

Reservation in Stoic Ethics¹

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Sometimes, Stoic philosophers enjoin us to use something called “reservation” (*hupexairesis*, *exceptio*) with our impulses. In this article I attempt to build on some recent work by other critics in order to advance our understanding of reservation.

Reservation plays a large role in several recent discussions of Stoic ethics. In Brad Inwood’s excellent and indispensable book,² he makes reservation absolutely central to Stoic psychology, and he has been followed in this by Long and Sedley, and by Nussbaum.³ Inwood’s book shed a flood of light on many areas in Stoic ethics because of his attention to the detailed psychology of action that the Stoics developed. However, on the topic of impulse with reservation, he left some of the details indeterminate, and it is here that I want to see if improvements can be made. I develop my case by first elaborating, and then rejecting, a view that is largely based on Inwood’s account, but is more determinate than his position; because it is not identical to his position, and because specific criticisms of Inwood are not the purpose of this article, I refer to it as “the standard view”.⁴

The first part of this article, then, will be taken up with laying out the standard view of reservation. The second part will involve showing

¹ This article began as one session of a seminar that Richard Sorabji and I led at the Institute of Classical Studies in 1996. I am grateful to all of the seminar’s participants, but particularly to Richard, Bob Sharples, and Anthony Price, for their questions and encouragement. At a late stage, it benefitted from the generous and judicious comments of Brad Inwood, whose landmark book lies behind the whole train of thought. Charles Brittain helped me think through some *aporiai*, and gave me advice on bibliography. And as always, my deepest thanks go to Liz Karns.

² Brad Inwood, *Reason and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, Oxford 1985.

³ Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Princeton 1994, esp. p. 399; A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Cambridge 1987, esp. vol. 2 p. 417.

⁴ I am grateful both to Inwood and to Jacques Brunschwig, a referee for this journal, for extensive correspondence through which they encouraged me to produce more accurate characterizations of our respective positions.

why this view cannot be right. In the third part, I offer an alternative reconstruction of the doctrine. In the fourth part, I look at the broader implications of reservation for the rest of the Stoic system.

Part I. The Standard View

A few sentences will suffice to review the general Stoic background of the theory, and map out the issues on which I agree with Inwood and the standard view. Impulse (*hormê*), in the early Stoa, is the genus of which all emotions, motivations, and evaluative judgements are species. All impulses are beliefs, and so assents to propositions, of the form “this object or state of affairs, in the present or future, is a good or evil, or a preferred or dispreferred indifferent, of such a sort that I should respond to it with elation or depression, pursuit or avoidance”. There are three major subspecies of impulse, namely emotions, *eupatheiai* and selections.⁵ Emotions are false ascriptions of goodness or badness to things that are in fact indifferent; *eupatheiai* are true ascriptions of goodness or badness to the only things that are truly good and bad, namely virtue and vice; and selections are true ascriptions of indifference to indifferent things.⁶ In the later Stoa, to judge by Epicuretan usage, the term “impulse” seems to have been restricted to the subspecies of selection (see below).

All of these impulses are not merely beliefs about value; they are also somehow equivalent to imperatives that I direct to myself, and also

⁵ I have elaborated this view in “The Old Stoic Theory of the Emotions”, in: J. Sihvola and T. Engberg-Pedersen, eds., *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, Dordrecht 1998, 21–70.

⁶ This last phrase is abbreviated; I spell out the full form in this footnote, but choose brevity in the main text. A selection (*eklogê*) is a veridical ascription, to a preferred indifferent, of preferred indifference (e. g., “this food is a preferred indifferent of such a sort that I should pursue it”). Thus a selection ascribes positive value to its object (since preferreds have value), not complete indifference. A disselection (*apeklogê*) is a veridical ascription, to a dispreferred indifferent, of dispreferred indifference (e. g., “this poison is a dispreferred indifferent of such a sort that I should avoid it”). Thus my short-hand includes disselections under the term “selection”, and collapses the two kinds of indifferents that are productive of impulse. But it should be kept in mind that what produces impulse is not the conception that something is an indifferent *tout court* (since were it absolutely indifferent it would not provoke any impulse), but rather that it is an indifferent with a lot of value or disvalue, i. e. a preferred or dispreferred indifferent.

equivalent to assents to the predicate that is somehow contained in the proposition.⁷ So, e. g., the desire to eat dinner tonight is also the belief that my eating dinner tonight is a good thing, and also an imperative “Eat dinner tonight!” which I direct to myself, and also an assent to the predicate “to eat dinner tonight”.

Reservation is mentioned explicitly in only a very small number of Greek Stoic texts: two passages from Epictetus, three from Marcus, and one from Stobaeus.

E 1 (Epictetus Ench. 2): Remember that the profession of desire is the attainment of what one desires, of disinclination the not incurring what was disinclined; and that whoever fails to attain in desire is unfortunate, while whoever incurs in disinclination is misfortunate. If you disincline, then, only from the unnaturals that are up to us, you will incur none of the disinclined things; but if you disincline from sickness or poverty or death, then you will be misfortunate. Remove, then, your disinclination from everything not up to us, and transfer it to the unnaturals that are up to us. But utterly do away with desire for the time being. For if you desire something not up to us, you must necessarily be unlucky. And of the things up to us, the ones that it is noble to desire are not yet present to you. And use only impulse and aversion, but lightly and *with reservation* and in a relaxed way.

E 2 (Epictetus fr. 27 apud Marcus 11.37.1): We must find an art of assenting; and in the realm of impulses we must preserve the attentive, so that they may be *with reservation*, and communal, and according to worth. And abstain from desire completely, and use disinclination towards nothing that is not up to us.

M 1 (MA 4.1): Whenever our inner mastery is according to nature, it relates to events so as always to transfer easily towards the possible and the given. For it loves no fixed stuff, but has impulse towards preferred things *with reservation*. And replacements it makes into matter for itself, like fire that overpowers the incidentals that would have smothered a little lamp. But the blaze quickly familiarizes to itself and consumes whatever is introduced, and grows higher by those very things.

M 2 (MA 5.20): In one sense the human is most familiar, in that we ought to do good to them and tolerate them. But insofar as certain humans block our familiar acts, the human becomes for me one of the indifferents, no less than the sun, wind or beast. But though activity may be impeded by them, they do not impede impulse or disposition, because of *reservation* and turning. For reason turns and transfers every impediment to activity into a preferred thing; what checked that function becomes functional, and what blocked that way comes to make way.

⁷ I take it that the point of the qualification “contained in the proposition somehow (*pôds*)” is that the predicate that becomes the imperative is not the outermost predicate of the evaluative belief, but rather the nested one. So if the evaluative belief is “it is good that I eat dinner”, then the predicate to which I assent is not “to be good”, but rather “to eat dinner”.

M 3 (MA 6.50): Attempt to persuade them, but act even if they are unwilling, whenever the logos of justice so leads. However, if someone resists by applying force, then shift over to the well-satisfied and painless, and use the impediment towards some other virtue. And remember that you were having an impulse *with reservation*, and that you were not desiring impossibles. What then? An impulse of that kind; and this you attained.

St 1 (SVF III.564 = Stobaeus ecl. II 115, 5 W): They say that nothing happens concerning the Sage either contrary to his desire or to his impulse or to his epibole, because he does all such things *with reservation* and none of the opposed things befalls him unforeseen.

What then is reservation? The word itself – *hupexairesis* – is rare, and its etymology tells us little. Nor do any of the six passages tell us exactly what a reservation is.⁸ But some time ago scholars noted that Seneca uses a Latin word, *exceptio*, which is a plausible literal translation of *hupexairesis*, and seems to occur in the right contexts. The two passages in which Seneca uses the term *exceptio* are much more forthcoming; he actually gives examples of verbal formulae which he calls *exceptiones* or reservations.

Se 1 (Ben 4.34): The Sage does not change his plan while everything remains just as it was when he formed it. So he never experiences repentance, since nothing could have happened better at that time than what was done, nor could anything better have been decided than what was decided. Further, he approaches everything with reservation: “if nothing intervenes to impede”. So we say everything

⁸ It is worth noting that the explanation of it given by Simplicius in his *Commentary on the Encheiridion* is manifestly wrong, and strikingly ill-informed. Commenting on *Encheiridion* 2 (our E 1) (p. 23 Dübner = p. 233 Hadot) Simplicius writes as though the only impulses with which we should use reservation are those directed towards our own psychic amelioration. We ought not to wish to jump straight from vice to virtue, but instead work slowly for gradual improvement: “For there are few natures, whether of body or of soul, that can summarily make the transition from worse conditions to pure goods – although such a nature did belong to Diogenes, Crates, Zeno and people of that sort. But most of us are by nature such as to decline little by little, and be roused little by little, in matters of the soul as also in the body [...]. Which is why he recommends having impulse and aversion “lightly and in a relaxed way, and with reservation”. Which is to say, to yield or concede a little, and not to intensify to the utmost your impulse and desire (or aversion and avoidance). For someone habituating himself from a disordered life into a state of self-control should not leap straight-away to the height of simplicity and fasting, but rather ought to remove (*hupexairein!*) himself little by little from his former habits [...].” (trans. by the author and Charles Brittain). That this cannot be right is shown both by the fact that Simplicius has conflated Epictetus’ advice about desire with his advice about impulse, and by the passage from Stobaeus (our St 1) which shows that reservation accompanies the impulses of Sages, who surely are not attempting the gradual amendment of their disordered lives.

succeeds for him, and nothing happens contrary to his opinion, since he mentally presumed that something could intervene to block his aims. Fools are confident that fortune is plighted to them; the Sage considers both parts of it. He knows the scope of error, the uncertainty of human affairs, the many obstacles to planning; suspending, he follows the doubtful and slippery fate of things, and weighs uncertain events with his certain plans. But the reservation without which he makes no plans and begins nothing, even here protects him.

Se 2 (Ben 4.39): I shall go to a dinner even if it is freezing, since I promised; but not if it is snowing. I shall go to a wedding even if I'm still digesting, since I promised; but not if I'll catch a fever. I'll go bail for you, since I promised, but not if you want unlimited bail. There is silent reservation; if I can, if I ought, if things remain thus.

These reservations are all "if"-clauses, the antecedents of conditionals; "if nothing intervenes to impede", "if I can", and so on. In view of this fact, scholars have assumed that the following passage from the *de Tranquillitate* also deals with reservations, even though the word "*exceptio*" does not appear there.

Se 3 (Tranq. 13.2 f.): For whoever acts much puts himself in the power of fortune, which it is safest to try seldom, and otherwise always to consider it but never promise oneself about its reliability. "I shall sail, if nothing occurs"; "I shall be praetor, if nothing prevents"; "My business will go as I want, if nothing intervenes". This is why we say that nothing happens against the Sage's opinion. We do not exempt him from human chances, but from human errors; nor does everything go as he desires, but as he thought. For he thought from the start that something could resist his aims. But the pain of failed desire must strike the mind more lightly if you have not promised certain success.

Assembling these bits of evidence, Inwood writes as follows:

An impulse with reservation is one which is directed at a predicate describing an action, like all impulses, but it has an added clause which considerably modifies its nature. Instead of assenting to the proposition "it is fitting that I should be healthy", one assents instead to "it is fitting that I should be healthy, unless something comes up to interfere", or "unless it goes against Zeus' plan".

These texts [from Seneca] do not present the doctrine of reservation in the technical terms of the orthodox psychology of action. But it is easy to see how the notion of acting with a certain mental reservation can be fitted into the framework of the doctrine as we have reconstructed it. Since the action one is committing oneself to do when one assents to a hortatory presentation is already described by a proposition, one may simply add the clause which constitutes the 'reservation' to the proposition. Acting with reservation would be harder to represent in a theory of action which lacked the means at the Stoics' disposal for expressing the relationship between the agent's thoughts and his actions.⁹

⁹ Inwood p. 121, 122. I have no quarrel with Inwood's substitution of "unless it goes against Zeus' plan" for Seneca's "if I can", "if nothing intervenes", etc.

These comments suggest an intriguing connection between Stoic psychology and their propositional logic, for which they have become rightly famous in this century. Reservation can be interpreted as an application of the logic to the propositional analysis of emotions – roughly speaking, having an impulse is believing a certain kind of proposition, and having an impulse with reservation is believing a certain kind of conditionalized proposition. Were this right, it would demonstrate an impressive theoretical synergy between Stoic logic and their psychology, and give us greater reason to admire their propositional analysis of emotions. So the theory of reservation shows us a sort of theoretical wind-fall; not only do the Stoics have a propositionally-based theory of psychological items like impulses, they also have a propositional logic of things like conditionals. So they are ideally suited to formulate a theory of conditional impulses.

But then reservation will not merely be a nice bonus resulting from an overlap between psychology and logic. It will also fill a vital gap in the ethical system. For it allows the Sage to have impulses that are always consistent with the will of Zeus, and can never be frustrated. If I have an impulse to be healthy, unless Zeus wills otherwise, then I can be sure that my impulse (sc. “it is fitting that I should be healthy, if Zeus does not will otherwise”) will be satisfied. For either I shall be healthy, in which case the consequent will be true, the conditional true, and the impulse satisfied. Or I shall not be healthy, in which case Zeus must have willed otherwise. But since this falsifies the antecedent, it still verifies the conditional, and thus satisfies the impulse overall. Inwood writes: “Acting with this reservation, he [Seneca] says, brings it about that the agent is never frustrated, filled with regret, or required to change his mind”.¹⁰ Inwood also thinks that we can retroject the theory of reservation three centuries backward, into the early Stoa of Zeno and Chrysippus, on the basis of two passages. First is the passage from Stobaeus quoted above (St 1), whose account of Stoicism seems to reflect the doctrines of the early Stoa. The other passage from the early Stoa mentions Chrysippus by name, but not reservation. Inwood notes that “[t]he terminology of impulse with reservation is not used here, but that is clearly what is being talked about”.

Chr 1 (Epictetus Diss. 2.6.9 f.): So long as the subsequent things are unclear to me, I always cling to the things more natural for attaining what is according to

since the general background of Stoic fatalism will mean that if something does intervene, then it must have been Zeus’ plan that something should intervene.

¹⁰ Inwood, p. 120.

nature. For God himself made me selective of these things. But if I knew that being ill was fated for me now, then I would even have an impulse for it. For the foot, too, if it had wits, would have an impulse to get muddy.

Inwood summarizes this passage as follows: “If one goes ahead in one’s uncertainty about the future, acting in pursuit of one’s own health, one may avoid conflict with the will of Zeus if one acts with a tacit reservation: if nothing comes along to interfere, i. e. if it is really fated to turn out so”.¹¹

Thus Inwood argues that the doctrine of having impulse with reservation, as a method of avoiding frustration, was a feature of the Stoa from its earliest days. Below I shall discuss how Inwood uses reservation to try to explain many other areas of the Stoic view, but for now the crucial points of the theory, and especially those that are now being popularized by Long and Sedley and by Nussbaum, are sufficiently clear. An impulse with reservation is an impulse made essentially unfrustratable by its incorporation of a *deo volente* conditional clause.¹²

Part II. Some Problems for the Standard View

Part II.1 A Crucial Unclarity

To see why the standard view cannot be right, we must first see that its proponents have left it underspecified in a crucial respect, and then see that both ways of specifying the interpretation are untenable. Given the logical form of the propositional contents of an impulse, we might include a conditional clause in either of two positions, with different results in each case. I first outline the two possibilities, then show in fairly brief order why the first will not work. The second – which I believe is closer to the intentions of the proponents of the standard view – receives more extended scrutiny before its rejection.

We should begin by returning to Inwood’s general analysis of impulses, with which I am in agreement. He writes: “In the hormetic proposition “It befits me to eat this cake” we may distinguish the logical subject ‘me’ to which the predicate is applied, the operator ‘it befits’

¹¹ Inwood, p. 120.

¹² “This reservation ensures that all one’s plans are going to ‘work out’, as Seneca said [reference to Se 1], because they include a conditional clause allowing for such failures”. (Inwood p. 123)

which makes the sentence hormetic, and the predicate which is applied, 'eating this cake'.¹³

Thus Inwood takes "it befits" or "it is fitting that"¹⁴ to be a sort of propositional operator, which when combined with a subject and a predicate turns an indicative proposition ("I eat this cake") into a hormetic proposition ("It is fitting that: I eat this cake").

Given this analysis, it should be clear that there are only two ways of spelling out fully the logical form of an impulse that includes a conditional clause, i. e.

- 1) (It is fitting that: I eat this cake), unless something comes up to interfere.
- 2) It is fitting that: (I eat this cake, unless something comes up to interfere).

That is, one can put the reservation-clause either outside or inside the scope of the impulse-operator. Given this analysis of what an impulse is like, I do not see any other options for putting the reservation into the impulse. In the following paragraphs, I shall show why the first option cannot be right (and why it does not seem like a plausible extension of the standard view in any case). Then I shall take a few pages to show why the second option cannot be right. In the sequel, I shall argue that the reservation should not be incorporated into the impulse in any manner, and that the evidence, properly assessed, shows that it was not so incorporated.

Part II.2 The External Option Considered

There are two main problems with the first option. First, if the impulse-operator does not govern the whole conditional, but only the first clause, then the impulse proper is only directed to the proposition that I should eat this cake (or to the predicate "to eat this cake", but with myself as the understood subject). But if the content of the impulse is simple in this way, then we will not be able to use reservation in order to render impulse unfrustratable. On the external analysis the impulse is directed only at eating the cake, and so is straight-forwardly frustrated whenever it turns out that I do not eat it. Thus anyone who wishes to argue that reservation exempts impulse from frustration will not choose the external analysis.

But more importantly, on the external analysis, the entire proposition simply fails to be an impulse in any way. Whoever assented to the first analysis of P would not actually be having any sort of an impulse, since the whole proposition is not governed by a hormetic operator. Rather, there is an impulse embedded inside of a conditional, which cannot be detached from that context – and so cannot function

¹³ Inwood p. 64.

¹⁴ Both translating "*kathêkein*".

as an impulse in the individual's psychology – until the antecedent is satisfied. It is not clear exactly what the force of this proposition is; if anything, it seems closest to a factual prediction about the possible future possession of an impulse. That is, despite the fact that my legs are perfectly sound, I might think about the possibility that a mad dog should bite my leg and give me gangrene, in which case I predict that I would want the leg amputated. And with this in mind, I might say, "If a mad dog were to give me gangrene, then I would want my leg to be amputated". In impulse terms, this would be "If a mad dog were to give me gangrene, then I would believe '(it is fitting that someone amputate my leg)'".

But of course, to make this prediction is not to have any kind of impulse to have my leg amputated. Assenting to this whole conditional is not having an impulse, since the antecedent has not yet been detached (any more than assenting to the whole conditional "if two were equal to three, then four would be equal to six" is having the belief that four is equal to six). Accordingly, it is not accurate to say of me that I currently want my leg to be amputated, in any way, shape or form – and it would not improve things to say that I currently have an impulse to have my leg amputated "with reservation". (As though I currently had the desire to have my leg amputated, unless I remain unbiten). So assent to this whole proposition would not be anything like an impulse – and so – importantly – no action of any kind would ensue on assent to 2). I do not reach for my bone-saw merely on reflecting what might happen if a mad dog bit me; if 2) were the proposed reading of my impulse "to eat dinner tonight, *deo volente*", then I would not begin the shopping and the cooking as soon as I had that impulse. And if it is not directly productive of action, then it is not a real impulse, on the Stoic view. This sort of conditional would not allow the Sage to begin acting before knowing the full details of Zeus' plan; it would require him to know the full details before any impulse, and so any action, could ensue.

Thus if we want an impulse with reservation actually to be an *impulse* (i. e. a movement of the mind that produces an action) then we must think of the reserved impulse as a proposition whose governing node is an impulse-operator; unless the impulse-operator has the largest scope, there is as yet no impulse at all. And, if we want the presence of the conditional to have some effect on the satisfaction-conditions of the content of the impulse (i. e. making them somehow essentially unfrustratable), then the reservation must be internal to the scope of the impulse-operator, in order to play its protective role. For both reasons, it is to the second, internal analysis that we should look in exploring the detailed viability of the standard view.

Part II.3 The Internal Option Considered

I turn now to the second option for the standard view, according to which the reservation is an antecedent clause in a conditional that is wholly internal to the impulse-operator. For convenience, I shall hereafter call this "the standard view", while acknowledging that it is not, in all details, a view that has been advocated by Inwood or anyone influenced by him, but rather one specification of that view, and indeed

the most viable specification of it that I can produce. I begin with three general logical difficulties for this view, which show why it would have been very difficult to make it work with the rest of the Stoic system, even if the textual evidence had proved that it was unequivocally Stoic. I then turn to the evidence itself, which fortunately shows that there was never any reason to attribute the standard view to the Stoics in the first place.

The proposal that an impulse with reservation is an impulse directed to a conditional proposition would be very difficult to square with any non-truth-functional analysis of the conditional; with any doctrine of theological fatalism; and with any analysis of the conditional that permits contraposition. But the Stoics were theological fatalists, and they did accept an analysis of the conditional which is non-truth-functional and permits contraposition. So it would be very hard to square the internal analysis with these aspects of Stoicism. Let us see why in detail.

1) The standard view involves the wrong analysis of the conditional. It supposes that the conditional will be verified, and so the impulse will be satisfied, just in case the consequent is true (i. e. I am healthy) or the antecedent false (i. e. Zeus wills otherwise). But the Stoics did not adopt this Philonian analysis of the conditional. Instead, they made the truth of the conditional turn on the existence of a conflict between the antecedent and the negation of the consequent; "If p then q" is true just in case p conflicts with not q. The notion of "conflict" is difficult; it seems to be roughly like logical incompatibility, but the precise details are controversial. This much is clear, however; having an impulse to be healthy, unless Zeus wills otherwise, does not seem to be the same thing as having an impulse that there be a certain kind of conflict between two things.

The problem is not merely that the existence of a logical incompatibility is an odd thing to direct one's intentions towards. It is also that, given the Stoic analysis of the conditional, the truth or falsehood of the antecedent and consequent has no direct bearing on the truth of the conditional at all. A conditional with a true consequent is still false, if its negation does not conflict in the right way with its antecedent. Transferred over to impulses, this suggests the strange outcome that the desire that (Q if not P), is in general never satisfied merely by Q's obtaining. In addition, it has to be the case that not-Q conflicts with not-P. But surely it would be natural to think that my desire to be healthy, unless Zeus wills otherwise, would be satisfied by my bringing it about that I am healthy. I should not have to bring it about, in addition, that there is a conflict between Zeus' willing that I be healthy,

and my not being healthy. In a way, that would be vastly too difficult for me to do, and in another way, as the next problem shows, vastly too easy.

2) There is a different problem with *deo volente* conditionals, on any analysis of the conditional, for theological fatalists like the Stoics. The Stoics were not merely strict determinists, they also identified fate with the will of God. Thus the statement “if God wills that P, then P”, while not a tautology, is at least a necessary truth for the Stoics, as is its converse, “if P, then God wills that P”. But from the Stoics’ views on bivalence, it also seems that God is very opinionated, so that for every P he either wills P or wills not P; God neither suspends judgement nor abstains from willing. Thus if it is not the case that he wills not-P, then he does will P. So unless he wills not-P, he wills P. But if he wills P, then P will be the case. So, unless he wills not-P, P will be the case, i. e. “P, unless God wills not-P” is a theorem in the Stoics’ theological fatalism. And the Sage knows all of this; he knows that “P, unless God wills that not-P” is a necessary truth. But then it is not clear what it could mean to have an impulse to a recognized necessary truth. This is the “too easy” part; as a Sage, I know that there is always a conflict between the antecedent “God does not will that not-P” and the negated consequent, not-P, no matter what P is. I do not need to do anything to bring about the truth of the conditional embedded in my impulse; it is necessarily true.

But then how could impulse with reservation lead in the right way to any action, as for instance the Sage’s reasonable avoidance of unnecessary injury? I have an impulse to, bracket, avoid injury if God wills that I avoid injury, end bracket. But the stuff in the middle is simply guaranteed to be true, no matter what I do. It seems very odd to imagine having an impulse towards something one takes to be a necessary truth (e. g., I have an impulse towards water’s being H₂O?). How could an impulse of this sort have any action-guiding force? How, for that matter, is the impulse to be healthy unless God wills otherwise different in its action-guiding force from the impulse to be sick unless God wills otherwise?

3) Finally, there is the problem of contraposition, namely that “if P then Q” is equivalent to “if not Q then not P”. This is a familiar fact with truth-functional conditionals, but it is just as much a feature of the Stoic analysis. “Conflict” (*makhê*) is symmetrical; if there is a conflict between P and not Q, then there is a conflict between not-Q and P. So this one symmetrical conflict supports either conditional, “if P then Q”, and “if not-Q, then not-P”.

Now it is pretty clear that one of the general aims of Stoicism is to adapt one's own mind and will, as closely as one can, to the mind and will of God. So it is perfectly reasonable for critics to want the doctrine of reservation to reflect and express that general effort at submission; I want to be healthy, but not if this would be contrary to God's will. The problem is that on the conditional analysis, reservation is no more meek than it is imperious. "I want to be healthy, unless God wills otherwise", seems to be equivalent to "I want God to will otherwise, unless I am healthy". But this is a very strange outcome. Surely it is blasphemous for me to want God to will this or that; instead of following God, I am now giving orders.

And in general, it seems that a desire with a proviso does not involve a symmetrical attitude between the content of the desire and the content of the proviso. "I would like you to do this, provided that it does not inconvenience you", is not the same thing as "I would like this to inconvenience you, provided that you do not do it". It is true that in a jocular vein one might equate "you had better be there, unless you are in the hospital", with "you had better be in the hospital if you are not there". But the joke presumably consists in the very fact that only the first is a way of expressing a desire that someone be there, whereas the second is a way of expressing the desire that someone be in the hospital. In neither case is one's desire symmetrically distributed over both clauses. What you really want is expressed in the main clause; the proviso may describe an outcome that you can tolerate, or an excuse for the non-attainment of the main clause, but it is not something that you desire *per se* as the main clause is. There is some kind of implicit ranking of options, or expression of a preference and a default, or some other asymmetrical ordering of the two possibilities. But exactly that asymmetry is ruled out on the conditional analysis, because of the symmetry of contraposition.

These are problems that arise for treating "I want Q, unless P" as "I want it to be the case that (if not P, then Q)". They do not show that there is necessarily anything incoherent about desires with provisos, or *deo volente* desires, nor do they show that these desires are not susceptible of some analysis or another.¹⁵ But these problems do show that there is something incoherent about embedding the conditional analysis in the rest of the Stoic system. They are sufficient to convince me that

¹⁵ I am inclined to think that the best route lies in taking advantage of the work done on conditional obligation, especially the recent contributions made by the theory of non-monotonic logics, e. g. John F. Horty "Moral Dilemmas and Non-monotonic Logic", *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 23, pp. 35–65, 1994.

if the Stoic doctrine of reservation involved having an impulse that such and such should happen, unless it goes against Zeus' plan, then the Stoics would not have been able to give any useful analysis of that impulse in terms of the conditionals in their propositional logic.

Part III. A New Interpretation of Reservation

Part III.1 The Proposal

In fact, the evidence for the standard view is very poor in any case. There is, to the contrary, some evidence that reservation does not involve a conditional impulse, and some evidence that it does not prevent frustration. The evidence that reservation does not involve conditional impulses comes in two pieces: first of all, Chrysippus shows us that the relevant impulses are not conditional, then Seneca shows us that the relevant conditionals are not impulses.

When we look at it with the standard view in mind, we should be surprised that the passage about Chrysippus' foot (Chr 1) says nothing about any impulses with conditional contents (and this should be just as puzzling on the external as on the internal option). Instead, Chrysippus says that, given one cognitive state, namely ignorance about the future, he has one sort of impulse – a simple one – and that given another cognitive state, namely knowledge about the future, he would have a different sort of impulse – again a simple one. In neither case does he have a conditional impulse. If this quote illustrates impulses with reservation, then reservation does not involve impulses to conditionals. And independently of the fine details, it certainly shows us that there was no general Stoic prohibition on having simplex, unconditional impulses. We may, presumably, take Chrysippus' recommendations as a good guide to what the Sage does; these are impulses of exactly the kind that a Sage might have. And Stobaeus tells us (St 1) that the Sage has all of his impulses with reservation; yet the Sage's reservations in this case have left no trace on the internal contents of what are clearly simple, non-conditional impulses.

Next, we should note that Seneca nowhere says that his conditional clauses are part of impulses. Instead, they are parts of opinions, promises,¹⁶ thoughts, mental assumptions, and the like; never desires,

¹⁶ The logical status of promises in the Stoic system is completely unclear; were they treated as assertions, oaths, or something *sui generis*? Promises are never mentioned in the standard lists of complete lekta, and in fact the only occurrence of the word "*huposkthesis*" and its cognates in SVF occurs in Lucian's account

wishes, impulses and the like. If these conditionals are reservations, then the reservations do not form any part of any impulses per se, but just of ancillary beliefs, predictions or thoughts. We shall see this in more detail below.

The evidence on frustration is difficult, and seemingly contradictory. The passage from Stobaeus certainly seems to promise the non-frustration of impulses with reservation: nothing happens contrary to the Sage's desire, or impulse, because of his doing all such things with reservation. And Seneca seems to weigh in on the same side of the debate: in one passage he says that "everything works out" for the Sage.¹⁷ And it is presumably such passages that led Inwood to write: "Acting with this reservation, he [Seneca] says, brings it about that the agent is never frustrated, filled with regret, or required to change his mind".¹⁸ Reservation, then, seems to prevent the frustration of the impulse to which the reservation is added. However, a second glance at Seneca shows that he too sometimes talks as though reservation cannot prevent frustration: "[N]or does everything go as the Sage desired, but as he thought [...]. But the pain of failed desire must strike the mind more lightly if you have not promised certain success". (Se 3) Here, then, it looks as though there is frustration: it is not the case that every thing goes as he desires, and there is failed desire. And reservation's role is somehow to ease the pain of failed desire, to help us in the aftermath of frustration.

The same vacillation appears when we take a second look at the Stobaeus passage. True, it says that nothing happens contrary to the Sage's impulse, and that this is the result of his using reservation. But

of the paradox of the crocodile (Lucian Vit. Auct. 22 = SVF 2.287). I am inclined to think they will have been treated on the model of oaths, but even this would not settle their status, since the evidence on oaths is unclear. That Seneca is not mistaken in mentioning reservations in promises is suggested by the scholium on Iliad 1.128, which also mentions making promises with reservation (the only Greek source to do so): "*ai ke poti Zeus: hoti meth' hupexaireseôs dei poieisthai tas huposkheseis, dia to adêlon tês tukhês*". This scholium is not included in any Stoic collections, but I am inclined to think it reflects genuine Stoic doctrine. It may also be that Seneca's "*promittere*" translates "*epaggellomai*" instead of "*hupiskhnomai*"; see the close relation of these terms at Plato's *Prot.* 319 a. In that case, Epictetus' Ench. 2 (our E 1) might show that every desire makes a promise of attainment, i. e. that there is an implicit prediction of future success (I translate "*epangelia*" with the more neutral "profession" in the main text). But this promise would still be distinct from the contents of the impulse proper, i. e. the attribution of some value to the object of the impulse.

¹⁷ Ben. 4.34.4.

¹⁸ Inwood p. 120.

then it continues on to say that none of the “opposed things” befall him unforeseen. What are these “opposed things”, and what are they opposed to? The natural reference is to “all such things”, i. e. his desires, impulses, and so on. But if the opposed things are things opposed to his desires, impulses and so on, then it seems that here too the Sage’s desires really are objectively frustrated; he desires one thing, and something opposed to it befalls him (although not unforeseen). So the Stobaeus passage too, on further examination, gives evidence that whatever reservation does, it does not prevent the Sage’s impulses from being frustrated. And here we may note that Seneca too uses very similar language in speaking about events resisting or opposing the Sage’s plans (*resistere suis propositis, consiliis obstant, destinata prohibeat*), where this would make no sense if reservation were an internal clause rendering impossible any opposition to the original impulse.

What, in that case, could Stobaeus mean by saying that nothing happens contrary to the Sage’s desires and impulses? Here is a proposal. Perhaps it means that there is never a conflict between what is happening to the Sage at a time, and his desires and impulses at that time, simply because the Sage changes his desires and impulses in response to what happens. True, yesterday the Sage had the impulse to be healthy today, and today something opposed to that has befallen him: he is sick. Since something opposed to his earlier desire has befallen him, that earlier desire has been frustrated, and things have not gone as he wished. But nothing that is now happening is contrary to the desires and impulses he now has, exactly because, as soon as he realized that he was sick, he extinguished his impulse not to be sick, and replaced it with an impulse to be sick. And this responsiveness to the turn of events was facilitated by his having foreseen that he might get sick, even at the time that he had the impulse to remain healthy. Something opposed to his impulse did befall him, but it was not unforeseen, and it is not happening contrary to his (current) impulse.¹⁹

¹⁹ This strategy of altering one’s desires will be familiar to the reader of Epictetus, e. g. Ench. 8, Diss. 1.12.15, 4.1.89, 4.1.99, and the quotation of Musonius at Diss. 1.1.27. But it is not a late innovation in Stoicism. I suspect it already lies behind some verses of Cleanthes, in which Reason and Spirit (*thumos*) conduct a stichomythic exchange:

“Whatever is it that you wish, Spirit? Tell me this”.

“I, Reason? To do everything I wish”.

“A kingly thing, indeed! And yet, say it once again”.

“[I wish] that things may come out, in exactly the way that I desire (*hôs an epithumô, taut’ hopôs genêsetai*)”.

On this reading, the Stobaeus passage fully recognizes the possibility of the frustration of the original impulse, and does not give any reason to think that reservation obviates the possibility of its being frustrated. Rather, reservation aids the Sage in recasting desires and impulses in response to events. And notice that this also exactly jibes with the passage from Chrysippus. As long as the future is unclear to him, he has the impulse to be healthy – a simple, non-conditional impulse. Now, if tomorrow it turns out that he is ill, then today's impulse will be frustrated. But as soon as the Sage knows that he is fated to be ill (e. g., by waking up ill), he immediately extinguishes the one impulse, and acquires the new, equally simple impulse actually to be ill – and thereby restores the harmony between his impulses, and what is happening. At no point does anything happen contrary to his impulses at that point, so long as he can keep his impulses up to date with what is actually happening.

The Chrysippus passage nowhere mentions or describes a reservation. But, since Stobaeus tells us that the Sage has all of his impulses with reservation, we may assume that a reservation was in operation even if not mentioned; and it is not too hard to see what its contents will have been. In having the first, simple impulse, the Sage presumably had the future-tensed belief, “I shall be healthy, unless it is fated that I should not be healthy”. This reservation – the awareness that the initial impulse may be frustrated – is presupposed by the responsiveness with which the Sage in this passage tailors his ongoing impulses in order to fit events. It would have been harder for him flexibly to notice and respond to what is happening, e. g. his becoming ill, if it had simply never occurred to him that he might become ill, or if he had convinced himself that he could not become ill, and resisted changing his mind for that reason. Here we see the work done in the Stobaeus quote by the fact that none of the opposed things befalls him unforeseen.

What is achieved by having Spirit rephrase its manifesto? I suggest that the point is to bring out more clearly how Spirit's over-arching desire is a second-order one, namely to achieve a complete correspondence between its first-order desires and the sequence of events, i. e. to avoid frustration. For then Reason can proceed to argue that this correspondence is symmetrical, a point displayed neatly in the last line; the same correspondence is achieved if things happen as Spirit desires, or if Spirit desires as things happen. But we have no control over external events, and complete control over our desires, so that if correspondence is what Spirit really wants, then its only sensible strategy is to tailor its desires to the sequence of events.

But this work is primarily cognitive, rather than conative.²⁰ The possibility that things can turn out otherwise needs to be built into his predictions of the future, not into his impulses. And that is actually what Seneca shows us. When the Sage makes predictions about the future, he builds conditional clauses into them, which register his awareness that the future is uncertain, and also prepare for his eventual readiness to respond to the failure of his predictions.²¹

On the evidence of Seneca, this seems to be what reservation amounts to; it is a feature of the Sage's future-tensed beliefs, not his impulses, and it is a hedge against error, not against frustration. "This is why we say that nothing happens against the Sage's opinion (*contra opinionem*). We do not exempt him from human accidents, but from human errors; nor does everything go as he desires, but as he thought (*nec illi omnia ut uoluit cedunt, sed ut cogitauit*)". And this hedge takes the form of a conditional clause built into his beliefs about future contingents; "I will sail, if nothing occurs". If reservations rendered impulse unfrustratable, as on the standard view, then Seneca should not say "nor does everything go as he desires". But if the conditional is in the belief, while the impulse remains simple, then Seneca makes just the right distinction; the original simple impulse is objectively frustrated, so that things do not go as the Sage desired, but the conditional belief is verified, so that everything does go as he thought.

Now this feature of the Sage's beliefs should not in the least surprise us. The Sage never opines; not only does he not have any false beliefs, he does not have any beliefs that are not equivalent to knowledge. He suspends judgement about anything which is not simply guaranteed to be true, whether because of its perceptual evidence, or because of its conceptual necessity, or its logical character, or the like. Thus, quite independently of any considerations of reservation, we already knew that the Sage would never assent to the proposition, e. g., that he will be healthy tomorrow, since it is perfectly possible that he might not be healthy tomorrow. But the Sage can assent to the proposition that he

²⁰ Can I maintain such a distinction, when I also take for granted here that the Stoics were thorough-going cognitivists about emotions and impulses in general, and treated them merely as a subset of beliefs? Yes, because the subset itself is distinct. What separates conation from other cognition, impulse from belief in general, is that impulses always have some evaluative content; if the belief makes no reference to what is good or bad, preferred or dispreferred, then it is a mere belief, not an impulse.

²¹ A referee for this journal reminded me of the relevance of Epictetus' advice to say to oneself, while kissing one's child, "tomorrow you may die" (Diss. 3.24.88).

will be healthy tomorrow unless he is not healthy tomorrow. The Sage's suspension of assent towards a simple, non-conditional proposition about a future contingent is only what we would predict from general considerations of the Sage's avoidance of opinion; thus we should not be surprised to see that Seneca says the Sage suspends judgement in this case as well (*suspensus, sequitur sortem*), and only assents to the reserved prediction.

And here the very vacuity of these conditionals, which vitiated them as contents for an action-guiding impulse, makes them perfectly good candidates for the Sage's beliefs; he must avoid error, and assenting to necessary truths is a reliable way of doing that. But while not having any simple belief that he will be healthy tomorrow, and assenting only to the tautology that he will be healthy unless he is not healthy, the Sage can nevertheless have a simple impulse directed towards being healthy tomorrow, the sort of impulse that could play a role in his eating food today, avoiding precipices, and the like. This impulse has the form, "my being healthy tomorrow is a preferred indifferent of such a sort that it is reasonable or proper or fitting that I should pursue it".

Now the Sage can assent to this impulse, because it can be true, even if it is false that he will be healthy tomorrow. In particular, the Sage can assent to this impulse, because he can actually know the truth of its propositional contents. From his experience of life, the Sage has gained knowledge about what things are and are not preferred indifferents, and what it is reasonable or proper to pursue and avoid. So his simple impulse to remain healthy is not an opinion of the sort that the Sage must avoid having.²²

²² I have discussed kataleptic impressions of the form "it is reasonable that/according to nature that ..." in my paper "Reasonable Impressions in Stoicism", *Phronesis* vol. XVI/3, 1996, pp. 318–334. Note that the Sage's avoidance of opinion also commits him to refraining from assent to the impression e.g. "I shall be alive tomorrow", though not to the impression "it is reasonable that I shall be alive tomorrow" (since this can be kataleptic). So if the Sage should happen to give one of the "reasonable accounts" of his actions in virtue of which they are *kathekonta*, then it could not contain any statements like "I will be alive tomorrow". E.g., suppose he were explaining why his eating dinner had been *kathekon*. The reasoning could well contain such statements as "if I am to continue living, then I must continue eating", or, "if it is reasonable that I shall be alive tomorrow, then it is reasonable that I should eat dinner", and "it is reasonable that I shall be alive tomorrow". Presumably, statements of this kind could produce the conclusion "it is reasonable that I should eat dinner". But statements of the form "I shall be alive tomorrow", or any other future contingents, could not appear, since the Sage could never know them to be true. So, if a Sage can give the kind of reasonable defence of his actions that is envisaged in the definition of the

Thus we have the following revised picture. Having an impulse with reservation means having a simple impulse, and having along with it a complex, conditional belief about the future. E. g. having the simple impulse to eat some food which might be expressed by the belief “it is fitting that I should eat this food”, along with the complex belief “I shall eat this food, unless Zeus wills otherwise, i. e. unless I do not eat this food”. There is no conditional clause in the impulse, and in fact there is no reservation *in* the impulse itself; an impulse with reservation is one thing along with another, not one thing containing another.

In consequence, the doctrine of impulse with reservation does nothing to prevent the frustration of the impulse, in the sense of its non-satisfaction. Reservation is, however, a necessary step towards eliminating what we might call “phenomenological frustration”, that is, a certain painful psychic reaction to the non-satisfaction of the impulse. Phenomenological frustration arises from the retention of the original impulse, in the face of its evident non-satisfaction; still wanting not to be sick, even once one has obviously gotten sick. And this is not merely subjectively unpleasant, it is also foolish, in the sense that it is wanting something impossible, namely that the present should not be what it is. It is also deeply blasphemous; for it is supposing that you know better than Zeus does, how things ought to have come out. “It would have been better if I had not gotten sick”, or “I should not have gotten sick”, are both necessary falsehoods in a world strictly determined by a providential God.²³

Part III.2 Distinguishing Reservation from Three Related Items

To make the current proposal more clear, I should briefly distinguish reservation from three related items; generalized conditional dispositions to impulse; impulses that contain conditionals; and second-order impulses. First, there is the agent’s disposition to have impulses, their pattern of preferences and dispositional evaluative beliefs – which I take it is exactly what Epictetus means by the term “*prohairesis*”. Dis-

kathekon, this defence cannot consist in reasonable impressions or reasonable axiomata of the sort “I shall be alive tomorrow”, but must instead consist in impressions or axiomata governed by operators stating “it is reasonable that ...”.

²³ Again, Epictetus: “To strive for things not possible is slavish and foolish; the mark of an alien, fighting with God [...]” (3.24.21) “Why then do I fight against God? Why do I desire to have at all costs things not to be desired, things not granted? How then [should I desire]? As it has been granted, and to the extent that it is possible [...]. It is not just that I am a fool to try force on One Stronger; long before that I am unjust”. (4.1.101)

positions involve conditionals in any case (e. g. this vase is fragile, and so will break if dropped), but the *prohairesis* of the non-Sage differs from that of the Sage in that the first is less responsive to the turn of events. When I become a Sage, my *prohairesis* – which may now be called my virtue – is so finely responsive, that the lag between God’s willing something and my willing it becomes vanishingly small; I zig when God zigs, and zag when God zags, and live in agreement to such an extent that my current mental contents are merely a subset of God’s. I am wishing with God, and desiring with God;²⁴ in the familiar Nozickian idiom, I am tracking the divine mind. Still, having a conditional disposition to have impulses is a different thing from having any impulses that are themselves internally conditional; Chrysippus’ foot shows this much.²⁵

Distinct from the disposition to have impulses, there is the possibility of an impulse which is intrinsically and internally conditional, in the way originally envisioned by the standard view. There is some evidence, contained in a fragmentary papyrus from Herculaneum, that Chrysippus did consider such impulses. The evidence does not mention impulses explicitly, but rather concerns the logic of imperatives. A fragment of Chrysippus’ “Logical Questions”²⁶ discusses the proper analysis of imperatives that, at least on the surface, seem to have conditional clauses somehow built into them. Now we know that on the Stoic analysis, every impulse is equivalent to an imperative. So this discussion may be evidence of an attempt to analyze impulses that have conditional clauses. If it is, it shows an awareness of exactly the sorts of inadequacies I have referred to, and the immense gap between the logical resources of Stoic logic, and the complexities of ordinary language.

In the columns of interest (cols. 11–13), Chrysippus considers the sentence “walk; and if not sit down!” He seems to claim that if this whole sentence is taken as a single command, then it is meaningless, since there is no single predicate with which one might construct the corresponding indicative sentence “this man walks-and-if-not-sits-down”. However, he continues, we more normally use the sentence as an abbreviation for the utterance “walk! but if you do not bring that to pass, then sit

²⁴ Epictetus Diss. 2.17.23, 4.1.89.

²⁵ Charles Brittain helped me to see this.

²⁶ Pap. Herc 307 = SVF 2.298 a = Hülser 698. The most recent discussion is that of Jonathan Barnes, “The Logical Investigations of Chrysippus”, in the *Jahrbuch* for 1984/85 of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, pp. 19–29. I am grateful to Charles Brittain for calling it to my attention. A new edition of the papyrus is being prepared by Catherine Atherton for the Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers series.

down!", which in turn really means "Best of all²⁷, walk! But if you do not bring that to pass, then sit down!"

Chrysippus' discussion seems to have been predominantly aporetic, even before the roll was ravaged by history. However, from what remains it seems to be clear that he was interested in imperative sentences of the surface syntactical form

P! and if not P, then Q!

He also seems to have been aware that the analysis of these sentences is dreadfully complicated, and that there is some sort of implicit ranking involved in such an imperative. P and Q are not indifferently enjoined; rather there is some suggestion that P is the command whose obedience is desired in the first instance ("best of all ..."), while Q is not so much P's ally as a *pis aller*. But none of this complexity – and Chrysippus seems to be aware of this fact, too – is expressible by the connectives of Stoic logic, or their modern counterparts.

Still, it might be objected, does not this clear evidence of interest in conditional imperatives suggest that there is some merit to the standard view, when it attempts to incorporate Seneca's conditional clauses into the contents of an impulse? The answer must be "no". For it is clear from the papyrus that the antecedents envisioned here (the 'P's above) are first mentioned as self-standing imperatives before being reused in the conditional (i. e. "P!, but if not P ..."). This means that the conditional could not be of the kind Seneca describes, in which an impulse towards a preferred indifferent is accompanied by a reservation mentioning its possible frustration, e. g. its prevention by Zeus or fate. For while it might seem plausible to have the impulse "May I be healthy, if Zeus does not will otherwise!", this is reduced to nonsense when the antecedent stands alone. For then we have: "Zeus, do thou will that I not be healthy! But if Zeus does not will that I not be healthy, then (may I) be healthy!"

There are two problems here. First, I am directing imperatives at Zeus and fate, which are blasphemous or pointless or both (and would not be equivalent to impulses in any case, which are only self-directed imperatives). Second, I am gratuitously requesting things which are dispreferred and contrary to nature. This becomes even stranger when we remember that Chrysippus notes that "P!, but if not P then Q!" suggests that the content of P is the most desired outcome. Now we have something like, "best of all may I be ill, but if I am not ill may I be healthy!" And both of these strange results must follow if we imagine, with the standard view, that reservation involves a conditional impulse to natural and preferred things, whose antecedent involves Zeus, fate or the like.

Now suppose, instead, that we imagine very different contents. Instead of making "Q" the content of the impulse to a preferred thing, let us make it refer to some dispreferred, contrary to nature thing, e. g. my being ill tomorrow. And instead of making "P" a statement about Zeus' plan or fate, let us make it refer to the correlative preferred natural thing, e. g. my being healthy tomorrow. Then we have plausi-

²⁷ "*Malista men peripatei*". Barnes' translation "please walk" seems to reject this very common use of "*malista men*" to introduce the most favored choice, but Barnes does not explain. I concur with Hülser's "vor allem".

ble, non-blasphemous impulses, that ought to look very familiar: "May I be healthy tomorrow! But if I am not healthy tomorrow, then may I be ill tomorrow!"

We have cleaned up both puzzles. We are no longer desiring illness best of all, and health as the second best. And we are now directing imperatives, not at Zeus, but at ourselves. Thus they could actually lead to action, i. e. to our taking steps to preserve our health or being resigned to our ill-health. Furthermore, it should become more obvious how Chrysippus, in considering the sequence of simplex impulses he has in Chr. 1, might have come to be interested in complex imperatives of Herculaneum type. Having such complex, prospective impulses might, e. g., be part of the training whereby one comes to have the right sort of simplex impulses at the right times. However, it is clear that the conditionals in play here cannot be Seneca's *deo volente* clauses, and thus that these imperatives, even if they do represent conditionalized impulses, cannot be the impulses with reservation that the standard view conjectured.

Finally, there are certain impulses whose complexity is not due to the presence of a conditional, but due to their being second-order impulses towards the possession of certain impulses, or towards the possession of a certain kind of disposition to have impulses. The first of these figures in M3 above, where Marcus says (MA. 6.50): [... R]emember that you were having an impulse with reservation, and that you were not desiring impossibles. What then? An impulse of that kind; and this you attained". Marcus' elliptical phrase "an impulse of that kind" seems to answer the question "what then?", i. e., "what then were you desiring (given that you were not desiring impossibles)?" What Marcus was desiring, it turns out, was that his original impulse should be of a certain kind, and this second-order desire was in fact satisfied (although the first order impulse was not). He attained "an impulse of that kind" which he had desired, exactly because his original impulse proved to be of the right kind, namely of the kind that extinguishes itself when faced with obstacles, that does not persist when its object proves impossible of attainment, that is appropriately responsive to the turn of events.

Similar doctrine lies behind a passage of Epictetus:

E3 (Ench. 4): Whenever you are about to come to grips with some act, remind yourself what sort of thing the act is. If setting out to bathe, imagine what happens at the baths: the splashers, the shovers, the abusers, the stealers. And thus you will undertake the task in a more secure way, if straightaway you say "I want both to wash myself and also to preserve my *prohairesis* in its natural state". And say this in the same way for each task. That way, if some obstacle arises to your washing, you will have ready to hand "But this was not the only thing I wanted, but also to preserve my *prohairesis* in a natural state. But I will not preserve it, if I am aggrieved at what happens".

Epictetus has an impulse to bathe, and an additional desire, that his *prohairesis* should be responsive to events. The link between Marcus' "impulse of a certain kind" and Epictetus' "*prohairesis* of a certain kind" will be the familiar two-way one, both that the *prohairesis* is exactly a disposition to have occurrent impulses, and that we develop such a disposition in large part by its exercise, i. e. through particular

occurrent impulses. Thus if I allow my current ablutionary impulse to continue unchecked by the impediments to bathing I have encountered – if I desire impossibilities – I not only get myself into an emotional upset right now, I also do long-term damage to my impulsive disposition (my *prohairesis*), making it less tractable to events.

These second-order impulses, like the internally-conditionalized imperatives of the “Logical Questions”, are fascinating in themselves, and help us better to understand the overall regimen of psychic discipline of which reservation played one part. However, these second-order impulses are also not reservations, as some have thought.²⁸ The evidence of Seneca²⁹ shows that they were *deo volente* conditional clauses in non-impulsive assertions about the future.

Part IV. Broader Implications of Reservation

As noted at the beginning, the standard view of reservation has been pressed into service by critics in explaining several related areas of Stoic ethics and psychology. This is especially true of Inwood’s treatment of reservation, but his generalized use of reservation as a key concept has caught on with others. Because he attempted to find a role for reservation in several areas, and because he has been followed by several other influential writers, it is important to see that the entire role of reservation in Inwood’s book needs to be reassessed. In particular, I strongly suspect that reservation has no role to play in the definition or nature of emotions, no role in the definition or nature of the *eupatheiai*, and no role in the definition or nature of the good.

One part of Inwood’s reconstruction which Long and Sedley have endorsed is the idea that reservation played a central role in the Stoic conception of emotions.³⁰ The idea is that the excessiveness of emotions, which are defined as excessive (*pleonazousa*) impulses, consists in their lack of the appropriate reservation clause. Now this conception of emotions as impulses that lack internal reservation-clauses cannot work, once we see that reservation is not a part of any impulse. But even had reservation turned out to be an internal feature of some impulses, as on the standard view, its presence or absence would still not distinguish emotions from non-emotions. The

²⁸ E. g. A. Bonhöffer, *Die Ethik des Stoikers Epiktet*, Stuttgart 1894, p. 86, glossing the phrase “*meth’ hupexaireseôs*”: “d. h. so, dass man dabei nicht die äussere Thätigkeit selbst, die ja durch allerlei Umstände gehemmt werden kann, sondern die innere Thätigkeit des richtigen Wollens sich zum eigentlichen Ziele setze”.

²⁹ As well as the evidence of the scholium on *Iliad* 1.128, mentioned above.

³⁰ LS vol. 2 p. 417: “For the importance of this concept [sc. *hupexairesis*] cf. Inwood [...] who interprets ‘excessive impulse’ [...] in terms of its lack of ‘reservation’. This is strongly supported by other instances of the word”.

view rests on a straightforward confusion. What distinguishes emotions from other impulses is that they falsely represent their objects as goods or evils, when they are in fact indifferent. This representation is an explicit part of the propositional content of the impulse; i. e., the desire for the cake has the content that “this cake is a good at which ...” while the selection has the content “this cake is a preferred indifferent at which ...” Reservation has no role to play here.

Part of the trouble here is that “impulse” (i. e. *hormê*), as Inwood himself rightly saw,³¹ is used in Epictetus with a different sense from the one it bore in the old Stoa. Earlier, impulse had been the genus of which emotions, *eupatheiai*, and selections were all species. In the late Stoics, its sense is narrowed so that it refers only to what had earlier been called selections, i. e. veridical ascriptions of indifference to indifferents. In this later sense, it is coordinate with and exclusive of the species of emotions (e. g. desire, fear, etc.).

Now if we took “impulse” in its earlier, generic sense, then we might imagine that the presence or absence of a reservation-clause was the differentia which distinguished one species of impulses (namely emotions) from another (namely selections). And then we might think that selections were selections because they contained reservation-clauses, and emotions were emotions because they lacked them. But when Epictetus tells us to use “impulses” with reservation, he is exactly not using this older, generic sense, i. e. the sense in which impulse is a genus of which emotions are a species. Instead, he is using “impulse” in its later, specific sense, as the equivalent of the older term “selection”. Thus, Epictetus is asking us to add reservation to a kind of mental event that could never have been an emotion in any case, namely a veridical assessment of a preferred indifferent qua preferred indifferent. Thus in supposing that the “impulse” becomes unemotional only by the addition of a reservation, and that without the reservation it would be an emotion, this proposal confuses the earlier and later senses of “impulse”.

The real story is much simpler. What makes a (generic) impulse an emotion, and what makes it excessive, is simply the fact that it involves attributing goodness or badness to something which is in reality indifferent.³² The presence or absence of a *deo volente* conditional antecedent can make no difference here. Having the false belief that acquiring this money would be a good thing is having an emotion, namely the desire to acquire this money, expressed either by the statement “I want to acquire this money”, or by the statement “it would be a good thing were I to acquire this money”. It would still be an emotion, even were it augmented by a conditional clause, “I want to acquire this money, unless Zeus wills otherwise”, for this would

³¹ Inwood pp. 116–117.

³² It may also be that the Stoics would have classed as an emotion the false ascription of goodness to badness or badness to goodness, e. g. a vicious person who took their own vice to be the good, or who felt fear at the prospect of their future virtue. But I know of no texts that bear on the question, and incline to think that the Stoics would have found the case psychologically impossible, or incorrectly described.

still involve the attribution of goodness or badness to the money. So long as the impulse attributes goodness or badness to an indifferent, it is excessive, and an emotion. Thus a Chrysippean “impulse” (i. e. member of the genus including emotions, *eupatheiai*, and selections) that attributed goodness or badness to an indifferent could never be anything but an emotion, with or without an internal reservation clause. And an Epictetan “impulse” (i. e. the species of selection) which accurately attributes indifference to an indifferent, could never be an emotion, with or without an internal reservation clause.

Nussbaum unfortunately added a confusion of her own, while citing Inwood’s work as her authority.³³ It is surely not the case, nor did Inwood ever claim, that the presence of a reservation can convert a generic impulse into a *eupatheia*. The Sage has two kinds of non-emotional impulses (in the generic sense). The first are veridical ascriptions of indifference to indifferent things (e. g. the Sage’s selection of health, food, and the like), which are “impulses” in the Epictetan sense, and so can be accompanied by reservations, which would merely register the Sage’s general epistemological avoidance of assent to future contingents. The second are veridical ascriptions of goodness and badness to virtue and vice respectively. These are the *eupatheiai*. No attitude towards an indifferent, whether accompanied by reservation or not, could ever be a *eupatheia*.³⁴

Still less does the issue of reservation give us any insight into Stoic axiology and the nature of the good itself. Inwood suggests³⁵ that a fragment of Stobaeus (and a lacunose one at that) shows that the good is “that which stimulates an unreserved impulse”. This is based both on his theory that impulse with reservation is a special kind of impulse, and also his suggestion that an enigmatic word in Stobaeus (*autotelês*) should be translated as “unreserved”. But there is no independent reason to think that *autotelês* means “unreserved”; had the whole picture cohered, we might accept the suggestion, but it emphatically does not. For Inwood also holds that the Sage’s *orexis* is only directed towards the good, and then he faces an immediate problem.

³³ Nussbaum, p. 399 fn. 78, discussing the topic of *eupatheia*: “Inwood (1985) argues persuasively that a central idea here is that of “reservation”: I want X, but with the proviso that it is accordance with Zeus’ will”. Inwood had clearly warned against exactly this muddle on Inwood p. 175.

³⁴ The evidence for this is discussed in detail in my article “The Old Stoic Theory of the Emotions”. To the evidence presented there, I should like to add Epictetus’ Diss. 3.7.7: “For it is not possible that one thing should be the good (*agathon*), while a different thing should be that at which we are reasonably elated (*eulogôs epairoumetha*)”. Here Epictetus uses the definition of the *eupatheia* of *khara*, as “reasonable elation” (*eulogos eparsis*, see e. g. SVF 3.432), and says that it cannot be directed towards anything other than the good. I should note that the context of this quotation, in which Epictetus is arguing with an Epicurean, might offer scope for doubt about its evidential weight; but it coheres so well with the other evidence that I believe it does reflect official usage.

³⁵ Inwood p. 125 n. 76, p. 212.

At one point [footnote to Stobaeus 2.115] we learn that the old Stoics did recommend that *orexis*, the pursuit of the good, should be subject to reservation. This can, however, be easily reconciled with the designation of the 'good' as that which stimulates unreserved impulse and with Epictetus' position. For presumably *orexis* is being used there in the sense of 'pursuit of the apparent good'. [...] A correct *orexis*, aimed at the good properly conceived, stimulates unreserved impulse. But when there is a possibility that the conception of the good which the agent is working with is incorrect, reservation is called for.³⁶

This reconciliation cannot work. For the passage Inwood wishes to explain away is the text from Stobaeus we have seen above (St 1), which is solely and explicitly about the Sage! In whatever way we are to explain the fact that the Sage is there said to use reservation with his *orexeis*, it is certainly not because he is only pursuing the apparent good, or has an incorrect conception of the good.

The proposal to translate *autotelês* as "unreserved", and to give reservation a role in distinguishing the good from other objects of desire, is thus completely unsupported, and should be rejected. There is, doubtless, some sense in which the Stoics thought our virtue was up to us in a way that food, health and so on are not. But reservation gives us no insight into the matter. Thus it is also confused for critics to write that, e. g., "the good is the only thing worthy of unreserved (or unconditional) choice". The fundamental mistake here, all talk of reservation to one side, is to suppose that one and the same sort of impulse, e. g. "choice", could be appropriate to the good (always and unconditionally), and also appropriate to indifferent things (but with reservation, or if certain other conditions are met, perhaps circumstantial ones). This cannot be right, since our sources show that there is no impulse that can be properly directed to the good (or virtue or what have you) and also directed towards indifferents, with or without reservation, with or without special conditions or circumstances being met. Only goods are the proper objects of the impulse called "choice" (*hairesis*, *haireta*); indifferents are worthy not of choice but of selection (*eklogê*, *lêpta*).³⁷ No single class of impulses can be directed to both. And this makes perfect sense; for from the definitions of emotions we know that impulses explicitly attribute goodness, badness, or indifference of either kind, to their objects. So the *eupatheia* of choice, for instance, when properly directed, truly attributes goodness to virtue, by saying "virtue is a good of such a sort that I ought to pursue it, or it is befitting that I pursue it". How could such an impulse ever be appropriately directed to an indifferent? What sort of condition or reservation could ever be added to the false statement "food is a good etc." that would ever make it a candidate for the Sage's assent? So all talk of the good or virtue being uniquely suitable for "unreserved" or "unconditional" choice is a mistake to begin with, even before we make this construct of "unreserved" choice somehow constitutive or criterial for goodness.³⁸

³⁶ Inwood p. 125.

³⁷ Plutarch 1070 a = SVF 3.123, Stobaeus 2.72.19 = SVF 3.88.

³⁸ I suspect that such talk among critics of the good or virtue being "unconditionally choiceworthy" comes originally from a common misreading of such passages

What then are the broader implications of reservation? It seems to me that it tells us important things about the state of mind of the Sage, and of those who aspire to sagacity. Critics sometimes write as though the Sage's mind was fixed and unchanging, focussed on the eternal truths and free of the vacillations in belief and desire that characterize other mortals. And this may have encouraged the view that reservation involved the desiderative analogue of *scientia media*; like the beliefs of Molina's God, the desires of the Sage would be able to persist unchanged by events, exactly because they had conditional responses to events built into them.

There is no doubt that the Sage knows many eternal truths, and has some unchanging desires. And since the Sage never has any false beliefs, the Sage will certainly not vacillate between true and false beliefs. But in opposition to this picture of mental fixity, I want to emphasize the degree to which the Sage is constantly changing his mind, in the sense that the Sage is constantly revising his impulses, in order to conform to the course of events.³⁹ And this is what we would expect the Sage to do, if we think that the Sage's end is to conform their mental contents to God's mental contents, to track the divine mind.

For there are two things that should strike us about God's mind, as we study it through the medium of nature. The first is its great regularity and lawlike generality. The second is its liability to countenance particular exceptions, especially in the sublunary affairs of animals. Human beings have two legs, and caribou begin to breed in their fourth year. But this human has just had one leg removed by a falling stone, and that caribou was just eaten while still a calf. And there is nothing

as DL 7.101–103 = SVF 3.117 = LS 58A, in which the Stoics argue that wealth, health, and other indifferents “no more benefit than harm”. It is natural to suppose that the Stoics therefore think that virtue differs from health etc. in that virtue is beneficial in every circumstance, while health benefits in some circumstances and harms in others. But this would have been a catastrophic view for them to take, since it would mean that, in those circumstances, health is actually a good or actually an evil. This is surely not their view; only virtue benefits, and health never does, completely regardless of circumstances. The “*ou mallon*” formula is being used in its negative sense here (on which see DL 9.75), to mean that the indifferents neither benefit nor harm — ever, in any circumstance. In some circumstances, health is a suitable object of selection (*eklogê*), and in others one should not select it; in every circumstance virtue or the good is a suitable object of choice (*hairesis*). The difference is already made by the type of impulse (selection vs. *eupatheia*); reservations or conditions are otiose.

³⁹ Inwood also stresses the Sage's flexibility at e. g. Inwood pp. 111 f., but I disagree with his account of how reservation enables this flexibility.

here that is not Zeus; all of the things that happen, whether regular or exceptional, happen in accordance with the will of God.

And so in my case too; things like me have a certain natural bodily constitution whose continued maintenance is called “being healthy”; and that I should be healthy tomorrow is a preferred indifferent of such a sort that it is reasonable for me to pursue it. Knowing only what I do about God’s general and lawlike intentions for things like me, I can know that the previous statements are true.⁴⁰ And in an important way, I do not change my mind when I discover, tomorrow, that it is God’s will that I be ill. This humble piece of divine revelation – my being ill despite my reasonable efforts to stay healthy – does not show me that my being healthy was not a preferred indifferent, or that it was not reasonable, given the unclarity of the sequel, for me to pursue it. Indeed, in the absence of such special instructions, it would have been culpable of me to do anything but pursue my health; it is a faulty foot indeed that seeks out mud without its owner’s express command. But events do show me that God wanted me to be ill today, and as soon as that is clear to me, I stop selecting my current health and select my current illness.⁴¹

⁴⁰ To live virtuously, Chrysippus wrote in his *On Ends*, is equivalent to living in accordance with our experience of how things happen by nature (DL 7.87). But of course this “experience”, when had by a Sage, must be equivalent to knowledge, so that it is not an error for Cicero to have translated this with the Latin “*vivere adhibentem scientiam earum rerum, quae natura evenirent*” (Fin. 4.14). Or he may have known a Greek variant that actually used “*epistêmê*” for the “*empeiria*” of DL 7.87.

⁴¹ The case is slightly more complex, because *eklogê*, like its vicious analogue *epithumia*, is intrinsically future-tensed and prospective (cf. “*doxa tou mellontos agathou*”). Thus the mistake to be avoided is not that of desiring or selecting one’s *current* health, when one finds oneself ill; that is not a logically possible mistake to make. However, one might viciously desire to be healthy a minute from now, when that is clearly impossible, e. g. because it is a twenty-four hour flu, or one’s leg has been permanently lamed. The non-Sage will then have unextinguished desires for impossible health, and feel pain at his present illness; the Sage will select a full day of flu, or a lifetime of limping. What impulse will the Sage have towards his current state of illness? For the non-vicious analogue of *lupê* we have no term corresponding to *eklogê*, and this is as it should be. Preferreds and dispreferreds have those characters only with respect to selection; their differentiating value is *axia eklektikê* (SVF 3.124). I take this strictly, to mean that they differ only in prospect; once they are present, they are completely and absolutely indifferent, and give rise to no impulse whatsoever. This is not Aristo; selective value still plays a role in our deliberations about future actions. Virtue has not been left without a function. But since their differentiating value is only relevant to the future, i. e. selection, our attitude towards their presence should be mere indifference, or perhaps what Marcus called “being satisfied” (*to euareston*).

There is also an important lesson in the fact that the Sage's eupathic *boulêsis* for his future virtue, and the non-Sage's vicious desire for money, food or what have you, are structurally indistinguishable. Reservation, according to Stobaeus, accompanies all of the Sage's impulses. Thus had it turned out to be an internal structural feature of the impulse, e. g. a conditional clause, then we would have been able to spot the vicious impulse merely in virtue of a structural characteristic. But as it turns out, there is no formal difference of internal content between the Sage's impulse and the fool's; both have the form of a belief that such and such (virtue or food) is a good of such a sort that it befits me to pursue it.⁴² The difference between the virtuous impulse of the one, and the vicious impulse of the other, must be found completely outside of the impulse proper, first in its overall coherence or conflict with the agent's other desires and beliefs, then in the stability of the disposition from which it arises, and finally, and most importantly, in the merely external relations of truth and falsehood.

⁴² This is also clear from *Encheiridion* 42, in which we are told that even evil-doers act with the thought in mind that it is befitting for them so to act; and most of all from Stobaeus (SVF 3.169) which tells us that what stimulates impulse is an impression of the *kathêkon*, i. e. that impulse comes, always and only, from conceiving of something as the *kathêkon* thing to do. This shows that "*kathêkon*" cannot mean anything like "duty"; it must instead have the barest gerundive force, something like "the thing to do" – applicable, indeed, to the constabulary's conception of duty, but equally applicable to the burglar's conception of burgling. One of them is simply right about what, in fact, the thing to do is, while the other is wrong; but that they both consider their own actions as "the thing to do" is central to Stoic psychology.