

# Of Archery and Virtue: Ancient and Modern Conceptions of Value

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*So too your friends ... when they had considered the beauty of virtue,  
forthwith flung aside everything they had seen except virtue itself.*

– Cicero, *Fin.* 4.42<sup>1</sup>

In the opening lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, just before he begins to sketch an account of the human good, Aristotle draws a distinction between the kinds of ends at which a skill (*technê*) or an inquiry (*methodos*) may aim. Some ends, he remarks, are themselves activities (*energeiai*). Other ends are products (*erga*) distinct from the activities. Whenever a skill aims at some distinct product, Aristotle says, the product is by nature better than the exercise of the skill.<sup>2</sup>

This Aristotelian claim has been thought to mark a difference between ancient and modern conceptions of value. Thomas Hurka, for instance, suggests that

it is characteristic of ... modern values to deny [Aristotle's assumption] and to hold that there are activities that necessarily aim at an external goal but whose value is internal to them in the sense that it depends entirely on features of the process of achieving that goal.<sup>3</sup>

Hurka argues that it is in fact the concept of a *game*, in contrast to that of a *productive skill*, that best illustrates the modern understanding of value. He maintains that “game-playing is an important intrinsic good, which gives the clearest possible expression of what can be called a modern, as against a classical, or more specifically Aristotelian, view of

1. *Sic isti cum ... virtutis pulchritudinem aspexissent, omnia quae praeter virtutem ipsam viderant abiecerunt* (trans. after Rackham).
2. “In the *technai* whose ends are certain things besides the practice of the *technê* itself, these products are essentially superior in value to the activities” (1094a, trans. Rackham). The implied classification is as follows: Ends are of two sorts, activities (*energeiai*) and products (*erga*). *EN X* classifies contemplation (*theorêtikê*) as an *energeia* or activity that is also its own *telos* (1176bff.). By contrast, Aristotle usually analyzes productive *technai* into processes (*kinêseis / geneiseis*) aimed at a distinct *telos*. In these cases, process and end together constitute the skill's *energeia*, but each is distinct from the other. See, e.g., *EN* 1140a11, 1174a13–b8, *Ph.* 201a9–b15.
3. Hurka 2006, 230.

value".<sup>4</sup> This is so, Hurka suggests, because although games are indeed directed at some goal distinct from the activity of the game itself, the value that attaches to playing a game does not depend on the value of the game's external goal. It rather depends on the endeavor to achieve an otherwise trivial objective under self-imposed limitations.<sup>5</sup> There is nothing particularly valuable about the state of affairs in which a small, thermoplastic ball occupies a shallow hole in the ground, at least not as such. But the skill displayed in bringing this result about at 220 yards, with a five-wood, and at single stroke, may be a valuable thing indeed. According to Hurka, the case of games offers an instructive exception to Aristotle's rule.

Hurka's contrast between ancient and modern conceptions of value is useful for my purposes on two counts. First, it is useful because I believe that the distinction Hurka draws between an Aristotelian conception of value and the conception of value associated with games is essentially correct. The structure of games differs importantly from that of a productive skill, and this has interesting and important implications for thinking about what kinds of activities are valuable and why. Hurka's account is useful in a second respect, however, because I believe his distinction between ancient and modern conceptions of value is essentially mistaken — not, indeed, because it is mistaken to associate what he calls the modern conception with modern views, but because it is mistaken to dissociate it from ancient ones. In fact the conception of value Hurka characterizes as modern is quite clearly a Stoic conception, and the example of games (though not the game of golf, as far as I know) is in fact a Stoic example. Hurka's analysis

4. As examples of modern expressions of this conception, Hurka offers (among others) Nietzsche's account of the will to power and Marx's ideal of transforming nature through productive labor even after conditions of scarcity are overcome. According to Hurka, "for both Marx and Nietzsche a central human good was activity that on the one side is necessarily directed to a goal but on the other derives its value entirely from aspects of the process of achieving it" (228).
5. On Bernard Suits's analysis, "playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles". See Suits 1978, 41 (qtd. in Hurka 2006, 218). Hurka accepts and elaborates Suits's account.

provides a useful introduction to my topic because I wish to argue that the Stoics *reject* the account of value Hurka associates with Aristotle, and that they *accept* the account he associates with the modern period. Both points, however, have been obscured by commentators who have treated the Stoic position as substantially similar to Aristotle's, and who have discounted or ignored the fact that the Stoics employ the example of games to clarify their account of virtue.

I am going to argue further that this misunderstanding of the Stoic view on the part of modern commentators is no accident. It is rather due to one of the Stoics' most capable critics in antiquity, the Academic skeptic Carneades. In the century before Cicero set out his account of Stoic ethics (which is now some of the best surviving evidence for Stoic views), Carneades mounted a formidable attempt to recast the Stoics' distinctive account of virtue in broadly Aristotelian terms. It is a measure of the force and influence of Carneades' arguments that this account of Stoicism still persists today and, indeed, is now rather deeply embedded in the scholarly literature on Stoic ethics. Since I think this conception is not the Stoic one, and since its attribution to the Stoics obscures the account of virtue they actually develop, I propose to explain how this misreading came about and to offer, in its place, what I take to be the correct account of the Stoic position. This account, I suggest, is remarkably similar to Hurka's modern conception of value as exemplified by the concept of a game.

### 1. Some background: Stoic ethics and stochastic skills

Before I introduce the interpretation of Stoicism I wish to challenge, I need to provide some background both about Stoicism and about the Aristotelian conception of stochastic skills that has mistakenly been associated with the Stoic view. For this purpose, it will be useful to begin by noting three theses to which the Stoics are committed and to which most scholars agree the Stoics are committed. One of these might fairly be characterized as Aristotelian, and two of them might be said to be Socratic, but the way in which the Stoics combine and defend them is unique and distinctive of the Stoic position. First,

then, the Stoics agree with Aristotle and with the broader tradition of Greek ethical thought in regarding *eudaimonia* (usually translated as ‘happiness’) as the single highest goal of life. This is typically understood to mean that, as Aristotle says, an agent’s own happiness is the end for the sake of which everything ought to be done and toward which all the activities of her life ought to be directed. The Stoics agree with Aristotle and the Greek ethical tradition on this point. They make it clear that every rational action will be done for the sake of (*heneka*) the agent’s own happiness and that this end is not sought for the sake of anything further.<sup>6</sup>

The Stoics depart from Aristotle, however, in their account of the kind of life that satisfies the concept of happiness. Aristotle, at least as he is commonly understood in the Hellenistic era, supposes that happiness requires a life of virtue together with a minimum of bodily

6. The summary of Stoic views preserved by Stobaeus characterizes the Stoic account of the *telos* as follows: “And [this is how] it is defined by those of the Stoic school: The end (*telos*) is that for the sake of which every action is appropriately (*kathêkontôs*) undertaken, but it is not itself undertaken for the sake of anything further” (*Ecl.* 2.76, trans. Pomeroy). The appearance of the Stoic technical term *kathêkon* in this formulation shows that the Stoic commitment is to rational eudaimonism, or (roughly) to the view that every rational action is done for the sake of *eudaimonia*. This is so because a *kathêkon* action, on the Stoic account, is one for which a reasonable (*eulogon / probable*) defense can be given (e.g., SVF 1.55, 3.134). Additional statements of Stoic eudaimonism include Stob. *Ecl.* 2.100.7 (SVF 3.589), Philo *On the Life of Moses* 2.151 (SVF 3.10). In general, I accept Glenn Lesses’s reasons for supposing that “the Stoic conception of happiness satisfies Aristotle’s basic constraints on an adequate notion of *eudaimonia*”, including the assumption that the *eudaimonia* in question is the agent’s own and that *eudaimonia*, whatever it turns out to be, is something self-sufficient and complete (Lesses 1989, 98–100). Alexander’s criticisms of the Stoic view at *Mantissa* 20.16 presuppose that the Stoics accept such a completeness condition, and Cicero clearly assumes it in defending Stoic views at *Tusc.* 5.23 and in criticizing them at *Fin.* 4.46 (cf. also Cicero *Fin.* 1.11, *Off.* 1.5–7, *Tusc.* 5.47–8). For an apparent reference to Chrysippus’ eudaimonism in particular, see Plutarch *Stoic. repugn.* 1035c. For the attribution of rational eudaimonism to the Greek ethical theorists generally, see, e.g., Vlastos 1991. Vlastos characterizes the “Eudaimonist Axiom” as the claim that “happiness is desired by all human beings as the ultimate end (*telos*) of all their rational acts” (203). Cf. also Sidgwick 1896: “In Platonism and Stoicism, and in Greek moral philosophy generally, but *one* regulative and governing faculty is recognized under the name of Reason” (197ff.).

goods and favorable external circumstances. As one Hellenistic account puts it, “Aristotle [in his account of happiness] combined the exercise of virtue with prosperity over a complete lifetime.”<sup>7</sup> On such an account, though virtue is a necessary part of happiness and perhaps its most important ingredient, it is not all that a successful human life requires. The virtuous agent who is wholly unfortunate in her external circumstances will find her happiness marred, as Aristotle says.<sup>8</sup> She must also possess at least a minimum of goods like health and wealth.<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, the Stoics follow Socrates in regarding virtue or human excellence (*aretê*) as a necessary and sufficient condition of the happy human life and, in fact, as the only unqualified good.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, on the Stoic account, a virtuous agent will retain her happiness in even the worst external circumstances. This fits with the Socratic claim that no harm can befall a good individual and implies that happiness is fully within an agent’s control, invulnerable to circumstances and the whims of fortune.<sup>11</sup> The Stoics also follow Socrates on a second point. They develop and defend the Socratic view that virtue is a kind of technical knowledge: it is the *technê tou biou* or *ars vitae*, the skill required to live one’s life well.

The Stoics, then, are committed to three fundamental claims that shape their ethical view: first, that an agent’s own happiness is the single end that justifies the activities her life comprises; second, that

7. *Fin.* 2.19: *Multi enim et magni philosophi haec ultima bonorum iuncta fecerunt; ut Aristoteles virtutis usum cum vitae perfectae prosperitate coniunxit*: “Moreover many and great philosophers have made these ultimate goods a composite, as Aristotle conjoined the exercise of virtue with prosperity in a complete life” (my translation). Cf. Aristotle, *Rh.* 1.5.

8. E.g., *EN* 1100bff.

9. As the Hellenistic thinkers appear to interpret Aristotle, these goods will not merely supply the agent with the means or scope for exercising her virtue; they rather constitute independently necessary and valuable components of happiness.

10. The claim that Socrates regards virtue as an intrinsic good is controversial, having been challenged by Terence Irwin in particular.

11. Thus Cicero (*Fin.* 3.29) describes the Stoic sage as “holding that no evil can befall a wise man” (*statuens nihil posse mali incidere sapienti*).

this end consists in nothing other than the expression of her own virtue; and third, that virtue itself is a kind of skill, a technical mastery of the knowledge needed to live a human life well. This account of Stoic ethics is fairly uncontroversial as far as it goes, and there is a good deal of surviving evidence attesting to the Stoics' commitment to each of these three claims. I want to focus here on the third claim, the thesis that virtue is a skill consisting in a certain kind of technical knowledge. In particular, I want to challenge what is now more or less a scholarly consensus about the *kind* of skill the Stoics believe virtue to be. So let me next present a bit of relevant background about the ancient conception of a *technê* or *ars*, which I will usually translate as 'skill' (though occasionally as 'craft' or 'art', since these terms are sometimes more natural in English).

There is a persistent distinction in ancient literature, dating back at least to Plato and possibly to Socrates, between two fundamentally different kinds of *technê*. The distinction is characterized in various ways, both by the ancients and by their modern commentators, but the rough idea is that, in the case of certain skills, of which medicine and navigation are stock examples, a perfect mastery of the skill does not always secure the result the skill aims to achieve, and a successful result is not always the product of consummate skill. In the case of medicine, for instance, the patient may die in spite of the doctor's best efforts, or she may recover in spite of his culpable mistakes.<sup>12</sup> Those skills in which the end bears a contingent relation of this sort to the activity are usually described as stochastic or conjectural skills (*stochastikai technai* / *artes coniecturales*), after the Greek and Latin terms for aiming or throwing, the idea being that in the case of stochastic skills the agent can only aim at, but cannot ensure, the result

12. In stochastic skills, that is to say, the perfect execution of the skill's methods is neither necessary nor sufficient for the looked-for outcome. A gust of wind may blow a successful shot *off target* or a poor shot *on target*. As an example of the latter sort of case, Carneades mentions a likeness of Pan that emerged, fortuitously, in the stone quarries at Chios (*Div.* 1.23, 2.48). I thank Tad Brennan for this marvelous example and for improving my characterization of stochastic skills.

she tries to secure. These skills are sometimes contrasted with skills like carpentry or mathematics, in which a technical mastery is both necessary and sufficient to secure the skill's stated aim.

An original motive for distinguishing various skills in this way may have been a desire to specify the conditions under which a craftsman or artisan could or could not be said to have mastered her craft.<sup>13</sup> The carpenter or shoemaker who, given sufficient resources, fails to deliver a satisfactory shoe or table ought to be taken to task, for in shoemaking and carpentry the quality of the product is a reliable guide to the expertise of the craftsman. But this is not so with navigation or medicine. We cannot infer from a doctor's failure to cure her patient or a navigator's failure to bring the ship to port that the agent has erred, nor can we infer, on the basis of a successful outcome, that she has done everything her craft requires. In navigation and medicine, success depends on elements beyond the agent's control. As Gisela Striker observes, it is the stochastic structure of medicine that underwrites the morbid doctor's joke: operation successful, patient deceased.<sup>14</sup>

The distinction between stochastic and non-stochastic skills appears in various ancient philosophical texts, usually with the same stock examples of each type of skill. In the *Philebus*, for instance, Plato describes mathematics and carpentry as *technai* that achieve their results through careful measurement, contrasting them with medicine and navigation, which involve a degree of guesswork.<sup>15</sup> Aristotle draws a similar distinction in the *Rhetoric* and the *Topics*, characterizing rhetoric as a stochastic skill whose end is persuasion, something even a brilliant rhetorical performance will not infallibly secure. Aristotle also sharpens the Platonic account by drawing a further distinction: The function (*ergon*) of the stochastic skills, he says, ought to be distinguished from the end (*telos*) they aim to achieve.<sup>16</sup>

13. For discussion of this and related points, see Allen 1993.

14. Striker 1996, 309.

15. 56a1ff.

16. *Rh.* 1355b8ff., *Top.* 101b5.

While the end of a stochastic skill remains beyond the control of the skill's practitioner, the function of such a skill is to exhaust the means available for achieving this end, and this activity is one that is up to the agent. Thus the function of rhetoric "is not so much to persuade, as to find out in each case the existing means of persuasion".<sup>17</sup> Similarly, "it is not the function (*ergon*) of medicine to restore a patient to health but only to promote this end as far as possible; for even those whose recovery is impossible may be properly treated".<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle's distinction between the end and function of a stochastic skill enables us to vindicate the practitioners of these skills in the following respect: Even if the doctor fails to secure the health of her patient or a rhetorician fails to sway her audience, we can say that they have fully performed the functions of medicine and rhetoric, provided that they have done all that a doctor or rhetorician can be expected to do. Each, that is to say, has done her job. Aristotle elsewhere employs this distinction in a number of suggestive ways. In the *Rhetoric*, he further associates stochastic skills with the concept of *tuchê*, or fortune: a skill is stochastic if fortune figures as a contributing cause of the outcome one is trying to achieve.<sup>19</sup> The *Magna Moralia* (which may not be by Aristotle but certainly reflects his views) characterizes virtue itself as *stochastikê tou telous*, as aiming at some further end, and the *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasizes that it is necessary to have an accurate conception of happiness so that, like archers, we will have a target to aim at.<sup>20</sup> Though Aristotle himself rejects the Socratic

view that virtue is closely analogous to a skill or *technê*, he sometimes characterizes virtue in stochastic terms, and this characterization fits nicely with the account of happiness Hellenistic thinkers attribute to him.<sup>21</sup> On such a view, happiness comprises both virtue and the goods of fortune, each of which is an independently valuable component of a successful human life. One of these components (virtue) is up to us, but if we are to strike the target of happiness, fortune must also play a contributing role.

Later thinkers appropriate and develop Aristotle's distinction between the end and function of a stochastic skill. Sextus Empiricus, for instance, associates the distinction with the Peripatetic Critolaus (second century BC),<sup>22</sup> and the Aristotelian commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias (second and third century AD) similarly employs and defends it. A fairly developed Aristotelian account of stochastic skills and a distinction between the end and function of such skills thus seems to have been familiar to Hellenistic philosophers of the second century BC. According to this conception, the job or function (*ergon*) of the skill is to employ the means that lie within the control of the skill's practitioner. The skill's end (*telos*), on the other hand, the benefit

17. *Rh.* 1355b11–3, trans. J.H. Freese.

18. *Rh.* 1355b14–5, trans. J.H. Freese. Aristotle here departs from the terminology he employs at the beginning of the *EN*, where productive skills are said to aim at products (*erga*). Nothing very significant would seem to be at issue here, since in the *EN* passage Aristotle treats the *erga* at which productive skills aim as one class of ends (*telê*).

19. 1362aff. Cf. *EN* 1140a18ff.

20. *MM* 1190a26–8, *EN* 1094a22–4: "Then surely knowledge of this good also carries great weight for [determining the best] way of life; if we know it, we are more likely, like archers who have a target to aim at, to hit the right mark" (trans. Irwin).

21. *EN* 1105b clearly distinguishes the conditions under which an agent possesses a *technê* from those under which she possesses a virtue.

22. Or, more precisely, with his pupil Ariston: "Ariston, also, the pupil of Critolaus, declares that the professed *skopos* of rhetoric is persuading, but its *telos* is to secure (*tuchein*) persuasion" (Sextus M 11.60, trans. Bury). In identifying persuading rather than persuasion as the *skopos* of rhetoric, Ariston follows Aristotle's terminology at *Rh.* 1362a17ff. Aristotle says there that the *skopos* at which the rhetorician aims (*stochazesthai*) is that which is expedient (*to sumpheron*), and that the expedient in turn is that which contributes to the end (*to pros to telos*). In this passage Aristotle alters his usual association of *skopos* and *telos*, identifying the *skopos* of a stochastic craft with its function rather than its end. Cf. Alexander in *Top.* 33,1: "For it is not required of the dialectician that the interlocutor should always be led into a contradiction, just as it is not required of the orator always to persuade: his task is to omit nothing that is persuasive with a view to making the issue credible. The same applies to medicine, the pilot's art, and all other stochastic arts: the physician's job is to do all that can be done toward saving the patient, not to save him" (trans. Sharples). Cf. Quintillian *Inst.* 2.15.19.



at which it aims, lies beyond the practitioner's control: its realization requires the cooperation of fortune.

## 2. Two problems for a standard interpretation of Stoic ethics

Keeping this characterization of stochastic skills and its Aristotelian credentials in mind, I want now to consider the way in which commentators have associated it with the Stoic view and offer two reasons this association is in fact misguided. Numerous contemporary commentators suggest that the Stoics appeal to the notion of a stochastic skill in order to explain their conception of virtue as the skill or art of life. Here are just a few illustrative quotations: According to Terence Irwin, the Stoics "recognize a class" of skills that are stochastic "because all the skillsman can do is to aim at an external result; the successful performance of his function does not ensure success in getting the external result".<sup>23</sup> Robert Dobbin, in his translation of Epictetus, suggests that the "Stoics maintained that wisdom, or virtue, was a 'stochastic' art: *i. e.* that it could be judged by the quality of the intention involved, not by the outcome, which was unpredictable owing to extraneous factors".<sup>24</sup> Martha Nussbaum writes that the "Stoics identify a type of *technê*, known as a *stochastikê technê*, which is characterized by the ability to grasp contingent particulars and improvise the correct response to them".<sup>25</sup> In his book *Justice*, which devotes a chapter to Stoic ethical views, Nicholas Wolterstorff suggests that the "Stoics called those skills in which achieving the end does not

ensure achieving the objective, 'stochastic' (*stochastikê*, aiming). And virtues, they held, are stochastic skills".<sup>26</sup>

These quotations are representative of a now-standard interpretative claim about Stoicism, and many similar quotations can easily be found. In associating stochastic skills with the Stoic account of virtue, commentators typically have something like the following in mind: The Stoics, as I have noted, leave no room in their conception of happiness for anything other than virtue. Not only do they exclude items like health and wealth from their account of the best human life, but they deny that these items are genuine goods at all. This classification poses a number of basic difficulties for the Stoic view. One difficulty arises from the way in which the Stoics endeavor to give content to the notion of virtue: they hold that although health and wealth are not goods and make no difference for happiness, we ought nevertheless to pursue them whenever circumstances allow. Indeed, virtue *requires* that we display an appropriate concern for our own health and for material possessions. So even though securing good health is not necessary for happiness, the Stoics claim that *cultivating* good health is necessary, for a failure to cultivate good health would be a failure of virtue, at least under ordinary circumstances. On the other hand, the agent who fails to maintain her health for reasons beyond her control nevertheless preserves her happiness, provided that she has done all that virtue requires.

Here, then, is one respect in which commentators have supposed that Stoic virtue resembles a stochastic skill: a virtuous agent must pursue what Aristotle regards as the goods of fortune, but a failure to secure these objects will not always imply a failure of virtue on her part. Just as we cannot reasonably base our assessment of the skillful doctor on the outcome of a particular case, so we cannot reasonably base our assessment of a virtuous agent's character on the success or failure of her virtuous intention. This comparison between stochastic skills and Stoic virtue is quite correct as far as it goes. It is worth noting,

23. Irwin 1986, 230. Irwin later remarks that "any plausible account of stochastic crafts should recognize that concern for the external result of the craft shapes our conception of the craft. Hence the Stoics ought to explain how their conception of happiness still allows rational concern for external advantages" (234). I agree with Irwin's point about stochastic crafts, but I take it to show that since the Stoics do not allow rational concern for external advantages, they do not conceive of virtue as a stochastic craft.

24. Dobbin 1998, 156.

25. Nussbaum 1995, 38.

26. Wolterstorff 2008, 166.

however, that there is nothing uniquely Stoic about it. Aristotle also points out that we appropriately praise and blame an agent only for what is within her control.<sup>27</sup> In the *Eudemian Ethics* he suggests that although successful virtuous action is more choiceworthy than a merely virtuous intention, praise and blame are accorded on the basis of the agent's intention or decision (*prohairesis*), not on the basis of an outcome she cannot control.<sup>28</sup> On this point, therefore, Aristotle and the Stoics can agree: external results are at best a fallible guide to an agent's character, and so our moral appraisals must look to the intentional features of virtuous action, not to its uncertain results.

Here, however, the aptness of the comparison between Stoic virtue and stochastic skills runs out, for there are two important respects in which stochastic skills and Stoic virtue make for a poor conceptual fit. Consider, first, the axiological structure of practices like medicine and navigation. On Aristotle's account the end of these skills is the external result at which they aim, and hence the ends and activities of these skills are distinct in an important sense: namely, the skillful execution of the methods and procedures of these skills cannot guarantee success in achieving their end. The ship may go down in a storm, or the patient may die on the operating table. According to the criterion laid down at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, then, medicine and navigation are cases of *technai* in which the ends are superior to the activities. Plato appears to assume a similar account. Book I of the *Republic* suggests that the skills of medicine and navigation may be distinguished by the benefits they bring, and the classification of goods in *Republic* II places the activities of healing and being healed in the category of goods welcomed solely for the sake of their results.<sup>29</sup> Plato and Aristotle thus appear to agree that skills like medicine have value because of their consequences and not (at least not primarily) because of the activities involved.

27. E.g., *EN* 1109b3off.

28. *EE* 1228a11–9.

29. *R.* 341dff., 357cff.

Are Plato and Aristotle correct in this judgment? If we restrict ourselves to the stock examples of stochastic skills, the claim seems quite plausible: it is the value of the end, the result at which the skill aims, which confers value on the exercise of the skill. Thus the value of rhetoric as a skill to be learned depends on the value of persuading or impressing audiences, as rhetoricians like Gorgias were quick to emphasize. The value of practicing medicine depends on the value of health, and the value of navigation depends on the value of bringing ships safely to port. Aristotle in particular appears to have a plausible rationale for regarding the external result as the *telos* or end of a stochastic skill: it is the result of hitting targets, not the job of aiming at them, that explains and justifies the practice of archery.<sup>30</sup> Since Aristotle ordinarily connects this explanatory and justificatory role with final causes, he plausibly identifies the end of a stochastic skill with the external objective at which it aims.<sup>31</sup>

But the Stoics cannot accept this feature of stochastic skills as analogous to the case of virtue, for they argue that virtue's value in no way depends on its causal consequences. Not only is virtue an intrinsic good, in the Stoics' view, but its goodness is *wholly* intrinsic, independent of any result it may secure.<sup>32</sup> Thus Cicero, speaking for

30. Of course there may be exceptions in individual cases: an orator may sometimes showcase her skill not in order to persuade but only to impress; an archer may sometimes shoot to demonstrate her skill. In such cases we may not wish to say that the value of the performance depends on securing the intended result. But the ordinary, systematic connection between the ends and activities of stochastic skills does seem to confirm Aristotle's claim. In the case of the paradigmatic stochastic skills, the value of the activity substantially depends on the value of the skill's end.

31. E.g., *Ph.* 194b3off.

32. The Stoics therefore reject the Platonic view that virtue is to be valued both for its own sake and for the sake of its consequences. A proviso: If one thinks of Stoic virtue solely as the cognitive disposition that governs action, there is a respect in which the Stoics value virtue for a limited class of causal results: the motivations and activities this disposition brings about. The Stoic thesis therefore falls short of identifying happiness with virtue narrowly understood as a state of character. It does secure a psychologically grounded material connection between happiness and virtue considered as a state, however. Given the facts of human psychology as the Stoics

the Stoics, says that “the school that I am discussing rejects absolutely the adoption or approbation of justice or friendship for utility’s sake, since the same utility might ruin or corrupt these”.<sup>33</sup> The same point is reflected in other Stoic texts, but the easiest way to see that the Stoics are committed to the view that virtue’s value is wholly intrinsic is to note that this thesis is a consequence of the Stoic commitments I mentioned earlier. Stoic texts treat *eudaimonia* as the final end of motivation and action, that for the sake of which every rational action is performed and which is not itself sought for the sake of anything further. Since *eudaimonia* is wholly realized in the “smooth flow” of motivational impulses that constitute virtuous activity, nothing outside the scope of this activity can supply the axiological basis of virtuous character and action.<sup>34</sup> Together with their identification of virtue and happiness, rational eudaimonism effectively commits the Stoics to a view sometimes attributed to Kant: that the intentional

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understand them, a virtuous disposition is both necessary and sufficient for the impulses (*hormai*) in which happiness consists, and this biconditional obtains in all practically relevant circumstances, including the *in extremis* hypothetical in which the sage is on the rack. I thank Tad Brennan for prompting me to clarify this point.

33. *Fin.* 3.70, trans. Woolf. Cf. Seneca, *Ben.* 4.21.4: *Nam ut omnium aliarum virtutum, ita huius ad animum tota aestimatio redit; hic si in officio est, quidquid defuit, fortuna peccat.* For as in the case of every other virtue, so in the case of this virtue, its value belongs wholly to the intellect; if this performs its duty, whatever else is lacking is the fault of fortune (my translation).
34. This point needs to be spelled out. I’m here assuming an essential connection between intrinsic value and objective normative reasons for action. In contemporary discussions, this connection sometimes proceeds via an analysis of reasons in terms of value and sometimes of value in terms of reasons. Ancient views seem to fall more naturally into the former category, but this point is irrelevant for my purposes here. What is relevant is the generally assumed material connection between value and the normative reasons that justify motivation and action. Since the Stoics regard *eudaimonia* as the only source of ultimate reasons for acting, and since they identify *eudaimonia* with virtue, the Stoics cannot without contradiction regard anything other than virtue itself as a source of value that could supply a rational agent with ultimate normative reasons that regulate her desires and actions. For other examples of the assumption I am making and discussion of the relation between intrinsic value and normative reasons see, *e.g.*, Scanlon 1998, Chapters 1–2; Audi 2003; Darwall 2003; Crisp 2005; Wedgwood 2009.

features of virtuous action exhaust the ground of its value.<sup>35</sup> If this is so, then the axiological structure of virtue differs fundamentally from that of stochastic skills.<sup>36</sup>

This axiological point has a further, psychological corollary, one that goes to the heart of the difference between the Stoics and their critics. For the Stoic position, like the Kantian, concerns more than the source of virtue’s value. It has corresponding implications about the character of appropriate motivation. Here again there is an instructive contrast to be drawn with Aristotle. Though virtuous actions are to be chosen for their own sake on Aristotle’s account, it is not the case, in Aristotle’s view, that virtue is the only appropriate object of rational desire. Nor is it the case that a virtuous agent will not be motivated by the further contingent goods virtue may bring.<sup>37</sup> On Aristotle’s analysis the objects of the

35. Cf. *Groundwork*, Section 399: “an action done from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose attained by it, but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon” (trans. H.J. Paton).
36. This argument assumes that the Stoics treat happiness as complete in the sense of including every final objective at which an agent may rationally aim (see n6 above). Terence Irwin rejects this assumption, but he does so *on the grounds that the Stoics think that virtue is analogous to a stochastic skill*: “The Stoic position may sound odd if we believe that all objects of rational concern must be included in happiness. But the Stoics have no reason to accept this particular eudaemonist claim, once they have distinguished ends from objectives” (Irwin 1998, 232). Cf. Irwin 1986, 230–4 and n23 above.
37. In general, Aristotle distinguishes action (*praxis*) from production (*poiësis*), and he says clearly that the virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions for their own sakes. It is a further question, however, whether Aristotle means to include contingent results in his analysis of virtuous action. Jennifer Whiting, for example, argues that Aristotle does understand virtuous action to include the contingent result at which the agent aims (*e.g.*, benefit to one’s friend), and hence that the agent who chooses virtuous action for its own sake chooses what she cannot fully control. See Whiting 2002. Moreover, on Aristotle’s analysis virtuous actions will be beyond the control of the agent to the degree to which they require external resources, a view Aristotle sometimes appears to endorse (cf., *e.g.*, *EN* 1177a–78b9). On the Stoic account, by contrast, the necessary and sufficient conditions of intentional action are satisfied by psychological states. See Seneca *Ep.* 113.23 (SVF 2.836): “Cleanthes and his pupil Chrysippus did not agree on what walking is. Cleanthes said it was breath extending from the commanding-faculty to the feet, Chrysippus that it was the commanding faculty itself” (trans. Long and Sedley). In



virtuous agent's decision (*prohairesis*) and deliberation (*bouleusis*) are necessarily restricted to the means available to her.<sup>38</sup> Yet this is not true of her rational motivations. Rational desire (*boulêsis*), which Aristotle contrasts with deliberation and decision, is appropriately directed at final ends beyond an agent's control.<sup>39</sup> Although on Aristotle's account a doctor cannot *decide* to heal her patient, since this result is not up to her, she will certainly be motivated by a desire for that outcome, and this desire will be a rational one. Similarly, no agent can fully control her own happiness, in Aristotle's view (or on one prominent account of it), but it is nonetheless rational for her to desire it.

The Stoics agree with Aristotle's claim that rational desire (*boulêsis*) is appropriately directed at final ends.<sup>40</sup> But they deny, as Aristotle does not, that rational desire may be directed at *external* final ends. This point can also be seen to follow from the fundamental Stoic commitments I have mentioned. Since happiness, as the single end of rational desire, consists in virtuous activity, and since this is up to the agent, no desire for any final end that cannot be realized through one's own agency will be rational, on the Stoic account. Seneca puts this point with characteristic flair:

I have, says [a good conscience] what I wished (*volui*), what I strove for (*quod petii*). I do not regret it, nor shall I ever regret it, and no injustice of Fortune shall ever bring

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general, the Stoic account isolates the intentional features of virtuous action more sharply than Aristotle's.

38. E.g., EN 1112b9ff: "We deliberate not about ends, but about what promotes ends. A doctor, for instance, does not deliberate about whether he will cure, or an orator about whether he will persuade ... rather we lay down the end, and then examine the ways and means to achieve it" (trans. Irwin). Cf. 1139a30ff.
39. E.g., EN 1111b20ff: "For we do not decide on impossible things — anyone claiming to decide on them would seem a fool; but we do wish (*boulêsis d'esti*) for impossible things ... Again, we wish for the end more [than for the things that promote it], but we decide on things that promote the end" (trans. Irwin).
40. The Stoics define *boulêsis* as *eulogos orexis*, rational desire; *orexis*, in turn, is a *hormê logikê* or *logikê kinêsis* directed at the *telos* of *eudaimonia*.

me to such a pass that she will hear me say, what was it I wished (*quid mihi volui*)? What profit have I now from my good intention (*bona voluntas*)?<sup>41</sup>

As Seneca here makes clear, there is no room in the Stoic account for rational regret as long as an agent has acted virtuously. Conversely, no contingent outcome can be the focus of a rational agent's motivation (*boulêsis / voluntas*). If we apply this analysis to the case of stochastic skills, this is as much as to say that a rationally motivated archer will not desire to hit her target but only to aim at it correctly. So too, on the Stoic diagnosis, a doctor who desires to cure her patient entertains a pathological motivation. She will certainly do everything in her power to cure him, for that is what her art requires, but she will not desire this outcome if she is fully rational. To do so would be to harbor a false belief about what is good.<sup>42</sup>

On the face of it, then, the ancient account of stochastic skills appears to supply a poor paradigm for the Stoic view for two related reasons. First, since virtue is the sole component of happiness and that for the sake of which a rational agent acts, the value of virtue is wholly independent of its results. On the Stoic account virtue shines, like the Kantian will, as the single unconditional source of value. Second, as the sole object of rational desire, virtue itself supplies the only possible focus for the motivations of a rational agent. Yet the paradigmatic cases of stochastic skills, especially as conceived by Plato and Aristotle, differ in both respects. The value of the skills of medicine, navigation and rhetoric substantially depends on the value of the contingent results these skills aim to realize, and most of us identify these results as an appropriate focus of desire. It would seem, then, that neither the axiological structure of stochastic skills nor the motivations appropriate to a practitioner of these skills provides a helpful analogue of Stoic virtue.

41. *Ben.* 4.21 (trans. Basore).

42. Cf. *Fin.* 3.35.

The upshot, then, is that there is a now-standard understanding of Stoic ethics according to which the Stoics compare virtue to stochastic skills in which the perfect execution of the methods and procedures of the skill is not sufficient for achieving the stated aim of the skill. Numerous commentators now defend this view, despite the poor conceptual fit I have emphasized. In fact, I believe that the Stoics themselves never proposed such a comparison, but I also think that the association of Stoic virtue with stochastic skills, and the fact that this association casts the Stoic position in an Aristotelian mold, is not an accident. I want briefly to suggest how this association, which I believe to be a basic misreading of the Stoics, came to be attributed to them.

### 3. Carneades' attack on Stoic ethics

The primary architect of this association, I suggest, is one of the Stoics' most formidable and effective critics in antiquity: the Academic skeptic Carneades (c. 214–129 BC). Some conception of Carneades' outstanding ability and influence can be gathered by noting that, though he himself wrote nothing, a large number of the surviving texts dealing with Hellenistic ethics and epistemology are concerned, in one way or another, with defending or rejecting or appropriating his views. It is also worth remembering that, as an Academic skeptic, Carneades did not necessarily profess any of the ethical doctrines that later came to be associated with his name (though this point, and the epistemic questions it raises, remain controversial in the scholarship). As befits a skeptic, he was known in antiquity for his ability to argue the *pro* and *contra* of any proposition.<sup>43</sup> This he did in a virtuoso display before the Roman senate in 155 BC, defending and attacking on successive days the Stoic view that justice is a virtue grounded in human nature. Cato the Elder was so appalled by Carneades' Thrasymachean assault on justice that he had him returned to Athens to avoid the demoralizing influence such arguments might have in Rome.

43. By all accounts, his wit and charm were considerable: DL 7.182; Cicero, *Acad.* 98, 137; *Nat. d.* 162.

Carneades is an almost constant presence in Cicero's surviving philosophical works, and thanks primarily to Cicero, we have some record of the strategy he adopted in his attacks on Stoic ethics, for which he had a particular distaste. Though Cicero does not always set out Carneades' arguments in detail, his many references to Carneades' views allow us to reconstruct some general lines of attack. This reconstruction makes it clear that the comparison of virtue to stochastic crafts is unlikely to have originated with the Stoics and, indeed, that the Stoics had good reason to resist it. For example, we know from Cicero that Carneades argued that the difference between the ethical position of the Stoics and that of the early Academics is a merely verbal one, something the Stoics themselves denied.<sup>44</sup> We also know from Cicero that Carneades himself claimed that the skill of wisdom or prudence *is* analogous to stochastic skills like medicine and navigation. This passage, somewhat neglected by recent commentators on Stoicism, is worth quoting:

It is obvious [Carneades says] that no skill is concerned with itself. We have the particular skill on the one hand and its object on the other. Thus medicine is the skill of health, navigation the skill of steering a ship. Similarly, wisdom is the skill of living, and it is necessary that it too have as its basis and starting-point something external.<sup>45</sup>

Carneades therefore held that every skill must be directed at some distinct result, and he offered the examples of medicine and navigation to illustrate the point. Cicero tells us further that Carneades agreed with Aristotle that this result is that *for the sake of which* [*causa*] the

44. "Carneades never ceased to contend that on the whole so-called 'problem of good and evil', there was no disagreement as to facts between the Stoics and Peripatetics, but only as to terms. For my part, however, nothing seems to me more manifest than that there is more of a real than a verbal difference between those philosophers on these points" (*Fin.* 3.41, trans. Rackham). Cf. *Fin.* 4.32.

45. *Fin.* 5.16, trans. Woolf.

skill is practiced, and that he applied this analysis to the case of virtue. If virtue is a skill, as the Stoics claim it is, then according to Carneades this skill “will consist ... in ... doing everything for the sake [*causa*] of ... getting [the goods of fortune], even if one does not attain any of them.”<sup>46</sup> Just as with medicine and navigation, virtue is justified by the external ends it tries to achieve, even if it sometimes fails to achieve them. Finally, Cicero tell us that Carneades held that virtue is no part of happiness at all, and that happiness is in fact a fully independent end that consists in *securing* health, wealth and the goods of fortune generally. Cicero adds, in a very valuable aside, that Carneades defended this account of happiness for the sake of arguing with the Stoics.<sup>47</sup>

Consideration of these claims suggests a cleverly constructed polemic against the Stoics. For if one accepts Carneades’ assumption that every skill is directed at an external objective, and if this objective also explains and justifies the practice of the skill, it follows that the Stoic position faces a dilemma. If virtue is valuable for its own sake and also for the independently valuable ends it achieves, either the Stoics must include both virtue and its contingent results within a single account of happiness, as Plato and Aristotle arguably do, or they must acknowledge that there are in fact two distinct ends of rational action: the happiness that consists in virtue and the valuable results at which virtue aims. To embrace the first horn is to give up the Socratic identification of virtue and happiness, accepting something comparable to the Platonic and Aristotelian position. To embrace the second is to abandon the eudaimonist framework generally accepted by the Hellenistic schools. We know from a number of ancient sources that Carneades accused the Stoics of tacitly embracing the second horn. The Stoics, he argued, commit themselves to *two* final goods: virtue and

the results it secures.<sup>48</sup> If the Stoics wish to preserve their conception of virtue as the art or skill of living well, then according to Carneades they should accept the mixed conception of human happiness favored by Plato and Aristotle, incorporating both virtue and the contingent ends at which it aims within a single, composite account.

If Carneades — and not the Stoics — defended the claim that virtue is analogous to a stochastic skill, how did the attribution of this view to the Stoics themselves come about? The central reason, I think, is that although a number of Stoic texts clearly *do* embed a reference to stochastic skills, the import of this reference has been misconstrued. Though I cannot consider all of the relevant textual evidence in detail here, I will illustrate this contention with reference to one of the most important texts in question.<sup>49</sup> In his exposition of Stoic ethics, Cicero employs the example of an archer to illustrate the Stoic conception of virtue and happiness. Cicero says,

Suppose a man were to set himself to take true aim at a mark with a spear or an arrow; this purpose would correspond to the ultimate good as [the Stoics] define it. The archer in this illustration would have to do all he could to aim straight, and yet it is doing this all he could to attain his purpose that would constitute his ultimate end, as we call it, answering to the chief good, as defined by us, in the conduct of life.<sup>50</sup>

46. *Fin* 5.19, trans. Woolf.

47. “Carneades also suggested the view that the highest good is to enjoy the primary objects nature has recommended [roughly Aristotle’s external goods] — but he did not do so because he approved it, but in opposition to the Stoics” (*Luc.* 131, trans. Brittain with my parenthesis in brackets). Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 5.84–5; *Fin.* 4.15, 5.20.

48. This is, in fact, the very allegation Cicero’s archer example is supposed to answer.

49. I have considered the textual evidence at greater length in a separate manuscript, “Stoicism and Stochastic Skills”.

50. *Fin.* 3.22. The Latin text may be corrupt. Certainly it is confusing. I have here followed Rackham’s translation of Madvig’s text, which is also accepted by Martha in the 1930 Budé edition. Following earlier editors, and for reasons related to those I have given in this paper, Madvig brackets the confusing *sic ... ut collineet* in the mss: *Ut enim si cui propositum sit collineare hastam aliquo aut saggitam, sic nos ultimum in bonis dicimus [sic ille, facere omnia, quae possit, ut collineet]. Huic in eiusmodi similitudine omnia sint facienda ut collineet, et tamen, ut omnia faciat quo propositum assequatur, sit hoc quasi ultimum quale nos summum in vita bonum dicimus.* The first instance of *propositum* suggests that Cicero’s

Now, there clearly is a reference to stochastic skills here, which many ancient readers would have recognized at once. If we suppose, however, that in this passage Cicero intends any straightforward comparison between Stoic virtue and the skill of archery, the comparison appears singularly inept. For notice that Cicero says that the task that is set for the archer, the one to which the Stoic end is analogous, is not *striking* the target but *shooting* or *aiming* at it correctly. That is to say, it is the job of aiming and shooting at targets, not the outcome of hitting them, which the Stoics understand to be analogous to happiness and the goal of life. This is perfectly in keeping with the Stoic view that happiness must be up to the agent, but it is a clear departure from the Aristotelian conception of a stochastic skill. For recall again that as Aristotle conceives of stochastic skills, it is the *independent result* — striking the target, persuading the audience, healing the patient — that is the end of a stochastic skill. If we assume that Stoic virtue is analogous to stochastic skills, there is something very odd about Cicero's example: the Stoics appear to have confused the job or function of archery with the end the archer tries to achieve.<sup>51</sup>

Commentators attentive to this aspect of Cicero's text (not all of them are) sometimes suggest that the Stoics, in employing the example of stochastic skills, have simply modified Aristotle's terminology to suit their own purposes.<sup>52</sup> On this account, the

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archer proposes only to aim correctly; the second may seem to suggest that the archer proposes to hit his target, but as I read the passage, both instances of *propositum* indicate that the scope of the archer's desire *qua* rational Stoic agent is restricted to the activity of *aiming well*. Seneca's comment on the Stoic agent's *propositum* and the logic of the Stoic position independently support this reading. Cf. n52 below.

51. Inwood 1986 is sensitive to the conceptual dissonance but nevertheless maintains that the Stoics regard virtue as analogous to a stochastic skill. Irwin 1986 refers to the case of archery as the Stoics' "favorite example" and relies on it to argue that concern for and disappointment with external outcomes may be rational in the Stoic view (230–4). Cf. n23 and n36 above.
52. Irwin 1986 maintains that the Stoics "call the external result the 'objective' or 'work proposed' (*prokeimenon ergon*, Latin *propositum*)" (230). This suggestion is ultimately due to Otto Rieth, who bases it on a supposed resemblance between one of Antipater's accounts of the Stoic end and Aristotle's account

archer's job (*ergon*) will be to hit the target, something she cannot infallibly achieve, but her end (*telos*) will be to aim or shoot well.

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of crafts like medicine and oratory. According to Rieth 1934 (pg. 28), "*Das prokeimenon ergon des Schützen ist zu treffen*" (The marksman's *prokeimenon ergon* is to strike [the target]). If this is so, then the Stoic sage aims to achieve what is not within her control. This is not what Cicero says, however, and to my knowledge there is no attested Stoic usage of the Aristotelian expression *prokeimenon ergon*. In the Stoic view, the *ekkeimenos skopos* is *achieving* happiness (Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.77ff.). Hence the Stoic sage infallibly hits her *skopos* (*Ecl.* 2.112) and attains the *prokeimenon* (SVF 1.216 = *Ecl.* 2.99). Marcus Aurelius (*Med.* 5.14) uses *prokeimenon* just as Cicero (*Fin.* 3.16) and Seneca (*Ep.* 71.2, 85.32) use *propositum*, to describe a proposed result (virtue) that is up to the agent to secure. Accordingly, neither the Stoic *skopos* nor the Stoic *prokeimenon* should be identified with any outcome not up to a rational agent. Since Cicero explicitly rejects the comparison of virtue to medicine and navigation (*Fin.* 3.23), Rieth's view can be defended only by drawing an implausible distinction between the structure of the craft of archery, on the one hand, and that of medicine and navigation on the other. According to Rieth 1934 (pg. 30): "*Vom Bogenschützen wird nicht mehr geredet. Dafür nennt Cicero andere stochastikai technai, die Heilkunst und die Steuerkunst (Fin. 3.24), aber nur um zu zeigen, daß ihr Telos andersartig ist. Bei jenen Künsten ist die Zielleistung nicht in der kunstgerechten Betätigung enthalten, sondern von äußeren Umständen abhängig*" (Nothing more is said of the archer. Instead Cicero mentions other *stochastikai technai*, medicine and navigation, but only to show that their *Telos* is different. In these crafts the realization of the goal does not consist in craftsmanlike activity but depends on external circumstances). Rieth here implies, implausibly, that the end of archery can be realized independently of external circumstances, although the ends of medicine and navigation cannot. In view of the etymological association of archery with *stochastikai technai* in general, this thesis would probably have struck the ancients as bizarre (cf. Plutarch, *Comm. not.* 1071c). If Antipater ever held it, he must either have invited Carneades' criticisms or offered a weak rejoinder to them. There is no need to attribute the comparison of virtue to archery to the Stoics, however, for the protasis with which Cicero introduces the analogy (*ut enim si cui propositum sit collineare hastam aliquo aut sagittam*) suggests that Cicero's archer is an exceptional case: he proposes only to aim correctly. Moreover, Cicero plainly introduces the example in order to counter the accusation that the Stoics are committed to two distinct ends. Both points support the view that Carneades rather than the Stoics first introduced the comparison with archery. Antipater's attested conformity to ordinary Stoic usage of the terms *telos* and *skopos* (SFV 3.63, pg. 255, line 22) further confirms this view, and Seneca (*Ep.* 85.32) says explicitly that the helmsman who proposes to make a safe landfall is not a proper analogue for Stoic virtue. Rieth's suggestion has been developed by Long 1967 and accepted by Soreth 1968 and Inwood 1986, among others. In general it is now widely disseminated in the literature on Stoicism. See, e.g., Wolterstorff 2008: "Virtues, [the Stoics] held, are stochastic skills" (166).



Insofar as it places the end, which is analogous to happiness, within the control of the agent, this suggestion certainly fits one feature of the Stoic view. Yet Cicero does not compare Stoic virtue to archery *tout court*, as a careful reading of the text confirms. He instead compares the Stoic agent to a rather exceptional archer who does not appear to care about hitting her target. What Cicero intends as a point of contrast with the ordinary case of archery has been mistaken for an implausible comparison. So far from comparing Stoic virtue to archery, Cicero is remarking that, unlike ordinary archers, a Stoic archer does not propose to hit her target. In fact her intention is only to aim well, and this object is within her power as hitting the target is not. It is something she can achieve even if an unexpected gust of wind knocks her arrow off its mark.

This passage, which has a prominent place in Cicero's exposition of Stoic ethics, is frequently offered as central piece of evidence for the claim that the Stoics compare virtue to a stochastic skill. What commentators have failed to notice, it seems, is that Cicero's description of the Stoic archer can equally be read as a *rejoinder* to someone who wishes to draw such a comparison. What we have in Cicero, that is to say, is not a comparison of archery and Stoic virtue but an attempt to *distinguish* the two cases. The comparison of virtue and archery is more plausibly ascribed to Carneades, and Cicero's odd description of the Stoic archer appears to reflect the Stoics' dialectical reply. This is also true of the other fragments to which commentators have pointed: they can equally be explained on the assumption that the Stoics are not proposing an analogy with stochastic crafts but arguing with someone who *does* propose it.<sup>53</sup> This is precisely what the ordinary conception of stochastic skills should lead us to expect, for even if the Stoics modify Aristotle's terminology, they cannot plausibly modify the axiological structure of archery, nor can they plausibly claim that archers, in general, do not care much about hitting their targets.

53. See esp. Plutarch, *Stoic. repug.* 1071b–d.

#### 4. Games and the good

If the Stoics reject the analogy with stochastic skills, to what sort of expertise should Stoic virtue be compared? The Stoic answer is fascinating, for it shows that they adopt an account of virtue that relies closely on the conception of value Hurka characterizes as a modern as opposed to Aristotelian view. The Stoics reject the assumption on which Carneades' polemic is based. They deny that every skill is directed at some independent result that justifies its exercise, and they appeal to two kinds of example to support this claim. The first is that of performative as opposed to productive skills. Here is how Cicero puts it in his summary of the Stoic position:

We do not think that wisdom [*i. e.*, virtue] is like navigation or medicine. Rather it is like the acting or dancing that I just mentioned. Here the end, namely the performance of the skill, is contained within the skill itself, not sought outside it ... It is ignorant (*inscite*) [Cicero adds] to compare the end of medicine and navigation with the end of wisdom.<sup>54</sup>

The skills of acting and dancing fit the Stoic conception of virtue in a way that medicine and navigation do not, precisely because the value of these activities does not depend on any outcome over and above the activities expressed in the performance itself. There is no further, external result that can plausibly be said to confer value on the

54. ...*inscite autem medicinae et gubernationis ultimum cum ultimo sapientiae comparatur* (*Fin.* 3.25, trans. Woolf with changes). Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 87: "Another wrong premise, they [the Peripatetics] say, 'for we notice that goods fall to the lot of the very lowest sort of men, not only in the scholar's art, but also in the art of healing or in the art of navigating. These arts, however, make no profession of greatness of soul; they do not rise to any heights, nor do they frown upon what fortune may bring ... Money tumbles into the hands of certain men as a coin tumbles down a sewer. Virtue stands above all such things. It is appraised in a coin of its own minting; and it deems none of these random windfalls to be good. But medicine and navigation do not forbid themselves and their followers to marvel at such things'" (trans. Gummere with minor changes).



virtuoso performance of an actor or dancer, nor one toward which her motivations are appropriately directed.

Performative skills, however, are not the only technical activities to which the Stoics look for examples. In her own discussion of Cicero's account of the Stoic archer, Julia Annas considers and rejects another possible model for the Stoic conception of virtue. "The archer example," she suggests, "has prompted suggestions that sports provide examples of stochastic skills which are suitable as an analogy for virtue. Virtue is supposed to be analogous to 'play up! and play the game!'"<sup>55</sup> Annas criticizes this proposal, noting that

Sports are based on the idea of (often violent) competition. Ancient writers, who were less coy than we are about the nature of violent competition, were never tempted to take them as analogues for virtue, a major concern of which is to *overcome* competitive and violent impulses. Modern scholars, who use sanitized examples of comparatively non-violent sports, and focus on the modern concern of rules in sports, often miss this.<sup>56</sup>

Annas therefore considers and rejects the suggestion that the Stoics (and indeed ancient writers in general) consider sports and games to be a suitable model of virtue.<sup>57</sup>

Though I agree with Annas that the Stoics have reason to reject the comparison of virtue to a stochastic skill, her additional suggestion

55. Annas 1993, 402, quoting Henry Newbolt's "Vitaī Lampada".

56. Annas 1993, 402n55.

57. This paper is very much indebted to Annas in that she is almost alone among contemporary commentators in noting the poor fit between the axiology of stochastic skills and the Stoic conception of virtue (Annas 1993, 400–4). But Annas seems to me to confuse the issue somewhat by also supposing that the Stoics (or at least some of them) *accept* the comparison of virtue to archery but *reject* the comparison of virtue to the model of a game. Suits's analysis helps to show that the axiology of games is not analogous to that of stochastic skills and that the Stoics have good reason to accept the game analogy while rejecting the comparison to archery.

that the Stoics reject the game analogy seems to me to be clearly mistaken.<sup>58</sup> While it is perhaps fair to say that comparisons between games and virtue do not abound in ancient literature, they can certainly be found, and they can especially be found in sources that are likely to have been influenced by the Stoics.<sup>59</sup> Though it is true that the Stoics have no reason to compare virtue to violent sports in particular, they undeniably do wish to understand the skill of virtue on the model of sports and games.<sup>60</sup> Such comparisons date at least to the time of Chrysippus (who is more or less the touchstone of Stoic orthodoxy in antiquity), for Seneca states more than once that Chrysippus used the example of a game of catch, and Cicero records that he liked to compare virtue to a footrace (Chrysippus himself is said to have been a distance runner). Though the texts to which Seneca and Cicero refer are now lost, there is one striking Stoic text that is not. Epictetus compares Stoic virtue to the skill required for a game on at least six occasions, and in one especially vivid passage, he explains how the Stoic analogy is supposed to work.<sup>61</sup> According to Epictetus,

Socrates [at his trial] was like a man playing ball. And at that time and place, what was the ball that he was playing with? Imprisonment, exile, drinking poison, being deprived of wife, leaving children orphans. These were the things with which he was playing, but nonetheless he played and handled the ball in good form. So ought we also to act, exhibiting the ball-player's carefulness about the game but the same indifference about the

58. Annas 1993, 402.

59. The comparison of virtue to sports and games cannot be an invention of Epictetus and the later Stoics, since Seneca attributes the example of a ball player to Chrysippus himself (*Ben.* 2.17, 2.25, 2.32). Cf. also Cicero *Off.* 3.42, Plutarch *Stoic. repugn.* 1045d. For an extended ancient comparison of sports to virtue, see Dio Chrysostom's *Eighth Discourse, On Virtue*. Cf. also 1 *Ep. Tim.* 4:7, 1 *Ep. Cor.* 9:24, *Ep. Heb.* 12:1.

60. Though, for the record, Stoic comparisons of virtue to violent sports can also be found. *E.g.*, Seneca, *Ep.* 13.2–3.

61. Cf. *Diss.* 1.24.20, 1.25.7–8, 4.7.5, 4.7.19, and 4.7.29–31.

object played with, as being a mere ball. For a man ought by all means to strive to show his skill (*philotechnein*) in regard to ... external materials, yet without making the material a part of himself (*apodechomenon*), but merely lavishing his skill (*philotechnian epideiknuonta*) in regard to it, whatever it may be.<sup>62</sup>

*Pace* Annas, the Stoics employ the example of games not because games are stochastic skills but because they differ importantly from stochastic skills. In particular, games are plausibly said to differ from stochastic skills in the two respects I have identified as crucial to the Stoic account. Games do indeed have a contingent objective that guides the motions of the players: getting a ball through a hoop or between two posts or into a hole in the ground. But unlike the case of stochastic skills, the value of a playing a game does not depend on the value of this result. As Hurka's analysis emphasizes, games are a paradigmatic example of activities whose value is "internal to them in the sense that it depends entirely on features of the process of achieving [an otherwise trivial] goal".<sup>63</sup> This is just the axiological feature of games that makes them an attractive example for the Stoics, as the passage from Epictetus makes clear. The materials with which virtue works are themselves indifferent, and they are not the source of virtue's value. But the use one makes of them is not indifferent. It is the handling of the ball in good form that, like the motions of a dancer, grounds the value of the game.

Once again, this axiological feature of games has a motivational corollary, and this is the second respect in which games provide a suitable analogy for Stoic virtue. As Hurka puts it, "when you play a game for its own sake you do something good and do it from a motive that fixes on its good-making property".<sup>64</sup> The good-making

62. *Diss.* 2.5.15, trans. Oldfather.

63. Hurka 2006, 228.

64. Hurka 2006, 228.

property of games is not the trivial result at which the players aim but various features of their endeavor to achieve this result: coordination, perseverance, grace under pressure, and so on. Both on Hurka's analysis and on a non-philosophical understanding of games, these features also constitute the appropriate motivational focus of the players. Players must play to win, but the desire to win is arguably not the purest motive: It's not whether you win or lose, as we say, but how you play the game. Just as the value of a game does not depend on the value of its trivial goal, so the motivations of a good player are not fixed on winning but on playing well.<sup>65</sup> Each of these features of games is to be contrasted with the case of stochastic skills.

If games and performative skills are the proper analogues for Stoic virtue, as I have argued, how did the mistaken association of Stoicism and stochastic skills gain such prominence? Here there are a number of possible explanations, which may include the fact that the Aristotelian analysis of virtue has struck some contemporary commentators as more plausible than the Stoic one. But the real credit for this confusion probably belongs to Carneades, the arch-critic of Stoicism who argued that there is no substantive difference between the Stoic and Aristotelian positions. In comparing Stoic virtue and stochastic skills, Carneades endeavored to force the Stoics to acknowledge, with Plato and Aristotle, the intrinsic value of fortune's goods. But this account is not the Stoic one, and in fact the Stoics defend a conception of virtue and its value that might fairly be said to anticipate certain modern views. Yet Carneades, it appears, was quite successful in his efforts to cast the Stoic conception in an older, Aristotelian mold.<sup>66</sup> So successful was he that most expositions of Stoic ethics today assume that the

65. Thus John Updike says of Ted Williams's final game for the Boston Red Sox, "For me, Williams is the classic ballplayer of the game on a hot August weekday, before a small crowd, when the only thing at stake is the tissue-thin difference between a thing done well and a thing done ill... [Baseball] can be maintained not by the occasional heroics that sportswriters feed upon but by players who always *care*; who care, that is to say, about themselves and their art" (1960, 112).

66. Cf. *Gorg.* 465a; *Phil.* 56a–b.

Stoics regard virtue as analogous to a stochastic skill, very much in line with Plato and Aristotle's own conception. Carneades, Cicero tells us, had a fine sense of humor. I think this unforeseen, successful result would have amused him greatly.<sup>67</sup>

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67. For discussion of the issues raised here, I am grateful to audiences at Colgate University, Cornell University, the University of Northern Florida, the University of Notre Dame, Trinity University (San Antonio), and Wake Forest University. I have registered some disagreement with Terence Irwin in this paper, but I am deeply grateful to him as a supremely knowledgeable and patient advisor who helped me sharpen my disagreement. Tad Brennan, Charles Brittain, and Gail Fine have been invaluable interlocutors. Alasdair MacIntyre offered encouragement and suggestions on an earlier draft. I thank James Allen, Joachim Aufderheide, Philipp Brüllmann, Nathan Jezzi, Sydney Penner, and Nicholas Wolterstorff for detailed written comments. I have not been able to respond to all of their insights and criticisms here, but I have tried to do so in related work. They are not responsible for my errors.
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