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The Ideal of the Stoic Sportsman

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One need not be a scholar of ancient Greek philosophy to refer to "stoic" conduct or a "stoic" approach to certain matters, because the vocabulary related to this apparently antiquarian view of life has seeped into our common language. Look it up. In the *American Heritage Dictionary* a Stoic is defined as "one who is seemingly indifferent to or unaffected by pleasure or pain." The qualification noted by "seemingly" in the definition is necessitated by the dualism of the inner and the outer; it is stoic conduct or behavior that occasions such judgments about the psychology of the Stoic. The Stoic appears calm, cool, and dispassionate, perhaps in the face of situations that normally cause people to act quite differently: failure, tragedy, separation, loss, even death. In such situations we often believe it takes real character, strength of will, to act as the Stoic acts, because it seems natural to act and feel otherwise. Yet there might be some ambivalence in our evaluations of the Stoic's character, whose conduct might merely mask an emotional indifference that is cold, mechanical, and inhuman.

This evaluative ambivalence is mirrored in our responses to stoic conduct in the sports world. Borg versus McEnroe—the cool, calm, dispassionate, and classy demeanor of Borg versus the paranoid, uncivil, and unrestrained outbursts characteristic of McEnroe. The mature Stoic versus the emotional adolescent, graciousness versus boorishness. On the other hand, some sports-talk commentators, fans, and even insiders might view it differently: uninteresting impassivity versus fire and passion, unnatural and robotic control versus enthusiasm and commitment. What's wrong with "playing with emotion"? Why criticize McEnroe for being an authentic person? Some might assert that his psychological unrest expresses his competitiveness, the ultimate virtue of the sportsman[1] exemplified by the emotional player or coach, or even the fan who cares so much about his team. Pick your favorite stoic athletes from the more recent sports scene. Chris Evert. John Stockton. Tim Duncan. Barry Sanders. Cal Ripken. Annika Sorenstam. Identify the relevant contrasting non-Stoic players or coaches. Is it clear that the supposedly stoic approach is somehow better?

The fan's situation is particularly interesting in this context. Let's suppose a Stoic is, as the dictionary suggests, one who is seemingly indifferent to or unaffected by pleasure or pain. (We should, of course, wonder how this indifference arises or what are its reasons or grounds.) It might reasonably follow from this indifference that the Stoic is never unhappy, but surely most fans realize that being unhappy is a permanent possibility of being a fan. Let's call this the fan's dilemma. To be a fan is to care who wins, and caring who wins is a condition for being a happy fan. But it

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is also a condition for being unhappy, and to the extent that your team loses often, it will be a condition for being unhappy—often. A fan can avoid unhappiness by not caring, but then she's not really a fan. So being a fan seems inevitably to lead to unhappiness. If a Stoic is unaffected by pleasure or pain, how could a Stoic be a fan? Either I care about my team's successes and failures or I don't care. If I care, I will inevitably be unhappy—at least at times. If I don't care, I will avoid being unhappy, but I'll also be unable to experience fan happiness. If the Stoic's goal is to avoid unhappiness, how could a Stoic be a real fan? For fans of historically bad teams, the Chicago Cubs, for example, the problem is more acute, because the Cubs lose so consistently. Perhaps they need to take their perpetual losing more "stoically." But how could this make sense? Could a Cubs fan be a Stoic?[2]

There are four important questions related to anyone who is involved in sports as a player, coach, fan, or otherwise.[3] What would it be like to be a Stoic sportsman? Is it psychologically possible in practice? Is it a worthy ideal? Should one be a Stoic sportsman? First we present a caricature of what a Stoic sportsman would be like. We then challenge this negative view by explaining how it mischaracterizes the Stoic's outlook in general, and in particular the Stoic's approach to being a fan, a player, or a coach. We draw on texts from the ancient Stoic teacher Epictetus in developing our own positive account of Stoic sportsmanship. Finally, we offer an evaluation of the Stoic sportsman that leads in the direction of some conclusions about the worthiness of the ideal.

I. Simple Stoicism[4]

A caricature of the Stoic sportsman derives directly from a common misconception of the Stoic's view of life. Let's call this misconception simple Stoicism. According to this interpretation, which seems to have seeped into our common understanding and vocabulary, the Stoic is believed to be a stiff, emotionless person who never smiles, laughs, or cries regardless of what happens to him or to the people around him. The Stoic keeps a firm upper lip in the face of adversity, so his courage and the resoluteness with which he pursues his endeavors are usually seen as admirable. On the other hand, the Stoic is also commonly thought to be utterly devoid of tender feelings. He lacks love, sympathy for others, and the ability to grieve real losses. Similarly, the Stoic is usually believed to lack the capacity for joy or exuberance about anything whatsoever. Apathy and emotional indifference characterize the unflappable Stoic, because he simply accepts whatever happens without the least agitation or excitement. The Stoic, as the caricature has it, resigns himself to all events in life, taking them in stride with a completely neutral emotionality, never celebrating or despairing anything that happens.

Although the concept of simple Stoicism might be a cultural artifact available to anyone who understands the usage described in the dictionary, it appears to have some textual basis. For those who take the time to consult the most accessible Stoic texts, there are well-known passages that might be interpreted along the lines of simple Stoicism. In the widely available *Handbook* of Epictetus (7), he says the following:

> It is not the things themselves that disturb people but their judgments about those things. Death, for instance, is nothing terrible, or else it would have appeared so to Socrates too. But the terror lies in our own judgment about

> death, that death is terrible. So, whenever we are frustrated, or disturbed, or upset, let us never blame others, but only ourselves, that is, our own judgments. (#5)
>
> Do not ask things to happen as you wish, but wish them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go smoothly. (#8)
>
> Never say about anything, "I have lost it"; but rather "I have given it back." Is your child dead? It is given back. Is your wife dead? She is given back. Is your farm taken away? Well, that also is given back. "But the person who took it was bad." And does it matter to you through what means the giver demanded it back? For so long as he gives it to you, take care of it; but as something that is not your own, as travelers treat an inn. (#11)
>
> If you want your children, and your wife, and your friends to live for ever, you are stupid; since you are wanting things that are not up to you to be up to you, and what belongs to others to be your own. In the same way, if you want your slave-boy to be without fault, you are a fool; you are wanting badness not to be badness, but something else. But if you want not to fail in getting what you desire, that is within your power. Exercise yourself, then, in what is within your power. Each person's master is the one who has power over what that person wants or does not want, so as to secure it or take it away. Whoever, then, wants to be free, let him neither want anything, nor avoid anything, that depends on others; otherwise, he must necessarily be a slave. (#14)
>
> Remember that you are an actor in a play, which is as the author wants it to be: short, if he wants it to be short; long, if he wants it to be long. If he wants you to act a poor man, a cripple, a public official, or a private person, see that you act it with skill. For it is your job to act well the part that is assigned to you; but to choose it is another's. (#17)

Passages such as these paint a portrait of a passive person whose interests and concerns are utterly detached from the people and events around him. *Handbook* #5 insists that judgments determine one's mental state, whether as good or ill, *not* events in themselves. This would suggest that if one's team loses, it is not at all bad in itself, but only judging it to be so makes it so. But a (simple) Stoic would not judge an event beyond his control to be bad, because doing so would render him the sufferer of a bad thing, and thus unhappy. If the loss of one's team is not a bad thing for the Stoic, then he appears to be no fan of that team at all.

Handbook #8 can similarly be construed so as to make the idea of a Stoic fan look incoherent. Wishing for his team to win seems contrary to the (simple) Stoic's willingness to wish for whatever does happen to happen. That is, it appears he should wait until the end of the game and then "wish for" (?!) the winning team to win. The (simple) Stoic would thus be just as happy if the opposing team won as he would be if his team won. He will embrace either outcome in order for his life to go smoothly, that is, in order to avoid having one of his desires (e.g., for his team to win) thwarted (when it in fact loses). Here again the absurdity is evident. The (simple) Stoic fan does not and cannot root for a team during a game; he can only celebrate the victory of the victors *after* the game is over, and he has no allegiance

to either team during the contest. Such total detachment from any team's in-game endeavors coupled with such a bizarre, fickle celebration of the victors' victory after the fact certainly appears to rule out the simple Stoic spectator as a fan.

Handbook #14 emphasizes that the Stoic must not desire something controlled by another, because to do so jeopardizes the security of the satisfaction of his desires. An example of this in sport might run like this. Team Red needs a hit to score two runs and win the game in its last at bat. Batter Jones of team Red is at the plate with two outs. Simple Stoic spectator Smith considers whether to desire that Jones get a hit. But Jones's getting a hit depends on his ability to hit opposing pitcher Peterson's pitch in the right kind of way. The latter depends partly on Peterson and partly on Jones, but not at all on Smith. Therefore, simple Stoicism prohibits spectator Smith from desiring a hit (or a walk, or a wild pitch, or whatever) for team Red because all such game events depend on the players on the field, not on himself. And if the simple Stoic spectator cannot root for the positive accomplishments of team Red from play to play, once again he seems to be no fan in the ordinary and obvious sense.

These do indeed appear to be crippling criticisms of the idea of a Stoic fan. According to simple Stoicism, the Stoic ought to limit his desires to the things that are up to him. The things that are up to him are his own desires, aversions, judgments, choices, decisions, and volitions. In order to preserve his peace of mind and unhindered, smooth flow of life, he must accept and embrace each event in the world. He must also let go each person and object that is taken from him or lost. To do so is to accept the will of Zeus in his administration of the universe and all of its events.[5] The simple Stoic accepts the roles he finds himself in and concerns himself with making good, virtuous use of the things that come his way as a traveler treats an inn but deliberately refuses to attach himself emotionally or psychologically to such things because he knows that his use and enjoyment of them is only and always temporary.

It is easy to see how to derive the corresponding attitude toward sport from this general conception of a Stoic person. The Stoic sportsman, the argument might go, would be utterly indifferent to any aspect of a sporting contest. First, he would not care in the least which team won or lost. Because the Stoic accepts every outcome as fated, it would make no sense to root for the California Angels over the San Francisco Giants, the Pittsburgh Steelers over the New York Jets, or Brazil over Mexico in the World Cup. But not only would such a Stoic be a completely disinterested spectator about the game as a whole, he would also not care about any individual player's performance, no matter how spectacular or abysmal. The hitting displays of Barry Bonds or Beckham's goal scoring would not so much as tingle a hair on the Stoic's head. The successes of their teams would not delight him, nor would their failures sadden him. Nothing, according to the caricature, makes the Stoic happy or sad, so no game-saving catches made, no clutch strikeouts thrown, no season of record-smashing hits would evoke the least rise out of him. Even goals caused by the "hand of God" would leave him unmoved. On the basis of such a portrait, the obvious question is, why would the Stoic sportsman bother watching a game in the first place if he simply doesn't care what happens? To be so utterly emotionally detached from the players, the game, and the sport itself is to fail to be a fan at all.[6] This or something like it is how the critic of the Stoic sports fan might argue.

A similar line of argument could be advanced to lampoon the Stoic player or coach. A Stoic player would not care if his own team played well or badly, won or lost. He will neither join his comrades in the victory celebration nor share in his teammates' misery after the heartbreaking loss. Because he doesn't judge the loss to be a bad thing, to constitute a terrible frustration of the team's determined effort to triumph, he has no motivation to comfort his dejected teammates in the locker room after the defeat. Why would the Stoic player strive to play his best if winning and losing make no difference to him? The Stoic would make a lousy teammate and a terrible player, it would seem. But, the critic could argue, the Stoic coach would appear to be even more ridiculous. Because the Stoic coach accepts every good play and every bad play of his team, every game won and every game lost, with the same bizarre emotional neutrality, how could the he motivate his players to give their best effort every minute of every game all season long? What motivation could he have to teach his players to doggedly improve their skills season after season? If the *coach* doesn't care how his players perform or whether they win or lose, how in the world could the *players* care? The critic of the Stoic coach could argue that such a coach would be a floor mat for opponents and a total disaster for his own team.

II. Sophisticated Stoicism[7]

Clearly the criticism just described poses a very serious challenge to the legitimacy of the Stoic sportsman. So why do we reject this criticism as mere caricature? We will now try to explain how such a portrait unfairly distorts the Stoic's understanding of what things are good, what things are bad, and what things are indifferent. Once the Stoic's scheme of value is properly grasped, his outlook as a fan, player, and coach can be seen to be more finely textured and much more conceptually compelling.

The central error of simple Stoicism is that it oversimplifies Stoic moral psychology. It detaches the emphasis on emotional neutrality from the broader context in which it should be understood and made more plausible. Perhaps the major misunderstanding is thinking that happiness, according to the Stoic, is simply a lack of unhappiness, understood as the absence of negative feelings and emotions like frustration, resentment, and despair. The happy life, that is, the good human life or the flourishing life, is the virtuous life. Stoicism famously espouses what has come to be called the "sufficiency thesis" concerning the relation between the morally virtuous life and the good life. Moral virtue is sufficient for the good life.[8] Simple Stoicism overlooks how enacting the virtuous life requires pursuing goals and preferences in the right kind of way, the virtuous way. The goals, the objects selected, and the preferences followed could well include game outcomes and athletic excellences that in themselves lack moral value. As long as the Stoic concentrates her efforts on dealing with the game outcomes and the plays as they unfold by conducting herself in a way harmonious with her reason, that is, in a way that sustains and expresses virtue, she can vigorously engage in sports as player, coach, and fan.

Stoics believe that the only things that are truly good, without exception, regardless of circumstances, are virtuous states of character, for example, wisdom, temperance, justice, courage, and the kinds of actions that flow from them. Only

virtues can never be abused. Only virtuous actions are choice worthy no matter what. Conversely, the only true evils, according to Stoicism, are moral vices: ignorance, intemperance, injustice, cowardice, and the like. These traits of character, and the intentions, decisions, emotions,[9] and actions flowing from them, are to be avoided at all costs. Stoics also believe that our own beliefs, judgments, desires, decisions, and intentions are the only things completely up to us. No one can force us to accept a belief, hold a value judgment, or make a choice, against our will. Because of this, Stoics maintain that we enjoy complete and total sovereignty in the mental and volitional sphere. Because they also believe that emotions (such as greed, anger, fear, and envy) are *not* things that happen to us against our will but rather are\aq\ the direct results of judgments we choose to make, Stoics believe that our emotional states are ultimately up to us, as well.[10] In order to strengthen our rational ability to make sound judgments, however, we must train our minds to consistently assent only to true beliefs about what is good, what is bad, and what is neither. Developing such habits of thought is quite uncommon, because most people do not commit themselves to maintaining such uncompromisingly rational and objective beliefs. As a result, non-Stoics tend to make unreasonable judgments that trigger greed, anger, fear, and envy, so they cause *themselves* to be frustrated and miserable.

The seminal, practical syllogism that captures the heart of Stoic ethics can be presented as follows:

- The good life is a happy life.
- The wisest attitude toward life is one that offers the best chance of happiness.
- Happiness is a matter of getting what we want (satisfying desires) and avoiding what we do not want (avoiding our aversions).
- If we desire things that are essentially out of our control, or want to avoid things that are inevitable or out of our control, our happiness will be fragile and contingent—we will certainly be unhappy.
- Therefore, the wisest policy for achieving the good life is to limit our desires to those things essentially up to us.

The things essentially up to us are our own judgments, beliefs, valuations, choices, and attitudes. These are the essential objects of concern. By concentrating on them—specifically, by keeping them in accordance with reason—we can obtain the only things that are truly good, without exception—virtuous states of character. In contrast, the things essentially out of our control are the people, positions (offices), physical objects, events, and material conditions in the world, and even the conditions of our own bodies, for example, our physical health or illness. The development of consistently and habitually rational judgments that constitute a virtuous character never depends on such external factors in life.

One example of a judgment a Stoic makes is that when one's favorite team loses, it is not a bad thing. The loss of a game is not *bad,* because it is not a lack of moral character, an irrational judgment, a false belief, or a vicious deed. Similarly, when a player one likes fumbles the ball, hits into a double play, or double-faults, those performative failures are not bad. As long as the player who erred did not *try* to err, he is blameless. The Stoic sportsman judges only the intention to fail, to deliberately "throw the game," to be a violation of his responsibility in his role as

a game player. If the ball is slippery or spinning oddly or moving very fast, it is in fact not entirely up to the player whether he will succeed in his attempt to catch it. Only the intention and the attempt are completely up to him. Consequently, it is foolish to criticize players or teams for failing to make plays or win games, as long as they exert their best effort and employ all their skills in *trying* to succeed on the field of play.

Developing and consistently maintaining such a rational, objective perspective is very difficult. Non-Stoics judge lots of things beyond their control to be really good or really bad. The birth of a healthy baby, winning a car, getting a promotion, being loved, and one's team winning are typically judged to be good. The death of a parent, wrecking one's car, being fired, being rejected by someone one loves, and one's team losing are almost always judged to be bad. But Stoics insist that because we are not morally accountable for events beyond our control, it is wrong to think those events are either good or bad. Rather, all such events are indifferent. Stoics value the self-respect they have earned in habitually acting rightly and acquiring good traits of character. A good person is proud of his good deeds and his good character because that is what he can reasonably, objectively strive to achieve, and being a virtuous person is what really matters according to the Stoics. The behavior of other people, the weather, the economy, and diseases have no direct impact on his moral character, so they need have no effect on his state of mind and happiness. For example, if he does his job well but gets laid off anyway because his company downsizes, the Stoic has nothing to be ashamed of and is no less a good person as a result. The Stoic does his best with what he can control and accepts the rest with courage and equanimity.

As we said, developing such an outlook is no quick or easy feat. Epictetus, the ex-slave and masterful teacher of Stoicism, compares training in Stoicism to the strenuous regimen of Olympic athletes.

> Difficulties are the things that show what men are. Henceforth, when some difficulty befalls you, remember that god, like a wrestling-master, has matched you with a rough young man. For what end? That you may become an Olympic victor, and that cannot be done without sweat. No man, in my opinion, has a more advantageous difficulty on his hands than you have, if only you will but use it as an athlete uses the young man he is wrestling against. (7: 1.24.1–2)[11]

This is an example of what Epictetus calls *askēsis*—the idea of persistent, disciplined training in Stoic habits of mind. When faced with a challenge that tests our ability to endure, to persevere, and to overcome, the Stoic embraces the opportunity to exercise his virtuous traits of character. By responding to a trying situation with patience, one strengthens one's ability to be patient in the future. By dealing with turmoil with poise, one strengthens one's ability to be calm in the future. By refusing to be provoked by someone who is abusive or insulting, one frees oneself from the destructiveness of anger. Occasions to deal virtuously with adversity are training sessions in *askēsis*.

How does this thinking apply in the case of sportsmanship? Perhaps the Stoic sportsman could choose to be a fan of the Chicago Cubs, for example. The Cubs have a very long history of losing, and losing magnificently late in the season after early success. They have not won the World Series since 1908. The Cubs have

not even *made* it to the World Series since 1945 (when they lost in heartbreaking fashion to the Detroit Tigers, four games to three). By watching the Cubs play, by closely following their players' exploits, by reviewing their statistics—in short, by consistently directing one's attention over the course of the whole summer to the goings-on at Wrigley Field and at the ballparks the North-siders visit, Stoic Cubs fans can train themselves to enjoy the blessings they receive without mistakenly judging the Cubs' blunders to be bad things—or the behavior of fans to be responsible for the ultimate downfall of the team. No protracted hitting slump, no stupendous fielding error, and no blown save is a hardship that detracts from the happiness, that is, the virtue, of the Stoic Cubs fan.

The critic could complain that we have not shown why the Stoic sports fan would *care* about how the Cubs do. It is easy not to be upset when your team loses, the critic could argue, if you are indifferent about its success in the first place. By clarifying what is and is not indifferent to the Stoic sportsman, this objection can be defeated. Epictetus urges his students not to worry about the events and circumstances they find themselves in, because they are ultimately beyond their control, but to concern themselves with how to deal with those circumstances wisely, bravely, and appropriately. That is, the situations in which the Stoic acts and the outcomes of his actions are indifferent, but his decisions and attempts to act are vitally important. Epictetus illustrates this idea using the analogy of playing a game of dice:

> The materials of action are indifferent; but the use that we make of them is not indifferent. How, then, shall one preserve constancy and tranquility of mind, and at the same time the due care that saves us from hasty and thoughtless action? By imitating those who play at dice. The counters are indifferent; the dice are indifferent. How do I know what is going to fall? To use whatever does fall with proper care and skill, that is my business. (7: 2.5.1–3)

What matters is how one uses the equipment of the game, not the equipment itself. Epictetus also uses the example of children playing with potsherds—they are careful in manipulating the potsherds skillfully in an attempt to prevail in the *game,* but the shards of pottery themselves have no value at all outside the practice of the game, so the children are not worried about them.[12]

This confident carefulness in handling externals is aptly illustrated by Epictetus in the following wonderfully pertinent analogy:

> This is what you will see skillful ball-players doing as well. None of them considers whether the ball is good or bad, but only how to throw it and catch it. Accordingly, facility lies in that, as do skill, speed, and good judgment; so that where I cannot catch it even if I spread out my cloak to do so, the expert will catch it whenever I throw. But if we catch or throw it in fear or perturbation, what kind of play will this be? How shall we keep ourselves steady, or how see the order of the game? One will say, "Throw"; another, "Do not throw"; a third, "You have thrown once already." This is a mere quarrel, not a game. In that sense, Socrates knew how to play ball. . . . And there in court, what was the ball he had to play with? Imprisonment, exile, a drink of poison, being separated from his wife, and leaving his children behind as orphans. These were what he had to play with; but nonetheless he did play,

> and threw the ball with dexterity. Thus we also should be careful how we play, but indifferent as to the ball itself.[13] We should do all we can to show our skill with regard to any external material, without, however, accepting it for its own sake, but displaying our skill with regard to it, whatever it may be. (7:2.5.15–21)

The Stoic player maintains her magnanimity, for example, by not being a poor sport in defeat but rather congratulating her opponents for playing well. She preserves carefulness by concentrating on performing the techniques of the game, the playing of the sport, as well as she possibly can, because that carefulness expresses her virtue. The Stoic fan can welcome the victory of her team without taunting the opposing team's fans. Moreover, the Stoic fan can exercise the virtues of patience, endurance, and loyalty when her team loses. She sees a lost game not as a disaster but as an opportunity for her team to improve. Whether she is a spectator, player, or coach, the Stoic sportsman appreciates the athletic excellence of other players on other teams. An appreciation of excellence is certainly another virtue. Therefore, the Stoic fan will not be an indifferent, disinterested spectator but rather a calm, polite, and engaged observer of the sport. The Stoic sportsman is not detached from everything willy-nilly. Rather, she is appropriately detached (for example, from the *outcome* of a game), because she recognizes sport to be serious nonseriousness. Sport is serious insofar as seriousness is a condition for the possibility of the development of virtue, nonserious insofar as the outcome doesn't really matter, and the important things in life, virtuous states of character, are not minimized by athletic victory or defeat. During the game, for the fan outside the lines, and for the player and the coach *inside* the game, how it is played is serious business deserving of serious care. The game itself is not a serious activity in the context of the living of a good life. The Stoic sportsman thereby correctly understands the nature of sport, and as a consequence she feels the right things in the right ways. The careful seriousness and confident playfulness that the Stoic sportsman balances constitute her equanimity in victory and defeat. Thus the Stoic fan can be enthusiastic when her team excels without jeering when it stumbles. She can cheer without fear.

III. Evaluating the Ideal

We began by considering what we called the fan's dilemma, which involved the possibility of experiencing unhappiness when one's favored team loses. The inevitable byproduct of rooting for a team and experiencing the joy of victory is experiencing the agony of defeat. Yet the admonition to take defeat "more stoically" seemed to undermine the conditions for being a fan at all. We have seen how the moral psychology of the sophisticated Stoic allows for being a fan, a "partisan," using one of Nicholas Dixon's helpful categories.[14] The Stoic (now understood as the sophisticated Stoic) embraces opportunities to train her character in the face of difficulty and hardship. The Stoic could, in fact, have partisan emotions and attachments. More strongly—the Stoic sportsman *must* have such emotions in order for sport to be a training ground for the development of virtuous states of character. Courage, endurance, perseverance, and other such virtues must be developed in the context of adversity, rather like some theists' insistence that God allows evil

in the world in order to provide the context in which character building can take place.[15] The Stoic sportsman—player, coach, or fan—should not be conceived as an emotional robot, caring for nothing that could be the basis for taking a serious interest in sports. The Stoic sportsman must care about the achievement of excellence and the pursuit of victory in order for *askēsis* to be possible.

There is a curiosity, however—some might wish to say, a paradox—associated with the psychology of the Stoic sportsman. Let's call this the paradox of stoic detachment. The equanimity or tranquility of the Stoic in the face of failure and defeat in sport is necessary in light of the Stoic's larger commitments to what is truly good and bad. Stoic detachment is the consequence of judging that the only things that are truly good, without exception, regardless of circumstances, are virtuous states of character, so the Stoic sportsman appropriately distances himself from the usual reactions to failure and defeat. But the Stoic must be "attached" enough to experience sport as a locus for the development of the things that are truly good without exception: virtuous states of character. The Stoic must be involved in such a way that he really cares about certain possibilities, and he must have the evaluative attitudes appropriate for the notion that some things—in sport—do matter for him. Loss and failure must hurt enough for persistent, disciplined training of Stoic habits of mind to be possible, yet such external events can never be truly bad overall, that is, from the larger perspective of Stoic ethics (and metaphysics—of which we have only offered a few hints). Internal goods in sport must somehow matter enough to be able to be *means* for bringing about the ends that truly matter; hence these internal goods don't "really matter"? Curiosity? Paradox? Or psychological incoherence?

Perhaps the most charitable defense of the Stoic here is to think of the psyche as a battleground between the more local and immediate attachments and reactions we have—our "natural" partisan emotions and judgments with respect to family, friends, schools, religion, regional and national identity, private commitments, and so forth—and the global judgments that constitute a more general and abstract account of how to live, according to the Stoic. It is as if Stoic ethics is made possible, but extremely difficult, because of inevitable aspects of partisan phenomenology. The question of whether perfect Stoic tranquility is possible, in general, might be impossible to determine. On the other hand, to the extent that Stoic graciousness and equanimity seem to be at least tangentially approached in the sports world, the ideal of the Stoic sportsman is neither incoherent nor hopelessly irrelevant. Our emotions can be corrected and trained, in life and in sport.

Nevertheless, there are lingering doubts that cannot be dispelled so easily. Consider another one of Dixon's categories. The "purist" fan, according to Dixon, is a fan who loves or is attracted by the game because he "supports the team that he thinks exemplifies the highest virtues of the game." This is a fan who appreciates athletic excellence above all and roots for the team that meets his standards of excellence. Participants who are actively involved in playing and coaching exhibit purist tendencies to the extent that they impersonally admire players and teams that "play the game the right way." Such purism might also be the basis for ethical criticism when players, coaches, or teams cheat or behave in unsportsmanlike ways. The purist fan is a "game fan," in contrast to the partisan, who is a "team fan." If we expect that a "real" fan of a team is characterized by more particular, enduring, and less flexible allegiances, then Dixon is right. The purist is hardly a fan at

all. The purist loves the game too much and the particular team too little, because the team he roots for is replaceable, essentially a placeholder for those things he admires in sport. On the other hand, the partisan, the team fan, loves his team too much and the game (along with the requisite ethical considerations) too little. His tenacious loyalty overrides the notion that his team might not deserve his support because it violates what sport is really about. Dixon's "moderate partisan" is one whose particular allegiances are moderated by broader concerns. Likewise, the ideal player or coach must also balance personal partisan concerns for victory with the more impersonal purist concerns that issue from a broader perspective about the nature of sport and sportsmanship. What about the Stoic sportsman?

The Stoic sportsman is neither a game fan nor a team fan in the senses we have explained. He is a *virtue fan*—and here lies the rub. The Stoic sportsman—let's say a potential Cubs player, coach, or fan—appears to love virtue too much and both the game and his team too little. The Stoic can't say he loves the game or his team so very much, because they are merely means to an end that really matters: virtuous states of character. The Stoic sportsman has an instrumentalist view of sport, which seems to miss the possibility that sport can be valued for its own sake, or for the sake of the goods that arise internal to it or are distinctive of it. Dixon's use of the analogy with romantic love is quite apt. We might be initially attracted to a person because of the qualities that person embodies, but as the relationship develops over time, our love becomes much more focused in quite particular ways, "on their unique instantiation of those qualities: in other words, on their special identity. . . . Our love becomes, as it were, *imprinted* on the particular person" (6: p. 150). Dixon notes that once our love develops, we don't "trade up" when we find someone who instantiates those initially attractive qualities more strikingly. Unlike the way in which romantic love comes to be directed toward a person who uniquely instantiates attractive and admirable qualities, the object of the Stoic sportsman's affections is always replaceable if another object performs its role as a means just as well. Note, if the Cubs finally won a World Series, perhaps the Stoic Cubs fan should switch allegiances to a worse team that might perform its function better as a means for the persistent, disciplined training in Stoic habits of mind. If one of the reasons that involvement in sports—or *a* sport—can be so satisfying is because a sport or a team can become the object of love and devotion, the Stoic sportsman can never experience such deep attachments. The Stoic sportsman is incurably a virtue lover,[16] not a sport lover.

Here, another analogy might be appropriate. The ethical egoist, that is, someone whose fundamental ethical principle is that everyone should seek to maximize his own good, is sometimes criticized because his ethical principle undermines the possibility of achieving some of the most significant goods in life. For the egoist, personal relationships are always instrumental; they are means for maximizing the egoist's own good. The egoist's motivation is always self-regarding. He is concerned only about his own life. Yet significant personal relationships, for example, friendships and familial or romantic love, require that a person act for the sake of the other sometimes. The lover must be willing to act for the beloved; her motives must sometimes be essentially other regarding. Could the egoist really have love interests or friends? And if friendship is a significant component of a good human life, the egoist's moral principle undermines itself. Acting solely on the basis of the

motivation to always enhance one's life appears to be the wrong way to enhance one's life. Likewise, the Stoic sportsman's seemingly obsessive concern with virtue appears to undermine those quite particular sport-related concerns that provide the basis for the possibility of experiencing sport's intrinsic values: the achievement of a certain kind of excellence, the joy of playful participation, the satisfaction of performing well and winning, and the elation associated with the victory of one's favorite team.[17]

In the end, the reason the extreme ideal of the Stoic sportsman seems unsatisfying is directly related to the sufficiency thesis. For the Stoic, the things that are truly good are virtuous states of character. Insofar as virtuous states of character are completely up to us and moral character is sufficient for a good or happy life, achieving the ideal makes our life, in principle, invulnerable to unhappiness.[18] There is, of course, a significant literature reflecting on the relation between the moral life and the good life.[19] Yet even in this limited context, when we reflect on the Stoic sportsman's attempt to make involvement in sports immune from the possibility of unhappiness, we can appreciate why there are legitimate suspicions about the sufficiency thesis.[20] The internal goods of sports are real goods, so if we fail to achieve them we naturally become, in some sense, unhappy. We might grant that achieving sporting excellence or winning games isn't as important or valuable as achieving moral virtue, but sporting excellence and victory are goods nonetheless, and failure to achieve such goods is unsatisfying. The paradox of stoic detachment is a real problem, because the Stoic ideal tries to take the sting out of failure and loss. Our suspicion is that the Stoic must not have been stung very hard—or perhaps the whole problem is to pretend one has not been stung at all. The more extreme Stoic ideal seems too lifeless and abstract—not enough blood, sweat, and tears to make sport matter in the way it does and should for stupidly involved lovers—like a Cubs fan.

Even so, the ideal of the Stoic sportsman, perhaps in a less extreme form, a moderate form, has much to teach us—and might not be so foreign to everyday life. A Father's Day section in a recent *Sports Illustrated* featured vignettes describing famous athletes and their relationships to their fathers. Barry Zito's father, Joe, says this: "The one thing I've always tried to teach him is that all of the great things in life are inside yourself: love, harmony, courage, conviction, commitment." How very Stoic! Let's suppose that Joe Zito is a moderate Stoic. Here is what he teaches. Although there are other constituents of a good life, don't forget that among the most important things are the internal ones like love, courage, and commitment, and these internal goods are ones that are, to a great extent, up to us. If these are the truly great things, then we should keep such evaluative judgments in mind as we participate in sport. Sport will test us, because the good inevitably comes mixed with the bad, but the pursuit of sporting excellence and victory should never compromise the more important goods—virtuous traits of character. Self-sufficiency and freedom from the dominance of externals are important for happiness, and we are sometimes responsible for our misery when we fail to appreciate the larger picture.

Could a Cubs fan be a Stoic? Is it a worthwhile ideal? If we are correct that the ideal of the moderate Stoic sportsman might diminish the fan's misery without extinguishing his love, and if we're right that devotion to the Cubbies is compatible with both purist ethical concerns and the development of moral character, then

the answer to both questions is yes. The Cubs fan *could* be a Stoic. Moreover, the continuing history of the Cubs suggests that it is *wise* for the Cubs fan to embrace this ideal.

Notes

[1]We know that it is linguistically fashionable, not to say "politically correct," to use the term *sportspersonship,* as in "the virtue of sportspersonship." Obviously, we do not mean to exclude female athletes when we refer to the "sportsman," nor do we deny that it has been important to raise issues concerning the relation between language and social reality. On the other hand, the term *sportsman* does have some historical resonance that is quite positive and carries with it the weight of an ethical tradition that might override our sensitivities to the politics of usage, notwithstanding what we take to be our legitimate aesthetic preferences for the term. Perhaps *sportsperson* is no more linguistically barbarous than other such forms (e.g., *chairperson*), but here we prefer to resist this invasion of politics into the way we write and talk.

[2]Given the Florida Marlins' dramatic rebound from a three-games-to-one deficit in the 2003 National League Championship Series to defeat the Chicago Cubs at Wrigley Field (especially given the fact that the losses in games six and seven were suffered by the Cubs' two best starting pitchers, Mark Prior and Kerry Wood), win the National League Pennant, and advance to the World Series, this question is particularly urgent and timely. Indeed, we might ask not only whether a Cubs fan *can* be a Stoic, but whether a Cubs fan must *perforce* be a Stoic in order to withstand crushing despondency in the wake of the events of October 14 and 15, 2003. Boston Red Sox fans might also be interested in these issues, as well as distraught World Cup fans.

[3]We realize that numerous issues are involved in an attempt to analyze the Stoic sportsman. One might initially wonder whether the ideals of the Stoic player, coach, and fan are similar, different, or how they are related. For our present purposes, we want to suggest what these different instantiations of the Stoic sportsman have in common. We will not develop a Stoic analysis of each, and we will leave the question of differences and relations for a future project. We will provide an overview here in order to initiate a conversation, and we hope to thicken the analysis in a subsequent paper. We would like to thank a helpful reviewer for calling our attention to a range of issues that might be addressed in this context.

[4]Some readers with more than a passing familiarity with Stoicism might find the following discussion somewhat elementary. If so, they can skip to the next section. On the other hand, we suspect that there are many readers who could find our introductory discussion of Stoicism helpful.

[5]For a lucid discussion of these points, see A.A. Long (9: 180–206). For a meticulous study of the Stoics' views on determinism, see Susanne Bobzien (3).

[6]This view might be twisted from a tendentious interpretation of a text from Epictetus (7: 3, 4, 9–12):

> When you enter the theater, then, should you say "Come, let Sophron be crowned"? No. But, "Come, let me ensure that my volition with regard to this subject-matter remains in accord with nature." For no one is dearer to me than myself; it would be absurd, therefore, that I be harmed so another can win the crown as a comic actor. Whom, then, do I want to see win? The man who does: and in that way, the man I want will always win. —But I would have Sophron crowned. Why, hold as many contests as you want in your own house, and proclaim him a Nemean, Pythian, Isthmian and Olympic victor; but in public,

> do not claim more than your due, nor seize for yourself what is public property: otherwise, you must put up with abuse, for if you act as the masses do, you put yourself on their level. (W.O. Stephens, trans.)

[7]Peter Railton (12) has defended a version of utilitarianism that he calls sophisticated consequentialism. In response to the criticism that consequentialism leads to alienation between the cognitive or deliberative self and the affective self, he argues that a consequentialist might be able to preserve the ethical importance of more local affections or motives while still preserving the efficacy, albeit indirectly, of more impersonal and global consequentialist deliberative demands or justifications. We refer to sophisticated stoicism primarily to suggest that a common understanding of Stoicism is inadequate. However, the issues that Railton confronts are also mirrored in the problems we have raised in relation to simple Stoicism. How can a Stoic fan retain his more immediate and local affective attachments—his feelings for *this* team or *this* player—while at the same time being committed to an impersonal and global view of things that seems to negate such emotions and feelings? Michael Stocker's article is another important reflection on these issues (15).

[8]See Julia Annas (1: 159–179, 262–276, 388–411).

[9]For the cognitive view of emotions see Solomon (13), DeSousa (5), and Sorabji (14).

[10]See Lawrence C. Becker (2) for an enlightening contemporary account.

[11]Compare 2.18.22, 3.15.1–7, 3.22.51–52; *Handbook* #51.

[12]Compare (7: 4.7.5):

> Well, then, if someone who has no absolute desire to live or die, but is satisfied with what he is granted, comes before the tyrant, what prevents him from approaching him without fear? —Nothing. —If, then, another should feel in the same way about his property or wife or children as the other does about his body, and, in short, from some madness or desperation, should be of such a disposition as not to care whether he has them or not; but, as children playing with potsherds contend with one another in the game, but are not concerned about the potsherds as such, this man likewise has come to count material things as nothing, but enjoys the game that is played with them and moving them back and forth, what tyrant, what guards, what swords are still capable of inspiring fear in such a man?

[13]If the cover of the ball is torn or the ball is otherwise defective enough to adversely affect play, it is only in this purely functional sense that the (Stoic) player would judge the piece of equipment to be a "bad ball."

[14]According to Dixon (6: p. 149), the "partisan" is

> a loyal supporter of a team to which she may have a personal connection or which she may have grown to support by dint of mere familiarity. The "purist," in contrast, supports the team that he thinks exemplifies the highest virtues of the game, but his allegiance is flexible.

Dixon defends the "moderate partisan," one who is willing to criticize her team based on ethical considerations yet whose allegiance is not as tenuous and contingent as the purist's support for a team. The purist "barely qualifies as a fan at all" because the support is so conditional. The moderate partisan's loyalty is not as "tenacious" as the partisan's, however, because "teams that violate the rules or spirit of the game do not deserve our support" (6: p. 153).

[15]See John Hick's classic soul-building theodicy (8).

[16]Because the Stoics defended the doctrine of the unity of the virtues—the view that all

the virtues are interentailing so that to have one is to have them all—the many types of virtue are really just classifications of wisdom. Thus, the Stoic is stubbornly and uncompromisingly a wisdom lover, that is, a philosopher in the strongest and most literal sense.

[17]Our argument here is very close to the way in which Susan Wolf criticizes the ideal of the moral saint (16). Wolf argues that the ideal of the moral saint is not a particularly attractive ideal for most of us, because it tends to discourage the development and pursuit of interests that might be legitimate aspects of a good life. Because a moral saint's life is so dominated by moral commitments, that is, by the motive to be as morally good as possible, nonmoral interests, desires, or excellences will tend to be subsumed or demoted in such a life. Furthermore, because modern ethical theories such as utilitarianism and Kantianism supposedly contain within themselves this all-consuming ideal of being as morally good as possible, there's something deeply wrong with trying to live according to these theories. They require us to give up too much. Wolf says,

> Thus, when one reflects, for example, on the Loving Saint easily and gladly giving up his fishing trip or his stereo or his hot fudge sundae at the drop of the moral hat, one is apt to wonder not at how much he loves morality, but at how little he loves these other things. One thinks that, if he can give these up so easily, he does not know what it *is* truly to love them. (4: pp. 83–84)

Later, she says

> In other words, the ideal of a life of moral sainthood disturbs not simply because it is an ideal of a life in which morality unduly dominates. The normal person's direct and specific desires for objects, activities, and events that conflict with the attainment of moral perfection are not simply sacrificed but removed, suppressed, or subsumed. (4: p. 84)

If we are right, it might be useful to add another category or subcategory of moral sainthood to her descriptions of the loving (utilitarian) saint and the rational (Kantian) saint. Arguably, the ideal of the Stoic is to become a Stoic sage (perhaps another version of the rational saint), and similar arguments are appropriately directed toward this ideal. It might also be interesting to wonder whether the Stoic sportsman can embody his reasons in his motives. If there is a disharmony between his reasons and his motives, insofar as his reasons or justifications for actions are ultimately moral (concerned with his virtue), whereas sport-related motives required for the relevant goods are more personal and direct, then the Stoic sportsman might inevitably suffer from "moral schizophrenia," as Michael Stocker calls this phenomenon. This is a somewhat different criticism, however, that raises issues of moral psychology outside the scope of this article. (Wolf's article has been frequently anthologized. The page references we give above are from a recent excellent collection [4]. Stocker's article on "moral schizophrenia" also appears in ref. 4.)

[18]See Steven Luper's fascinating investigation of the tradition (including such great thinkers as Buddha, Socrates, Epicurus, and Epictetus) that attempts to show us how to ensure ourselves a happy life (10).

[19]For an interesting overview and analysis of these issues, see Thomas Nagel (11: 189–207).

[20]These suspicions might be raised from a variety of perspectives: Aristotelian, Nietzschean, and others.

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