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“Those stubborn principles”: From stoicism to sociability in Joseph Addison’s Cato

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Abstract

Joseph Addison’s 1713 play, Cato: A Tragedy, dramatizes the final days of Cato the Younger’s resistance to Julius Caesar before his eventual suicide at Utica in 46 BC. Although Addison initially seems to present Cato as a model for emulation, we argue that Addison is ultimately critical of both Cato and the Stoicism he embodies. Via the play’s romantic subplot and via his work as an essayist, Addison offers a revision of the Catonic model, reworking it into a gentler model that elevates qualities such as love, friendship, and sympathy and that is more appropriate to the type of peaceful civil and commercial society he wishes to promote.

The uncompromising virtue of Cato the Younger dominates the action of Joseph Addison’s Cato: A Tragedy. The 1713 theatrical drama depicts republican Rome’s doomed resistance to Julius Caesar’s growing power and Cato’s ultimate decision to take his own life rather than to submit to what he sees as the tyrannical rule of Caesar and the suffocation of Roman liberty. Offsetting the political action is a romantic subplot, featuring a romance between Marcia, Cato’s daughter, and the Numidian prince Juba, as well as a romantic triangle involving Cato’s two sons and the daughter of a Roman senator. Cato was wildly popular throughout the eighteenth century, in Great Britain, North America, and much of continental Europe. During Addison’s own lifetime, both Whigs and Tories tried to appropriate the play--and Cato’s principled defense of liberty--for their own causes; Alexander Pope’s account of the play’s London premiere describes the furious competition between the two parties to applaud Cato most loudly.[1] For the American colonists, the play’s themes of liberty, virtue, and resistance to tyranny also held particular significance. Not only did George Washington have the play staged on the eve of battle at Valley Forge, but Cato’s speeches were so thoroughly woven into the American colonial mind that some of the most famous and inspirational lines of the period--including Nathan Hale’s “I regret that I have but one life to lose for my country” and Patrick Henry’s “Give me liberty or give me death”--are drawn from Addison’s Cato, and the play clearly influenced other members of the Founding generation, such as Benjamin Franklin and Noah Webster.[2]

Whether on stage or in the wings, the figure of Cato dominates every scene of Addison’s drama. The embodiment of Roman greatness and of virtue in the face of adversity, Cato initially seems the model Addison offers for emulation.[3] Within the drama, Cato’s example and judgment orient the other characters to what is true and what is false, what is virtuous and what is vicious. As Juba notes, “I’d rather have that man / Approve my deeds, than worlds for my admirers” (II.5).[4] Yet Addison’s depiction of Cato stops short of being an unqualified endorsement. While the theatrical Cato is certainly the standard by which other characters judge themselves, their emotions, and their behavior, a closer examination of the play reveals that Addison himself does not completely endorse Cato as an exemplar. He is critical of Cato on several fronts, particularly for the rigidity of his Stoicism and his prioritizing “stern” principles over personal attachments and the “softer” passions of sympathy, love, and friendship. The dramatic Cato thus requires revision and modification if he is to serve as a model for Addison’s eighteenth-century audience. Via the play’s various subplots--particularly the Marcia-Juba subplot which unites Cato’s two closest surrogates in marriage--Addison indicates the direction such a modification must take.[5] Addison’s efforts as playwright are complemented by his work as essayist, in that at least part of Addison’s project in The Spectator seems the project of a moralist, and the reworking of Cato’s qualities into a gentler and more moderate model, one better

suited to eighteenth-century Britain and to the peaceable civil and commercial society he wishes to advance there.[6]

This interpretation of the play goes against most critics, who view Cato as the "ethical core" of the play and the embodiment of Addisonian virtue. M. M. Kelsell's suggestion that Cato is "an ideal representation of the highest virtues, both public and private" is but one example of the standard reading.[7] In arguing that Addison maintains a critical distance from his hero, we follow a path first suggested by J. M. Amistead and James S. Malek over forty years ago but largely neglected until recent work by scholars such as Lisa A. Freeman and Richard Terry. By moving Cato out of a spotlight as a model for emulation, our reading of the play also brings the romantic subplot closer to center stage, casting it as central both to Addison's reworking of Cato's character and to his broader philosophic and cultural project. This, too, runs counter to the dominant line of criticism since the eighteenth century, according to which the love scenes are peripheral to the play and were merely appended to humor the public.[8] We note, however, that foregrounding the romantic subplot is consistent with the structure of the play itself: Cato begins by announcing the conflict between love and Cato's stern virtue in Portius's opening-scene exhortation to his brother ("And call up thy father to thy soul: / To quell the tyrant Love"), and although the tragedy ends with Cato's suicide in the name of his principles, his final words arrange the marriages of the play's pairs of lovers, Marcia to Juba and Lucia to Portius, thus underlining the significance of the romantic subplot and the reworking of Cato's character represented in it.[9] While both Terry and Freeman highlight the romantic subplot, our argument differs from their arguments in some crucial aspects. With Terry, we suggest that Addison finds Cato's character unsatisfactory, but we differ from Terry in focusing particularly on the Marcia-Juba love plot as the Addisonian corrective to Cato's defects, and we go beyond Terry's analysis in arguing that Addison's criticism of Cato is part of the larger cultural project of politeness that Addison undertakes both in the play and in The Spectator.[10] We also differ significantly from Freeman, with whom we share the notion that the love theme is essential to both the play and to Addison's broader cultural project, but who casts her argument in terms of the politics of gender and the gendered agency of ideological projects.[11]

Set just following Julius Caesar's victory over the Roman republican forces at Pharsalus, Cato: A Tragedy depicts the final days of Cato the Younger's resistance at Utica. The play's main action involves a conspiracy against Cato by the Roman senator Sempronius and the Numidian general Syphax. Cato's inflexibility and high-handed rejection of Caesar's emissary provides the pretext for Cato's supporters' attempted rebellion. Ultimately, both the conspiracy and the rebellion are unsuccessful, the conspiracy's leaders are killed, and Cato's loyal son, Marcus, loses his life in battle as well. The tragedy also includes a romantic subplot, which we argue is essential to the meaning of the play. In this subplot, the Numidian prince Juba strives for the affections of Cato's daughter Marcia, while Cato's sons compete for the affections of Marcia's friend, Lucia. The play ends with Cato preferring to end his life in suicide rather than suffer Caesar's rule, and with the pairings off of Juba and Marcia, and Portius and Lucia.

Cato and the Stoic Ideal

Central to both the historical and the dramatic Cato is his Stoicism, and Addison's simultaneous embrace and critique of Cato's character mirrors his treatment of the Stoicism with which Cato is virtually synonymous. As a philosophy, Stoicism emphasizes self-command through the subordination of the passions to reason, in order to achieve a proper degree of detachment and the impartiality which enable an individual to endure misfortune and failure with equanimity. Other aspects of Stoicism include living in harmony with nature, and as part of its commitment to that

harmony, a belief in the unity and interdependence of the cardinal virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude; and the belief that liberty requires a life committed to these virtues. For the Stoic, liberty in the absence of virtue cannot truly be considered liberty, and the vicious individual cannot be not free, whatever his political condition. Seneca praised Cato's suicide as a sublime example of liberty, and he regarded Cato the Younger as one of the two great wise men or models for imitation in the Stoic tradition.[12]

In contrast with Seneca, Addison's endorsement of Cato and of Stoicism is qualified at best, for the play calls into question the degree to which Cato ought to be considered a model for emulation. Addison is not, of course, the first to suggest that Cato might not be the ideal Stoic, and some Romans saw Cicero--who himself criticized Cato for the inhumanity or immoderation of his Stoicism--as offering a more flexible, prudent, moderate, and humane version of Stoicism.[13] Freeholder 51, which declares Cicero and not Cato to be "the most consummate Statesman of all Antiquity," suggests that Addison also found Cato's Stoicism politically imprudent.[14] Addison's critique in Cato, however, is more extensive than the political critique lodged via Freeholder 51, for while the dramatic Cato is laudable for many reasons, we shall see that Addison's tragedy depicts his rigid attachment to principle as not merely impolitic, but inhumane.

Thus, although there are aspects to Stoicism which Addison appears to admire--particularly its emphasis on liberty and self-command, the idea that virtue and liberty are inextricably linked, and the importance of character and constancy in changing circumstances--his play questions Cato's "rigid virtue" (I.4) and attachment to Stoic principles. Addison's Spectator essays offer additional, more direct criticisms of the bizarre and inhuman outcomes to which Cato's strict adherence to Stoicism would appear to lead. Yet Addison does not simply reject the Stoicism Cato represents; rather, we argue that he attempts to moderate that doctrine and to adapt it to the human condition by giving it a more social and polite character, with politeness understood in the eighteenth-century sense as a culture of sociability in which amiability, conversational skill, and educated taste were the most important markers of gentlemanliness.[15] The culture of politeness promoted by Addison sought to transcend political and religious division by creating a public sphere whose rules of engagement required the moderation but not the extirpation of difference. As such, polite society accommodated diversity both by promoting sociability among different groups and by modeling a "communal vision for a complex society."[16] In softening Cato's Stoicism, Addison also opens a greater role for the affections and the social passions which attach us to others. In particular, he elevates the bonds of friendship and love as part of his general emphasis on the place of human attachments and the private sphere within his understanding of a life lived well.

An Exemplary Hero?

To understand Addison's complex stance toward his play's protagonist, it is first helpful to explore how Cato's character is depicted in the tragedy. By Cato's own account, his example teaches "watchings, abstinence and toil / Laborious virtues all" (II.4). In particular, Cato's language emphasizes his steadfast attachment to the principles of justice and Roman liberty. The significance of liberty to Cato's understanding of virtue cannot be overstated, for he asserts that it is liberty which inspires souls and makes life happy. Death in defense of liberty is a glorious death; thus, the demise of Rome's liberty is a loss worthy of Cato's tears, whereas the death of his own son in defense of Roman liberty is not. Cato's "soul breathes liberty," but it is not simply freedom from constraint which Cato endorses. Rather, he commends--and Addison appears to endorse--an ordered liberty in which rational control of passions shapes the passions themselves, until the individual desires that which he ought to desire, in the way he ought to desire it. In Cato's words, "A day, an hour of virtuous

liberty / Is worth a whole eternity in bondage" (II.1, emphasis added). Cato's understanding of liberty is linked to law, moderation, and justice; the political liberty he praises is associated with the rule of law, with the protection of rights, and with limited power (III.5). Roman liberty, it seems, "reforms" the soul by bringing the restraint of law to human nature, by moderating the passions, by teaching men sociability, and by bringing "wisdom, discipline, and the liberal arts" to them (I.4).

Addison reveals Cato's character as much through the words of the other characters as through Cato's own speeches and deeds. The others' conversations about the Cato they perceive emphasize the qualities we have already seen in him, including his steady temper, his selfless devotion to Roman liberty, his unwavering virtue in the face of adversity, and his greatness of spirit/soul, as well as the "godlike height" to which his virtue has elevated him (I.4). Beyond these speeches, Cato's qualities are most fully visible in the character traits and words of his daughter Marcia and her suitor, Juba. Given the importance we ascribe to the eventual pairing of Marcia and Juba as Addison's modification of Cato to fit the world of sociability, it is not entirely surprising that Addison chooses them as the characters through whom Cato's qualities are manifested.

Although the audience is told that Cato's sons Marcus and Portius strive to emulate him,[17] Marcia is said to be the child from whom "Cato's soul / shines out in everything she acts or speaks" (I.5), and whose physical beauty is complemented by "inward greatness, unaffected wisdom, / And sanctity of manners" (I.5). Marcia is depicted as sharing her father's devotion to Rome, his severity, and his constancy of mind (I.4, IV.3). She is in many ways Cato's surrogate, albeit a surrogate in female form.[18] Addison, however, presents two criticisms of Marcia which presumably apply equally to her qualities as manifested by Cato. While the first of these criticisms, Sempronius's calling her "haughty" and deriding her "stubborn virtue" (III.7), could be read simply as the complaints of the spurned suitor, Cato is similarly criticized (albeit by Sempronius again) for being "ambitiously sententious" (I.2), proud, stubborn, and haughty (I.4). Sempronius is not alone in his criticisms of Marcia's Cato-like character, and even Marcia's friend Lucia suggests that Marcia is overly severe in her reprimand of Juba for his ill-timed expression of love for her (I.6). Although Marcia's severity toward Juba is moderated before the final act and she yields to her love for him, Cato remains unmoved by private concerns even in the face of his son's death.[19] Because Marcia's stern virtue is softened by the end of the play--primarily through her love for Juba--she comes to embody a tempered version of Cato's virtue, one in which the social ties of family, community, and love serve to moderate the principles of radical independence and complete emotional detachment embodied by her father. These revisions of Cato's Stoicism are more in keeping with Addison's own project in The Spectator of bringing philosophy "out of the Closets" and into coffeehouses, where it could regulate the passions and shape the sensibilities of the middling classes, in order to promote moderation, self-discipline, and the pursuit of the public interest.

If Marcia's character embodies Cato's virtues, Juba offers perhaps the fullest articulations of what Cato and his example mean to his observers. Through Juba's words, we learn that Cato represents the best qualities of the Roman soul--including honor, faith, goodness, justice, patience, self-discipline, austerity, discipline, strength, and steadfastness. Cato has served as a father figure for Juba, and his example is said to have taught the young prince "to break the fierceness of his native temper" (I.1). In a lengthy speech in the play's opening act, Juba offers an extended description of the Roman soul, emphasizing its transformation of the barbarian or natural soul. With Juba clearly representing the latter and Cato the former, the speech illuminates Cato's character:

These are virtues of a meaner rank,

Perfections that are placed in bones and nerves.

A Roman soul is bent on higher views:

To civilize the rude, unpolished world,

And lay it under the restraint of laws;

To make man mild, and sociable to man;

To cultivate the wild, licentious savage

With wisdom, discipline, and liberal arts--

The embellishments of life; virtues like these

Make human nature shine, reform the soul,

And break our fierce barbarians into men. (I.4)

As presented in Cato, to be Roman means--among other things--to be capable of regulating the passions and restraining the appetites by law and by education. Such cultivation of the soul defines one as a man (or a human) rather than a savage or a barbarian, for the ability to free oneself from enslavement to the passions and appetites is the defining human characteristic. Moreover, this self-discipline enables humans to live together both peacefully and freely; consistent with this, the play's understanding of liberty is ordered freedom, based upon an internal governance. Cato's reference to "an hour, a day, of virtuous liberty" alludes to this connection between self-governance and liberty; such liberty, he concludes, is worth an "eternity in servitude." Without individual self-governance, political liberty is not possible, for self-governance provides the necessary foundation for external structures which frame public interactions between members of the body politic. The state whose citizens are enslaved to their own desires cannot maintain its political liberty, for its citizens will either willingly submit themselves to a domestic tyrant or--extending beyond internal politics--they will lack the military virtue necessary to defend themselves from external threats.[20] In Cato, Addison suggests that late republican Rome finds itself in precisely this crisis and that Rome's political situation both mirrors and is due to the disorder of the Roman people's souls. As Cato's son Marcus asks, "what can Cato do / Against a world, a base degenerate world, / That courts the yoke, and bows the neck to Caesar?" (I.1). Political freedom, it seems, cannot be restored without reinvigorating citizen virtue, and in this sense, Cato's virtue does serve as a model for emulation. This theme is also developed in Addison's essays. Freeholder 29, for example, fleshes out the connection Addison saw between virtue and liberty, adding piety as well--though a piety consistent with Addison's own Latitudinarism, which he saw as a middle course: less authoritarian and more tolerant than the High Church Anglicanism, yet less prone to dangerous enthusiasm than the dissenting Protestant sects. He asserts that "no government can flourish which doth not encourage and propagate religion and morality among all its particular members" and that citizen virtue and piety "guarantee" public prosperity.

Dramatic Criticisms

Yet Cato and the qualities he represents do not go uncriticized in the play. Not only is Cato directly criticized by other characters, but he also adheres to his principles with a severity and rigidity which seem likely to strike the play's spectators as unnatural. Taken together, both the explicit criticisms and the audience reaction to Cato suggest that he is not intended as a decisive role model. Via the romantic subplot which unites Cato's closest surrogates, Juba and Marcia, Addison offers a revision of Cato, in which his severity is tempered by the "softer" ties of love and affection and reworked into something closer to the type of polite and sociable character endorsed in The Spectator. The corrections Addison believes are necessary to Cato's character are best seen via the play's explicit and implicit criticisms of his qualities, and it is to these criticisms we now turn.

Syphax, one of the chief conspirators against Cato, is Cato's primary critic within the play, railing against Cato's "pride, rank pride, and haughtiness of soul" (I.4) and encouraging Juba to abandon him.[21] Addison also chooses Syphax as the voice for two significant and substantive assaults on Cato's character, through Syphax's critiques of Cato's understanding of virtue and honor.[22] The first of these two major critiques, a debunking of virtue, comes following Juba's elaboration of the cultivating effects of Roman virtue in the opening act (I.4).[23] Far from accepting Juba's claim that Roman virtue makes "our fierce barbarians into men" or that the practice of virtue allows the highest--and most fully human--aspects to emerge, Syphax offers an extensive rebuttal in which he asserts that the purpose of virtue is to promote hypocrisy. The aim of "these wondrous civilizing arts / This Roman polish" is, he claims, "to disguise our passions, / To set our looks at variance with our thoughts." What Juba and Cato would call virtuous behavior or self-control is in Syphax's account nothing more than artful deceit in which all connection between what is believed and what is said has been severed. For Syphax, Roman virtue does not "Make human nature shine, reform the soul, / And break our fierce barbarians into men"; instead, it denatures men, transforming them into inauthentic beings and changing them "into other creatures / Than that what our nature and the gods designed" (I.4). Syphax's own understanding of virtue emphasizes naturalness over artificial or learned behaviors, praising the severity and austerity of the African hunter.[24]

The second major critique of Cato comes in Act II, scene 5, when Syphax offers an almost Falstaffian critique of honor, another key principle embodied by Cato. Having listened to Juba's outpouring of his love for Marcia and his concerns that revealing that "weakness" of his soul to Cato has caused Cato to disapprove of him, Syphax suggests that Juba might gain Marcia simply by abducting her. Juba recoils from this suggestion, criticizing Syphax both for "such dishonest thoughts" and for trying to "seduce my youth to do such an act that would destroy my honour" (II.5). Syphax scoffs at Juba's devotion to the "fine imaginary notion" of honor, disparaging it as a dangerous and seductive illusion which induces young men to foolishly risk their lives. Honor, he says, "draws in raw and unexperienced men / To real mischiefs, while they hunt a shadow." Syphax further suggests that even the most honorable individuals are only recently rehabilitated criminals--according to Syphax, the high virtue of the Roman republic traces its origins not back to honor, but to the rape of the Sabines. Syphax asserts that what is true of the Romans is true of all men and that what is called "honor" is merely disguised vice and criminality. Syphax voices a Machiavellian perspective: stubborn adherence to ideas such as honor or virtue will only lead man to ruin, in a world peopled by the dishonorable and vicious. Juba's youthful infatuation with Cato prevents him from reading mankind's true nature and inclinations; according to Syphax, such blindness is dangerous, for Juba risks finding himself unprepared and defenseless in the real world.

The possibility that Addison intends the substance Syphax's criticism of honor to be ultimately persuasive seems slim, for Juba's defense of honor within the play is picked up by Addison in later essays. In response to Syphax's assertion that he would sacrifice his own honor should his service to

(or love for) Juba require it, Juba calls honor “a sacred tie, the law of kings, / the noble mind’s distinguishing perfection, that aids and strengthens virtue where it meets her, / and imitates her actions, where she is not.” Far from leading one to ruin, then, honor either crowns virtue or serves as a type of training, a habituation to the ways of virtue. Honor accompanies the virtuous, and for those who are not independently virtuous, honor helps them to follow virtue’s course as well as perhaps developing the qualities of soul which bring them closer to actual possession of the virtues. Guardian 161, which quotes the scene of Cato, reiterates Juba’s understanding. Calling honor “graceful and ornamental to human nature,” Addison observes that the sense of honor is “to be met with in minds which are naturally noble, or in such as have been cultivated by great examples, or a refined education.”

While Addison does not endorse the substance of the Syphaxic assaults on Cato’s principles, they remain an important element of his reworking of Cato in two senses. First, the very presence of repeatedly voiced criticism in the play begins the undermining of Cato’s authority as a moral exemplar. Certainly, the criticisms are voiced by Cato’s enemy, but Syphax is a compelling character, and his challenges to the authoritativeness of Cato’s principles--challenges that end, as Terry correctly notes, with “the ring of rhetorical triumph”--are surely intended to give both Juba and the play’s audience pause.[25] More importantly, however, there is an element of truth to the criticisms’ content, for while the substance of Syphax’s critique of honor is not meant to be persuasive, he is also making a more general and reasonable point about the subordination of life to a mere abstraction. Syphax’s observation to Juba that “you have not read mankind” (II.5) underscores the argument that the Catonic virtue to which Juba aspires represents the type of theoretical principle that is ill-suited to the real world. This aspect of Syphax’s critique would be more consistent with the centrality of ordinary life in Addison’s essays and with his own statements about the need for moderation and the undesirability of carrying principles--whether political, religious, or moral--too far.[26]

In addition to the explicit criticisms of Cato voiced by Syphax, at least four moments in the play’s dramatic action seem designed to evoke the audience’s discomfort with or even disapproval of Cato, thereby inviting the tragedy’s spectators to reconsider Cato as a model--for his fellow Romans, for Addison, and for themselves. The first of these is Cato’s suicide, which historical evidence suggests to have been both morally and dramatically problematic for Addison himself.[27] Not only is presenting a character who kills himself as a model for emulation thorny--particularly in a Christian context--but the very reasoning which leads Cato to find suicide the best option also typifies the rigidity, self-absorption, and unnatural detachment for which Addison criticizes Cato elsewhere in the play. Taking one’s life might also suggest a proud arrogance or hubris, insofar as it implies a claim to know the inherently unknowable workings of providence. Yet as Addison notes in The Spectator, “we are not in a proper situation to judge the Counsels by which Providence acts” (Spectator 237).[28]

Nevertheless, Cato’s suicide was an unavoidable part of the story--not only was Addison bound by the historical facts, but he also had to grapple with the common interpretations which cast Cato as a hero and which viewed his death as the ultimate proof of his commitment to liberty and virtue.[29] One of the things that makes Cato’s story “a tragedy” is that his patriotism, love of liberty, and willingness to defy the superior force of Caesar are indeed admirable character traits, yet those very virtues, and the strength of Cato’s attachment to them, make his suicide inevitable. However much Addison might have admired some of Cato’s principles, he could not have fully endorsed Cato’s willingness to take his own life, since Addison understood living with misfortune as nobler (and perhaps more difficult) than escaping from it through death. Spectator 357’s discussion of Milton’s Paradise Lost makes this clear, for Addison notes, “The Resolution of dying to end our Miseries does not shew such a degree of Magnanimity as a Resolution to bear them, and submit to the Dispensations of Providence.” Attempting to live virtuously in the world--even a corrupt world--requires greater heroism and virtue than simply withdrawing from it. In this sense, then, Addison might have preferred a Cicero, who

chose to try to work within the system to restore Roman liberty, than Cato, who chose to remove himself from it.

Addison offers a second tacit criticism of his hero in his depiction of Cato's hostility to and ultimate rejection of Caesar's envoy Decius. Cato's reply to Decius's salutation--the traditional "Caesar sends health to Cato"--is a curt "Could he send it to Cato's slaughtered friends, it would be welcome" (II.2) and sets the tone for the entire scene. Cato rejects each of the overtures Decius makes on behalf of Caesar, refusing to entertain Decius's entreaties that Cato name the terms for reconciling himself with Caesar. While Cato's refusal to negotiate with Caesar is indicative of his admirable attachment to Roman liberty, the manner in which he rejects Caesar's overtures is high-handed, ungracious--even churlish--and certainly impolitic, if not suicidal. As Decius notes, "A style like this becomes a conqueror," rather than the defeated and outnumbered Cato. Not only does Cato shut down all possible routes for compromise and reconciliation, but he also seems to take every opportunity to alienate and inflame Caesar. Indeed, Cato's language combines severity and a certain extravagance--an immoderation that Addison also conveys in Syphax's denunciation of "the extravagance of [Cato's] virtue" in II.5. In his high-handed rejection of Decius, Cato's concern appears to be either exclusively for his principles or, interpreted less benignly, for his own reputation. Whichever interpretation one makes of Cato's motives, he is clearly not concerned with the safety of his family and his supporters, and he is more than willing to bring Caesar's wrath down upon them as well as upon himself. Moreover, it could be argued that Rome has also moved from the forefront of Cato's concern.[30] Clearly disgusted with the erosion of Roman virtue which has permitted Caesar's rise, Cato prefers the extreme course of washing his hands of this Rome rather than taking the more moderate, Ciceronian course of trying to work from within either to rehabilitate it or to temper the effects of Caesar's rule.[31] In Spectator 243's discussion of Stoicism, Addison condemns precisely this type of rigidity and this view of the options as a zero-sum game. Writing commentary on the political and religious factionalism of his own time that could certainly also be read as direct criticism of Cato, Addison states, "A man must be excessively stupid, as well as uncharitable, who believes that there is no Virtue but on his own Side, that there are not Men as honest as himself who may differ from him in political principles."

If the scene with Decius caused the audience to question Cato's priorities, his apparent preference for himself and his own principles over his supporters and his family, and also perhaps the inflexibility of those principles, two additional episodes within the play serve to deepen those doubts. The most dramatically striking of these moments is Cato's reaction to the death of his son Marcus. Upon learning that Marcus has fallen during combat with Caesar's forces, Cato's first response is to express his satisfaction with the manner of Marcus's death and to thank the gods that Marcus did not shirk his duty of defending Roman liberty. Even the arrival of Marcus's corpse does not evoke paternal grief. While Cato's speech as he meets the body is the eloquent and inspirational "How beautiful is death, when earned by virtue! ... what pity is it / That we can die but once to serve our country!" (IV.4), it seems unnatural to react by praising the virtuous manner of the death before and without evincing even the smallest emotion as a grieving father. Addison underlines Cato's preference for the public over the private in the next speech given to Cato, in which Cato chides his fellow Romans for mourning Marcus: "Why mourn you thus? let not a private loss / Afflict your hearts. 'Tis Rome requires our tears" (IV.4, emphasis added). In Cato's judgment, Rome's life is more important that the life of his son, and the remainder of the speech ("'Tis Rome requires our tears ... Rome is no more. / Oh liberty! Oh virtue! Oh my country!") emphasizes Cato's prioritization of Rome over his son. Cato is capable of mourning, but only of mourning Rome, or the idea of Roman liberty. He cannot mourn his son because he does not understand love for a particular individual, as opposed to love for an abstract principle. The contrast between a father's natural grief and Cato's unnatural self-command is underscored through the comparison with Marcia's reaction to the news of Juba's supposed death in IV.3. Her "Have I cause to rave, and beat my breast, / To rend my heart with grief" and "Talk not

of comfort, ‘tis for lighter ills. ... I will indulge my sorrows, and give way / To all the pangs and fury of despair, / That man, that best of men, deserved it from me” seems an appropriate response to the death of a beloved. Via these contrasts, Addison reminds us that just as undue attachment to one’s familial ties merits criticism, so too does Cato’s undue detachment from these natural connections.[32]

Cato’s general denigration of private in favor of public attachments extends even to the sweetest of private attachments: marriage. Addison does not depict Cato’s own marital situation,[33] but the unfolding of the Juba-Marcia subplot reveals to the audience both something of Cato’s position on the private attachment of romantic love as well as a final Addisonian critique of Cato. At the end of Act I, scene 4, Juba begins to confess his love for Cato’s daughter to her father, but he is instantly silenced by Cato, who wants to hear nothing of this subject. Cato replies, “I would not hear a word / Should lessen thee in my esteem: remember / The hand of fate is over us, and heaven / Extracts severity from all our thoughts: It is not now a time to talk of aught / But chains or conquest, liberty or death.” Speaking and thinking of love is inopportune during republican Rome’s crisis, and Cato again places the public before the private.

Considered by itself or within its context, Cato’s reaction to Juba’s profession of love seems perfectly sensible, for it is untimely to talk of love while the republic and the lives of its supporters are in immediate peril. Further details within the play, however, suggest that no matter what the timing, Cato opposes the private attachment of romantic love or marriage as a distraction from the proper duties of the citizen-statesman. Given the importance of Cato as Juba’s model or standard, Juba’s characterization of his love for Marcia as “the weakness of my soul” (I.5) merits consideration as a correct statement of Cato’s view.[34] This viewpoint is echoed by the other Cato-like character in the play, Marcia, who praises Juba’s good qualities, then adds that his love would make any woman “but Marcia” happy, for “While Cato lives, his daughter has no right / To love or hate, but as his choice directs” (IV.1). Yet “his choice” has not directed that Marcia ally herself with a man other than Juba; instead, it has dictated (albeit implicitly, though through his own words and example) that she should ally herself with no man.[35] Only when Marcia believes Juba dead does she regret having hidden her love, and only then does neither “modesty nor [Catonic?] virtue” prohibit revealing that love. Her confession to the dead Sempronius (disguised as Juba) is overheard by the real Juba; by this dramatic device, Addison unites the two lovers and allows them to discover their mutual love. Ecstatic in mood, the scene is the climax of the romantic theme, and the pitch of its language seems designed to carry the audience along. The eighteenth-century theatergoer would undoubtedly enter into sympathy with the lovers, echoing Marcia’s “With pleasure and amaze, I stand transported!” and Juba’s “Am rapt with joy ... I’m lost in ecstasy” as their mutual love breaks through “its weak restraints, and burns in its full luster.” By aligning the audience’s emotions with Juba and Marcia at this juncture, Addison dramatically indicates a limitation to Cato’s understanding, for Cato’s austere virtue does not give due weight to eros generally and to romantic love in particular; as we have also seen, he discounts the private attachments in general. The audience senses that Juba and Marcia are right in loving each other, whereas the suppression of that emotion à la Cato seems unnatural. Addison’s offering the Juba-Marcia love plot as a correction to Cato is consistent with his elevation of love in Spectator 397, where he calls love “the most delightful passion,” and characterizes it as the source of many of the other important social passions. “Pity,” Addison notes, “is nothing else but love softned by a degree of Sorrow; In short, it is a kind of pleasing Anguish, as well as generous Sympathy, that knits Mankind together, and blends them in the same common Lot.”[36] To be sure, Juba’s final line of the scene--”Let Caesar have the world, if Marcia’s mine”--swings too far in the other direction, and it indicates the need for some of the self-control embodied by Cato. Juba in particular has a lesson in moderation and self-control to learn from Cato, but Cato might also learn from the romances of his children.

From Stoicism to Sociability

The Spectator mirrors Addison's ambiguous attitude toward his drama's protagonist. Seneca's observation that "it must be a Pleasure to Jupiter himself to look down from Heaven, and see Cato amidst the Ruins of his country preserving his Integrity" is paraphrased with apparent approval by Addison in Spectator 237, yet this praise of Cato's character and judgment is modified in the following paragraph. Quoting the New Testament's "we see but in part, and as in a Glass darkly,"[37] Addison suggests the impossibility of understanding the connections between events, perhaps subtly also pointing to the hubris of Cato's committing suicide because he judged the situation beyond hope. Just six Spectator papers later, Addison attacks Stoicism as "the pedantry of virtue" and mocks Cato for taking the Stoic identification of virtue and beauty so literally that he (Cato) "would not allow any one but a Virtuous Man to be handsom" (Spectator 243). The condemnation of Cato's virtue as "pedantic" is particularly telling when read in the context of Spectator 105: there, as Klein observes, the various pedantries are associated with resistance to or intolerance of other points of view, the same type of prejudice and partisanship attacked elsewhere in the Spectator.[38]

Given the close identification of Cato with Stoicism, Addison's critiques of Cato and Stoicism should be read together, and they invite consideration of whether Addison believes Stoicism to be inherently problematic, or whether he thinks it is merely the Catonic embodiment of Stoic principles which goes awry. We suggest that Addison finds both Stoicism and the Catonic interpretation of Stoicism to be defective, and that he judges both the philosophic doctrine and its particular embodiment to be excessive or extreme. Stoicism is deficient from an Addisonian perspective because it encourages a certain excess or intemperance, including undue independence and detachment, and because it fails to take into account the importance of human attachments and passions, especially the importance of love. Similarly, Cato is deficient as a role model, both because his principles are partially misguided and because he pursues those principles in an immoderate manner, without regard to the situation or to other contextual matters which might justify or even require softening virtue's austerity. Thus, although Cato is a tragedy because Roman liberty is lost to Caesar and because the play's hero commits suicide, it is also a tragedy because Cato's flaws lead him to conclude that suicide is the only option for him and because he commits suicide with little regret and with little thought for his family and his supporters.[39]

Addison does see much in Cato that is praiseworthy--particularly his constancy, his self-control, and the strength of his commitment to justice and liberty--and he finds much to admire in ancient Stoicism's virtues of temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence. In the end, however, Addison can endorse neither Stoicism nor its Catonic embodiment. Accordingly, Spectator 243 picks up the play's critiques and mocks Cato overtly for extending his principles of moral perfection ad absurdum.[40] The essay immediately continues by making clear that Cato's tendency to carry even his laudable principles too far is merely one individual's manifestation of a defect which Addison finds inherent in Stoicism. Addison then broadens the critique of Cato, disparaging the Stoics more generally for thinking that "they could not represent the Excellence of Virtue, if they did not comprehend in the Notion of it all possible Perfection." In the same vein, while Cato's aloofness from his family and friends is consistent with Stoic principles counseling detachment from people and emotional distance in our relations with them as part of the ordering and control of the passions which is a prerequisite to a virtuous, free, and happy life--a life that is less subject to the winds, to fate, and to surprise--Addison suggests that the Stoics go too far in their quest for self-mastery and in their complete renunciation of passion and personal attachment. The passions should not be suppressed; rather, they should be governed "like free Subjects rather [than] slaves" if they are going to be able to provide the necessary energy and motive force to pursue a good life in community with others. Too strictly governed, the passions become incapable of drawing humans together--"abject and unfit for the purposes for which they were designed" (Spectator 408); one of Stoicism's defects is precisely its

attempt to quell the natural impulses which bring humans into society (and eventually, into political society) with each other. Like Aristotle, who finds the man without a city to be either a beast or a god, Addison finds the Stoic model of the dispassionate man à la Cato ultimately to be inhuman.[41]

The Stoic virtues may be laudable, but from an Addisonian perspective, they cannot be the essential virtues for humans, as they do not take into account our social and political natures. Because Addison understands social life to be both a necessary and a good thing--as Spectator 9 reminds us, “Man is said to be a Sociable Animal”--Cato’s Stoicism must be “socialized” and softened, rendered more human, flexible, and compassionate if it is to be incorporated into the polite world of The Spectator. Accordingly, The Spectator revises the Stoic understanding of virtue by advancing Addison’s own cardinal virtues of justice, charity, and munificence.[42] As contextualized in The Spectator, each of these virtues is other-regarding, and together, they represent the moderate, polite, and social virtue Addison believed necessary to the burgeoning commercial society of the eighteenth century. The Spectator’s attack on Stoicism as “the pedantry of virtue” continues the Addisonian critique, by implying that Stoicism is overly interested in virtue for virtue’s sake or for the individual’s private benefit and that it is not adequately concerned with the salutary effects virtue can and should have on social and political relations. The Spectator papers themselves, which modeled peaceable social interaction by their very form and which sought to encourage a polite, thoughtful, and judicious sociability by providing proper topics of conversation as well as subtle guidance to individuals about how best to think about these topics, correct the Stoic/Catonic understanding of virtue by promoting virtues which render their possessor beneficial to society and pleasing to others. In The Spectator, the ornaments of virtue are not Cato’s stern and foreboding countenance, but good nature and cheerfulness--certainly not the attributes that spring to mind when one considers the character of Cato. Addisonian virtue is amiable, and the awful virtue of a Cato cannot ultimately be endorsed as the model upon which social men and women should pattern themselves.[43]

In Epistle XI, Seneca exhorts Lucilius to “cherish some man of high character and keep him ever before your eyes, living as if he were watching you. ... Choose therefore a Cato!” Addison clearly admires Cato and wants the audience to admire certain facets of Cato’s character--his commitment to liberty, his antifactional patriotism, his personal integrity, and his steadfast character--but both the play itself and The Spectator call into question the notion that the dramatic Cato is a model simply to be imitated. Just as Seneca’s epistle softens its endorsement of simply imitating Cato by continuing, “or, if Cato seems too severe a model, choose some Laelius, a gentler spirit,” Addison also finds Cato’s virtue unsuitable for his audience and seeks--through the play’s romantic subplot and through The Spectator--to rework Cato’s qualities into a gentler model, one which gives weight to qualities such as friendship, love, and sympathy and which is more appropriate to the peaceable civil and commercial society he seeks to promote.

Footnotes

1 Cited in David Walker, “Addison’s Cato and the Transformation of Republican Discourse in the Early Eighteenth Century,” British Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies 26 (2003): 105. Despite his own Whig affiliation, Addison maintained the play was nonpartisan, even going so far as to have the prologue written by a Tory and the epilogue by a Whig. In a reading with which we largely agree, however, Lawrence Klein casts such non-partisanship and the related ideas of moderation and toleration/sociability as inherently Whiggish (Lawrence E. Klein, “Joseph Addison’s Whiggism,” in “Cultures of Whiggism”: New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century, ed. David Womersley [Newark: University of Delaware Press , 2005], 108 -26, esp. 110).

2 For more complete discussions of Cato in early America, see Forrest McDonald, Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution (Lawrence : University Press of Kansas , 1985), esp. 195-99; Garry

Wills, Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment (Garden City, NY : Doubleday , 1984), esp. 133 -38; Carl Richard , The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press , 1994), esp. chap. 3; Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, "George Washington and the Life of Honor" in The Noblest Minds: Fame, Honor, and the American Founding, ed. Peter McNamara (Lanham, MD : Rowman and Littlefield , 1999), 59 -71.

3 Cato explicitly offers himself as a model, as well (II.4). For one discussion of the eighteenth-century perspectives on Cato and Cato within a political context, see Reed Browning, Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press , 1982), esp. 5-10; for a discussion of Addison's work--including Cato--within the political context of his time, see Walker "Transformation," 91-108.

4 References to Cato are by act and scene. The edition used here is Joseph Addison, Cato: A Tragedy, and Selected Essays, ed. Christine Dunn Henderson and Mark E. Yellin (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004).

5 The romance of Cato's daughter and the Numidian prince is interesting for many reasons, including its opening themes of race and cultural identity within the play and its eighteenth-century British context. (See, for example, Julie Ellison, "Cato's Tears," English Literary History 63 [1996]: 571 -601 10.1353/elh.1996.0023; Laura J. Rosenthal, "Cato and Enlightened Cosmopolitanism," Studies in the Literary Imagination 32, no. 2 [1999]: 63 -76.) Also worthy of mention is that the youthful George Washington identified himself with Juba.

6 Klein, "Whiggism," offers an extensive discussion of Addison as a moralist.

7 Laura Brown, English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Dramatic History (New Haven : Yale University Press , 1981), 155; M. M. Kelsall, "The Meaning of Addison's Cato," Review of English Studies, n.s., 17, no. 66 (1966): 150. See also Peter Smithers, The Life of Joseph Addison (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), 260 -62, though Smithers describes Cato as the embodiment of political virtue only.

8 Pope is among those who held this view. See Smithers, Life of Joseph Addison, 262.

9 Although not penned by Addison, Garth's epilogue also focuses on the romantic subplot, concluding with the hope that "Virtue again to its bright station climb ... And every Lucia find a Cato's son." With J. M. Armistead, we suggest that "Cato has, in reality, a double plot ... a politico-military plot ending in tragic death, and a socio-civil plot ending in imminent marriage" (J. M. Armistead , "Drama of Renewal: Cato and Moral Empiricism ," PLL 17 , no. 3 [1981]: 277). We are grateful to Michelle Zerba for initially drawing our attention to the love plots, by observing that it is a very odd tragedy which ends in a double marriage.

10 Armistead, too, connects Cato with Addison's project in The Spectator, but he does not develop the substantive connections between the works (Armistead, "Drama," 271-72).

11 Amistead, "Drama," 271-83; James S. Malek, "The Fifth Act of Addison's Cato," Neuphilologischer Verein 74 (1973): 515 -19; Richard Terry "Revolt in Utica: Reading Cato against Cato," Philological Quarterly 85 , nos. 1-2 (2006): 121 -39, and Lisa A. Freeman , "What's Love Got to Do with Addison's Cato ? ," Studies in English Literature 39, no. 3 (1999): 463 -8210.2307/1556215. Brown's brief (3-page) discussion of Cato is interesting, for although she ascribes significance to the love plots, she does not see any undermining of Cato's stature as moral exemplar (Brown, English Drama).

12 Socrates is Seneca's other exemplar. See Seneca, Epistulae morales, letter 104. For a provocative reading of Seneca's De providentia account of Cato's death in terms of self-command and self-making, see Christopher Star, The Empire of the Self: Self-Command and Political Speech in Seneca and Petronius (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 50-52.

13 Cicero, Pro Murena 74; Plutarch, Life of Phocion.

14 Armistead draws attention to the fact that Cato counsels moderation to his family and friends, but takes the extreme course himself (Armistead, "Drama," 273).

15 Or, of course, gentlewomanliness.

16 Lawrence E. Klein, "Property and politeness in the early eighteenth-century Whig moralists: The case of the Spectator," in Early Modern Conceptions of Property, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1996), 299. See also Lawrence E. Klein, Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3 -14.

17 See, for example, Portius's exhortation to Marcus to conquer his love for Lucia. "To quell the tyrant Love, and guard thy heart / ... Would be a conquest worthy Cato's son" (I.1).

18 Marcia as a gendered reworking of Cato also invites discussion. Julie Ellison observes that Marcia-Cato is at once the example Juba seeks to emulate and his reward for that emulation (Julie Ellison, Cato's Tears [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999], 60).
19 See Cato at IV.4: "Why mourn you thus? let not a private loss / Afflict your hearts. 'Tis Rome requires our tears."
20 Cf. Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War 2.35-46. Quentin Skinner discusses how the ancient connection between political virtue and military virtue was picked up again in the Renaissance (Quentin Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, vol. 1, The Renaissance [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], chap. 4).
21 Spectator 185's condemnation of religious zeal links it with pride. See Edward D. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, Joseph Addison's Sociable Animal: In the Market Place, on the Hustings, in the Pulpit (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971), 173.
22 Ellison also focuses on the Syphaxic critiques of Cato, but she reads them very differently (Ellison, "Cato's Tears," 577-70).
23 See the speech in its entirety and a brief discussion of it, pp. 230-31, above.
24 Syphax praises the hunter's qualities, but he does not argue that natural virtue embodied by the African makes one "good, and just, and anxious for his friends," as Juba asserts Cato's virtue has made him.
25 Terry, "Revolt," 126. Terry observes that Addison could not "have been blind to the way that Syphax rhetorically worsts his opponent, his every rejoinder trumping a prior one by Juba" (ibid., 127).
26 See, for example, Spectator nos. 114, 125, 143, 185, 206.
27 The eight-year gap between the completion of the fourth and fifth acts as well as the fact that Addison invited a fellow contributor to The Spectator, John Hughes, to write the final act before he finally penned it himself indicate that Addison found the tragedy's ending challenging (Smithers, Life of Joseph Addison, 252).
28 Just at the moment of Cato's suicide, Portius announces that Pompey's son is offering reinforcements to Cato's forces (V.4.55). Although Addison does not suggest that Cato knew of Pompey's son's offer, the audience's awareness of it underlines that Cato chose suicide without full knowledge of his situation (Malek, "Fifth," 517).
29 Browning details Cato's popularity in Addison's Britain (Browning, Political, 4-10).
30 In I.4, Cato advises his fellow senators not to let a "torrent of impetuous zeal" move them beyond reason's bounds, exhorting the exiled Senate to steer a middle course between rash opposition and diffidence to Caesar. Faced with compromising his own principles or reputation, he finds himself unable to follow the advice he had given, and he prefers to cling to principles at all costs.
31 Plutarch believed that Cato's inflexibility caused him to reject Pompey's repeated overtures--including Pompey's attempts to ally their families by marriage--thus alienating Pompey and driving him into an alliance with Caesar that facilitated Caesar's consolidation of power (Plutarch, Life of Cato the Younger, in Plutarch's Lives , ed. A. H. Clough [Boston : Little, Brown , 1907], 4 :400 -401 , 408-10). See also Rob Goldman and Jimmy Soni, Rome's Last Citizen: The Life and Legacy of Cato, Mortal Enemy of Caesar (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2012), 110-13.
32 Both Freeman and Terry offer similar readings of this scene, with Freeman also astutely commenting on Cato's complete unawareness that Marcus seems to have thrown himself into battle and death less out of patriotism than out of broken-heartedness at Lucia's not returning his love (Freeman, "Love," 471; Terry, "Reading," 133-34). Given the dramatic prominence of the Marcus-Lucia-Portius subplot, this is something that would have been abundantly clear to the play's audience, yet Cato is oblivious to his son's motives. Kelsall, however, casts this moment as "the proof of Cato's natural virtue," with virtue understood à la Sparta, as public spiritedness (Kelsall, "Meaning," 158). For Spartan virtue in an identical context, see Plutarch's Sayings of Spartan Women, in Moralia, vol. 3, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 241a.
33 For an account of the historical Cato's marital situation, see Plutarch's Life of Cato: "And, indeed, it seems Cato had but ill-fortune in women" (Plutarch , Lives , vol. 4 , trans. Dryden , rev. A. H. Clough [Boston : Little, Brown , 1859], 394).
34 See also Portius's characterization of love as a "tyrant" and a weakness (I.1).
35 See Cato I.6, though the suggestion seems to be that giving in to love during this critical political moment would be untimely. On the other hand, might not all political moments be critical for Cato, given the vigilance required for the maintenance of republican virtue?

36 Armistead emphasizes the centrality of sympathy to the Addisonian virtues, citing Cato's inability to sympathize as evidence that "Addison could hardly have wished us to emulate a man whose moral code allowed only the narrowest range for human sympathy" (Armistead, "Drama," 273). Cf. Rousseau on pity's pivotal role in creating the social virtues.

37 1 Cor. 13:12. In the play, however, Portius attributes a similar understanding to Cato: "Remember what our father oft has told us: / The ways of heaven are dark and intricate, / Puzzled in mazes, and perplexed with errors: / Our understanding traces them in vain, / Lost and bewildered in the fruitless search; / Nor sees with how much art the windings run, / Nor where the regular confusion ends" (I.1). Compare with our earlier discussion of Cato's suicide and hubris (pp. 235-36, above).

38 Klein, "Property," 229. Klein cites Spectator nos. 432, 438, and 445, of which only the final paper was penned by Addison. Curiously, he neglects Spectator 243.

39 Browning reads this through the politics of Addison's own day, describing what could be termed a "Catonic Whiggism," in contrast with a more moderate and prudential "Ciceronian Whiggism" (Browning, Political, 18-20).

40 See p. 237, above.

41 While Spectator 397's criticism focuses on Stoicism in noting, "As the Stoick philosophers discard all Passions in general, they will not allow the Wise Man so much as to pity the Afflictions of another. ... The more rigid of this Sect would not comply so far as to shew even an outward Appearance of Grief," Addison would presumably also be critical of any doctrine or sect requiring the extreme course of complete renunciation of the passions.

42 Spectator 243.

43 In Spectator 169, Addison follows Sallust in describing Cato's character as "awful rather than amiable." By contrast, Caesar's character is said to be "chiefly made up of Good-nature."