

PART I

*Sport and
Education*



Sports, Relativism, and Moral Education

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The idea that sports help build moral character is an ancient one, finding some support even in the dialogs of Plato, who declared in the *Republic* that “there are two arts which I would say some god gave to mankind, music and gymnastics . . . not for the soul and body incidentally, but for their harmonious adjustment.” Centuries later, the existentialist philosopher Camus noted that the context in which he really learned ethics was that of sport.¹ Of course, the belief that sports are an important form of moral education is not one that is restricted to some philosophers but is widely held throughout our culture. On the other hand, many critics of contemporary sport rejoin that sport may very well promote values, but that frequently what they regard as the wrong values, such as an overemphasis on winning and consequent disrespect of opponents, are being taught.

These critics raise important issues about moral education. Who decides what values are to be promoted and what values are to be abjured, particularly in controversial cases, and on what basis should such a decision be made? Whose morals are to be taught? Moreover, is it the business of organized athletic programs within educational and academic institutions to promote a moral stance? Surely, secondary schools, colleges, and universities should educate, not indoctrinate. But isn't “moral education” simply a guise for indoctrination into the

values of those who control the institutions in question? If not, how specifically can it avoid being partisan?

These are extremely difficult questions. The discussion that follows is an attempt to suggest a response to some of them and, in particular, to suggest what role sport can play in moral education. To help make our inquiry manageable, let us focus on the role of athletic programs in secondary schools and in colleges and universities. We can begin by identifying a number of concerns about the very idea of moral education.

Perhaps the most serious concern is over what values should be taught within an institutional setting. Do we want schools fostering a partisan ideology, perhaps based on the religious values of some people in the community but opposed by others? Do we want coaches imposing their own religious or political commitments on their teams? Whose values are to be taught, promoted, or expressed? To avoid these difficulties, many would argue that public schools, as well as colleges and universities, should be politically neutral and avoid taking partisan stands on controversial issues. But how can the very same institution both be neutral and promote certain values? The price of neutrality would seem to be abstinence from moral education, but to abandon neutrality would open the door to partisanship and indoctrination. Neither horn of this dilemma is attractive, but how are we

to avoid one or the other of the two alternatives?

Second, what form should moral education take? Should it be explicit, as in the form of special classes or lectures? Should it involve explicit philosophical treatment of ethical issues, as in a class on ethical issues in sport, or should it be informal and implicit? Indeed, how can some form of implicit moral education be avoided in educational institutions? How could any learning even go on, for example, if students were not required to be civil? However, the more informal moral education is, the less control there would appear to be over its content. How are we to strike the right balance?

Moreover, while one segment of the population seems at least on the surface to be very clear about what moral values it favors and wants others to adopt, a significant number of students, at least in my experience, enter college already imbued with a kind of moral skepticism or crude moral relativism. This segment of the student population seems to equate making moral judgments either with dogmatism, with being judgmental or opinionated, or with what is regarded with almost as much disdain, holding an “absolute.” This group of students actually may hold covert moral judgments of their own but disguise them under the cloak of skepticism or relativism to avoid appearing dogmatic or intolerant in front of their peers. Perhaps because one segment of the population often appears quite dogmatic in advancing its own moral views, it is not surprising that another segment of the population identifies advocacy of moral principles with intolerance and drops out of moral discussion entirely. An admittedly extreme case of this reluctance to make moral judgments occurred when one of my students commented on an examination, “Of course I dislike the Nazis but who is to say they are morally wrong.”

Does making moral judgments commit us to a belief in “absolutes?” Is that to be avoided? But how can we support moral education without believing that at least some approaches to morality are correct? Should “absolutophobia,” the fear of committing to what one regards as an objectively warranted moral judgment, prevent us from endorsing moral education?²

My suggestion is that approaching such questions by way of sport can not only be illuminating, but also show that commitment to moral principles need not be dogmatic or intolerant, and that “absolutes,” depending upon what we mean by them, need not be avoided at all cost. The discussion that follows begins by exploring three approaches to values and sports, then examines whether moral education must necessarily be partisan or dogmatic, and concludes with some comments about implications for moral relativism, dogmatism, and moral judgment.

Values in Sport

Before exploring how sports might serve as a form of moral education, it will be useful to consider how they might be related to moral values in the first place. Although proponents of sport stress its value as a character builder and critics worry about the kind of character that might be produced, it is important to go deeper and ask what sport might primarily have to do with ethics or morality.

According to one view, sports merely reflect and perhaps reinforce adherence to the dominant values of the wider society. According to this thesis, often called the mirror thesis or reductionism, sports serve a conservative social function. They express the values of the wider culture and perhaps socialize participants and spectators to accept those values as their own. For example, advocates of the mirror thesis might argue that in a primarily capitalist society such as the United States, it is not an accident that sports are highly competitive, glorify individual stars such as Michael Jordan, and emphasize fame and fortune as rewards for competitive success. The mirror thesis is an example of what might be called an externalist theory, where *externalism* is the view that sport is not an independent source of value but borrows whatever normative or moral force it has from outside sources.³

Other observers of sport, however, contend that sport has internal connections to certain values. These internal values can often conflict

with those of the wider society. If these *internalists* are correct, sport can be an independent basis for criticism of the wider culture and, depending upon the morality dominant in the rest of society, can be a force for social change.

One version of internalism is known as formalism. "Formalism" is the name given to a position or, more accurately, a family of positions that characterize games, and such game-derivative notions as "winning a game" or "making a move or play within a game," in terms of the formal structure of games, particularly their constitutive rules.⁴ Thus, an act counts as a move or play within a game only if it is allowed by the constitutive rules. For example, hitting a pitch with a bat in a manner allowed by the rules is part of baseball but running over the opposing pitcher in an armored personnel carrier is not. Formalists tend to see the point of the rules of games to be the creation of worthwhile challenges, and hence conformity to the rules is required if the challenge is to be truly met.

Let us assume for our purposes that sports primarily are games of physical skill and ask what normative implications formalism has for how sports should be played. Perhaps the most important normative implication of formalism is what is often called the incompatibility thesis. According to this, it is logically impossible for cheaters to win at competitive games or sports. Since cheaters violate the rules, they fail to make moves within the sport and hence fail to play it. Since cheaters aren't playing the game, and one can only win the game if one plays it, cheaters can't win. Formalists also tend to view sports-personship primarily in terms of conformity to the letter and perhaps the spirit of the rules, and fairness in their application.

Formalism, however, has problems dealing with ethical issues in sports that go beyond the application of current rules. Consider, for example, whether a team that is winning easily against a much weaker opponent should deliberately "run up the score" against the opposition. Opponents of running up the score argue that such a tactic humiliates opponents and hence disrespects them as persons. However, such an orthodox view has been questioned

lately by Nicholas Dixon, who asks whether athletes ought to be humiliated as persons by the result of a sports contest, and points out that running up the score sometimes can serve important functions such as demonstrating athletic excellence to the spectators.⁵ Which position is correct? What does sports-personship require in such cases? Whatever the answer, it is far from clear that a formalistic emphasis on the rules provides the intellectual resources to resolve such issues of sports-personship, which, at least on the surface, seem to go beyond mere conformity to the constitutive rules of the sport.

Formalism also may have difficulty assessing the desirability of proposed changes in the rules. What makes a change in the rules desirable from the perspective of improving the sport rather than, say, making it more entertaining to casual spectators? Formalists may suggest that since the point of the rules of the game is to provide a challenge to competitors, who in turn seek excellence in trying to overcome that challenge, we can ask whether rule changes improve the challenge the sport provides. Such a reply is a fruitful one but, as will be argued below, it seems to go beyond pure formalism. It requires that we formulate and act upon an account, not just of the rules, but of their point or purpose. This suggestion, as we will see, is well worth pursuing, but whether or not we recognize it as an extended form of formalism, it certainly is conceptually richer than a primary focus on the actual constitutive rules themselves.

Consider also the ethics of the strategic foul in athletic competition. Strategic fouls are those that are committed with the intent of gaining a competitive advantage in the contest. To take a common example, the losing team in a basketball game may foul late in the game in order to stop the clock and provide a chance for a comeback in case the team with the lead misses its foul shots. Is this practice ethical?

On an analysis that seems closely tied to the formalist emphasis on constitutive rules, some writers maintain that since the players who foul are intentionally violating the rules (unlike players who foul while making legitimate defensive moves while trying to steal the ball or block a shot), they are cheating. In reply to the claim

that strategic fouling is part of the game because the rules prescribe penalties, one writer has stated that this is as absurd as arguing that murder is permitted by law because the law contains rules for its punishment.⁶

However, the claim that strategic fouling in basketball is a form of cheating is rejected by many other theorists as well as by many if not most players and spectators. After all, each team commits strategic fouls and all teams know other teams will foul to stop the clock when they are losing at the end of the game, so the behavior is not covertly practiced by the few to the disadvantage of the many. Rather, it is an accepted part of practice.

At this point, many readers may conclude that formalism is too removed from reality and that its "purist" vision of sport is too ideal to be of much help in practice. Some theorists who are dissatisfied with formalism agree, and suggest that the formalists have ignored actual practice by not paying attention to the implicit conventions that participants accept as applying to their sport. These conventions sometimes are referred to as "the ethos of the game."⁷ For example, with respect to strategic fouling in basketball, conventionalists may argue that there are conventions accepted by basketball players according to which such action is permissible. Strategic fouling is not cheating, on this view, but is legitimized by widely accepted social conventions which apply within the game. This form of conventionalism, I would suggest, is a kind of externalism, since the conventions are thought of as social norms arising from the social context surrounding sport and hence are not necessarily tied to the internal logic or nature of sports themselves.

However, it is far from clear that social conventions associated with a game or sport can provide a basis for ethical values. To say that conventions exist is to claim sport can provide a basis for ethical values. To say that conventions exist is to claim that they are followed, but values are concerned with what behavior is justified, or with what sorts of acts ought to be prohibited, required, allowed, or encouraged. Conventions describe *accepted* behavior but ethics is concerned with what behavior is

acceptable or *ought* to be encouraged or condemned.

In fact, conventionalism in sport has some resemblance to the position in ethical theory sometimes called normative cultural relativism, which claims that we ought to follow the moral code of our own society or culture. This view seems unacceptable for reasons that also undermine the idea that social conventions surrounding sport can by themselves provide a basis for a justifiable ethic of sport. Both positions imply that the existing social order ought to be followed and that those who would reform or change it always are in the wrong. But surely we cannot decide in advance of even knowing the issues that we ought always to follow dominant codes or conventions no matter what. Moreover, dominant social codes and conventions may be arbitrary and in some cases involve great damage to important human rights and liberties. A similar problem can arise in sport. For example, suppose the dominant set of social conventions surrounding a particular sport implies that it is permissible for competitors to try to seriously injure star players on the opposing side. Would that make it morally right?

Rather than simply accept existing conventions and practices uncritically, we can instead be more critical and return to the suggestion of the formalists that the rules of sports have a point; namely to provide good competition. This leads us to an extension of formalism, or perhaps just a broader interpretation of it, that I have called *broad internalism*. This view suggests that there are values internal to sport and these values are supported by a broad understanding of the purposes and point of athletic competition, including an interpretation of the point of the constitutive rules on which formalism places such emphasis.

Formalists see the point of the constitutive rules of games and sports as creating challenges simply so that participants will have worthy challenges to face. Broad internalism extends this idea by providing an overall theory of the nature of those challenges and of how the challenge created by a sport is best understood, and, most important for our purposes, makes explicit the values presupposed by the activities in ques-

tion. For our purposes, it makes no difference whether broad internalism is viewed simply as a fuller version of formalism or, as I would suggest, as a distinct approach which encompasses formalistic elements but goes beyond formalism in its scope and purposes.

Consider, for example, the application of broad internalism to the question of strategic fouling in sports such as basketball. One approach, which I have defended elsewhere, maintains that it is a mistake to view all penalties within a sport as analogous to sanctions or punishments for wrongdoing.⁸ That is, not all penalties fit the model of punishments within the criminal law. Consider, for example, the unplayable lie rule in golf. According to the rules of golf, when a player hits a shot into a position where no subsequent shot is feasible, as for example when the ball is lying in the middle of a large, thick bush, the player is given various options for dropping the ball for a next shot, subject to accepting a penalty stroke for moving the ball. For example, the player may drop a ball within two club lengths on either side of the position of the original ball at the cost of a one-stroke penalty. Clearly, the point of this rule is not to punish the player for an infraction but to allow the player an option which may be exercised at the cost of “paying” the penalty stroke, so that the player gets no competitive advantage over others. The penalty in this case seems much more like the price of exercising an option, or perhaps the payment of compensation to the other players, rather than a punishment for a crime or infraction.

Similarly, it is arguable that strategic fouling to stop the clock in basketball is an option allowed by the rules. The foul shots awarded to the other team are not punishment for breaking the rule against fouling but are the price the other team must pay for stopping the clock (or the compensation the team receives for being fouled). If the price is a fair one, a good team would be indifferent between possessing the ball and running out the clock or having the foul shots and a chance to increase its lead. (Of course, a poor foul-shooting team might prefer not to be fouled, but that does not show the penalty is an unfair price; rather, the team

should work to improve its free-throw shooting.)

Whether or not such an analysis of the strategic foul in basketball is correct, it provides an example of a broad internalist analysis. In particular, it places the act of strategic fouling within the broad context of a theory of basketball which is claimed to make good sense of the game and to provide a perspicuous account of the challenges it involves. Such a theory sees basketball as a sport, embodying the mutual quest for excellence among competitors through the challenge one side provides to the other, and then tries to give an account of the particular features and nuances of basketball within this broader account of the point and purpose of competition in sports and athletics.

But what has all this to do with moral education? For one thing, a full understanding of sport along lines of broad internalism includes commitment to fundamental moral values. Thus, as a number of writers I would classify as broad internalists have maintained, sport presupposes a commitment to such values as fairness, liberty, and equality. For example, equality and fairness are guaranteed not only by the commitment to following the rules, but also because the rules themselves must be equitable and not favor competitors on grounds irrelevant to the basic skills and virtues called forth by the challenges of the sport. Moreover, if we view the sports contest as a mutual challenge acceptable to all the competitors, we can view sport as a freely chosen and unalienated activity in which the competitors are committed to viewing their opponents as fellow persons equally engaged in meeting the challenge set by the contest itself. This does not necessarily mean that competitors must like each other, but it does imply that each should be committed to seeking a good contest in which each participant plays at his or her best in order to bring out the best in the opponents.

This suggests further that while winning is an important goal of the sports contest, since it is a primary way in which a competitor meets the challenge of the sport, it is far from everything. After all, even an undefeated season achieved through scheduling only competitively inferior

opponents might lack significant value. In fact, it may be of less value than an outstanding but losing performance against an especially worthy opponent. For example, I am now the best basketball player in my neighborhood, mainly because all the other players are less than 8 years old. I win every game, but since my opponents are too small to even reach the basket, is that an achievement of any note?

Accordingly, then, certain values seem inextricably involved in the idea of a sporting contest as a mutual quest for excellence through competitive challenge. Sport is not a value-free activity. Moreover, as Peter Arnold has emphasized, these values are not relativistic but are involved at all levels of serious sport, in the sense that violation of them normally is a justifiable ground for criticism throughout the now virtually world-wide sporting community.⁹ For example, bribing an official to insure the victory of a team in a soccer competition is not seen as “unfair for us” but “fair for them,” but is universally regarded as a violation of the ethics of sporting competition. On the broad internalist analysis suggested above, this is because the major point of a sporting contest is to test the skills and character of the competitors according to the challenges presupposed by the formal rules; bribing an official removes the challenge and so defeats the point of the contest before it even gets off the ground.

What, then, are the implications of this analysis for moral education? After all, even if sports are a value-laden activity, it does not follow that those values can or should be taught or promoted in the schools. In particular, isn't the promotion of any set of values in educational institutions highly partisan? After all, who is to say what values should be promoted and in what manner?

Sports, Morality, and Inquiry

Even if there is what might be called an inner morality of sport, focused on such values as fairness, respect for the opponent as a facilitator in a mutual quest for excellence, and dedication and commitment to meeting challenges, why should that morality be favored by educational

institutions? There are other conceptions of sport, such as the belief that winning is either everything in sport, or at least the predominant value that ought to be emphasized. Which view of sport should be taught? Second, why should *any* moral values be taught? Why is it the school's job to endorse one conception of morality, perhaps a highly partisan one, over other conceptions? After all, shouldn't we just be tolerant of moral differences rather than simply impose one morality on everyone?

Let us begin with the question of tolerance. First of all, those who maintain that we should avoid making moral judgments about the behavior of others, particularly about the moralities of other cultures, out of concern and respect for differences among peoples, are themselves making a moral judgment. Rather than avoiding ethical judgment, they are committing one. For their claim is that we *ought* to be tolerant of and respect differences, including cultural differences in ethical belief and judgment. But that itself is an “ought” claim which purports to be morally justified. The advocates of tolerance are claiming it is better to be tolerant than intolerant. If they did not believe such a view, they would have no basis for condemning invidious discrimination, racism, or sexism, or even Nazi genocide. One cannot have it both ways by denying that we ought to make moral judgments and asserting that the stance of tolerance and respect for difference is morally best.

A related point is that moral judgments need not be made in a dogmatic or intolerant way, any more than, say, scientific judgments ought to be made dogmatically or without regard for evidence. Rather, in making a moral claim, one can and should be open to discussion of the issue and consideration of arguments for other positions, and should be willing to revise one's position if that is what the evidence suggests is warranted. A participant in a discussion of an ethical issue normally can and should take the stance of a discussant in a form of inquiry designed to elicit the most justified view. Discussants, if inquiry is to be effective in eliciting justified views and avoiding unjustified ones, must be open to dialog with others and consideration of objections to their own positions. Dog-

matism and unwillingness to consider criticisms of one's own position simply make it less likely that one's own views are justified. Discussants who are not open to intellectual challenges are like sports teams that never play worthy competitors; just as the latter have little or no basis for asserting that they have achieved excellence by meeting challenges, so the former have no sound basis for claiming their views are justified, for they have never considered or responded effectively to worthy criticisms that might show just the opposite.

This point has an important implication for moral education. It suggests that there are fundamental moral values which must be in place for education and discussion to even take place. For example, participants in inquiry must be free to make critical points and engage in discussion, canons of rational inquiry and logic must be observed, and persons may not be excluded from the conversation simply because we don't agree with their views. If such requirements are not observed, rational discussion either cannot take place or can occur only in an attenuated and impoverished form, which is far less likely to arrive at truth or justification than a more robust version which accepts the status of others as interlocutors or fellow discussants in dialogic inquiry.

In fact, our discussion suggests that there is a close connection between what might be called the internal morality of sport and the morality of intellectual inquiry and discussion. Just as good sport requires seeing competitors as fellow facilitators engaging in a mutual quest for excellence, so rational inquiry, if it is to be carried out effectively, requires us to regard others as fellow discussants.¹⁰ Both, in other words, require respect for others as persons and so stand in contrast to both personal selfishness and the kind of limited sympathy which regards only those like me (my team or my group) as worth full moral consideration. Moreover, just as competitors in sport must subject themselves to the discipline of the rules of the game, so participants in intellectual inquiry must subject themselves to the requirements of evidence and good reasoning. Parallels such as these are not just coincidental, and as we will see provide the basis for the role that sport can and should play in moral education.

Before turning directly to implications for moral education, we need to address the issue of partisanship. Consider, first, the kind of values that are presupposed by intellectual inquiry. Although these are values, and hence inquiry is not a value-free activity, they are non-partisan, in that anyone committed to genuine inquiry and to dialog on the issues with others is committed to these values, for they are presuppositions of critical investigation itself.¹¹ They are non-partisan or neutral, not in the sense of being value free, but in the sense that anyone committed to inquiry is committed to them.¹² That is, if someone whom we can call "the dictator" claimed to be committed to inquiry but arbitrarily silenced others, refused to listen to criticism, or excluded positions from discussion on grounds irrelevant to their merits, then the dictator would be in a very weak position to claim that her own views were justified. As noted earlier, she would be in a position like that of a team that claimed to be excellent at a sport but never played a worthy opponent.

Couldn't an elitist group conduct inquiry among its own members but exclude others who were not group members, perhaps because those excluded were members of the "wrong" ethnic group, race, gender, or religion? Such an exclusionary policy, however, would be open to the charge of arbitrariness. Moreover, it would be self-defeating. The exclusion would be arbitrary because those excluded might be, or could be if provided with fair opportunities, as effective contributors to dialogic inquiry as those included. It would be self-defeating because the insights those excluded might have provided would have made inquiry more thorough and comprehensive. In effect, by limiting access to the playing field, the participants have unjustifiably protected themselves from possible challenges and from the positive insights that might have been provided by those left out of the activity. The participants would be like athletes who thought of themselves as competing at the highest levels but who did not actually do so because whole groups, such as African Americans in the days of racially segregated sports, were excluded from the playing field, thereby lowering the overall level of the competition.

Schools, then, are not acting in a partisan way when they require that students be civil, listen to the positions of others, respond to criticism and evaluation through rational discussion, and respect the status of other students as fellow participants in a common endeavor. Although these are values, they are not partisan values. Rather, they provide the framework within which partisan positions can be debated and examined. By promoting, encouraging, and endorsing such a framework for dialog, discussion, and inquiry, the schools are not acting as political agents in any narrow sense but are promoting and preserving the arena in which reasoned political discourse and intellectual inquiry can take place.

The internal morality of sport also can be regarded as non-partisan for similar reasons. That is, if the broad internalist argument is correct, this morality will include values that are presupposed by a commitment to sport and so can be presumed to be acceptable to all athletes. Thus, the ideal of the good sports contest between worthy opponents seems inextricably involved with the idea of sports as a framework within which challenges are addressed. Dedicated athletes should be committed to pursuing excellence through meeting the challenges set by the formal rules of the sport in which they are participating. Of course, individual athletes may have other goals as well. Professional athletes, for example, may have the goal of earning a good living through their play. The point is, however, that competitive sport would not be a good way of earning a living if the players did not try to meet the challenge set by the sport, because it would not generate the same interest and excitement. Michael Jordan, Mia Hamm, and Tiger Woods are great athletes because they meet the challenges set by their sport with style, grace, dedication, and courage, and for that reason fans are eager to pay to see them play. So external goals, such as making money from sport, are parasitic on the internal goals of sport in at least the sense that the external goals can be achieved precisely because the internal ones are honored and achieved. When critics argue that much of contemporary sport has become corrupt, what they seem to be suggesting is that the pursuit of such external goals as fame and for-

tune have undermined the structure of meeting worthy challenges within a fair framework of competition.¹³

Our discussion suggests, then, that certain activities, including both sport on the one hand and intellectual inquiry and dialog on the other, can be value laden without being partisan. That is because the values involved are not highly partisan but are presuppositions of the activities themselves. This does not mean that all participants share the exact same conception of either sport or inquiry. Some of the values alleged to be presupposed by each activity may be contested or controversial. Surely, there can be different but related conceptions of each area, and dispute about contested areas can be healthy and constructive. However, individuals who reject core aspects of either activity face a heavy burden of proof if they still claim to be participants in it. It normally would be absurd, for example, for someone to claim to be engaged in intellectual inquiry on an issue if he refused to even consider evidence that might count against his view or excluded any possible critics from stating objections through the use of force. Similarly, it normally would be absurd for anyone to claim to be playing a sport if she intentionally violated rules whenever she felt like it, and excluded worthy opponents from competition by physically barring them from the field.

Thus, we can distinguish between a partisan use of values within sport, as when coaches require their team members to say a prayer before contests regardless of the religious views of the players, and relatively non-partisan uses of values, as when coaches emphasize the value of competing hard so as to provide a good contest for the opponent. In the latter case, but not the former, the values at stake are required by our best understanding of what athletic competition requires and so involve values internal to athletic competition itself. How, then, does this bear on sport as a form of moral education?

Sport and Moral Education

Consider the claim that schools ought not to be involved with, endorse, or teach morality, in

order to avoid indoctrination or imposition of highly partisan ideas on relatively powerless students. Such concerns may have considerable force when applied to the imposition of specific highly controversial values and principles. For example, secular colleges and universities almost surely should not adopt official stances on such topics as abortion.

However, it does not follow that educational institutions can or should be totally value free. The proper kind of neutrality for educational institutions is not total value freedom but non-partisanship on controversial issues which have no direct tie to the educational mission of the institution itself. However, schools, including colleges and universities, must insist on civility in the classroom so that learning can take place, respect for evidence and rational canons of inquiry and investigation, and willingness to consider rather than suppress the points made by others. Thus, in training students in the techniques of inquiry and discussion, in teaching them how to test their views through discussion with others, schools are engaging in an important and indeed crucial form of moral education. Moreover, although various elements of the idea of inquiry may be contested at any given time, as when protesters assert that their demonstrations are a contribution to dialog while others view them as disruptive of learning, core values at the heart of inquiry do seem to have presumptive universal force. Thus, if proponents of a position in a debate refuse even to hear objections to or criticisms of their view, then they justifiably can be accused of being dogmatic. Even worse, they are not in a good position to claim their view is justified, since they have not shown it can meet objections.

In teaching the fundamental values of inquiry and discussion, schools are creating the moral climate in which views can be discussed, debated, and evaluated. This function, of course, is crucial for democracy, since democratic government presupposes examination of important issues so that citizens and their representatives can vote on the basis of reasoned opinions, not blind loyalty or ignorance.

One kind of moral education which is clearly proper for the schools to engage in, then, is

training in the process of inquiry and discussion, which involves such values as respect for evidence and reasoning, recognition of the rights of other inquirers, and the benefits of engaging in dialog with adherents to alternate perspectives. Training in the nature of inquiry and rational dialog is not indoctrination but rather is a prerequisite for the kind of liberation that the ability to think critically for oneself involves.

But what has all this to do with sport and the role it might play in moral education? What I want to suggest is that training in and involvement with the internal values of sport is an important element of the kind of moral education with which schools are properly involved. That is, sport, when uncorrupted by over-emphasis on external values such as fame and fortune or a win-at-all-costs mentality, provides lessons in respect for others, meeting challenges, facing difficulties, and engaging in dialogic activity that supplement and reinforce similar values that should be emphasized in class.

A number of scholars have emphasized that the internal values of sport support and reinforce other educational values as well as those of equality, fairness, and respect for others that are so central to the proper functioning of a liberal democracy. As Peter Arnold points out, "democracy as a way of ordering and living our lives is dependent upon the social principles of freedom and equality, and . . . it is these same principles that underpin in turn what it is to be liberally educated as well as the idea of sport as fairness."¹⁴ Moreover, as Arnold also maintains, sport is a major social practice in our culture (and in most cultures throughout the world), and learning how to engage in it appropriately or appreciate and criticize sporting activities intelligently is an important part of being an educated person in our society.

These points, while true and important, may not do enough to bring out the special features that make sport such an excellent tool of moral education. These features, in my view, are (1) the accessibility of sport, (2) the dialogic structure of sport, and (3) the related characteristic that sport is a critical activity. Let us consider all three in turn.

First, sport is a widely recognized and followed cultural practice or set of practices. Different sports have wide followings ranging from fans of professional sport, to serious amateur participants, to recreational players and their families. Critics of sport understand what it is they are criticizing, while, in our culture at least, even those who are not interested routinely employ the vocabulary of sport in everyday activities, as when one may be told by one's friends to "hit a home run" when leaving for a job interview. That is, sport is accessible to and understood by a wide segment of our population, so that the values sport might express or presuppose are out in the open for all who approach sport with some understanding to appreciate.

Second, and more important in my view, I suggest that the structure of competitive sport is dialogic in a way that resembles the dialogic structure of intellectual inquiry. Just as the latter involves criticism and reply, so sport involves moves and countermoves among the participants. In each case, this involves considering the opponent (or critic) as a person whose choices must be responded to within a framework of rules and principles that provide fairness and promote the point of the activity (a mutual quest for excellence through challenge in sport, and justification and the pursuit of truth in inquiry). Sport, then, because of its accessibility, provides an excellent context for introducing people to the structure of dialogic activity and encouraging them, through participation, to internalize its ethic.

For example, no serious competitor likes to lose a sports contest but, as I believe every successful athlete would acknowledge, losing provides a significant opportunity to analyze one's performance and learn from one's mistakes. The good competitor's attitude to a loss is to see what can be learned from it. Similarly, participants in intellectual inquiry normally do not enjoy having their pet theories devastated by criticism, but a good inquirer still welcomes criticism and tries to learn from it when it is cogent or sound. Sport, because most of us lose at least some of the time, can at its best teach us a useful way to deal with failure as well as to

understand and respect the achievements of our fellow competitors. Participation and understanding of competition in sport, then, is participation in a kind of give-and-take of dialog that also characterizes intellectual inquiry and democratic discussion.

This in turn suggests that sport is a kind of critical activity. Participants learn to have game plans, to analyze their own weaknesses and strengths and those of their opponents, and to devise programs for improvement. This requires an objective analysis of one's abilities and those of others, and the willingness to revise that analysis when it turns out to be inaccurate or incorrect.

It is important to be clear about what is and what is not being suggested here. I am not claiming, for example, that there is a direct causal link between becoming a good competitor in sport and becoming a good scholar in the domain of intellectual inquiry or a good participant in democratic debate. Extreme versions of the thesis that sport builds character are no doubt grossly overstated. More modest versions, however, may have some degree of plausibility. It probably is no more unreasonable, for example, to think that learning to be a good competitor in sport may *tend to promote* carry-over effects in the other areas than it is for advocates of liberal arts education to believe that the traits they value among their students, such as intellectual openmindedness, may also tend to promote similar values in other areas, such as in the workplace or in civic affairs.

What I most want to suggest, however, is that in addition to tendencies to develop or reinforce desirable character traits that sport may promote, the *understanding* of the structure of competition in sport can help promote *understanding* of parallel underlying values presupposed by both intellectual inquiry and democratic debate. Sport, on this view, is an excellent tool of moral education, because understanding the internal values and structure of sporting competition at its best is a way of understanding broader values that apply in a variety of other important contexts as well.

This is not to imply that sport simply is a means for promoting certain values in other more important contexts. Sport is an important

practice in its own right and it flourishes in great part because of our concern with the value, much of which is intrinsic, of meeting the unique challenges to mind and body presented by the good athletic contest. Nevertheless, sport has an underlying internal normative structure which encompasses broad values of wider concern, which we would do well not to ignore. But the way to promote these values is not to use sport as a platform for preaching, but to promote understanding of its internal morality and its relationship to broad ethical principles that apply across a variety of domains and activities.

While the exact form that moral education in sport should assume is debatable, I doubt that simply preaching is what is needed. Rather, at all levels of sports, parent, coaches, and players need to discuss and examine actual sporting practices. Within educational institutions, this might involve formal classwork parallel to courses already offered in many institutions on medical and business ethics. Within the arena of sport itself, a beginning could be made if coaches were judged as much on their ability to articulate the values implicit in sporting competition and to criticize excesses taken in the pursuit of victory as on their won-and-lost record. Coaches, for example, can teach much of value in ways appropriate to the age, maturity, and level of competition of their players, in getting their athletes to view opponents as persons and to appreciate the achievements of others, even when performed by the other side. Opponents are to be viewed, on this account, as facilitators in a mutual quest for excellence, not simply obstacles to be beaten down and defeated.¹⁵

Unfortunately, much sporting practice in our culture, particularly at the higher levels of many sports, is open to severe moral criticism. The cult of victory at almost any cost has been widely criticized, as has the tendency of sport to degenerate into a form of entertainment, as when subtle elements of a sport are replaced by features that make it more intelligible or entertaining to a mass audience at the price of removing nuances of the game and reducing the variety of skills that are required for success. However, by understanding the internal structure and values

of sporting practice, and engaging in critical dialog about them, we can become better able to distinguish the best in sport from corruption of what sport should be, and make intelligible the moral standards that should apply both within sport and, if what I have suggested is right, across critical inquiry and dialog as well.

Sport, Relativism, and the Refutation of Absolutophobia

Does our discussion have implications for the views of those individuals who, when confronted with a moral issue, respond by dismissing the possibility of rational discussion, because moral issues, they assume, cannot be rationally adjudicated? "Who is to say?" is their response to moral issues, implying, often without argument, that no one is ever in a better position than anyone else to offer a reasoned defense of a position on a moral controversy.

While nothing said here implies moral conclusions can be "proved" in any mathematical sense, my discussion does support the view that, at least on many moral issues, some positions are more reasonable than others. Thus, a team which claimed that the rules of a sport ought to be changed simply because such a change was to its competitive advantage but not those of opponents would be holding an arbitrary position. Unless a relevant consideration was provided as to why its competitive interests should outweigh those of opponents, or the interests of the athletic community in having the sport be appropriately challenging, such a claim should be rejected. Likewise, someone who claimed her interests always ought to take precedence over those of others, regardless of the circumstances, surely would have the burden of proof on her to show why she was so special that her interests ought always to be assigned priority over anyone else's.

While many moral issues are highly controversial, and reasonable people can be found taking opposing positions, not all moral issues are of that kind. Moreover, inquiry into complex moral issues can often suggest that not all views are equally reasonable, or at least advance the

discussion to a new level of thinking. Thus, the view that at least some penalties for strategic fouls in sport are prices for an allowable option rather than punishments for prohibited behavior calls into question the formalist view that strategic fouling is a form of cheating. Formalists, of course, may be able to effectively criticize the view that such penalties often are prices rather than punishments, but if, as I would suggest, the discussion has been moved to a new level, then a response is clearly required. Moral issues, then, are not best approached by dogmatic assertions but can be investigated and sometimes resolved or advanced through inquiry and reasoned dialog among proponents of different views.

Perhaps a feature that makes sport such a useful medium for moral education is that many of the values presupposed by or involved with sporting practices are not relative to a particular perspective or culture, and can be supported or justified by strong reasons. While cultural differences may affect styles of play, or the importance assigned to a given sport within a broad social context, core values of sport do not seem to be culturally variable in the same way. The American and Chinese women were playing the same game in the finals of the 1999 World Cup Soccer Tournament. Moreover, this is not only a descriptive point but also a normative one. Cheating, attempts to intentionally injure opponents, or bribing officials to influence the outcome, had no moral place in the game regardless of other cultural differences that may have existed between the teams.

Similarly, lying about one's score on a hole in a golf tournament surely cannot be justified. The whole idea of a golf tournament is to see which of the competitors best meets the challenge set by the golf course and the pressure of keeping pace with the performances of the other players. It provides a context for seeing if one can meet the physical and mental challenges set by the sport of golf. Lying about one's score may, if undetected, allow one to win a trophy or prize money, but it does not show that one has met the challenge of the sport. Moreover, it shows disrespect for the other competitors, since cheating gains one an advantage only if others don't cheat. The cheater, therefore, arbi-

trarily assigns to himself or herself a superior position that takes advantage of the compliance of the other players with the rules of the game, and so cannot be justified.¹⁶

Sport, then, provides an arena which illustrates a framework of universal values within which competition takes place. These values can be given rational support, and as players are socialized into the game, they tend to internalize them as their own. Of course, there can be cultural differences between the styles in which a game is played and strategies that tend to get employed, but the basic ethic of meeting challenges within a mutually acceptable framework of rules and the principles they presuppose is a constant. Some aspects of sport will be controversial and some issues in sport may be difficult to resolve reasonably. Different sides may each hold plausible views. This no more suggests that all values in sport are arbitrary than the fact that some theories in science are debatable suggests that no scientific theory is any more justifiable than any other. Rather, education about a subject, whether it is sport or chemistry, should help us distinguish areas that are controversial from those that are not, and promote the habits of inquiry and dialog that allow us to build upon what is basic to make progress in resolving disagreements over what is not.

What I hope our discussion suggests, then, is not that players, spectators, or others ought simply to be told how to behave morally in sport. Although beginners need to become immersed in the practices and traditions of sporting communities, and may properly be required to conform to appropriate standards of behavior, moral education as presented here is in a particularly important form a kind of inquiry, involving reasoned dialog with others. Moral education in sport would require teachers, coaches, players, and observers to become more cognizant of the structure of sport as a quest for excellence through challenge, and conversant with and articulate about the values and principles presupposed by such an activity. It would involve emphasis on reasoned inquiry and dialog, rather than dogmatic pronouncement, as a means of resolving controversies. This does not mean that sports teams should

be run as direct democracies. After all, even philosophy classes require direction and decision making, for example in the choice of texts, by the instructor. It does imply, however, that coaches proceed as educators and try to promote understanding of the underlying principles and values of the sport with which they are involved, as well as of its strategies and techniques.

Moreover, educational institutions need to stress the affinities between sporting activities and intellectual inquiry and scholarship that were emphasized earlier. Although it is at best unclear whether participation in sports makes athletes more moral (of course it is doubtful if participation in corrupted versions of sport would have such a positive effect), sport *at its best* expresses and illustrates important values and norms that can be of educational value to the whole community. Sport, when properly

practiced, can be an important medium for transmitting values of fundamental moral worth and for enhancing our understanding of them. The beauty of sport as a form of moral education is that for sport to serve this function, it cannot be reduced simply to a means or mechanism for promoting good behavior. Rather, if sport is valued on its own terms, as a challenge and as a test of our minds and bodies, then we already are immersed in a framework of fundamental values.

Proper understanding of sporting activity, then, involves us in a moral framework that encompasses the thrills and excitement of competitive athletics. If the argument suggested here is sound, crucial elements of that framework apply not only to the realm of sport but also more broadly to the pursuit of the examined life itself.

Notes

- 1 The quotation from Plato is from *The Republic*, book III, section 412. Albert Camus, "The Wager of Our Generation," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 242.
- 2 I discuss student relativism and "absolutophobia" in my article, "The Paralysis of Absolutophobia," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, XLIII, 42 (June 27, 1997), pp. B5–B6, and draw on the discussion there throughout the present article.
- 3 My discussion of internalism and externalism in this section draws heavily on my Presidential Address to the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport (formerly the Philosophic Society for the Study of Sport) entitled "Internalism in Sport." I discuss these views more extensively in that paper, which is to appear in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. I thank the editors for permission to use some of that material here.
- 4 For such a characterization of formalism, see, for example, Fred D'Agostino, "The Ethos of Games," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, VIII (1981), p. 7, and William J. Morgan, "The Logical Incompatibility Thesis and Rules: A Reconsideration of Formalism as an Account of Games," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, XIV (1987), p. 1.
- 5 Nicholas Dixon, "On Sportsmanship and 'Running Up the Score,'" *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, XIX (1992), pp. 1–13 (reprinted here as reading 9).
- 6 See Kathleen M. Pearson, "Deception, Sportsmanship, and Ethics," *Quest*, XIX (January 1973), p. 118 (reprinted here as reading 8).
- 7 See D'Agostino, "The Ethos of Games," pp. 7–18.
- 8 What follows is a summary of the position I defended in *Fair Play: Sports, Values, and Society*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 48–9.
- 9 See Peter Arnold, *Sport, Ethics and Education* (London: Cassell, 1997), particularly chs 1 and 2.
- 10 These standards may be positive as well as negative. For example, in sport, participants may not only be required to refrain from certain actions, such as bribing officials or deliberately injuring opponents, but also be encouraged to perform acts of good sportsmanship. Similarly, participants in dialogic inquiry may not only be prohibited from silencing critics by force but also be encouraged to support institutions, such as schools, which are necessary for the development and support of other inquirers.
- 11 Of course, there might be different conceptions of what constitutes inquiry, as well as dispute over what methods of participation, e.g. forms of civil disobedience, are contributions to it. But while

there is much room for debate in this area, it is doubtful if any activity would qualify as a form of inquiry if it allowed participants to be silenced on grounds irrelevant to the intellectual merits of their position or if it abandoned canons of reasoning and respect for evidence altogether.

- 12 For a fuller discussion of the forms neutrality can take in educational contexts, and of the distinction between neutrality as value freedom and more robust forms of neutrality, see my *Neutrality and the Academic Ethic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), especially chs 2 and 3.
- 13 See, for example, William J. Morgan, *Leftist Theories of Sport: A Critique and Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), particularly ch. 5.
- 14 Arnold, *Sport, Ethics and Education*, p. 90.
- 15 Professional and high-level amateur golf is perhaps the best example among popular contemporary sports of an athletic practice most closely combining intense competition with mutual respect for opponents, the rules of the game, and the internal values of the sport. Top-level players frequently call penalties on themselves and enforce among themselves the courtesies, traditions, and internal values of the game.
- 16 More precisely, cheating cannot be justified in the absence of some overriding justification. For example, if the cheater must win to avoid having his family assassinated by criminals who have bet on the game, cheating presumably would be justified, or at least excusable.