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A critical note on sporting supererogation

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ABSTRACT

Alfred Archer recently argued that there is good reason to think that sporting supererogation exists. In the present paper, I take a closer look at Archer's two key cases from association football and his arguments in favour of positing that there is a sporting supererogation phenomenon or realm that needs to be reckoned with. I argue that his project fails and that the notion of 'sporting supererogation' as championed by Archer should be rejected.

KEYWORDS Supererogation; sporting supererogation; luxury phenomenon; chance; merit

Introduction

Supererogation denotes the idea that a certain action may be laudable, but not mandatory or required. Supererogatory efforts are beyond the call of duty. In ethics, which is where supererogation is most widely discussed, this means that a supererogatory action is morally admirable, while failing to live up to the standard set by such an action is not morally blameworthy. The morally supererogatory action is good or right, but not obligatory. Recently, Alfred Archer argued 'that there is good reason to think that sporting supererogation exists' (Archer 2017, 359). In the present paper, I take a closer look at Archer's arguments and argue that they fail to establish sporting supererogation as a phenomenon or realm that should receive special attention.

Supererogation and sporting supererogation

In ethics, the motivation for debating supererogatory actions is often the observation that some theories fail to accommodate this category of action. The usual culprit is utilitarianism. Utilitarianism, which requires always doing that which maximizes utility, seems to leave no room for going beyond the call of moral duty. If something other than what you did yields a better result, then utilitarianism prescribes that this is what you should have done. However, according to James Urmson – the philosopher who brought the

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notion of supererogation into the twentieth-century philosophical discourse – some actions are saintly or heroic (Urmson [1958] 1969). Morality demands that we act in certain ways and that tells us what we ought to do, i.e., that which is morally obligatory, mandatory or required. Then there are so-called saintly or heroic actions, which compared to what we ought to do represent better or best courses of action, but which we pre-theoretically would not ask of an agent, as they are too demanding with regard to cost or risk, or both. Such actions are not obligatory, mandatory or required; they are optional and praiseworthy. Supererogatory actions surpass the demands of morality, making things better or having a tendency to make things better. The latter is needed (e.g., in the case of risking one's own life to save others) if we are to count failed attempts as supererogatory, while excluding reckless actions, senseless self-sacrifices, and the like. Certainly, *prima facie*, recklessly risking one's own life or sacrificing it by pursuing a course of action that was bound to fail to achieve its objectives is bad, not virtuous. Similarly, if we find the phenomenon of supererogation in domains other than the moral one, a supererogatory action must go beyond whatever demands that domain prescribes, while making it better or having a tendency to make it better.

Archer's point of entrance into the issue of supererogation is what he calls commonsense morality, which I assume is some set of beliefs and opinions, commonly accepted by ordinary people, concerning what is good and bad, right and wrong, and the like.

A commonly accepted feature of commonsense morality is that there are some acts that are supererogatory or beyond the call of duty (Archer 2017, 360).

On the other hand, among philosophers we find no lack of individuals who reject the supererogation intuition of commonsense morality (Heyd 2019, 3.1). Still, Archer's observation that, pre-theoretically, we adhere to the idea that some actions are good or right and beyond the call of duty seems to me a perfectly legitimate starting point for a philosophical exploration.

Moral supererogation requires that an action be 'morally optional (neither morally required nor morally forbidden)' and that it be 'morally better than the minimum that morality demands' (Archer 2017, 361). Broadening this understanding of supererogation to other areas of the social world of humans – which Archer calls normative domains – one only finds supererogatory actions in such a domain, if it 'generates requirements' and if it is 'possible to perform acts that are both permissible (...) and better (...) than the acts that are required by that domain' (Archer 2017, 362). Transferred to sport, we get the following:

Sporting Supererogation: The domain of sport includes acts of sporting supererogation if and only if:

- (1) Sport generates requirements.
- (2) It is possible to perform acts that are both permissible (according to the domain of sport) and better (according to the domain of sport) than the acts that are required by sport (Archer 2017, 362)

I think it is fair to say that Archer's clause 1 stands on firm ground. Sport generates requirements. The question then is which requirements, and the answer to that question is premised on how we understand sport.

Archer is not interested in moral supererogatory actions that happen to be carried out within a sport context, rather he wants to defend the notion that there are 'acts that are better from the *sporting* point of view than what is required from the sporting point of view' (Archer 2017, 363). Only that would give us sporting supererogation. Archer's two key cases of sporting supererogation are from the world of association football, and much of his ensuing debate involves these two cases.

The Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler ran onto the ball and was left with only Arsenal goalkeeper David Seaman to beat (. . .) Fowler fell dramatically to the ground. The referee judged that Seaman had fouled Fowler and awarded a penalty to Liverpool. Fowler responded by trying to persuade the referee to change his mind, claiming that Seaman had not made contact with him and so no foul had been committed. The referee, though, refused to change his mind (Archer 2017, 359).

According to Archer, Fowler received 'an undeserved penalty', and his attempt to rectify the situation 'was not required from the sporting point of view and was better from that point of view than other permissible actions' (Archer 2017, 365). The betterness of Fowler's action follows if sport is seen as being only or primarily about sporting abilities or skills. Archer writes that a wrongly awarded penalty 'distorts the sporting competition', because '[t]he result that follows from such a match will tell us less about the relative sporting abilities of the two teams' (Archer 2017, 365). Unfortunately, from an empirical point of view, things are not that straightforward. It is not the case that 'Fowler's action is a clear example of an act of sporting supererogation' (Archer 2017, 365). Why? Because it is not clear that Fowler's Liverpool had 'benefited from a mistaken decision from an official' (Archer 2017, 366).

I made one last, slightly more muted attempt to tell him Seaman hadn't touched me. The ref muttered something like, 'Maybe not, but the intent was there.' This turned out to be a little-known but technically accurate reading of the penalty laws that came back to us again, much later in my Liverpool career, when the referee gave us a penalty at Sheffield United after their goalkeeper 'intended' to scythe down Stevie Gerrard! (Fowler 2019, 133).

It was referee Gerald Ashby who got it right that afternoon at Highbury and not Robbie Fowler.¹ Still, it is easy to see the appeal of the Fowler-Seaman incident for Archer's line of argument, so let me provide another example that unarguably gives the same result.

Norwegian footballer Arne Larsen Økland informed the referee that the goal he scored for his club Bayer 04 Leverkusen against Bayern München [in 1981] had never crossed the goal line. Økland's goal was consequently disallowed (Borge [2010] 2018, 161).

Økland tells us that he was certain the ball had not crossed the goal line and that '[h]e wants to be fair. Knows that it wasn't a goal and wants to report it', concluding that '[h]e just did what felt right' (Ulseth 1985, 44; 49, my translation). Whereas Fowler had not benefited from an official's mistaken decision, Økland had, and the latter succeeded in disallowing the goal that had mistakenly been given his team. The Økland incident fits Archer's mould for sporting supererogation. Let us call this *the player-cum-referee-corrector case*.

Archer's other key case of sporting supererogation also involves a footballer stepping up not merely as a sport practitioner within the confines of his or her sport, but also as someone with aspirations to be the one who decides what counts as what in the sport event.

West Ham's Premier League match against Everton on the 16th of December 2000 was tied at one each when Everton's goalkeeper Paul Gerrard went down injured on the edge of his own box. Just as Gerrard was collapsing, West Ham's Trevor Sinclair delivered a cross into striker Paolo Di Canio, who would have been given an easy chance to give West Ham the lead. Instead, Di Canio decided to catch the ball in his hands in order to stop play to allow Gerrard to receive treatment (Archer 2017, 366).

The Di Canio incident differs from the Fowler-Seaman incident in that it is not about 'the correction of refereeing decisions' (Archer 2017, 366). Instead, Di Canio takes on the role of deciding when sporting action should be suspended. Let us call this *the player-cum-sport-suspender case*. Both cases are cases in which players, in effect, take on the role of co-refereeing the game. Let us call the genus of these two cases *the player-cum-co-referee type*.

According to Archer, what makes the Di Canio incident a case of sporting supererogation is that 'Gerrard's injury presented Di Canio with a clear chance to score' and '[i]f Di Canio had taken this chance, then the result would have been decided not on the basis of sporting merits but on an unfortunately timed injury' (Archer 2017, 366). Unfortunately, the latter is not quite the case. First, Gerrard had committed to clearing the ball outside his box when he got injured, and, thus, had he merely slipped and tumbled, he would not have recovered to save any attempt from Di Canio. If anything, it is Sinclair receiving the ball that lacked sporting merit. Second, looking at the footage from the incident, I do not think it is likely that Di Canio would have scored even if

he had tried.² Had he taken his chance, it would have carried sporting merit. Be that as it may, Gerrard's injury played a role in the build-up to Di Canio receiving the ball. The betterness of Di Canio's action of catching the ball instead of attempting to score follows if sport is seen as being only or primarily about sporting abilities or skills. Sinclair did not win the ball because of his sporting abilities or skills or get it owing to Gerrard's lack of them. A bad clearance or a misplaced pass would be an example of the latter. Rather, chance, not abilities or skills, was involved. Sinclair was lucky, Gerrard was unlucky, and we must assume it is the element of chance that distorts the sporting competition. Presumably, the luck involved in Sinclair getting the ball carries over to whichever action sequence Sinclair sets off after receiving the ball. From a sporting point of view, what makes Di Canio's action of bringing the match to a halt by catching the ball better than other actions required by the sport is that the opportunity awarded Di Canio involved, in part, the element of chance and the latter, presumably, did not reflect or tell us anything about the sport practitioner's abilities or skills, thus distorting the sport competition of the football match.³

Rejecting Archer's two key sporting supererogation cases

The first step in Archer's theory of sporting supererogation is the idea that sport generates requirements. What does that mean? To answer that question one must inevitably touch upon the question of what sport is. Sport is a social kind. Understanding sport as a social kind in detail is no mean feat, but that need not worry us here (Borge 2019, 83–94; 2020). I take it to be uncontroversial that sport being a social kind means that our sporting activities or practices and our understanding of ourselves as doing sporting activities or practices are what make something sport and not some other kind of activity or practice. How one should analyse the social kind of sport, on the other hand, is not uncontroversial, but the suggestion that sport is ruled-based stands a fairly good chance of being accepted in most corners of the philosophy of sport.⁴ Archer appeals to Bernard Suits' view of sport, and Suits holds that sport requires rules (Archer 2017, 363; Suits [1978] 2005). A sport's constitutive rules define what count as what in a sport – there are no goals scored in association football unless you have in place a rule that defines when something does or does not count as a goal – and furthermore, such constitutive rules of a sport 'prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means' (Suits [1978] 2005, 54).⁵

The constitutive rules of a sport create requirements in the sense that unless there was some sort of acceptance and recognition of the constitutive rules of the sport under consideration among the purported practitioners of the sport, then the sport would not exist, and those purported

practitioners of the sport would in fact be doing something else. Consider the following case.

Football and the Natives: A tribe of native Norwegians coming to the British Isles oversees a football match. Not having any conception of sport, the natives quickly conclude that this is some form of elaborated ritual. Imagine the natives' amazement when, courtesy of the British weather, it starts pouring down just before the end of the match. Highly impressed, the natives acquire a rule book and bring home what they take to be an elaborated rainmaking ritual; they then start acting in accordance with their understanding of the rule book of football (Borge 2019, 79–80).

The natives are not playing football because they do not meet sport's requirement of being seen as sport when played and having its rules implemented *qua* the rules of a sport. The natives are doing something else; they are performing a rainmaking ritual. A basic requirement of any sport is being seen as a sport of a specific kind and having its rules implemented *qua* the rules of that sport. Sport is a transparent social kind that requires the acceptance and recognition of the various sports' respective constitutive rules.⁶

The constitutive rules of association football make the sport possible, and the constitutive rules that limit or prohibit certain means available to footballers, such as the handball rule, the off-side rule and so on and so forth, make the sport-specific goals of football, such as scoring a goal, 'more difficult than it otherwise would be' (Archer 2017, 363). The constraints that various sports put on the means available to sportsmen and -woman are welcomed constraints, and part of being a sport practitioner is accepting and recognizing whichever constitutive rules a sport consists of.

[T]hese constraints are accepted because they present us with the challenges that transform otherwise easy tasks (putting a ball into a net) into an interesting activity. It is these constraints that make the sport an activity worth pursuing. These challenges may be deemed valuable either intrinsically or instrumentally. We may simply enjoy challenging ourselves for its own sake (Archer 2017, 363).

In general, I find this passage from Archer right-headed, though the details need some shoring up. Certainly, if you look at the rules of track and field, you will find that they implicitly rule out using a motorbike, rocket shoes and the like in the 100 metre dash. Still, even with such constraints in place, finishing the 100 metre dash is, for most of us up to a certain age, an easy challenge or task. What is not an easy challenge or task is winning 100 metre races. Sports are not only challenges or tasks. They are competitions. In the case of the 100 metre dash, it is not the challenge or task and associated constraints that make it an activity worth pursuing, it is the presence of other human competitors. Furthermore, consider association football and the challenge or task of putting a ball into a net. If you removed the prohibitions football has on hacking, holding, hitting, biting, head butting and the like, I suspect that the

challenge or task of putting a ball into a net during a football match would become harder, not easier. The point of these perhaps pedantic remarks is to show that, when thinking about what makes a sport an activity worth pursuing, one needs to check the mechanics of the sport and how the sport is actually done. As a challenge or a task, the 100 metre race is easy, but as a type of sport competition to be won, it is perhaps hard. In football, the aim of the game is to score during a match, while not conceding goals – not merely to put a ball into a net. Some of the rules of football make that harder, while others make it easier. The answer to the worthwhileness of sport or sports is not one-dimensional, and it probably differs to varying degrees from sport to sport.

If we are careful not to present an oversimplified picture of what makes a sport worth pursuing both as practitioners and as spectators – the mechanics of the sport and how the sport is actually done matter – then we should be in a position to look at Archer's second step. Apart from sport generating requirements, there must be some actions that are permissible yet not required – actions that, from the sporting point of view, would be better to perform than not to perform. Do Fowler and Di Canio's actions meet these requirements? Is performing these actions permissible, yet not required, while also being better according to the relevant sport domain than not performing them? I am going to grant Archer the permissibility of these actions when they happened. Obviously, Di Canio violated a constitutive rule of football when he handled the ball, but as Archer writes, 'as well as formal constitutive rules, sports are also governed by more informal norms' (Archer 2017, 364).⁷ The latter is an appeal to the ethos view of sport, and that view is a competitor view to the previously invoked Suitsian view of sport (D'Agostino 1981). Be that as it may.

When considering the player-cum-referee-corrector case, brought to our attention by the Økland incident, I have previously argued that these kinds of actions are problematic.

There is also a philosophical problem with the ideal of self-reported fouls in football matches. On such a hypothesis, if one is less than entirely able at such self-reporting – whether because one lacks the necessary self-reflective awareness of one's actions in the heat of the moment or because one lacks insight into the possible wrong-doings of one's own side more generally – the more one can get away with. This puts the conscientious and able player at no small disadvantage, while the ignorant will be awarded. This seems like the wrong result (Borge [2010] 2018, 171).

This would similarly hold for asking referees to change decisions they have made in favour of a player and his or her team – awarding a goal in the Økland incident or a penalty in Fowler-Seaman incident – but which the player in question thinks are mistaken. Archer concurs with this line of argument.

One problem that may arise here is that fair-minded players who are able to look upon the referee's decisions in an unbiased way would be more likely to ask the referee to overturn decisions. Players who have a biased view of the game on the other hand would be less likely to do so. If such a norm were in place, then it *can be expected* that it would *unfairly penalize* those who can view the game in an evenhanded way (Archer 2017, 367, my italics).

I conclude that '[i]t would be better to drop the idea altogether of burdening players with the obligation of making matches maximally rightful in so unrealistic fashion' and, again, Archer follows suit and argues that 'the norms of sport should not require people to act in the most sportsmanlike way possible' (Borge [2010] 2018, 171; Archer 2017, 367). The player-cum-referee-corrector type actions should not be seen as obligatory or required by the sport of football.

Still, Archer thinks that, according to the domain of sport, the player-cum-referee-corrector action type, exemplified by the Fowler-Seaman incident, is better than those required by sport. Presumably, this is better because incorrect referee decisions distort the sporting competition, and correct referee decisions are in keeping with or promote sporting merit.

[T]he praiseworthy thing to do from the sporting point of view is to ask the referee to change her decision. This means that there can be reasons for players to try and change the referee's mind about mistakes they have made in their favour even if there are also reasons not to make this a general sporting norm (Archer 2017, 367).

However, it then looks like sporting supererogation ends up being a luxury phenomenon, something one can allow oneself as long as it does not become a more frequent or widespread practice. It is good to do it occasionally, again, because it corrects decisions that distort the sporting competition (the Fowler-Seaman incident and the Økland incident) or prevents sporting competitions from not being decided on sporting merit (the Di Canio incident). As a norm, however, it should be rejected according to Archer, because it can be expected to have the consequence of unfairly penalizing those who can view the game in an evenhanded way. From a sporting point of view, the reason why such a practice is not better than actions required by sport must be that unfair penalization of fair-minded unbiased players ends up distorting the sporting competitions or not deciding them on sporting merit.

One would expect that if the Økland and Fowler-Seaman player-cum-referee-corrector incidents were good from the sporting point of view, then many incidents of the same action type would be even better from a sporting point of view. But as Archer and I both contend, this is not the case. From a sporting point of view, too much of this kind of so-called sporting supererogation leads to an overall unfair or unwanted situation and is seemingly only praiseworthy if the occasional footballer does it, but not if too many do

it. This would seem to be a phenomenon very different from the familiar moral supererogation phenomenon. There is nothing in the moral supererogation phenomenon to suggest that, even though one or a few moral saints or heroes are good, many of them would not, from the moral point of view, be something we would want. The label 'sporting supererogation' should be withheld from the player-cum-referee-corrector action type.

The player-cum-sport-suspender cases are beset with the same problems. Archer wants this kind of action – the voluntary suspension of play – to be recognized as better than those required by footballers in the course of playing a football match, because it nullifies a game advantage received not as a consequence of sporting abilities or skills, but of an unfortunately timed injury. From a sporting point of view, this is good, as it ensures that the advantage gained is forfeited and does not distort the sporting competition. At the same time, Archer does not want voluntary suspension of play to be a sporting requirement for footballers.

There may also be good reasons not to have a norm that requires players to put the ball out of play whenever a goalkeeper is injured. Such a norm may be liable to abuse by goalkeepers who recognize a quick and easy way of nullifying a goal-scoring chance for the opposition (Archer 2017, 367).

Not only goalkeepers, but also outfield players have actually already recognized the game advantages that the voluntary suspension of play phenomenon offers. What Archer is worrying about in the quote above has been a problem in football for a while now. Football at one point entered a period in which voluntary suspension of play and calls for it in matches became so commonplace and contentious that it was clearly an unhappy situation for the game. Only five years after Di Canio gave the footballing world his ball catching display, the voluntary suspension of play phenomenon created bad blood between Lyon and Rosenborg in a Champions League match in Lyon in December 2005. With the match at 1–1 in its closing stages and Lyon chasing the victory, Rosenborg's Daniel Braaten was on the floor and had been there for a while. Lyon kept on attacking. Here is how the Norwegians saw it.

Daniel was injured and Wiltford (the Lyon captain) was aware of it throughout the previous attack. We were going to knock the ball out, but they kept on going. There is something called fair play in this game, Christer Basma told TV3 after the match. French arrogance at its worse. They had two chances to play the ball out themselves, but they didn't, said a very resigned RBK coach Per-Mathias Høgmø (NRK 2005, my translation).

The problem was that when Rosenborg tried to put the ball out of play, Braaten was already on his feet and clearly not in any immediate need of treatment. Lyon's Sylvain Wiltord saw no reason to not keep on playing, and his team grabbed the winner in the attack that ensued. Over the years, the chaos at times surrounding the phenomenon of voluntary suspension of play

has somehow calmed down. Or, at least, that is my impression. Perhaps many referees now make it clear that they, not the players, will decide when an injury dictates that play is to be suspended. Still, all is not quite on the voluntary suspension of play front. At the beginning of the 2019–2020 season, 'Bristol City have written to every Championship club to tell them that they will not kick the ball out of play for any opposing player (...) we're going to let the referee manage the game' (The Guardian 2019). What prompted the letter were angry reactions from Leeds United to the Bristol City team not kicking the ball out. Leeds, of course, was already on record that very spring for telling Derby County that the club had instructed the 'Leeds United team not to kick the ball out of play if an opponent is injured' and that 'the person that has to take this decision is the referee' (Taylor 2019a). The Leeds United position was a consequence of a voluntary suspension of play controversy earlier that season, where a game at Elland Road between Leeds United and Aston Villa ended in 'a mass, ugly, on-pitch melee' (Taylor 2019b).

The purported sporting supererogatory action of voluntary suspension of play, exemplified by the Di Canio incident, only holds up as better, according to that domain of sport, than actions required by the sport of football if this action type remains a fairly exclusive phenomenon, where only one or a few actually voluntarily suspend play. History has already shown us that when player-cum-sport-suspender cases become more frequent or widespread, as happened in football with voluntary suspension of play, we find ourselves, from the sporting point of view, in unwanted situations.⁸ Archer ends up endorsing a certain kind of action, which our recent footballing history has shown to be an action type that – when it becomes more frequent or widespread with all sorts of expectations of predictability, reciprocity, actual and possible exploitation, and so on and so forth – is not better than other actions required by the sport of football. Of course, for anyone familiar with football, the disarray sometimes associated with the voluntary suspension of play phenomenon is not at all surprising, because football, at least at its upper levels, is played in an uncooperative fashion (Borge 2019, 154–157). Suffice it to say here, we have seen what happens when the purported sporting supererogation act of voluntarily suspending play in football, exemplified by the Di Canio incident, becomes more frequent or widespread, then that action type, from the sporting point of view, is no longer better than actions required by the sport of football. Furthermore, we might add that the suggested sporting supererogation in the Di Canio incident is in a clear sense based on luck. Di Canio was lucky. He voluntarily suspended play when this action type was still quite rare. Thus, when this action happened, it could be seen as better than other actions required by the sport of football. The same cannot be said if it had happened today. Again, sporting supererogation seems to end up being a luxury phenomenon. As already argued with regard to player-cum-referee-corrector cases, the phenomenon on

display in the Di Canio incident seems very different from the familiar moral supererogation phenomenon, and, once again, for the very same reasons, the label of 'sporting supererogation' should be withheld from the player-cum-sport-suspender cases.

There is a further issue with the player-cum-sport-suspender cases and the Di Canio incident that deserves our attention. Archer's explanation for why this kind of action is praiseworthy from a sporting point of view concerns sport results being decided on the basis of sporting merit. Sporting merit is a matter of the relative sporting abilities or skills of practitioners of sport, like two football teams. In his description of the Di Canio incident, Archer emphasizes that Di Canio's action allowed 'Gerrard to *receive treatment*', and when he considers why voluntary suspension of play should not be a norm, but still be seen as a good thing, the emphasis is yet again on health concerns, as Archer tells us that 'in cases where a goalkeeper is *clearly injured*, there is good reason to stop play in the way that Di Canio did' (Archer 2017, 366, 367–368, my italics). Does this help Archer and his theory of sporting supererogation? In the Di Canio incident, we assume that Gerrard was not responsible for his injury and, thus, unlucky to lose the ball the way he did. Gerrard getting injured was a chancy event (a product of chance) and from this resulted Sinclair's cross, upon which Di Canio caught the ball with his hands. Di Canio rectified a chancy injury that gave his team an unmerited game advantage. Is it the chance-part or the injury-part of a chancy injury leading to a distortion of a sport competition that connects to the sporting in Archer's sporting supererogation? The sporting point of view, as presented by Archer in his defence of his suggested notion of sporting supererogation, is generally concerned with sporting merit, and by that I assume he means that the results of sport competitions are based on, reflect, mirror, are in accordance with, etc., the practitioners' sporting abilities or skills. It is a concern about chance or luck not distorting the sport competition that is given centre stage in Archer's own explanation of where sporting supererogation gets its impasse.⁹ If that is so, then the emphasis on Di Canio allowing Gerrard to receive treatment and the notion that a clearly injured keeper gives good reason to do what Di Canio did is a red herring. If Gerrard had gone down injured when, say, play was taking place deep inside West Ham's half, then with regard to sporting merit there would have been no direct reason to stop play. One can see this more easily with outfield players, because an open unguarded goal quite quickly turns into a huge game advantage for one of the teams.

Consider our earlier example of the match between Lyon and Rosenborg. Rosenborg's Braaten being injured around the halfway line, while Lyon is attacking the Rosenborg goal, does not, from the sporting perspective of football, warrant putting the ball out of play. When Lyon scored and got the win they were chasing, the result was in fact decided on the basis of sporting

merit and not an unfortunately timed injury.¹⁰ The concern for Braaten's health might have been real, but health concerns are not the same as sport concerns. A player going down on the pitch, when he or she is not involved in play, and the opposing team continuing their attack, does not constitute a distortion of the football match as a sport competition, and any goal scored will tell us something about the relative sporting abilities or skills of the two teams. Obviously, if a footballer collapses on the pitch the way Fabrice Muamba did in the Tottenham versus Bolton game at White Hart Lane on March 17th, 2012, then play must be suspended as quickly as possible. This is not because playing on would distort the match as a sport competition *qua* sport competition, but because we happen to value the life of a man higher than winning a football match. Serious (enough) health concerns take precedence over sport competition, but this does not give you sporting supererogation. Furthermore, I suspect that Archer would agree with me that it does not even qualify as moral supererogation. It is not beyond the call of duty to stop playing football when a man has gone into cardiac arrest on the pitch. This is not a sporting question or a question of fairness within sport. When an episode is serious enough, like the Muamba incident, then no one would think it a supererogatory action in any sense to voluntarily suspend play. Moreover, when someone is merely injured and not involved in play, as in the Braaten incident, then from the sporting point of view of not distorting the sport competition, voluntary suspension of play is not warranted. This does not mean that it is not praiseworthy to voluntarily suspend play when one is concerned about another player's health, but it is not the injury-part in chancy injury that connects to Archer's notion of sporting supererogation. It is only the chance-part that does.

The fact that, from a sporting perspective, it is the chance-part of chancy injury, not health concerns, that would justify Di Canio catching the ball with his hands leaves Archer's theory of sporting supererogation in even more trouble. If we make our way across Stanley Park to Anfield and the Premier League match between Liverpool and Chelsea on April 27th, 2014, we find another Gerrard slipping up and awarding the opposing team a clear chance to score. This time it was Liverpool's Steven Gerrard who lost his footing, but Chelsea's Demba Ba did not stop to ponder whether the slip was bad luck or an error, or a bit of both. Ba punished Liverpool and derailed their title challenge. To be fair, the infamous Gerrard slip is a mixture of bad luck and error, but if it had been purely accidental, say a patch of the Anfield turf giving way under Gerrard's standing foot, then Ba would still have capitalized on Gerrard's misfortune. In football you are supposed to strike when Lady Luck smiles upon you, not second guess her decisions. You take your chance. If that means that the result is decided not on the basis of sporting merit but on an unfortunately timed turf malfunction, then not only would it not require a player to suspend play, I am fairly sure that it would be deemed

unacceptable sporting behaviour in a football match by the footballing world, if a player were to do so. I cannot recall any episode in which a player has done that. Thus, apart from such a practice being unmanageable, if one wants to maintain a proper competitive edge in football, that practice would also be rejected as unacceptable and unwanted. The element of chance in football is an acknowledged and accepted part of the game. However, Archer's reasons for thinking that the Di Canio incident is a case of sporting supererogation require that not to be the case. But it is the case, and this gives us yet another reason to reject Archer's notion of sporting supererogation.¹¹

Conclusion

I have argued that, contrary to Archer's claims, we have not been given good reason to accept the existence of sporting supererogation *simpliciter*. On closer examination, the so-called sporting supererogation argued for in Archer's two key cases from association football would seem to be a phenomenon very different from that of familiar moral supererogation. Archer's sporting supererogation ends up looking like a luxury phenomenon, and the label of 'sporting supererogation' should be withheld. Furthermore, the case of voluntary suspension of play due to player injury does not connect with the sporting part of Archer's so-called sporting supererogation, because it is not considerations of the end result and sporting merit that warrant suspension of play, but instead health concerns. The latter could even dictate suspension of play in cases where such a stop would in fact distort the sporting competition by taking away one team's chance to score.

Notes

1. In his earlier autobiography, Fowler does not mention that the referee said something along those lines (Fowler, Robbie with David Maddock 2005).
2. Sinclair's cross is not put in front of Di Canio for him to run onto, but is struck backwards in a looping fashion. It is hard to judge how much power Di Canio would have been able to get on the ball had he attempted to head it, especially because Everton's Steve Watson was there to challenge for the header. Moreover, had he got the ball on target, there would still have been two Everton defenders between Di Canio and the goal line. Had Di Canio decided to let the ball come down on his feet, he would have had to deal with both Watson and Everton's Niclas Alexandersson. The latter was on the other side of Di Canio. When Di Canio decided to catch the ball with his hands, there were two Everton players near him and another two between him and the goal line. Whatever else you think about the Di Canio incident, Di Canio did not forfeit an easy chance to give West Ham the lead.
3. Archer presents several other cases, and the running race incident from Simon, Torres and Hager deserves mentioning (Simon, Torres, and Hager 2015, 73;

Archer 2017, 365). The case is underdescribed, but one could make a case for local running race supererogation due to the mechanics of running races and the fact that the alleged sporting supererogation happens after the sport event is over. The possible existence of some local sporting supererogation does not justify the three quite far-reaching lessons for sport in general that Archer draws on the basis of his own discussion of sporting supererogation (Archer 2017, 368–369).

4. So-called nature sports would represent a challenge to this demarcation. See Borge (2019) for an argument to the effect that nature sports should not count as sports (Borge 2019, 108–110).
5. Contrary to Suits, I do not hold that prohibiting use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means is a necessary condition for something being a sport, instead I argue that this is a rational possibility in sport (Borge 2019, 129–133). This difference between Suits and me on this point is of no importance in the present paper.
6. On sport as a transparent social kind, see Borge (2019, 85, 119, 134). The transparency relation for sport is more complex than indicated here (Borge 2019, 136–138).
7. For an argument suggesting that the handball rule in football is a constitutive one, see Borge (2019, 183–186).
8. Some might want to add ‘unfair situations’ to this description of the player-cum-suspender case and appeal to arguments similar to that given with regard to player-cum-referee-corrector cases. The conscientious and able player might end up putting the ball out of play more often than other less conscientious and able players. I will leave it to my reader to decide whether such an addition is warranted. Note that I do not use the word ‘unfair’ with regard to the arguments pertaining to the player-cum-referee-corrector cases, Archer does.
9. Mistaken referee decisions are not chancy in that way, but we can talk in a fairly straightforward sense about Økland being lucky in that he benefitted from something that was not based on his sporting abilities or skills or on his opponents’ lack of sporting abilities or skills.
10. One would do well to remember that in football play goes on when a player is receiving treatment outside the pitch. One team playing with one less man on the pitch does not in itself warrant suspension of play.
11. For a more thorough treatment of how one can understand what is going on in voluntary suspension of play cases in football, see Borge (2019, 217–221, 251).

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