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Thinking about the Gym: Greek Ideals, Newtonian Bodies and Exercise in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain

ROBERT BATCHELOR

Abstract: Revival of Greek ideas about exercise in the British and Irish Enlightenment by doctors led to a shift in understandings about the independent mind by establishing a relation between bodily and mental health. By the late 1730s, interest shifted away from mind and body and towards the sentiments and passions, which marked gender distinctions and held together national communities. Gilbert West's writing about the Olympics in the 1740s indicated the difficulty in resolving tensions about exercise and sport as producing aristocratic distinction and violent passions as against their encouragement of healthy minds and civic virtue in the nation.

Keywords: exercise, Olympics, sport, George Cheyne, sentimentalism, Gilbert West, Enlightenment

It is often easy to forget that the original Olympics as well as their nineteenth-century revival had as much to do with exercise and education, the practice of the gymnasium, as with the competitive entertainment of sport, the spectacle of the arena. Although the connection between the cultivation of the mind and the body came down from the Greeks in the medical tradition through writers such as Aristotle and Galen, the radical distinction made by Descartes between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, mind and body, as a defining point of science and Enlightenment appeared to suggest that the cultivation of reason was best served by a kind of Stoic detachment from physical activity.¹ But in early eighteenth-century Britain, a crucial location for the development of modern notions of sport, the concept of 'exercise' became on the advice of physicians the basis for a kind of mass movement supporting physical activity as good for cultivating both body and mind. Rather than a discourse of restraint, like politeness, this revival of the ancient Greek concept of exercise actively attempted to address the limitations of the theory of the independent mind inherited from seventeenth-century science and philosophy, building in the process a broader public for the claims of the new science and new philosophies.

There remains something of a cultural taboo in mentioning exercise and sports in connection with the Enlightenment, or the 'Age of Reason' as it was once called. It goes back at least to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who for good reasons expressed anxiety about the Nazi sports palace and Leni Riefensthal's celebration of the Olympics, writing rather bluntly that 'Those who extolled the body in Germany, the gymnasts and outdoor sports enthusiasts, always had an intimate affinity to killing.'² Others, notably Norbert Elias and his student Eric Dunning in their landmark collection of essays *Quest for Excitement*, did their best to rehabilitate sport in relation to the 'civilizing process' as something that not only decreased violent impulses but also defined polite and rule-bound conflict appropriate to an emerging democratic society. They in turn

1 failed to capture the liberating and often transcultural aspects of sports and exercise
2 that appeared, for example, in C. L. R. James's famous account of cricket. Each of these
3 approaches avoids the question of the embodied mind and the dynamic historical
4 questions that emerged in the British Enlightenment around the question of how to
5 understand it.³

6 The ambiguities surrounding the most famous advocate of exercise in the early
7 eighteenth century, the Newtonian physician George Cheyne, offer some sense of why it
8 remains difficult to address these questions. Cheyne, in his *Essay of Health and Long Life*
9 (1724), had been one of the first to recommend a broad spectrum of everyday exercises as
10 part of a healthy daily regimen, including billiards and cricket for rheumatism, tennis for
11 feeble arms, football for weak hams and bell-ringing or pumping for a bad back, as well as
12 exercise more generally for the health of the mind and spirit. Dancing and walking could
13 be equally effective for men and women.⁴ With this very popular book, which went
14 through eight editions in the decade that followed, Cheyne's exercise and diet suggestions
15 became the subject of dinner conversation and what one author called 'Sects in the
16 Dietetic philosophy'.⁵ Born in Aberdeen, Cheyne is usually given only a minor role in the
17 history of the Scottish, and more broadly British, Enlightenment, despite his clear influence
18 from his Newtonian and medicinal theories on Hutcheson and Hume as well as his work with
19 the Methodist and sentimental movements in England. Cheyne considered himself as one
20 who wanted to 'enlighten' the public, as he said in his autobiographical 'Case of the
21 Author' appended to his *English Malady* (1733), and at one time he aspired to write a
22 *Principia* for medicine that would turn that discipline into a true mathematical *scientia*.
23 When the poet Thomas Gray imagined a conversation between ancient and modern
24 geniuses, he included Cheyne among a list of conversants that included Aristotle, Euclid,
25 Ovid, Virgil, Locke, Malebranche and Swift.⁶ But Cheyne was also a failure, angering
26 Newton in 1703 by publishing before the master a general summary of the fluxion
27 calculus. In the aftermath of the controversy he gained vast amounts of weight (up to 32
28 stone or c.450 lb.) in the 1720s in binges of drinking and eating as he struggled to find a
29 place in Aberdeen, London and Bath, and he sought solace in a kind of Neoplatonic
30 spiritualism learned from Scottish mystics.⁷

31 Many historians as a result treat Cheyne as an almost grotesque figure, clearly damaged
32 by Newton's rejection of his ideas and his own provincialism and later obsessed with all
33 too discursive mental health diagnoses of hysteria, the vapours and melancholia in
34 women. Roy Porter quoted him as struggling with his 'own crazy Carcase', understanding
35 Cheyne's confessional writing about diet as a kind of *Pilgrim's Progress*.⁸ His popularity
36 clearly did at some level come from his performative story of depression and weight gain
37 and loss, which brought him down to as little as 9 stone (125 lb.) if his accounts are to be
38 believed. His portrait from 1732, dignified but hardly what one might imagine for a diet
39 and exercise guru, circulated widely as an engraving and mezzotint in both London and
40 Bath, where it was a popular souvenir at the Great Toy Shop. This portrait has been in
41 many ways an ambiguous sign, serving as a visual reminder of the challenges in framing
42 Cheyne's work within broader narratives of Enlightenment. Indeed, Cheyne consistently
43 returns historians to George Rousseau's provocative question, 'In which "discipline"
44 ought a figure such as Cheyne be studied?'⁹

45 In the early eighteenth century, certain strains of Enlightenment thinking along with
46 the more practical advice of physicians tried to place a particular vision of ancient Greek
47 exercise and sport in a closer dialogue with contemporary Britain. Cheyne's friend
48 Jonathan Swift, for example, put at the core of Houyhnhnm society a kind of utopian
49 version of Greek gymnastic education, having Gulliver describe them as

1 train[ing] up their Youth to Strength, Speed, and Hardiness, by exercising them in running
2 Races up and down steep Hills, or over hard stony Grounds; and when they are all in a Sweat,
3 they are ordered to leap over Head and Ears into a Pond or River. Four times a Year the Youth
4 of certain Districts meet to shew their Proficiency in Running and Leaping, and other Feats of
5 Strength or Agility; where the Victor is rewarded with a Song made in his or her Praise.¹⁰
6

7 Swift clearly wanted to use such gymnastic training to differentiate Houyhnhnms from
8 Yahoos, who rarely, in Gulliver's increasingly estranged eyes, practised the equine values
9 of 'temperance, industry, exercise and cleanliness'. The questions involved here are rather
10 different from those posed by Elias and Dunning in relation to sport as a tool for the
11 moderation of social violence or more recent discursive studies about eighteenth-century
12 'politeness' and religious 'enthusiasm'. They are closer to what Jan de Vries, C. A. Bayly
13 and Craig Muldrew have talked about in terms of the 'industrious revolution', the efficient
14 bodies photographed a century later by Muybridge in his time-motion studies. Bayly, in
15 particular, has written about modernity as 'building outward from the body', a growing
16 uniformity in bodily practices at a global level observable in, among other things, rules for
17 sports and games but also intertwined with colonial practices, as in Swift's Ireland.¹¹ As
18 Swift's horses suggest, there could be something unsettling about the need for exercise to
19 theories of the independent rational mind. Swift's Houyhnhnms in some way must be
20 horses – the success of their civic virtue requires a generation of independence by
21 educating the youth through exercise. Rather than pantheistic, this enlargement of the
22 human into horseness, which connects the education of mind and body, seems like an
23 uncanny return of 'country' and aristocratic values to the mercantile Gulliver, and
24 Gulliver finds it difficult to return to London, where he is surrounded by the confused
25 bodies and minds of Yahoos.

26 Part of the dilemma seems to have come out of the sense that Stoic intellectual labour
27 (and critical observation or 'spectatorship') failed on its own to produce an independent
28 political subject or, in the case of the Irish Dean Swift or of Cheyne the Scot, despite their
29 moves to London, a proper scientific observer. Conversely, simple industriousness and
30 exercise seemed virtues more appropriately aimed at labourers, wild Irish and highland
31 Scots. This broader British and Irish uncertainty about political subjectivity and
32 intellectual labour may be one reason why the 'English Enlightenment' has often seemed
33 less clearly defined than the rationalist French or even Jonathan Israel's radically
34 pantheist and internationalist Dutch, and why writers such as Swift expressed such
35 ambiguity about the Laputa-like rationalism of London's Royal Society, floating above the
36 undisciplined activities of the 'many busy Heads, Hands, and Faces' of Balnibari.

37 For France, Descartes had set the model for the solitary mind alone in his study,
38 withdrawn from the world and using geometry to leverage the world from its stability.
39 Despite an interest in Greek geometry and Platonic dualism, Descartes's gesture was
40 largely Roman and Stoic, in which a connection existed between mind and body that
41 should be actively resisted. Seneca's eightieth epistle (epitomised by the translation in
42 1620 by Thomas Lodge) set out the terms quite starkly: 'That the common sort went to the
43 Shewes and Games, hee to his studie and contemplation. That the minde is to be beautified
44 and not the bodie.' Seneca's letter began not with the scholar himself withdrawing but
45 with everyone withdrawing from the scholar because of, as it was translated in the
46 seventeenth century, a football game:
47

48 This day I am wholly mine owne, not onely by mine owne means, but for that the Foot-ball
49 play hath withdraawne all those that were troublesome unto mee, and came to importune
50 mee. There is not one that thrusteth in upon mee, no man distracteth my thoughts, my doore

1 creaked not so often as it was accustomed, my hanging was not lifted up, I have freedom to
2 be solitary, which is most necessary for him that walketh alone, and followeth his own way
3 [...] Behold a huge cry is rayseed in the Theater, where men exercise their running, which
4 cannot draw my selfe from my selfe, but rather transporteth me to contemplate on the
5 Combats that are in hand. I thinke with my selfe, how many exercise their bodies, how few
6 their minds; how many men throng to a vaine and trifling spectacle, and what desolation
7 there is about good arts, how weakly minded they are, whose armes and shoulders we wonder
8 at? But above all I meditate upon this: If a man may by exercise bring his bodie to this patience
9 whereby he may sustayne not only the strokes and spurnes of many men, whereby soyled
10 with his own blood [...] how much more easily may the mind be strengthened invincibly to
11 entertayne the shocke of Fortune, to the end that being cast to ground, and trod under foot,
12 he may yet rayse himself? ¹²

13
14 For Descartes, Stoic training of the mind had been a way of clearly defining in-
15 dependence and the individual away from both common bodily and Jesuit spiritual
16 exercises, one reason why he proved attractive to an Irish Protestant such as his English
17 translator William Molyneux. 'The mind', as Milton would have Satan say, following
18 Seneca and the broader Stoic and indeed Protestant idea of self-sufficiency, 'is its own
19 place.'¹³

20 The radically independent mind of Seneca and especially Descartes has traditionally
21 served as the classic basis of Enlightenment rationality and republicanism. Without a
22 Stoic concept of the independence of mind, how could one frame the notion of individual
23 authority or scientific observation in ways that did not simply derive from the virtual or
24 Hobbesian body of the sovereign? Scholars have proposed collective witnessing (the Royal
25 Society), sociability (politeness), printing and coffee houses (the public) and the citizen-
26 soldier of civic humanism as possible late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century answers to
27 this question in terms of collective authority. But especially by the 1720s such collective
28 solutions also raised suspicions, and here lay the core of Swift's satire. In the world of
29 Walpolean Parliamentary corruption, Irish penal laws and General Wade's Black Watch
30 one could not achieve independence through mere Senecan/Cartesian withdrawal of the
31 mind, despite the efforts of John Locke to create a natural world of ideas or Bishop Berkeley
32 of Cloyne to make perception divine. Only among the horses in a country retreat could one
33 emulate the Greeks and achieve true embodiment of mind through a combination of
34 physical and intellectual labour.

35 Many of Swift's English contemporaries were, however, far more confident of the
36 possibilities of Grecian exercises. A new translation of the Greek Stoic Epictetus described
37 his preparations for the Olympic Games as a process akin to training for philosophy,
38 while Plato became a wrestler in the account of one of his early eighteenth-century
39 biographers.¹⁴ Compared with this, the Senecan scholar, fearful of the public and their
40 sporting events, looked unhealthy, sitting at his desk all day and night, squinting at
41 mathematical diagrams and scribbling calculations by candlelight. Following certain
42 Greek ideals, Joseph Addison proclaimed himself no mere spectator but 'a compound of
43 soul and body', obliged to labour and exercise as well as study and contemplate. Although
44 he too preferred the country activities of hunting and riding, when in town, as he wrote in
45 the *Spectator* for 12 July 1711,

46
47 I exercise myself an hour every morning upon a dumb-bell [a bell without a clapper] that is
48 placed in the corner of my room, and pleases me the more because it does everything I require
49 of it in the most profound silence. My landlady and her daughters are so well acquainted with
50 my hours of exercise, that they never come into my room to disturb me whilst I am ringing.¹⁵



1 Addison felt obliged to lift in private, explicitly away from the eyes of the women in the
2 house, let alone the broader public. He also engaged in solitary *skiomachia* (σκιομαχία), or
3 shadow boxing with free weights, which he appropriately claimed to have learned from
4 reading an obscure sixteenth-century treatise on gymnastics rather than training at a
5 martial arts academy or emulating street fighting.¹⁶

6 Why exercise in private rather than publicly in a gymnasium like the Greeks or
7 collectively through sport? Addison's initial concern in his essay was to separate ordinary
8 labour, the industriousness of the English populace, from the voluntary labour of exercise.
9 Resistant to the more violent aspects of James Figg's boxing (Figg opened his School of
10 Arms and Art of Self-Defence Academy in Tottenham Court Road in 1719) as well as
11 popular ball games and acrobatics in the fields surrounding London, where William Bedle
12 was becoming the first star of English cricket, Addison nevertheless believed that such
13 activities were ultimately healthy.¹⁷ He understood the body in terms of Newtonian and
14 ultimately Aristotelian kinetics (although Newton himself held different views), a system
15 of pipes that needs to be cleared and cleansed by exercise. Without such movement
16 the body lacked 'vigour' and the soul 'cheerfulness'. Addison went out of his way to
17 emphasise the benefits of exercise for the 'faculties of the mind', including 'keeping the
18 understanding clear, the imagination untroubled, and refining those spirits that are
19 necessary for the proper exertion of our intellectual faculties, during the present laws of
20 union between soul and body'. Neglecting exercise by the studious and sedentary led to
21 melancholic spleen in men and the vapours in women – that is to say depression. Country
22 life as well as industrious physical labour provided such cleansing as a matter of course, but
23 the emerging urban middle class did not reap the same benefits. They needed to use their
24 leisure time in an industrious manner in order to remain healthy. Beneath Addison's
25 confident advocacy of an hour of private exercise each day lay the sense that, unlike the
26 Greeks, the English and the 'moderns' more generally had failed to come to terms with the
27 compound nature of mind and body.

28 The 'British Enlightenment' deserves to be called such precisely because it marked a
29 radical departure from the more limited theory of mind espoused by Cartesianism and
30 neo-Stoic science more generally, involving an active debate over what the relation
31 between mind and body should be. Before the late seventeenth century, recommendations
32 for exercise were largely aimed at preserving the integrity of the body and mind. In the
33 1680s Thomas Sydenham was the first English physician to advocate exercise as part of a
34 regimen of health, specifically for warding off hysteria.¹⁸ Michel Foucault, as one might
35 expect, attributed Sydenham's encouragement of riding and walking to an increasing
36 regulation of the movement of the body, arguing that this, 'therapeutics of movement
37 conceals the idea of a seizure by the world of the alienated mind'.¹⁹ But for Sydenham,
38 whose writings tended towards a kind of natural philosophy, the basic gesture was to
39 stabilise the mind within a now fragile, uncertain and in a Hobbesian sense discredited
40 natural order, the Restoration regrets of one who like Milton supported the cause of a
41 monarch-less Parliament.

42 In the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, English physicians, notably Francis Fuller
43 and John Floyer, began to investigate diagnostic and therapeutic strategies derived from
44 other medical traditions, respectively the Greek and the Chinese, in order to try and resolve
45 how one could actually measure the effects of exercise on producing healthy mental
46 states. Addison took the lion's share of his ideas on exercise from the 1705 edition of
47 Fuller's *Medicina Gymnastica: or, A Treatise Concerning the Power of Exercise*, which argued
48 that gymnastic exercise, neglected since the ancient Greeks, was in fact the key to
49 medicine. Fuller worried that to some modern doctors this might seem to be a primitive

1 approach, alluding to the famous semi-barbarous nature of the Greeks and their
2 Dionysian festivals, but he nevertheless insisted that it should form an equally valid part of
3 therapeutics. He could not say why the contemporary British no longer exercised properly
4 in the manner of the Greeks. The omission of exercise from medicinal practice might be a
5 very old Gothic problem in which Greek concepts had not translated – northern European
6 nations not placing as much emphasis on exercise as southern ones – or it could be a more
7 recent problem derived from the impression given by the anatomical table that medicine
8 was an entirely internal rather than partially an external question. Addressing both
9 issues, Fuller redefined exercise in Newtonian terms as the motion of the body generated
10 at least partially by externalities to it. Such motions in turn could change both bodily and
11 mental health, asserting both performatively and physically a new self, one in some ways
12 appropriate to the more republican gestures of the Glorious Revolution.²⁰

13 Published in 1707, the same year as the second edition of Fuller's book, John Floyer's
14 *Physician's Pulse Watch* also tried to redefine therapeutics and exercise. Floyer relied on a
15 series of accounts of Chinese medicine, including Andreas Cleyer's *Specimen Medicinae*
16 (1682), on Chinese methods for taking the pulse.²¹ In terms of which tradition to revive
17 and which concepts to translate, Floyer thought that the Chinese used a more empirical
18 method than the Greeks (Galen) for taking the pulse, tying it to the state of particular
19 organs in the body rather than more abstract and mathematical 'magnitudes' defined
20 through geometry. Regulating heart rate was the essence of Chinese medicine, a
21 balancing of forces both between the body and the world and between organs within the
22 body, whereas the inaccuracies of Greek pulse measurement techniques (and geometric
23 science) had led them to neglect the interplay of forces external to and within the body.²²
24 Because the Chinese technique was more precise, they could use pulse measurement as
25 part of 'therapeutics' rather than simply diagnostics (which he classified in good Greek
26 fashion as 'Prognostications and Semiotica') – like the heart rate monitor on a modern
27 treadmill. But Floyer, not knowing how to read Chinese and  having access to a Latin
28 translation and some Chinese anatomical prints, admitted  would not fully understand
29 their methods. So in a nod to Newtonian mechanics he recommended instead using a
30 stopwatch (his own model – the 'pulse watch') and then moderating the pulse through a
31 combination of baths, diet and, above all, exercise. As with Addison's dumb-bell, exercise
32 required a technical apparatus that could guarantee physical labour was actually
33 occurring and not becoming excessive.

34 It was Cheyne who in the 1720s spread these ideas more broadly, but even before that
35 point the movement had become fashionable, as Addison's private exercises suggest. By
36 the 1720s the idea of *public* exercise was also gaining traction, tied in part to the interest in
37 popular spectator shows and sports. In 1727 twenty-two men in their seventies played an
38 exhibition match of cricket in Cranbrook, Kent.²³ East India Company servants diverted
39 themselves in the 1720s with 'Cricket, and other Exercises' as locals watched on as
40 'spectators' near Khambhat.²⁴ Not to be outdone, the gentry and aristocracy at times
41 participated in such country activities, but they increasingly developed their own spaces
42 for public exercise. This was especially true in the fashion for purchasing country houses
43 next to spa towns such as Bath or Epsom. Advertisements suggested that light exercise
44 such as walking or fishing could be combined with spectatorship of village sports like
45 cricket or the more aristocratic pastimes of horse-racing and fox-hunting.²⁵ John Wood,
46 Ralph Allen's chief architect for the resort town of Bath, wanted to put in a 'Forum, Circus
47 and Imperial Gymnasium', along Roman lines. Wood believed that this would re-establish
48 Roman gymnastics in Britain, claiming falsely that the first Roman gymnasium had been
49 built at Bath. Inspired by the Colosseum, Wood's celebrated King's Circus (1754) was to

1 have a 320-foot diameter central space for the 'exhibition of sports'. In the final design this
2 was decided impractical. In fact, it had fallen victim to a complex reaction to the English
3 exercise movement.²⁶

4 In the 1720s Bath became an important centre for the exercise movement, in particular
5 because Cheyne went there to conduct public exercises and to cure maladies such as
6 melancholy, hysteria and the gout. Cheyne became a major backer not of the exercise
7 fields, however, but of the General Hospital or Infirmary (also known as the Mineral Water
8 Hospital, founded in 1738), a charity for which he served as a trustee from 1725.²⁷ Cheyne
9 had moved to Bath by 1718 and become a sensation there and in London, especially with
10 his publications in the 1720s. His milk diet, which appeared in Cheyne's *Essay on Gout*
11 (1720), was learned from a doctor in Croydon but supposedly inspired by 'lusty and strong'
12 Scottish Highlanders, who ate lots of porridge.²⁸ But by 1725 Cheyne was ~~also~~ having
13 weight problems with this regimen, which became the subject of his confessional story in
14 *The English Malady* (1733).²⁹

15 By the 1730s Cheyne, both personally and publicly, shifted the debate from exercise to
16 diet. Cheyne knew some Greek and was seen by his contemporaries as inspired by Greece.
17 'So many Grecian Sages live in Thee', wrote one admirer.³⁰ He came to think of medicine,
18 however, in terms of removing of obstructions and excess. Newtonian bodies in rest and
19 motion, ~~with~~ ~~the~~ ~~Miller's~~ or Floyer's effort to translate a Classical approach to mind and body
20 derived from either Greece or China. For Cheyne medicine had always been defined by the
21 natural, and all the physician could really do is to prescribe a regimen, involving air,
22 exercise and evacuation to facilitate removal of such build-ups.³¹ His *English Malady, or, A*
23 *Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds* (1733) reflected his growing sense of ambiguity
24 about exercise, especially games and sports, as tools for doing this. His recommendations
25 for activities narrowed substantially, and he only supported a 'low regimen' of exercise
26 (namely riding and walking), leaving out many of the specific sports he had previously
27 recommended for fear that too much exercise could lead to nervous and psychiatric
28 disorders. He argued that slow thinkers were better than quick thinkers because they
29 proved less prone to disease, and he advocated 'easy and agreeable' reading and 'innocent
30 entertaining amusement' rather than more excitable sports such as football or cricket.
31 Cheyne seems to have come to fear what Elias and Dunning (not to mention Aristotle in
32 the *Poetics*) refer to as the cathartic power of sports.³²

33 Despite its strong connection with medical discourse, clearly by the 1720s exercise had
34 taken on broader implications not only for philosophy but also, and more importantly, for
35 sociability. In part, Cheyne's new fears seem to have come out of a redefinition of women
36 in relation to the embodied mind, a shift, as Anita Guerrini has argued, that involved
37 conceiving of women as emotional and sociable rather than in terms of the bodily and the
38 mental.³³ Cheyne already in the mid-1720s was contending that riding was the best
39 exercise because it was 'manly'. Adam's punishment of working by the sweat of his brow
40 was actually for Cheyne a kind of remedy for bodily disorders and specifically the poison of
41 the tree of knowledge. These passages on exercise from his *Essay on Health* made some
42 quite radical claims about the relation of the body and mind to environment, noting that,
43 after the Fall,

44
45 there happened an intire Revolution in the Complexion and Qualities of the minds of the first
46 Pair (of Mankind) so to me there appear to be evident Indications of a designed change and
47 alteration in the material World, and the Nature of the Animals and Vegetables, which subsist
48 on this Globe, from what they were when God pronounced everything good that he had
49 made.³⁴

1 Such remarks in the 1720s were entirely aimed at the treatment of men, even though
2 Cheyne had women patients. After some prominent failures, including the death under his
3 care of Robert Walpole's eldest daughter, Catherine, in 1722, as well as the success of his
4 diet, Cheyne by the 1730s refocused his efforts towards emotional and sentimental
5 problems affecting women, notably hysteria and the vapours.³⁵

6 Cheyne, now in his sixties and from 1733 avidly corresponding with Samuel
7 Richardson, began to reinstitute the split between mind and body in his descriptions of
8 emotional and sentimental pathologies that empiricist doctors in the first three decades of
9 the eighteenth century, including himself, had undermined.³⁶ The nervous system, which
10 included emotional and sentimental states once associated with the body, was in this
11 account removed from the world and thus increasingly from exercise and sport. His shift in
12 emphasis paralleled that of Francis Hutcheson, working in Ireland in the 1720s and then
13 Scotland in the 1730s, who was developing a theory of the passions and sentiments and
14 interested in the problem of their moderation.³⁷ Influenced by Cheyne's writings, Edmund
15 Burke would come to argue that the sublime was a kind of convalescence after the
16 aesthetic experience of pain, which shook and worked the emotions as exercise did the
17 muscles.³⁸ Musings on feeling replaced questions about the kind of physical education
18 necessary to maintain independent minds, and women were increasingly divorced from
19 such questions together.

20 As exercise became more closely tied to emotional states, particular kinds of sports –
21 notably cricket – became identified with national passions and masculinity, the 'manly
22 Britishness' of the new patriotism that emerged in the 1740s and '50s.³⁹ Away from the
23 exercising body, mind became defined much more broadly in relation to a public network
24 of sentiment and affect described as 'sympathy' and linked through the imagination.
25 Because of this the passions of the spectator became an even more significant issue than
26 the passions generated in actual participation in sports. This would be the signature of
27 both Richardson's sentimentalism and the Scottish Enlightenment, beginning with
28 Hume's engagement with Cheyne's work in the *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739). Hume
29 emphasised the way that physical labour produced a different constellation of sentiments
30 in day labourers, as opposed to 'men of quality'. Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*
31 (1759) would broaden such observations into communities of sentiment, while Adam
32 Ferguson worried in civic humanist terms in his *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*
33 (1767) that the national spirit and 'the vigour of a nation, like that of a natural body, does
34 not waste by a physical decay, that yet it may sicken for want of exercise.'⁴⁰ Such writers,
35 along with the spiritualists in the Methodist movement, were now quite far away from
36 physicians who had generally advised an hour of exercise each day for reasons of health,
37 let alone the democratic aspirations of the Greeks and the Houyhnhnms, where the idea
38 had been to create independence of both mind and body at an individual level prior to the
39 nation as a community of sentiment. Walking and riding increasingly had more to do with
40 sociability than as strategies for personal improvement and Enlightenment.

41 The exercise movement, despite the rise of sentimentalism, did leave a critical legacy to
42 the British Enlightenment in relation to the concept of Olympic Games themselves. To his
43 translation of Pindar from 1749, Gilbert West appended a *Dissertation on the Olympic*
44 *Games*. In it the patriotic West, who had been part of the Cobham circle of opposition
45 Whigs in the 1730s, defined the 'Gymnasium' conceptually as a 'School of Exercise
46 maintained at the publick Expence, with a View of training up their Youth in a Manner
47 that best suited, as they imagined, to make them usefull to their Country'.⁴¹ Such schools
48 were not limited to physical exercise, for it was in this active context that one would
49 encounter and learn from rhetoricians, philosophers and other men of learning. As with

1 the Houyhnhnms, these were institutions for the creations of citizens, a suggestion made
2 directly by Lucian in a dialogue also translated by West: 'Our first and principal concern is
3 how to make our Citizens virtuous in mind and strong in Body.'⁴² Schooling, at least for
4 boys, was not to be a mere credential-gaining process but a training ground for breaking
5 away from the kind of 'self-imposed immaturity' later described by Kant in his definition of
6 *Aufklärung*.

7 But for West the basic problem with the Olympics and the gymnasium system of public
8 schooling as a historical model was the general tendency for Greek history to be shrouded
9 in myth and the aristocratic magnification of heroes. Rather than neglecting the mind or
10 mixing the classes, exercising the body created an inappropriate sense of superiority within
11 a national community of sentiments. In many ways like Elias in his historiography of
12 sport, West understood the Olympics as a 'Heroic Age' institution, one that celebrated
13 conquerors and supported through the aristocratic munificence of figures such as
14 Achilles. West also explicitly turned to Isaac Newton's *Chronology* (1728), in which
15 Newton followed Pausanias' *Description of Greece* (1.V.7) in arguing that the games were
16 connected with war and 'celebrated in Triumph for Victories', beginning with Hercules
17 Idaeus' victory over Saturn and the Titans. This aristocratic and mythic nature of the
18 Olympics made them for West an uncertain institution, and they were in turn surrounded
19 by, in his words, a 'Diversity and Uncertainty' of accounts as well as striking silences in
20 Homer. But, as West noted, Homer did talk of games and heroes participating in 'exercises'
21 like those supposedly part of the Olympics. To West this seemed to indicate that, instead of
22 being 'restored' by King Iphitos of Elis to initiate the 'Olympic truce', they were actually at
23 that point 'founded'. The Olympics were thus 'modern', only loosely based on older heroic
24 or aristocratic practices. Stadium events such as 'Gymnastick Combats' and 'Horse-Races'
25 were events added only later, by those who wanted to return the aristocratic element to the
26 games by making them both more violent and, because horse-training was expensive,
27 more aristocratic.⁴³ West here expressed a kind of double uncertainty about sport. It
28 created better citizens but retained overt practices of violent barbarism. It also could be
29 hijacked by the aristocracy and become an end rather than a means – creating largely
30 useless professional athletic stars rather than warrior citizen-soldiers in the civic
31 humanist tradition.⁴⁴

32 What West thought was interesting about Iphitus was his institutionalising of the
33 Olympic Games, framing them into 'a regular and coherent System or Form', 'uniting the
34 sacred and Political institutions' and creating a 'Principle of Life and Duration as enabled
35 it to outlive the Laws and Customs, the Liberty, and almost the Religion of Greece'.⁴⁵
36 The Olympics themselves were a way of rationalising the calendar and, as a kind of
37 measuring-stick of time, had contributed to Newton's ability to revise historical
38 chronology, a book that clearly impressed West. The stadium was based on the length of
39 the stadion – an eighth of a mile – and was a space of exhibition for 'Gymnastic Exercises'.
40 The collection of exercises called the pentathlon were all trials of skill rather than chance.
41 And with the exception of the horse activities, introduced according to West by
42 aristocratic families, gymnastic exercises favoured, as Alcibiades had noted, the 'meanly
43 born, more meanly educated, and Inhabitants, perhaps of mean and inconsiderable
44 cities'.⁴⁶ In other words, not only was there something modern about the Olympics – in the
45 sense of a coherent or rationalised system along the lines of Newton – but there was also
46 something translatable, equitable and cosmopolitan about the Olympics that transcended
47 national sentiments and enabled them to survive despite the almost complete
48 disintegration of Greek culture, which by and large was seen by early eighteenth-century
49 commentators such as West as 'superstitious and ostentatious'. Unlike Swift, West was

1 neither utopian nor cynical, and he offered an alternative to the emerging consensus
2 about the nation as an imagined community of 'moral sentiments' in which the bodies
3 and minds of citizens must be disciplined and repressed into a more passive obedience and
4 provincial outlook than the Greeks would have thought healthy.

5 The recent death of the French scholar of Greek thought Jacqueline de Romilly has
6 provoked some reflection on the translation of concepts and the momentum of languages
7 across time through crises and rebirths.⁴⁷ The physicians and historians of eighteenth-
8 century Britain and Ireland seem at some level doing work more aptly characterised by her
9 methodologies than by those of either Elias, with his figurations of the civilising process,
10 or Foucault, with his discourses of medicine and madness. Cheyne, along with Fuller and
11 Floyer and others who laid the foundations for our modern understandings of exercise and
12 sports medicine, do indeed belong in the history of sport. Perhaps more importantly, the
13 history, languages and practices of sport and exercise should play a greater role in our
14 understanding of the Enlightenment. In this regard Elias and Dunning remind us of
15 something very important. Fields of study such as sports, 'the only global idiom apart from
16 science', as Laurence Kitchin once quipped, require approaches that are not merely
17 limited to a particular nation state or to a particular conception of the body and mind
18 entirely divorced from biological and environmental questions.⁴⁸ To the extent that we
19 discuss emotions and not exercise, education and not sports, mind and not body,
20 discourses and not physicality, the Enlightenment's problems, like those constantly
21 re-invented concepts of the Greek language, remain with us. And while the elements of
22 fascist spectacle and sentimental nationalism may linger over modern sporting events,
23 it is also worth remembering and carrying forward other elements inherited from
24 the Enlightenment – the range of possible exercises, the complex mental and physical
25 demands required for achievement, the sense of experimentation with physical causes and
26 the potential to participate in a cosmopolitan dialogue across divergent political, cultural
27 and historical formations.

28 NOTES

29
30 1. Jonathan Israel's emphasis on Spinoza's materialism as a rejection of Cartesian dualism and Stoic
31 teleology is interesting here, but it has a tendency to move away from questions about the critical individual and
32 towards more abstract questions about theology and materialism. See generally Jonathan Israel, *Radical
33 Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and especially *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford: Oxford
34 University Press, 2006), p.457-70.

35 2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Noerr ([1947] Stanford,
36 CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.195. For the problematic development of exercise in the British context
37 from the 1880s see Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain,
38 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). A very brief introduction to ideas about exercise in the
39 broader Enlightenment can be found in L. H. Joseph, 'Gymnastics in the Pre-Revolutionary Eighteenth
40 Century', *CIBA Symposia* 10 (March-April 1949), p.1054-60.

41 3. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process* (Oxford:
42 Blackwell, 1986); C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* ([1963] Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). For an
43 interesting comparative case see Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford:
44 Oxford University Press, 2010). For an introduction to the concept of the embodied mind see: Andy Clark,
45 *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); R. A.
46 Wilson, *Boundaries of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Francisco Varela, Evan
47 Thompson and E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Most recent
48 positive reassessments of the Enlightenment still ignore these questions. See, for example, Robert Loudon, *The
49 World We Want: How and Why the Ideals of the Enlightenment Still Elude Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
50 2007).

51 4. George Cheyne, *An Essay of Health and Long Life* (London: George Straahan, 1724), p.98-9, 107.

52 5. Archibald Bower (ed.), *Historia litteraria* 2 (London: N. Prevost, 1731), p.374

53 6. Thomas Gray to Richard West, January 1742, in P. Toynbee (ed.), *The Correspondence of Gray, Walpole,
54 West and Ashton*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), p.19. John Ray and Henry More, as well as Bruyère,

Boileau, Madame Sevigné and her cousin Roger de Rabutin, were also in the conversation. Gray portrays this as a kind of confusion of tongues. For Cheyne as an Enlightenment figure see Roger French, *Medicine before Science: The Rational and Learned Doctor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.201, 213, and Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.98.

7. For the standard biography of Cheyne see Anita Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression in the Enlightenment: The Life and Times of George Cheyne* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), as well as Guerrini's DNB entry, and H. Viets, 'George Cheyne, 1673-1743', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 23 (1949), p.435-52. On Cheyne's popularity and influence see George Rousseau, 'Mysticism and Millenarianism: "Immortal Dr. Cheyne"', in Richard Popkin, *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought, 1650-1800* (1988), p.81-126. In terms of his weight, the actual amount meant by a 'stone' has been questioned – see Bernadine Paulshock, 'Review of Obesity and Depression', *Journal of the American Medical Association* 284:10 (2000), p.1305 – and Cheyne's actual weight in various periods is largely anecdotal.

8. Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), p.59-60, 84. Porter surprisingly spends very little time on Cheyne in his *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 2001), p.139, 282, 367.

9. G. S. Rousseau, *Enlightenment Borders: Pre- and Post-Modern Discourses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p.78.

10. Lemuel Gulliver [Jonathan Swift], *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*, vol. II (London: Benjamin Motte, 1726), p.130.

11. See Jan de Vries, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution', *Journal of Economic History* 54:2 (1994), p.249-70; Craig Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.19.

12. Thomas Lodge (trans.), *The Workes of Lucius Annaeus Seneca* (London: William Stansby, 1620), p.331.

13. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: S. Simmons, 1668), Book I, l.254. But see Book IV, l.32-113, for an argument about the failure of this ideal.

14. Gilles Boileau, *Epictetus His Morals: With Simplicius His Comment*, trans. George Stanhope (London: Richard Sare, 1694), p.237-40, chaps 36-7. On Plato see *The Lives of the Ancient Philosophers* (London: John Nicholson, 1702), p.150.

15. Joseph Addison, *Spectator* 115 (12 July 1711). Writing to Samuel Richardson, Cheyne, also describes the 'chamber horse' as a kind of exercise machine: see Charles Mullet (ed.), *The Letters of Dr. George Cheyne to Samuel Richardson* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1943), p.59-60. See Carol Houlihan Flynn, 'Running Out of Matter: The Body Exercise in Eighteenth-Century Fiction', in G. S. Rousseau (ed.), *The Language of Psyche: Mind and Body in the Enlightenment* (Los Angeles, CA: Clark Library, 1990), p.147-85.

16. See Geronimo Mercuriali, *Artis gymnasticae apud antiquos* (Venice: 1569), fol. 50 C-D, 73 D, 105D. Addison probably used the Amsterdam edition of 1672.

17. This was a common refrain about the character of the 'English nation' more broadly, as Edward Chamberlayne wrote: 'The natives will endure long and hard Labour, insomuch that after 12 Hours hard Work, they will go in the Evening to Foot-ball, Stool-ball, Cricket, Prison-base, Wrestling, Cudgel-playing, or some such like vehement Exercise for their Recreation.' Edward Chamberlyne, *Anglia notitia* (London: T. Hodgkin, 1694), p.78. (This passage first appears in this the 18th edn.) By 1708 John Chamberlyne had changed 'natives' to 'Common people' (*Magnaë Britanniaë Notitia*, London: Timothy Godwin et. al., 1708), p.30). Chamberlayne also suggests that the 'Ringing of Bells' is particularly English, 'a Recreation used in no other Country in the world' (p.187).

18. Thomas Sydenham, *Dissertatio epistolaris ad Guilielmum Cole* (London: 1682); see also Pechey (ed.), *The Whole Works* (1696; 2nd edn, enlarged, 1706). On Pitcairne see Guerrini, 'Archibald Pitcairne and Newtonian Medicine', *Medical History* (January 1987), p.70-83.

19. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), p.164-6. Anthony Bateman in his analysis of cricket also sees 1650-1750 as a kind of 'discursive ferment' in which cricket alone generates a surprising amount of divergent discourses; see Anthony Bateman, *Cricket, Literature and Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p.19.

20. Francis Fuller, *Medicina Gymnastica: or, A Treatise Concerning the Power of Exercise*, 2nd edn (London: Robert Knaplock, 1705), p.4-5.

21. Andreas Cleyer (ed.), *Specimen medicinae sinicae sive opuscula medica ad mentem sinensium* (Frankfurt am Main: Joannis Petri Zubrodt, 1682). Cleyer, the VOC's chief physician at Batavia, relied on the work of Michael Boym for this text. See also Michael Boym, *Clavis medica ad chinaram doctrinam de pullsibus*, ed. Andreas Cleyer and Philip Couplet (Nuremberg: Wolfgang Endter, 1686). Boym drew heavily on the classic *Huangdi Neijing* ('The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon', c.2nd-1st century BCE) and Wang Shuhe's *Maijing* ('Pulse Classic', c.2nd century CE).

22. David Hume famously, at the beginning of his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. I (London: John Noon, 1739), argues that Locke does this as well in his broader philosophy and revives Hobbes's notion of 'impressions'.

23. *Gentleman's Magazine or Monthly Intelligencer for the year 1731* 1 (October 1731), p.451.

24. Clement Downing, *A Compendious History of the Indian Wars* (London: T. Cooper, 1737), p.229.

- 1 25. John Toland, 'A Description of Epsom', in *A Collection of Pieces*, vol. II (London: J. Peele, 1726), p.114-5.
2 26. John Wood, *An Essay towards a Description of Bath, in four parts* (London: James Bettenham, 1749), vol.
3 I.232; Nigel Jones, *Architecture of England, Scotland and Wales* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2005), p.17.
4 27. Mowbray Green, *The Eighteenth Century Architecture of Bath* (Bath: George Gregory, 1904), p.101-3.
5 28. John Smith, *The Curiosities of Common Water [...] to which are added some rules for preserving health by diet*
6 (Edinburgh: Gideon Crawford, 1739), p.55; George Cheyne, *Essay on Gout* (London, 1720), p.103-8.
7 29. George Cheyne, 'The Case of the Author', *The English Malady* (London, 1733), p.342.
8 30. 'To Dr Cheyne of Bath on Reading his Works', *Gentleman's Magazine or Monthly Intelligencer for the Year*
9 1733 3 (April 1733), p.205.
10 31. Cheyne, *An Essay on Regimen*, 2nd edn (London: C. Rivington, 1740), p.iv-v. This difficult and
11 philosophical book in fact did not sell well, despite two editions, and Cheyne had to buy back most copies from
12 the publisher.
13 32. Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*, p.90.
14 33. Anita Guerrini, 'The Hungry Soul: George Cheyne and the Construction of Femininity', *Eighteenth-*
15 *Century Studies* 32:3 (Spring 1999), p.279-91. One suspects a turning point here, a narrowing of what Michèle
16 Cohen refers to as space for the achieving girl because of concerns over masculine sociability; cf. Cohen, 'Is
17 There a Space for the Achieving Girl?', in Patricia Murphy et al., *Equity in the Classroom: Towards Effective*
18 *Pedagogy for Girls and Boys* (London: UNESCO, 1996), p.125-36.
19 34. Cheyne, *Essay of Health and Long Life*, p.89-90.
20 35. The case of Catherine is described in Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University
21 Press, 2009), p.43-53. See also G. S. Rousseau, 'A Strange Pathology': Hysteria in the Early Modern World',
22 in Sander Gilman, *Hysteria beyond Freud* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p.145-65. For a
23 more successful relationship with the prominent Methodist Selina Hastings, countess of Huntingdon, see
24 Mullet (ed.), *The Letters of Dr. George Cheyne to the Countess of Huntingdon* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library,
25 1940). On the focus on men in the construction of the discourse of masculinity see Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning*
26 *Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1996).
27 36. For the Richardson correspondence see F. Mullet (ed.), *The Letters of Doctor George Cheyne to Samuel*
28 *Richardson (1733-1743)* (1943), which reproduces Edinburgh University Library, Laing MSS. Cheyne also
29 contributed the sections on spas to Richardson's 1742 edition of Defoe's *Tour*. For Cheyne and sentimentality
30 see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.7-15.
31 Similar to this influence on sentimentalism is the emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of Cheyne's work by the
32 founders of Methodism George Whitfield and John Wesley. See: David Shuttleton, 'Methodism and Dr. George
33 Cheyne's "More Enlightening Principles"', in Roy Porter (ed.), *Medicine in the Enlightenment* (Amsterdam:
34 Rodopi, 1995); Ruth Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University
35 of California Press, 2004), p.41-3; and David Grumett and Rachel Muers, *Theology on the Menu* (New York:
36 Routledge, 2010), p.60-3.
37 37. On this as part of a broader trend in Dublin in the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble see Sean Moore,
38 *Swift, the Book, and the Irish Financial Revolution: Satire and Sovereignty in Colonial Ireland* (Baltimore, MD: Johns
39 Hopkins University Press, 2010).
40 38. Aris Sarafianos, 'Pain, Labor, and the Sublime: Medical Gymnastics and Burke's Aesthetics',
41 *Representations* 91 (Summer 2005), p.58-83.
42 39. Most famously in James Love, 'Cricket: An Heroic Poem', in *Poems on Several Occasions* (Edinburgh: R.
43 Fleming, 1754); see Bateman, *Cricket*, p.18-19. On the rise of national sentiments in this period see Linda Colley,
44 *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), and Kathleen Wilson, *The*
45 *Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
46 Press, 1995).
47 40. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 2nd edn (London: A. Millar, 1768), p.329-30.
48 Tellingly, Ferguson goes on to question the validity of his own analogy, suggesting that exercise was no longer
49 adequate to the national task at hand.
50 41. Gilbert West, 'Dissertation on the Olympic Games', *Odes of Pindar*, vol. II (London: R. Dodsley, 1753),
51 p.204.
52 42. West, 'Dissertation on the Olympic Games', p.221.
53 43. West, 'Dissertation on the Olympic Games', p.3-11.
54 44. West, 'Dissertation on the Olympic Games', p.243-5.
55 45. West, 'Dissertation on the Olympic Games', p.11-12.
56 46. West, 'Dissertation on the Olympic Games', p.58-60, 76, 105-6.
57 47. See, for example, her recent *Petites leçons sur le grec ancien* (Paris: Stock, 2008), with its diffusionist and
58 comparative approach to Greek. My thanks to Martha Zebrowski for similarly keeping this Greek torch alight at
59 BSECS and to Haun Saussy for reminding me of de Romilly's significance in this regard.
60 48. Kitchin is quoted by Elias and Dunning, *Quest*, p.5.

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62 on the role of translation in shaping London's development as a global city.

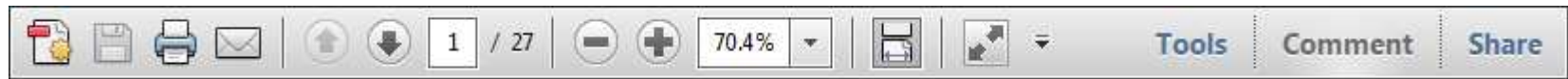
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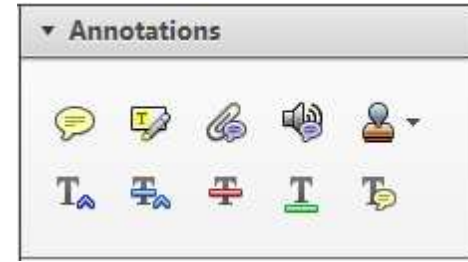
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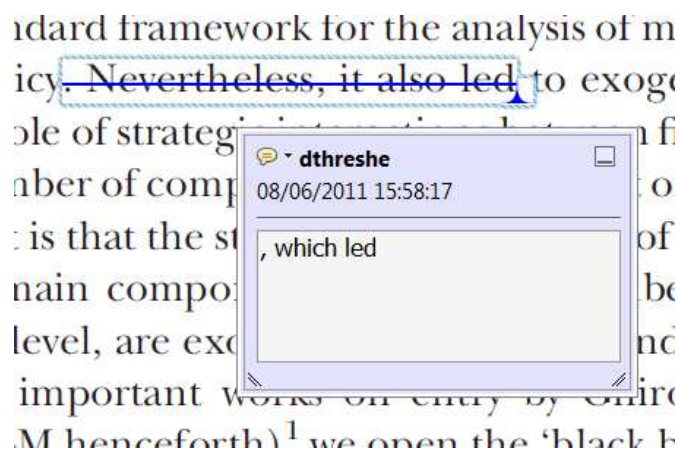
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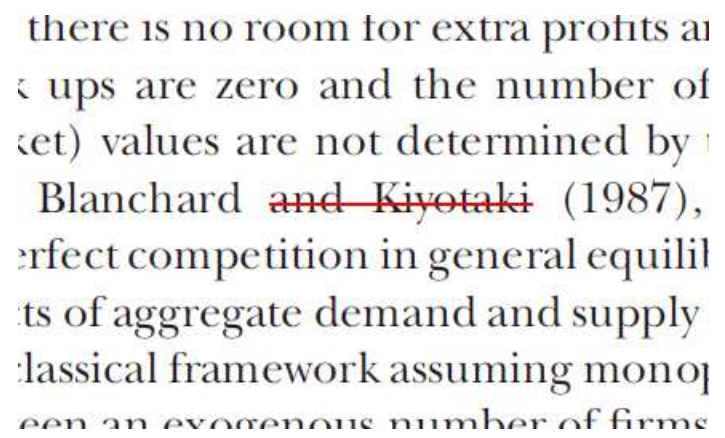
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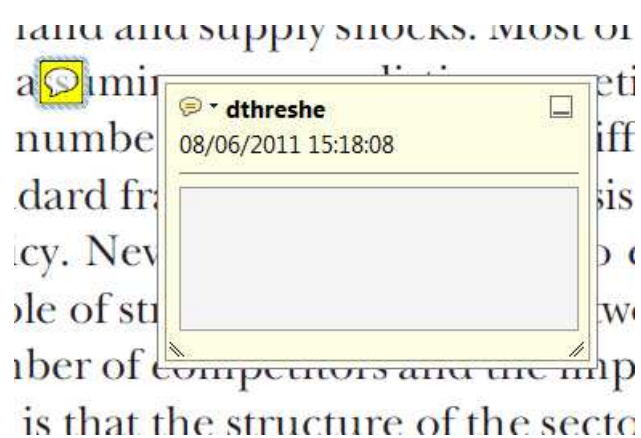
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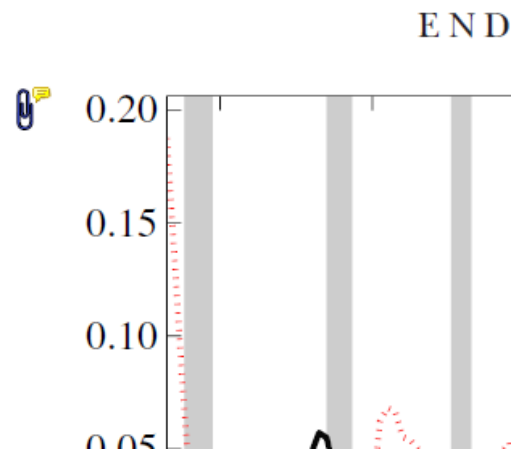
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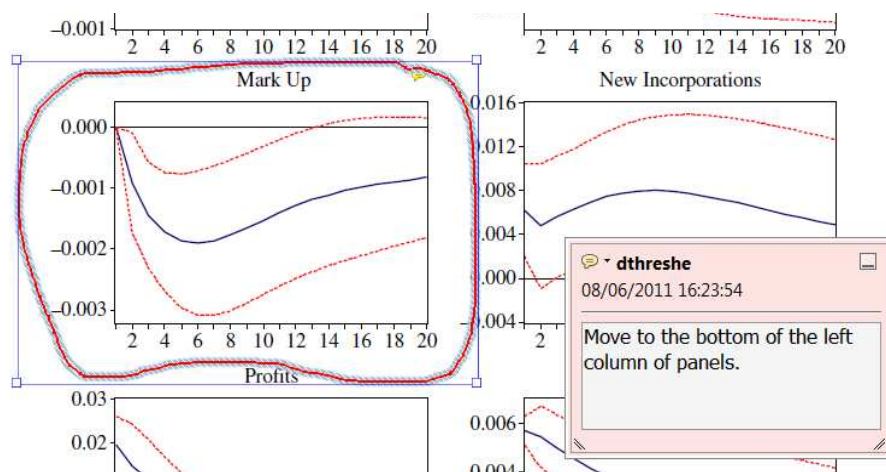


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