

May the Blessed Man Win: A Critique of the Categorical Preference for Natural Talent over Doping as Proper Origins of Athletic Ability

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Doping scandals can reveal unresolved tensions between the meritocratic values of equal opportunity + reward for effort and the “talentocratic” love of hereditary privilege. Whence this special reverence for talent? We analyze the following arguments: (1) talent is a unique indicator of greater potential, whereas doping enables only temporary boosts (the fluke critique); (2) developing a talent is an authentic endeavor of “becoming who you are,” whereas reforming the fundamentals of your birth suit via artifice is an act of alienation (the phony critique); (3) your (lack of) talent informs you of your proper place and purpose in life, whereas doping frustrates such an amor fati self-understanding (the fateless critique). We conclude that these arguments fail to justify a categorical preference for natural talent over integrated artifice. Instead, they illustrate the extent to which unsavory beliefs about “nature’s aristocracy” may still be at play in the moral theatre of sports.

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I. INTRINSIC ANTI-DOPING, PRO-TALENT ARGUMENTS

Doping is often discussed without defining what is meant by it, and when an attempt at explicit definition is made, most authors who set out to do

so conclude that a largely undisputed definition is not to be found (see for instance, Van Hilvoorde, Vos, and De Wert, 2007). This unsatisfactory situation caused the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to adopt a “positivistic” legal definition of doping, namely: doping is whatever is on WADA’s prohibition list.¹ Nevertheless, for clarity’s sake we define doping here as a “family construct”² made up out of the following components: *doping is the use of an exogenous substance, device, or method that enables enhanced physical ability by altering a person’s bodily make-up beyond the ability level (1) that the (otherwise healthy and able-bodied) doper possessed before this use (bypassing or “short-cutting” doping), (2) that the doper might come to possess if he were to apply maximized effort and enjoy optimal social and environmental circumstances (individual surpassing doping), (3) of the biological species the doper is (or was) a member of, that is, homo sapiens (species surpassing doping).*³ We are mindful not to presuppose that doping is wrong: that is what needs to be proven, not assumed (table 1).

In this paper, we deal exclusively with the question of doping’s *intrinsic* and categorical wrongness, suspending our judgment on all extrinsic or circumstantial issues.⁴ The intrinsic question is as follows: if doping were provided in a “best of all possible worlds” wherein issues regarding health, equal access, free choice, and all other extrinsic issues were resolved, would there still be something wrong with doping in competitive sport *in itself*?⁵ The authoritative World Anti-Doping Code (WADC) and its signatories seem to believe so. In its chapter on “The Fundamental Rationale for the World Anti-Doping Code,” the WADC states: “Anti-doping programs seek to preserve what is intrinsically valuable about sport. This intrinsic value is often referred to as “the spirit of sport,” it is the essence of Olympism; it is how we play true. [. . .] Doping is fundamentally contrary to the spirit of sport” (WADA, 2009, 14). Read in isolation, this excerpt does not necessarily imply that doping is wrong in itself and thus wrong in any setting, but only that doping is always wrong *when used within a sport*. However, it is often argued that what is valuable in the Spirit of Sport and under threat from doping are in fact principles with a universal validity, such as fair play and equal opportunity, as well as virtues such as dedication, courage, and character (see the bullet point list of

Table 1. Three degrees of doping

Species surpassing doping	Enhances ability up to a “superhuman” level that cannot be reached via such ways and surpasses species boundaries
Individual surpassing doping	Enhances ability up to a level that cannot be reached via such ways, but that remains within species boundaries
Bypassing doping	Enhances ability up to a level that could also be reached via better training, focus, dedication, nutrition, coaching, etc.

principles and virtues that are used to exemplify the Spirit of Sport in WADA, 2009, 14). The world of sport is then seen as a “moral theatre” in which such values and principles are put on explicit display (a view widely advocated in the world of sport, explicitly underlying the modern Olympic Movement; see Young, 1996). This, then, is how we will conceive of the “Spirit of Sport” here: as a virtue ethic requiring that the respectable athlete—to a certain extent and in confluence with many other, perhaps conflicting requirements—demonstrates not only some excellent physical performance, but also an adequately *honorable character* in doing so. We do not have the space here to justify such a virtue ethic as basic to proper sports. Rather, we take a virtue-ethical conception of sports as a premise and proceed to investigate: (1) whether doping can indeed never be compatible with such a spirit of sport; and (b) whether deep attachments to natural talent are as readily compatible with such a spirit of sport as is often taken for granted.

The intrinsic, categorical arguments against doping in competitive sport seem to run along three main lines, respectively based on the conviction that a proper athletic accomplishment should (1) originate from proper origins, such as natural talent; (2) take place via proper, intentionally directed processes; and (3) result in proper, recognizably human outcomes (President’s Council on Bioethics, 2003; Sandel, 2007; Murray, 2009), whereas doping would respectively turn that proper athletic accomplishment into something *debasing, mechanistic, and/or dehumanizing* (table 2).

Because of the relative lack of focused and sustained analyses of the intrinsic issues in the doping debate, we will further restrict ourselves, within the category of intrinsic arguments, to the first bone of intrinsic contention—Proper origins.

Table 2. The main intrinsic objections to doping⁶

Performance	Natural	Doped/Enhanced
Proper origins	From “given,” natural origins Praised as “gifts,” providing a sense of given place, purpose, or predestination	From self-styled, artificial origins Denounced as “hyperagency,” eroding our sense of given place, purpose, or predestination
Proper processes	Proper, for sports should display who has been allotted greater/lesser talent Through one’s inherent, endogenous bodily processes and one’s active intentional effort Praised as authentic accomplishments	Improper, for it distorts the display of “real,” natural superiority/inferiority Through intrusive, exogenous means and by passively undergoing their influence Denounced as effortless and mechanistic
Proper outcomes	“Vitruvian” Toward a perfected optimum within the normal, species-typical range Praised as perfected humanity	“Promethean” Toward a distorted excess over and beyond the normal, species-typical range Denounced as alienating dehumanization

II. TALENTOCRACY: FAIR PLAY OR RIGGING THE GAME FOR TALENT?

From its inception, modern Olympic sport has been promoted as a meritocratic institution: *palnam qui meriut ferat*—may he who merits it win the prize—was the guiding motto of the trailblazing Olympian Games organized in England from 1850 onward by Dr. William Penny Brookes.⁷ To realize this motto's aspiration, an environment of "fair play" needs to be put in place—an environment purged from (blatantly) unearned privileges and advantages. As such, the sports arena has often been heralded by the ideologues of the Olympic Movement as an artificially constructed ethical idyll in which one can escape from (and perhaps stage an attack on) the many undeserved privileges and their discriminatory protectionism in real world society. In fair, universal, and classless sport, the "true, natural order" is allowed to prevail, whereas daily life is replete with false hierarchies of privilege and deprivation, protectionism, and discrimination that deeply obscure our view of who merits what he has, and who does not. Within the splendid isolation of the sports arena, organizers should ensure that all participants enjoy an "equal opportunity to perform" (Loland, 2009, 163) insofar as it is logistically feasible (Dixon, 2008). The closer we come to reaching this ideal of the "fair opportunity principle" (Loland, 2009, 163), the more likely it becomes that the intrinsically most deserving person wins: irrelevant inequalities are equalized, so that the relevant inequalities can make (most of) the difference. Across the spectrum of athletic disciplines, organizing institutions seek to implement this fair opportunity principle to some satisfactory degree by neutralizing the distortive effect of irrelevant luck factors. (Possible ways of achieving this include intervening in significant disparities in the quality of equipment, position on the playing field, access to proper training facilities, etc.)

However, with regard to one fundamental and highly decisive luck factor, the situation seems to be wholly reversed. Toward this particular luck factor, organizing institutions are determined to ensure that brute luck remains decisive in determining who comes out on top. That factor is natural talent. Indeed, today it is still widely advocated that sport ought to be—as former WADA president Richard Pound put it—"a humanistic endeavor to see how far you can go on your own talent." (Pound in Foddy and Savulescu, 2007). With this talent-centered take on the Spirit of Sport, Pound implicitly echoes some elements of the bygone "amateur" sports doctrine, which remained the official doctrine of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) until it was discarded after the 1988 Olympics (after having been conceptually plagued and de facto hollowed out for decades; see Guttman, 2002). According to this amateur Spirit of Sport, applying too much effort is undignified: an ideal athletic performance should well up from more or less spontaneous talent, and training may only be engaged in leisurely—not too tenaciously, certainly not professionally. During the early Modern Olympics of the late nineteenth

and early twentieth century, even being coached was seen as a disturbing degradation of the Spirit of Sport which demanded that an athlete should flourish on his own talent, not via the help of some external aid (Young, 1996, 32). Similar to what is now often said of doping, such coaching aid would allow the athlete to circumvent his own lack of strategic cunning and motivational perseverance, and it would introduce a second entity (the coach) as a disruptive distinct origin to whom to attribute the performance.

In part, amateurism was a blunt weapon of class distinction, wielded to exclude the working class (which Brookes, in his original modern Games, explicitly sought to *include*) merely for the snobbish joy of exclusivity. However, in its more refined renditions, such as those given by the “Muscular Christianity” movement that inspired the Liverpool Olympic Festival of 1862, it is about cultivating the art of living of the “well-rounded, chivalric, and pious gentlemen,” a brittle, internal spirit to be carefully protected against lowly motives. To ensure that the athletes came to the Games for the love of the game and not for the love or need of money, the original amateur Spirit of Sport shunned all who would attend for material gain. Also, the motives of the participants were to be screened in some way to be sure they were based on honor rather than “bestiality,” for as sport involves some measure of “ritualized aggression,” “athleticism can occasion the most noble passions or the most vile. [. . .] It can be chivalrous or corrupt, vile, bestial” (modern Olympics founder Baron Pierre de Coubertin in Baker, 1988, 330). Generalizing grotesquely, many Gentlemen Amateurs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sought to realize these aims by categorically excluding the entire working class from participation.

But besides snobbery and a high-minded honor code, the Gentleman Amateur Spirit of Sport was also rooted partly in tendencies to believe that socially constructed classes were in fact hierarchies ordained by God (aristocratic beliefs) and/or Nature (social Darwinist and related beliefs). Such beliefs helped to resolve what we now see as a glaring contradiction between the painstaking efforts to ensure fairness for the upperclass men on the sport field with the principled exclusion of the entire lower classes. The upperclass men regarded themselves already, as a matter of imagined metaphysical fact, to be superior to the lower classes, so it was perfectly reasonable to have the upperclass men only compete amongst themselves. This discrimination was legitimized by appealing not to a difference in skill or proper motivation (although such fictions were also widespread), but to an *essentialistic* difference: the working class was literally perceived as of another class, as *another kind of being*, so that even if the working class would perform better when measured objectively, their performance would nonetheless be tainted by its ignoble origin: the body and mind not of a Gentleman, but of a proletarian brute.

In time, the social struggle for equal opportunities managed to prove that the perceived inferiorities of the lower classes with regard to skill, motivation,

and essence were little more than smokescreens erected to protect the privileges of the well-off. Today, the Olympic Movement proudly claims that it has largely succeeded in realizing its commitment to proper “universalism:” there is now open access for all, regardless of class, creed, race, sex, or any other purported essentialist difference that would stand in the way of universal eligibility to participate. However, in this paper we will investigate whether one such privilege-protecting obstacle to full universalism may still be in place: the requirement that one achieve athletic excellence only via the (more or less effortful) “cultivation or display of natural talents” (Sandel, 2007, 28–29) that may (inadvertently) protect the privilege of those who have been referred to as the “natural aristocracy” (Jefferson, 1988 [1813], 387–91) or “lucky sperm club” (Young, 1958), and that we propose to denote more precisely as the athletic “talentocracy,” this being the societal class consisting of those who happen, through no merit of their own, to be born with a biological endowment advantageous to athleticism. We seek to answer the questions: is such talentocratic thinking at play in contemporary sports? If so, does this endanger the “equal opportunity to perform”⁸ of those who were perhaps less lucky in the natural lottery but seek to obtain a similarly advantageous bodily endowment via biotechnology?

One may point out that the celebration of *effort* in our contemporary Spirit of Sport seems to show that we no longer value natural talent above all other origins of athletic ability. Indeed, in the wake of broader societal trends of increasing industriousness and social mobility, talent-driven amateurism has apparently been complemented by an ethic of effort-driven professionalism.⁹ Elite sport today is no longer supposed to be a leisurely, genteel display of natural talent. Rather, the ethic of our contemporary “pro’s” is all about the superintensive, maximally efficient optimization of that talent. The cult of talent has been supplemented by a cult of effort, grit, and determination, a meritocratic work ethic wherein the prize and praise should go to those who put in the most intentional effort to realize the potential provided by natural talent. Indeed, it has been supplemented, not replaced, it seems, because even if Pound’s Spirit of Sport invites you to “see how far you can go,” you still have to restrict yourself to “your own talent” as the proper material to draw on for your maximizing exercise.

The implicit model of human flourishing that Pound and like minds seem to draw on can be clarified with the following genetically-modified-organism analogy. It is one thing to make a seed flourish into a strong, tall, and many-flowered plant via nourishing environmental influencing: in doing so, we endeavor to see how far the seed can go based on the seed’s own natural (genetic) predisposition—the seed’s “talent,” if you will. It is something else, perhaps something wrong, to let our nourishing environmental influence penetrate the ontological membrane of the seed itself, then we will slide from a *discovering* exploratory practice of seeing how far the seed can go on its own natural predispositions into a very different *creative* exploratory

practice. We then not only discover what a seed is capable of, but instead begin to *remake* the seed. This is certainly somewhat confusing, and it may be very wrong. And if it is very wrong, it will probably be all the more so when sliding from discovering exploration into creative exploration with humans.

Perhaps this underlying discovery-creation distinction helps to explain why effort-driven professionalism appears to have supplemented talent-driven amateurism not as an equal, but as a *second best* ethos. Consider once again two flower seeds: one is tossed aside and left unattended in poor soil, the other is meticulously exposed to the most nourishing environments—earthed in the best soil, given the perfect amounts of light and water, perfectly managed on all fronts to see how far the seed can go. Flourishing time comes around and lo: *both* seeds grow into equally strong, tall, and many-flowered plants. Surely, the horticulturalist will be more impressed by the “diamond in the rough” plant that managed to come to full bloom unaided and in unwelcoming terrain than by the plant that flourished equally only by investing continuous effort to optimize its growth. Analogously, when considering the arguments of Richard Pound, Michael Sandel, Thomas Murray, and many others, we perceive a historical and ethical tension between the professional and the amateur mindset being resolved by ultimately letting talent trump effort—a “talentocratic” conclusion:

[S]triving is not the point of sports; excellence is. And excellence consists at least partly in the display of natural talents and gifts that are no doing of the athlete who possesses them. [. . .] This is an uncomfortable fact for democratic societies. We want to believe that success, in sports and in life, is something we earn, not something we inherit. Natural gifts, and the admiration they inspire, embarrass the meritocratic faith; they cast doubt on the conviction that praise and rewards flow from effort alone. [. . .] No one believes that a mediocre basketball player who works and trains even harder than Michael Jordan deserves greater acclaim or a bigger contract. The real problem with genetically altered athletes is that they corrupt athletic competition as *a human activity that honors the cultivation and display of natural talents*. (Sandel, 2007, 28–29, emphasis added)

For Sandel and many others, ultimately, talent still comes out on top when compared to effort, even when this creates enormous friction with the deeply entrenched meritocratic beliefs of modernity, as Sandel admits. Before we turn to our analysis of candidate justifications for such pro-talent, contra-doping valuations, we should clarify what is at stake for the Olympic Spirit of Sport. WADA, the IOC, and other anti-doping advocacy groups regularly assert that their categorical anti-doping norm and their Spirit of Sport have *universal* validity: anti-doping Olympism presents itself not as *one* spirit among many, but as the basic concept of proper sport that underlies all reasonable conceptions of proper sport (cf. Parry, 2009; WADC, 2009; IOC, 2010). If one adds to this the assumption that all sports cultures existing within the bounds of reasonable moral pluralism do indeed accept the

categorical anti-doping norm and Olympism, then such a factual consensus might be used to justify claims to universal *regulative authority* of institutions such as WADA and the IOC. In his discussion of Olympism, Parry for instance seems to hold that these connections (from universal aspiration to factual universal consensus to legitimate universal authority) can be made (Parry, 2009, 8). However, this implies that if a reasonable conception of the good athletic life can be construed that is permissive or positive toward certain doping practices, the assumed universal consensus across reasonable moral pluralism would not (necessarily) hold, and categorically anti-doping Olympism would be reduced to one *particular* spirit of sport that, even while having universal ambitions and remaining overwhelmingly majoritarian, would not be able to exercise factual universal authority.¹⁰ In such a scenario, it would be inappropriate to impose the categorical anti-doping norm on sports communities who live by reasonable views of the good athletic life in which doping is not categorically rejected.

Talent as Greater Potential and the Fluke Critique of Doping

A good commonsense reason to categorically prefer talent over effort refers back to the seed-plant analogy. Imagine a 400-m sprint where two runners, A and B, cross the finish line at the same time, but A has had to invest all his effort and falls to the ground panting, whereas B runs unexhausted toward the cameras to mimic a lightning bolt that travels at the speed of light. The exhausted A may be greatly appreciated for having made an excellent time and for having demonstrated the impressive character traits of extraordinary determination and willpower. But with regard to athletic skill per se, athlete B can be admired more because he has clearly not exhausted all of his running capacity: compared with A, B still has a reservoir of untapped potential and thus demonstrates by his lack of fatigue that he has a potential for running skill superior to A's. They may have crossed the line at the same time on this occasion, but should B choose to also invest the extraordinary perseverance of A, his performance would exceed A's. In contrast, it is not an option for A to choose to also have a body like B's. Therefore, when someone with a greater talent—understood here as *a (natural) predisposition or aptitude for some remarkable capacity*—ties with someone with a lesser talent, it is reasonable to infer that the more talented athlete has a greater athletic potential than his competitor. A clearly already exhausted all he has and does not have the option of obtaining extra talent, whereas B does seem to have the option of obtaining extra determination and exercising greater effort.

However, when effective doping is possible, this partly sweeps the rug from under this commonsensical argument. Without doping as an option, A cannot gain an added predisposition as a matter of *fact*: there is literally no way to do so. If doping were to become an option, however, that

factual barrier is lifted and what may keep A from gaining a similar aptitude becomes a matter of *value*: he now does have a way to do so, but perhaps a moral code forbids it. Therefore, as a preliminary conclusion, the argument about natural talent as the best indicator for greater potential loses its general validity because effective doping may just as well provide such great potential. What is more, theoretically it could even do so to a greater extent than the most attuned natural predisposition ever could.

One could try to counter this by pointing out that doping practices as we know them today only enable a *temporary* boost of performance levels, whereas the presence of natural talent indicates a more durable, longer-lasting potential for high-level performance—a *predisposition* proper. This argument may have some validity if one restricts one's view to the effectiveness of contemporary doping technologies, but it would be an exaggerated simplification to say that, come what may, *only* natural talent can ever count as a truly reliable marker for long-lasting potential. We must not let the image of today's pills, syringes, and injection needles, and the often fleeting effects they bring about, obscure the fact that a plethora of current and future doping practices will not follow the lines of this "Popeye caricature:"¹¹ doping taken up right before the performance is to be performed, bringing the body to a temporary high, resulting in an extraordinary strong performance, after which the enhancing effect fades away, and it becomes evident that the athlete without the spinach/doping is, "in reality," a less able athlete who could never have performed his feat "on his own."

What this Popeye caricature misses is that long-lasting potential may also be obtained via certain forms of doping, for instance, a doping agent that would secrete chemicals over a long space of time (contrast Popeye to Spiderman, Asterix to Obelix), or a permanent enhancing intervention such as today's Lasik eye surgery that golfers undergo to provide them with better than 20/20 vision. We might one day develop a genetic intervention to bring down lactic acid production, which would endow cyclists with an enduring capacity to fatigue more slowly and recuperate more quickly (Mehlman, 2009a, 62). Ergo, *deeply integrated* doping practices such as the very real Lasik eye lasering or the still theoretical lactic acid intervention seem immune to the *fluke* critique of doping. What is more, even if—counterfactually—not a single type of doping would ever be able to provide a potential for physical performance as profound or durable as natural talent, this alone does not suffice to categorically depreciate the acquisition of skills via doping—it would only mean that natural talent could be appreciated somewhat more as it would mark a somewhat more robust potential. In sum, it is an erroneous overgeneralization to hold that doping could only ever induce fluke performances and that natural talent is and always will be the best proxy for deeply ingrained and durable predispositions.

Would such deeply integrated doping then really equal the "deep potential" that natural talent harbors in every respect? Ultimately, no. There is one

fundamental dimension that eludes doping techniques. They lack the same fundamental thing a silicone-filled bosom lacks: contrary to naturally given traits, the deeply integrated athletic or aesthetic enhancements are no reliable markers of *hereditary* potential. In this sense, as long as the techniques do not induce a hereditary enhancement (which is not theoretically impossible), their effects are categorically more superficial and fleeting. Even if they would be so deeply integrated that they exert their enhancing influence flawlessly throughout the entire lifespan of the doer, perhaps even more reliably and robustly as natural talent ever would, their enhancing influence would never live on in their offspring. To the extent that sport competitions still are in part atavistic relics of the ritualized fighting between animals to demonstrate who is the alpha male or female (De Block and Dewitte, 2009), doping would dramatically corrupt this primitive Spirit of Sport: to demonstrate who is “truly” genetically superior with respect to physical prowess.¹² To the extent that we still are hardwired to seek out such reliable markers of hereditary physical superiority, doping, like silicone, frustrates.¹³ From the perspective of this primal evolutionary-psychological craving, which is itself highly dubious and dangerous as a normative stance (even gravitating toward the “fascistoid” according to bioethicist Torbjörn Tännsjö, 2000), they can be regarded as superficial, “fake,” and categorically inferior abominations that corrupt this primal point to sports. This may be a way to flesh out Eric Juengst’s suggestion that deeper reflection on the widespread categorical objection to doping may reveal how many still turn to sport to “glorify a genetic prejudice that the world is working hard to evolve beyond in other spheres of human life” (Juengst, 2009, 176–7).

Talent as the True Self and the Phoney Critique of Doping¹⁴

Precisely by resolving the fluke objection (save for the hereditary dimension although that might also be resolved by considering for instance germline genetic doping), the deep integration of doping can raise a new set of objections on an altogether different and perhaps more fundamental plane. On this plane, succeeding *only all too well* in endowing the athlete with a predisposition to perform in a manner equivalent or even superior to natural talent becomes the problem. The deeper cause for concern is this: by implanting such novel (perhaps more enabling and superficially satisfying) predispositions, one may betray the (perhaps more incapacitating and superficially frustrating) predispositions that are properly one’s own, that make up the essence of who one is. The more permanently and profoundly one modifies one’s own inherent capabilities—and doping does exactly that—the more one “tries to be somebody else,” the more one turns into a “phony.” Doping, therefore, might deeply undermine personal authenticity.

In light of this deeper danger, critics like Carl Elliot and Howard Baillie call for an ethic of authenticity, more precisely an ethic of *affirmative* authenticity

(Elliot, 2003; Baillie, 2005). In such an ethic, self-exploration is conceived of as (primarily) self-discovery (cf. *supra*): drawing out what is already inside of you, as opposed to drawing in alien things from the outside. In the face of human enhancement interventions, this ethic would imply that one accepts and affirms, conserves, and cultivates at least those elements of one's biology that are constitutive to one's individual identity. This general authenticity argument can be invoked with extra vigor in the field of sport and doping. Articulating the more fundamental reasons of why sport may be of great ethical value, several philosophers have characterized sport as a "spiritual exercise" of self-discovery. Although sport may often seem to be all about *Citius, Altius, Fortius*—that is about transgressing given physical boundaries and striving toward "superhuman performance" (Savulescu, Foddy, and Clayton, 2004, 666)—this apparently *transgressive* practice can also be understood as an ongoing *approximative* discovery of the eventual, ultimate boundaries of one's given potential—a practice akin to optimally nurturing a seed but refraining from remaking the seed. Sport can thus be engaged in as the intensive gauging of the inner depths and outer contours of one's "true self." The reward of intensive sporting then lies not only in the pride one can take in excellent performance, but also the valuable existential self-understanding one gains by it. This existential dimension is expressed in such widespread sporting slogans as "show what you are made of," "find out what you have in you," "stretch yourself to the limit."¹⁵

Viewed from this perspective, doping now presents itself as a diametrically opposed practice of self-*alteration*. For that reason, doping can be said to be fundamentally at odds with the Spirit of Sport: instead of showing us what someone is made of, it makes that someone anew. By redrawing one's given physical boundaries instead of approximating them, doping blurs precisely what the ethic of affirmative authenticity wanted to bring into sharp focus. Such arguments help to explain why doping can be considered as a form of cheating not in the superficial sense of breaking a conventional agreement that no one is to use stimulants (just as no soccer player is allowed to carry the ball over the field in his hands), but cheating in a more profound sense as *cheating oneself* in becoming a fake, a phony, a fraud—denying and corrupting who one "really is" or "was cut out to be."

However, the disorienting effects of human enhancement interventions must not be exaggerated and must also be properly compared to the way in which our natural, unenhanced body may be disorienting and alienating to us too. First, as for instance, David DeGrazia (2005) makes philosophically plausible and Peter Kramer (1993) backs up empirically, it is quite possible that identity-altering enhancements, even radical ones that directly intervene in one's mental life, may be *solicited* by certain persons, *welcomed* at the moment of the intervention, *positively assessed* afterward and *seamlessly appropriated* as a core feature of the person's "narrative identity." Such interventions may even serve to *conserve* a given identity. For instance, we can

readily imagine a subset of doping practices engaged in to preserve one's youthful skill levels into older age, thus making the self more rather than less stable, at least in one regard. Second, it can be called into question whether a pharmacologically or prosthetically enhanced body must in all cases be more disorienting than one's default, nature-given bodily endowment. Applying this to doping, when it is engaged in mindfully and autonomously, in order to realize an athletic life project that is of fundamental value to a person, it may well be that in his doped state he will experience a *heightened* sense of authenticity (we could label this "aspirational authenticity," distinguishable from "affirmative authenticity") and that he will appropriate and affirm his newly enabled body as properly and proudly *his*, where he may have felt out-of-place and ill-at-ease in his default, nature-given body that lacked the sufficient capacity to adequately realize his fundamental life project. Third, drawing on a more philosophical and undoubtedly less common motivation, enhancement could also be engaged in as an explicit gesture to affirm the burdensome reality that we are "self-shaping animals" whether we like it or not, thus displaying the virtues of moral courage and epistemic dignity (cf. *infra*). In the same vein, enhancement could be engaged in as an act of "civil disobedience" against the evolutionary forces that shaped our *Homo sapiens* nature. Insofar as sports are a form of moral and existential theatre (Baker 1988), the use of doping could be a dramatic, public exemplification of this affirmation of our self-shaping dignity, and a public repudiation of the supposed duty to be natural (Bonte, 2011, 2012; Levy, 2011).

Based on these three arguments, there seems to be no good reason why people should categorically be denounced for critically reviewing their own natural predicament and deciding that their biological inheritance could use some "civil engineering." However, the "true self" objections raised here do contain considerable value if we properly tone them down into nonessentialistic, scientifically warranted arguments that we should pay close attention to the possible psychological effect of "spiraling self-doubt" (McKibben, 2003, 55) if one uses doping or other human enhancement interventions too abruptly, too erratically, or in any other way damaging to a valued sense of personal coherence and continuity (Kramer, 1993; DeGrazia, 2005). We must not let the mere possibility of all sorts of enhancement muddle the pivotal practical wisdom that it may still be best, all things considered, to appreciate and be content with the capacities one already has (Buchanan, 2011, 69–114). As such, however, the "true self" objection turns out to be not a categorical one about intrinsic, inextinguishable features of doping, but a precautionary one about *extrinsic eventualities* of *some* doping practices that, again, need not be overgeneralized.

Talent as a True Gift and the Fateless Critique of Doping

Resolving the *phony* objection may not suffice to quell all concern about proper origins of athletic ability. Instead, that very resolution may once over

give rise to a new set of objections on an even more fundamental plane than that of personal authenticity. That even deeper cause for concern is this: precisely by heeding the moral call of his aspirational authenticity only all too well, the “self-made man” may come to neglect the respect he owes not to his self, but to the forces that made him. Changing the fundamentals of how one was created, as doping arguably does, overrides one’s natural biological blueprint. This overriding can be seen as a moral transgression: one should stay true to something more, something deeper, than one’s “ego.” Perhaps this is where the intuition comes from that the “gifted athlete,” like the “natural beauty,” deserves special reverence: he got his special gift from nature, whereas the doper helped himself to a gift.

In a particular religious mindset, for instance, one can perceive one’s body to be literally given by some wise and benign giver. Arguably, one must not squander a benign and wisely given gift, nor should one be discontent with it. Ideally, one rejoices in the gift and makes the best of it without asking for a greater gift. From this perspective, good sports could be an outright religious practice in which pious athletes, having been endowed with special natural talents, prove their gratefulness to their creator by cultivating and displaying those special bodily gifts they received—this is indeed a pivotal theme in the theology of sports (Weir, 2011). The Spirit of Sport may then be religiously rephrased as follows: may the most blessed man win. The founder of the IOC, Pierre de Coubertin, and many of his twentieth century successors, such as Avery Brundage, were convinced that the spirit of Olympic sport did indeed consist in a universal, modern religiosity (Guttman, 2002), premised in part on a deep attachment to the giftedness of natural talents. Today, previous IOC president Jacques Rogge asserts that “the religious aspect has now totally disappeared” (Braeckman et al., 2011, 83), yet the appreciation of sports as a display of the giftedness of natural talent remains common. To resolve this tension, Michael Sandel has set out to argue for the fundamental value of giftedness in sports (and in life in general) without drawing on (overtly) religious argument. In the chapter “Bionic Athletes” of his book *The Case Against Perfection*, Sandel writes:

The deeper danger is that [human enhancement interventions] represent a kind of hyperagency, a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. [. . .] To acknowledge the giftedness of life is to recognize that our talents and powers are not wholly our own doing, nor even fully ours, despite the efforts we expend to develop and to exercise them. [. . .] It is, in part, a religious sensibility. But its resonance reaches beyond religion. (Sandel, 2007, 26–27)

Sandel advances two closely connected objections to doping: (1) doping represents that Promethean aspiration; and (2) doping entails a failure to acknowledge the giftedness of life. We believe the first accusation may be too harsh and overgeneralizing, and the second to be open to a respectful difference of opinion.

In line with Allen Buchanan's (2011, 69–114) reply to Sandel, it seems more prudent and precise to nuance that first accusation into a probabilistic statement: doping *may in specific contexts* represent a “hyperagency-like” aspiration to remake nature to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. Perhaps, in the contemporary Western culture of professionalism and perfectionism, such a drive toward absolute mastery over one's biological constitution may indeed be a common risk against that we do well to warn. And several entrenched contemporary doping cultures, such as those surrounding anabolic steroids or erythropoietin, may indeed be deeply marked by an obsessive drive toward mastery and perfection. But surely, there may be many other, less troublesome motives to engage in biotechnological alterations of one's bodily capacities, such as the active curiosity to seek out new aesthetics of embodiment and of athletic virtuosity. What is more, in answering Sandel's second objection, we find that doping might even be engaged in precisely out of a deep recognition and acknowledgement of something that is fatalistically given to any human person: not so much a given biological blueprint, but rather the given responsibility over oneself. As such, when one should actively take the fundamentals of one's own biology into one's own hands and reshape them, this need not be rooted in an aspiration for mastery and perfection. It need not even be rooted in aspiration, period. It may be rooted in the earnest, fatalistic *acceptance* of the burden of responsibility over oneself: an acceptance of the self-understanding of oneself as a “self-shaping animal” (cf. *supra*). In this light, the opposite position of feeling compelled to stay true to one's given biological constitution may also come with a risk of being inspired by a lack of virtue, and in some cases even by vice. It may be inspired by the desire to escape a too great responsibility and too disorienting freedom to shape one's own existence. The escape plan then lies in choosing to conceive of oneself—perhaps counterfactually—as a creature that should stay true to how it was created. In this way, one may *outsource* substantial amounts of burdensome decisional responsibilities over what one should maintain and what one should change about one's biological constitution to that (created?) creator. This may be a choice for psychological comfort—going with the natural flow of things—over epistemic and moral courage—feeling honor bound to actively take responsibility over one's own existence. From such a general existentialist position, a nonessentialist, nonperfectionist Spirit of Sport may sprout, in which (prosthetic and doped) sport is engaged in as “a virtuous exploration of bodily virtuosity.” If the point is granted that this might be so, even if only in certain marginal cases, it seems advisable to respect such (and perhaps only such) doping practices as part of the respectful disagreement between certain religious and humanistic conceptions of the good athletic life that both fall within the bounds of reasonable moral pluralism.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summarizing the conclusions of this critique of the talentocratic Spirit of Sport, we argued that all three anti-doping objections fall short as categorical objections but do have significant residual value as extrinsic, prudential arguments. First, the arguments on natural talent as greater potential alert to the eventuality that certain doping practices will not be an equally trustworthy indicator of profound or long-lasting potential as natural talent. However, deeply integrating doping may resolve this although it may still lack the feature of being an indicator of hereditary traits. Then again, if the Spirit of Sport would consist in the demonstration of hereditary superiorities, that spirit would be an ethically dubious relic of evolutionary psychology. Second, the arguments on one's (lack of) natural talents as a part of the true self alert to the eventuality that if one engages in doping practices without paying due attention to how this fits with one's affirmative and aspirational authenticity, it may possibly result in profound disorientation about who one is and what one should be doing with oneself. Nevertheless, doping could also be engaged in mindfully in order to achieve greater authenticity. Moreover, profound authenticity problems may also arise from not using available means for altering one's natural endowment. Finally, the arguments about natural talent as a true gift alert to the possibility that the use of doping may be rooted in a problematic drive toward mastery and perfectionism. Nevertheless, it may also be rooted in the humanistic dignity of feeling honor bound to take full responsibility over one's own existence, including over one's own biological constitution, which may be integrated in a nonessentialist, nonperfectionist Spirit of Sport of "the virtuous exploration of bodily virtuosity" as opposed to the "virtuous perfection of natural talent." Moreover, there seems to exist a converse risk, that the categorical anti-doping position may be rooted in a problematic urge to outsource such responsibilities over oneself, in order to maintain an easy and comfortable sense of "naturally given" place and purpose.

In our exploration of what might constitute proper origins of athletic ability, we have found it possible to have a reasonable conception of the good athletic life that permits or even lauds profound corporeal alteration via artifice. However, an exploration of further intrinsic issues concerning proper processes and proper outcomes may reveal insurmountable intrinsic objections to doping nonetheless. What is more, even if doping would ultimately be found intrinsically permissible or laudable on all fronts, an exploration of the many extrinsic objections to contemporary doping practices such as health-related harms, indirect coercion, rule breaking, etc. may still lead one to conclude that (virtually all) contemporary doping practices necessarily imply impermissible conditions. Therefore, one might accept our current argument and still argue, *anno* 2014, for a ban of all contemporary doping practices until proven that those impermissible conditions are sufficiently

alleviated. The crucial difference, however, would be that, for want of intrinsic objections, such bans would cease to be based on “anti-doping” grounds, but rather on “anti-unhealthiness,” “anti-peer pressure,” or some other such (aggregate) grounds.

Although any given sports institution could still organize sports on categorical anti-doping grounds as long as it grants other institutions the right to organize sports on doping-neutral or pro-doping grounds, sports institutions based on Olympism face a particular challenge if no intrinsic objections can be found that all reasonable moral communities should accept. Given the universalist ambition of Olympism to include “all games for all peoples” (Parry, 2009), how should the Olympic Movement respond to the jarring figure of the reasonable, virtue-ethical doper? If the commitment to universal inclusivity outweighs the attachment to natural talent, it seems that he should in principle be welcomed and that, once forms of doping unburdened by decisive extrinsic objections are made available, provisions should be made to accommodate him. If instead the attachment to natural talent trumps the commitment to inclusivity, the Olympics may have to check its doctrine of universalism and clarify that it will host only “all games for all natural peoples.”

NOTES

1. The list is not baseless, however. Criteria to be put on the list are (1) possible performance-enhancing effect, (2) possible health risk, and (3) against the Spirit of Sport (henceforth: Spirit of Sport), where meeting only two of these three criteria suffices to be dubbed doping (WADA, 2009).

2. Similar to the WADC definition where the presence of two out of three components suffice to hold something to be doping, for family constructs not all components have to be present in every individual instance of doping, but there is nevertheless adequate persisting (familial) similarity between all instances.

3. These can be thought of as three successive frontiers: a doping practice may bring about transgression (1), but not yet (2) and (3); (1) and (2), but not yet (3), or (1), (2), and (3). It is interesting to mention the possibility of “leapfrog technologies,” of which the running blades of Oscar Pistorius might be a contemporary example, wherein a *therapeutic* intervention may not only restore health or ability but at the same time, perhaps even inextricably, effectuate all of these enhancing transgressions, for instance, by developing prostheses that are in certain respects superior to conventional homo sapiens biology.

4. Circumstantial issues are, of course, crucial in reaching a conclusion on what to do with doping *as it exists today*. Even if doping may turn out to be permissible or even—*ex hypothesi*—laudable in itself, such neutral or positive valuations can be easily outweighed, when one is deciding on some particular doping practice in some particular sports context in a particular day and age, where countless contingencies should weigh in on such context-specific decision making. However, even if such extrinsic concerns would outweigh an intrinsic neutral or positive valuation of doping, even an extremely negative valuation of particular doping practices can only be called an “anti-doping” position proper if something intrinsic to doping would be found decisively negative. Otherwise it would be a “anti-unhealthiness,” “anti-peer pressure,” or some other such (aggregate) position. Contemporary anti-doping positions often present themselves as full-blooded anti-doping positions proper, premised on an intrinsic denunciation of doping. In this vein, the World Anti-Doping Code states: “Anti-doping programs seek to preserve what is intrinsically valuable to sports. [. . .] Doping is fundamentally contrary to the spirit of sport” (WADC, 2009, 14). To give clear and sustained attention to these core arguments, we must suspend an ethical analysis of the contingent features of doping practices prevalent today—such as the *periodic intake of pharmaceutical substances that induce fleeting effects and come with grave health risks*.

5. As, for instance, there seems to be something profoundly wrong with the healthy, abundantly available and noncoerced contentment-inducing “soma” drug in Aldous Huxley’s (2006 [1946]) *Brave New World*.

6. This table is not intended to be exhaustive, nor to state a particular and supposedly proper use of the labels “unnatural,” “inauthentic,” and “dehumanizing,” as these labels can and often are used in other contexts.

7. Brookes is one of the often forgotten precursors of Pierre de Coubertin, the French Baron who went on to found the international Games we still know today and who is often—incorrectly—portrayed as the lone visionary who founded the modern Olympic Movement. For a detailed history of the early modern Olympic movement(s), see Young (1996).

8. We limit our discussion of the “equal opportunity to perform” to questions of equal eligibility and admission. Further questions of equal (re)distribution (of talent and of doping) will not be addressed here, as our arguments can be made without settling these questions. We would, however, briefly note that the argument we present in this paper remains compatible with views on just redistribution from one end of the spectrum to the other: uncompromising luck egalitarian views in which all “unfair (biological) advantages” must be undone (for instance by handicapping the talented or by enhancing the less talented) so that every member of a community of equals may come to enjoy “equal (biological) opportunity;” uncompromising libertarian views of “fortunocracy” in which individuals are left free to exploit for personal gain any good fortune that may come their way—financial capital, social capital, cultural capital, biocapital, and biotech-capital alike; and any position in between. For a luck egalitarian argument for handicapping the talented (for instance via point leads or head starts for the less talented) so that sports competitions can better track ethically relevant differentials such as character and effort, see Mehlman (2009b). See Murray (2009) for a critical response in the same volume. For a thorough analysis of the notion that perhaps the entirety of one’s constitution may be “predetermined all the way down,” one’s character and capacity for effort included, and thus wholly a matter of luck for which one cannot be held accountable, see Hurley (2002).

9. Money-driven professionalism—that is: sport as a true profession that supports one in one’s livelihood—has also become dominant although merely as something permitted as a socioeconomical reality, whereas effort-driven professionalism has become dominant as an ethical aim.

10. Adherents of anti-doping Olympism may of course still believe that others are (reasonably) mistaken, and that their Spirit of Sport truly reflects the only proper way to play sports and thus still try to convince others, noncoercively, of the wrongness of their ways.

11. Curiously, Popeye is designed and accepted as a very loveable character, even if his relation to spinach is eerily similar to taking periodic shots of (healthy) doping.

12. Similarly spirited, many mainstream beauty pageants place a deep taboo, and regularly prohibitive regulations, on aesthetic surgeries as these also dramatically corrupt the primal urge to discern who is innately superior with respect to beauty, which proxies for fertility and for the heredity of the beauty itself.

13. Here is not the place to pursue this fully, but it may prove fruitful to further tie this in with evolutionary-psychological analyses on the pervasiveness of mimicry as an evolutionary adaptive strategy, and how this created a deep evolutionary dynamic toward fine-tuned mechanisms for fake detection and the creation of testing situations in which an organism can probe and provoke proof of the actual traits of relevant others such as competitors, mates, kin, natural enemies, and symbiotic partners.

14. This set of arguments is closely connected to the “proper processes” concerns that require adequately *active* agency by the athlete as an person, so that the athletic performance can be ascribed to that athlete as a proper *accomplishment* of her. However, here we suspend that further discussion on active agency that delves deeper into the origins issue of what falls within and without the self, and how one may integrate novel ways of being into one’s authentic self-conception, a question preceding the active/passive distinction.

15. For any sport hobbyist, this is true on the individual level, but a reason why the absolute top athletes are so revered may be that they are seen to reveal such an existential insight on a species level: at the Olympic Games, we appear to find out something about what “mankind” is capable of, what mankind truly is. This crucial thought strengthens the emphatic connection of the spectators with their sport heroes. In global top sports, people from around the world can collectively rejoice in the most excellent performances given by the top crop of the great in-group of mankind. This exalted sentiment has always been at the heart of Pierre de Coubertin’s and the IOC’s vision of the Olympic Games as a humanistic endeavor to inspire fellow feeling between all human beings (Young, 1996). However, an argument

against doping on these grounds would then be epistemic or aesthetic, rather than ethical. We thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this ethical-aesthetic distinction.

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