool could fail, respectively, to assent or not to assent. Perhaps, in comparison with the early Stoics, Epictetus was more preoccupied with ordinary people rather than sages. But still assent is part of rational faculty that is 'up to us' as rational beings (to see that external events outside of our power). If one is able to discern that something is not 'up to us' (such as being condemned by Caesar), then the assent *must* be given. This view of Stoic [rational] assent to the inevitable is strengthened by the Stoic famous dog-cart example (Hippolytus *Refutations* I.21) that Campbell gives in the horse/cart version (with reference to L Tolstoy). The dog, tied to a cart, would be dragged together with it, even if unwilling. The willing one is led, but unwilling is dragged (Seneca *Letters* 107.11).

It may be then that the power of *choosing* is collapsing into the power of *discernment*. In his paper Campbell seems to distinguish these two powers (with reference to Luther). Campbell (who might be a bit more clear on this point) *may* link

the power of discernment (as power of choosing well [?AT]) to human flourishing. He certainly links the 'basic' [he used term 'guaranteed'] power of choosing (as a necessary [but not sufficient] condition for human flourishing) with free will. One (perhaps, 'technical') point might be made with respect to applying a notion of 'human flourishing' to a Stoic-like 'self-rule': the specifically Stoic focus might be on self-preservation, as based upon Chrysippus's notion of natural concern- *oikeiosis*, rather than on pleasure or happiness as such. Stoic human flourishing might exist only within their paradigm of living '*in accord with nature*' (though the early and later Stoics may diverge as to what may this mean).

Campbell contrasts (in my view rightly) the Stoic derived 'self-rule' with what he defines as 'leeway' views (linked by him to 'classical compatibilism') – a view that determinism may be compatible with *specific ability to do otherwise* (as essential to the power of choosing). Campbell seems to distinguish this ability to act otherwise from the Stoic-like power of choosing as pertained to merely assent (that may be given or not).

Campbell then raises the key question of moral responsibility as an intrinsic attribute of free will. He thus discusses the so called *Frankfurt* cases that are meant to show that there might be moral responsibility, even if there is no option to act otherwise. In his view, 'unfettered compatibilism' allows for moral responsibility *via* 'ability to willfully assent to or to resist an impulse to act' (p. 10).

It would be helpful, if Campbell could give a specific *Frankfurt* case example, applicable to the Stoic-like assent dilemmas, such as of being condemned by Caesar. Epictetus' language of 'good' and 'bad' *may* have moral connotation. But if I am just a feeble-minded person and cannot but feel pity for myself, am I morally responsible for my feeble-mindedness?

Perhaps, Epictetus thought so. But this might be not exactly the same scenario as in the cited case of the tax avoidance.

The discussion above is meant to be just this: an exchange of the views in the shared pursuit of knowledge. I have greatly enjoyed Joe Campbell's paper and readily recommend it to others as the most stimulating argument on the most exciting question (troubling the mankind at least two millenniums) : what is free will?

References

1. ^A *Taitlin*. 'Stoic natural law as Right Reason', J Crowe and CY Lee (eds) *Research Handbook on Natural Law Theory* (Edward Elgar 2019) 31-56.