

Address to the *Cyprus Anti-Doping Authority* and the *Cyprus National Bioethics Committee*

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Doping, Knowledge, and Virtue

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μία Προσωπική Εισαγωγή

Ανακάλυψα σε ένα άρθρο περιοδικού ότι, μια πρώην αθλήτρια την οποία θαύμαζα, έκανε ντόπινγκ σε όλη την καριέρα της. Αποκάλυψε ότι, σιωπηλά την έδιωξαν από την ομάδα που θα συμμετείχε της Ολυμπιακούς Αγώνες του 1984 μετά ένα μυστικό έλεγχο (ενώ ολόκληρη η ομάδα της Αγώνες έκανε μεταγγίσεις αίματος). Αυτό που με θύμωσε περισσότερο ήταν που είπε πως πίστευε ότι θα μπορούσε να κέρδιζε, χωρίς ντόπινγκ. Αυτό ήταν που κατέστρεψε, το ντόπινγκ της στέρησε την ευκαιρία να μάθει μέχρι που μπορούσε να φτάσει. Το ντόπινγκ στέρησε της και από εμένα την ευκαιρία να αναμετρηθώ μαζί της και μάθω μέχρι που μπορούσα εγώ να φτάσω. Και το χειρότερο από όλα ήταν ότι, στέρησε από το άθλημα την εκπλήρωση του σκοπού του, δηλαδή να προωθήσει την γνώση και την αρετή.

Γνώση και Αρετή στον Αρχαίο Αθλητισμό

Από την εποχή των Ασσυρίων και των Αιγύπτων στην 3^η χιλιετία της, η άθληση ήταν συνδεδεμένη με την αρετή. Αυτό το οποίο πέτυχαν οι Έλληνες ήταν να κάνουν την άθληση ως εξέταση της αρετής. Στον Όμηρο, επικρατεί ένα ήθος αριστείου και ο Οδυσσέας χρησιμοποιεί την άθληση για να αποδείξει την αρετή του. Στη συνέχεια, με την απαρχή των Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων, ξεκίνησε της αντικειμενικός αγώνας για την επιλογή αυτού που θα αξίζει περισσότερο την τιμή να ανάψει την ιερή φλόγα. Την αθλητική υπεροχή την αντιλαμβάνονταν σαν έκφραση της αρετής των ηρώων ή των θεών. Για παράδειγμα, της δρομέας για μια στιγμή γίνεται ο Αχιλλέας ή ο Ερμής και οι ωδές και τα αγάλματα που επαινούν της άθλους του, είναι όλα μέρος μιας γιορτής της αρετής.

Γνώση και Αρετή στον Σύγχρονο Αθλητισμό

Της εξετάσουμε, της τον Σωκράτη, κατά πόσο ο σύγχρονος αθλητισμός έχει να κάμει με την αρετή και την γνώση. Μία άποψη είναι ότι ο σύγχρονος αθλητισμός είναι για την πολιτική, τη διασκέδαση και το κέρδος. Όλα αυτά της εξαρτώνται από την σχέση μεταξύ της σχέσης αρετής και αθλητισμού. Μια άλλη άποψη είναι ο αθλητισμός είναι μια βιομηχανία για τη διασκέδαση και οι αθλητές είναι πλούσιοι λόγω του είναι οι αθλητές είναι μέρος της της βιομηχανίας διασκέδασης. Της και η αξία της διασκέδασης εξαρτάται από την αρετή. Μια άλλη ένσταση είναι ότι, οι αθλητές σήμερα δεν έχουν αρετή και είναι χειρότεροι από της υπόλοιπους ανθρώπους. Της πούμε ότι είναι αλήθεια και ο αθλητισμός της κάνει ακόμα χειρότερους. Πώς είναι δυνατό; Ο αθλητισμός που δημιουργήθηκε για την προώθηση της αρετής κατάντησε να περιέχει κακία; Δεν υπάρχει πλέον αρετή στον αθλητισμό; Η απάντηση είναι ότι ασφαλώς υπάρχει η αρετή. Ίσως της η νίκη να εξαρτάται λιγότερο στην αρετή και περισσότερο στην κακία, της δόλος, και τεχνάσματα της το ντόπινγκ.

Τα κακά νέα και τα καλά νέα

Τα κακά νέα είναι πως μπορεί να είναι αλήθεια, ο σύγχρονος αθλητισμός επιβραβεύει πιο πολύ την κακία παρά την αρετή. Τα καλά νέα είναι ότι μπορούμε να το διορθώσουμε γιατί ο αθλητισμός είναι δημιούργημα του ανθρώπου και κάτω από τον έλεγχο του. Ο σκοπός του αθλητισμού δεν είναι, ούτε ποτέ ήταν αγώνας τεχνολογικής ή φαρμακευτικής υπεροχής. Πάντοτε σκοπός του αθλητισμού είναι η προώθηση και εξέταση της αρετής. Κάθε άθλημα είναι μια «κοινωνία» όπου το κάθε μέλος έχει ευθύνη να προστατεύει τα αγαθά του αθλήματος. Το κύριο αγαθό του αθλητισμού είναι η αρετή και πρέπει να διαφυλαχθεί, εις βάρος το κέρδος και τη δόξα. Προστατεύοντας την αρετή σημαίνει ότι προστατεύεται η πρόκληση που εμπεριέχεται στον αθλητισμό. Το ντόπινγκ απαγορεύεται όχι λόγω ισότητας, ασφάλειας ή υγείας αλλά για τον ίδιο λόγο που απαγορεύεται ο κινητήρας της αγώνες ποδηλασίας, γιατί μειώνει το ρόλος της αρετής.

Επίλογος

Αυτό που χρειάζεται σήμερα είναι η επιστροφή στο ήθος της αρετής. Η αρετή αποτελεί τη βάση του αθλητισμού και με την προώθηση της, ο αθλητισμός μπορεί να ξανακερδίσει την κοινωνική και πολιτιστική του αξία, χωρίς να χάσει από την οικονομική του αξία ή τη διασκέδαση που προσφέρει. Η γνώση και η αρετή εξακολουθούν να αποτελούν την καρδιά του αθλητισμού και έχουν την δύναμη να σώσουν τη ψυχή του.

A personal introduction

Some years after I had retired as a competitive cyclist and begun my graduate studies in philosophy, a friend handed me a magazine with a former competitor's picture on the cover. My mind drifted back to 1983--a year abuzz with excitement as we geared up for the debut of women's cycling in the Olympics—and a particular race in Northern California called the Nevada City Classic. The race course was a three-kilometer loop in the Sierra Mountains: one and a half kilometers up, then one and a half kilometers down. In the sharp left turn at the bottom of the hill, on the third or fourth lap of the race, I crashed and broke the brake lever off of my handlebars. The mechanic took one look at my bike and said, "you're done." So I leaned against the fence to watch the race from the sidelines. Cindy Olavarri, the woman on the magazine cover, had broken away from the pack and was increasing her lead with every lap. She was wearing a heart-rate monitor, which was new technology then, and a team of kinesiologists reported to the announcer that she was the fittest athlete they had ever tested. She looked so strong and confident flying around the difficult course, alone in the lead, with a smile on her face. I was amazed. I wanted to be like her. I wanted to be a great athlete like that.

The next year, Cindy Olavarri made the 1984 Olympic team and I didn't. I went to watch as a spectator, and the USA won both the gold and silver medals—part of an unprecedented success for the cycling program--but Olavarri had been removed from the team at the last minute after testing positive for mononucleosis. I felt sorry for her at the time for having reached such a state of greatness only to miss the Olympic Games. As I began to read the article, however, my admiration faded and then froze into bitterness. It was not sickness that had kept her off the team, it was a positive result on a prophylactic doping test that the USOC conducted just before the Games. In the article, Olavarri admitted to taking all kinds of dope during her career, from amphetamines to steroids. She was warning others not to follow that path because the drugs had ruined her health and caused her to sink into depression after being kicked off the team. For a moment, I admired her courage in admitting all this for the benefit of others, but the next line I read really made me bitter: she said she believed she could have achieved all that she did without using the drugs.

To me, this "belief" was almost worse than the doping itself, because the one thing you give up the moment you dope is the chance to know what you could have done—and who you could have been—without it. What made sport interesting and worthwhile to me

was *learning* about myself through *thoughttesting* in competition and wrestling with the perpetual challenge of achieving my best performance. By engaging in practices that we had agreed as competitors not to do, Olavarri not only gave up her own chance at knowing what she could achieve, she had also interfered with my own and others' athletic pursuit of self-knowledge by falsifying the test through which we were measuring ourselves. Her doping was not just a personal affront, it was an affront to the whole project of self-development through sport, and more specifically, to the nature of sport as a knowledge-seeking and virtue-building activity.

What is worse, this athlete's personal affront was enabled and apparently encouraged by the sport's institutions. Not only were the officials in charge of enforcing the rules failing to do their job (what else can we call a situation in which top athletes remain unpenalized despite long-term use of illegal drugs?), the officials in charge of the team were figuring out their own ways to circumvent the integrity of the contest. At the 1984 Olympic Games, the United States Cycling team, as a group, engaged in autologous blood transfusions. The practice was not illegal at the time, but it was clearly an attempt to gain an unfair advantage in the contest. What are all those Olympic cycling medals really worth if the challenge of the contest was diminished not only by the absence of boycotting teams, but also by the presence of unethical techniques? Even if some rival teams were doing the same thing, and even if it was permitted by the rules, this practice harmed not only the athletes, but the sport itself. Sport is and always has been about knowledge and virtue. Practices that circumvent that function constitute a threat to sport's very purpose.

Knowledge and Virtue in Ancient Athletics

This being a Hellenic culture, I expect a little Socratic questioning. "Knowledge and virtue?" you ask. "Where did you get that idea?" "From somewhere close, and at the same time very far away from here," I reply. I got the idea from the origins of competitive sport in ancient Greece. Long before the ancient Olympic Games or even Homer's Trojan Wars, there had been a conceptual link between athleticism and what ancient Hellenes called *aretē*. From Egypt to Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium BCE, such leaders as Gilgamesh, Shulgi, and the Pharaohs used real or imagined feats of athleticism to demonstrate their divine heritage and worthiness to lead. Hellenic heroes like Heracles, Achilles, and Atalanta also display athleticism as evidence of their *aretē*. Odysseus also uses athletic contests to *prove* his noble identity when it is doubted by the Phaeacians and even his own household. *Aretē* is about excellence rather than deference. In fact its Homeric version, *aristeia*, is inherently

competitive—it comes from “being the best and outdoing all others” (αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπερέροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων), [Iliad 6.208, 11.784]. What was new, even revolutionary, about the Greek approach to athletics, however, was the invention of the impartial athletic test—the use of sport to answer questions about virtue.

The origin of this was probably religious—a conflict at Olympia over who would light the sacrificial flame. It was important in such rituals to give that honor to someone truly worthy, since the success of the sacrifice depended on the god’s pleasure with it. Following established social hierarchies and simply giving the honor to the local king wouldn’t work at Olympia since it was a Panhellenic sanctuary and there would have been a variety of tribes present at the sacrifice. Philostratos reports that the problem was solved by running a race from the *temenos* to the altar and allowing the first to arrive to light the flame [*Gymnastikos*, 5]. In time the athletic victor became a symbolic sacrifice to the god, decorated with the same colored fillets and crowns of vegetation worn by sacrificial animals. We may interpret the race to the altar as a way of leaving the choice of honoree up to the god, or as constructing a “scientific” test for *aretē*—either way the Olympic contest developed as a way of gaining knowledge about virtue.

The subsequent realization--no doubt brought about by athletic competition--that *aretē* not only could be found in non-nobles but also could be cultivated through training brought about an explosion of gymnastic activity motivated by the love of victory (*philonikia*), and adapted by Socrates and his followers to the pursuit of intellectual and spiritual *aretē* known as *philosophia*. Athletes who achieved pinnacles of performance were again related to the gods and heroes of a golden past, no longer through real or imagined family heritage, but now through the public demonstration of their *aretē* in an overtly religious setting. At the moment of his victory, the champion runner reanimates the spirit of Achilles, or even the divine runner Hermes. The poems and statues created to celebrate such victories, furthermore, align the athlete with gods and heroes—or more precisely with the *aretē* of gods and heroes—in a community-wide celebration of virtue. It is the testing, the questioning, the challenges posed by contest that bring virtue to life and give sport its ultimate value.

Virtue and Knowledge in Modern Sport

Our Socratic questioner still will not be satisfied. “That was then, this is now!” he retorts. “Sport in the modern world is not about knowledge and virtue, it is about politics, entertainment, and profit.” It is true, I concede, that the religious function and cultural heritage of ancient Greek athletics are absent from modern sport. The basic structure of sport—indeed its metaphysical nature—remains largely unchanged, however. Sport’s association with politics, entertainment, and profit, furthermore, is hardly a modern phenomenon. The very same criticisms are made of sport in ancient Rome, including *Greek* sport in Rome. I would argue that the political, economic, and entertainment value of sport (in both ancient and modern times) *depends* on its ability to answer questions about virtue. How else could a person from the lowest social class—either a Roman gladiator or a modern football player—come to be celebrated in a hierarchical society if his athleticism was not taken as evidence of social value, i.e. *aretē*?

My students, like the Athenians that Socrates chastises in *Apology*, often take the player’s personal wealth to be evidence of his worth. “Star football players are worthy,” they say, “because they are rich.” Now it is my turn to play Socrates and show that this argument fails because lottery winners are also rich, but their wealth is evidence of nothing more than luck, and therefore their wealth does not endow them with social merit. A business major may then raise his hand to clarify. “Well,” he might say, “the player is rich because sports are an entertainment industry and people are entertained by watching him play.” This argument fails, too, however, because people are also entertained by jugglers and silly pet videos but those forms of entertainment do not attract much money. What makes sport a more successful form of entertainment, I submit, is its enduring association with virtue. We are fascinated by sports as contests of virtue and compelled by the display not only of athletic excellence, but of the aretic excellences that underpin it: the courage (*andreia*), the self-control (*sophrosyne*), the persistence (*epimone*).

Next an observant realist at the back of the room (playing the role of Thrasymachos) may raise her hand and say, “But athletes really aren’t virtuous these days. They cheat on their taxes and beat on their wives, and they get away with it because they help the team win—and winning, in the end, is all that matters in sport.” Now she has a point. Even if the immoral behavior of star athletes—a favorite topic for journalists—is no more or even less

common than the public at large, my claim that athletics cultivates virtue seems out of line with modern reality. In fact some social scientists argue that participation in sport actually promotes immoral behavior. For the sake of Socratic argument, let's just concede that point and ask ourselves why? How does a human practice designed to test and reward human virtue end up promoting and rewarding the opposite?

One answer is that the virtues underlying athletic success are no longer of social value. This answer is easy to reject, however; courage, self-control, persistence, and other such qualities remain extremely important for achievement in all kinds of worthwhile activities. Another answer is that athletic success no longer depends (so much) on such virtues, but now comes more often from vices such as deception, disrespect, dishonesty, and outright cheating. Or perhaps victory now depends more on performance-enhancing technologies such as expensive equipment, nutritional supplements, and performance-enhancing drugs. Virtue still matters in sport, it just doesn't bring victory anymore. To win, you need technology and duplicity.

Bad News and Good News

The bad news is that this claim may be correct. The good news is that we can do something about it. Sport, by definition is a human construction. We make the rules, we construct the test, and we are responsible for ensuring that it fulfills its intended purpose. Sport is not and never has been intended as a test of technological or pharmacological superiority—it has always had the primary purpose of promoting and testing virtue for the benefit of the larger community. If, in practice, victory is coming to depend more on performance-enhancing technologies than virtue, then the human beings responsible for preserving the spirit of sport are failing. The World Anti-Doping Association was created in response to one such spectacular failure, but the preservation of sport is not their responsibility alone.

Ethics, as Aristotle noted, derive from *ēthos*—the characteristic beliefs and aspirations of a community. Sports, too, are communities and everyone involved in these communities—from beginning athletes to international officials—is responsible for preserving the goods internal to that community. I have been arguing that the primary good internal to sport is not health, or fitness, or recreation, or even fun; the primary good is virtue, *aretē*—excellences that have social worth beyond sport. Victory, education, entertainment,

profit—all the other “goods” associated with sport ultimately depend on *aretē*. And we all have a responsibility for preserving our sports’ primary goods, even if it means foregoing such personal goods as honor and wealth.

Doping and other forms of performance-enhancing technology that undermine virtue should be rejected both by sports rules and by individual athletes because they harm the primary good of sport. Health is not sufficient reason, nor is safety, or equality, or simple ethical convention. The ban on doping and other technologies is just another of the prescribed inefficiencies that make sport what it is—a test of virtue. We ban EPO from cycling races for the same reason that we ban motorcycles. Inefficiencies are absolutely fundamental to sport, which may be succinctly defined—as philosopher Bernard Suits has done—as “the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.” Those who try to undermine the obstacles and inefficiencies of sport, undermine sport itself by undermining its connection to knowledge and virtue.

What we need today is a return to the *ēthos* of *aretē*. This was once a distinctively Hellenic cultural *ēthos*, which was widely admired in antiquity and repeatedly imitated in such modern institutions as democratic states, universities, and the Olympic Games. *Aretē* is the bedrock foundation of sport, and sport may regain its social and cultural value—without giving up its economic and entertainment value—by rallying around this ancient ideal. Even my old rival, Cindy Olavarri, seems to have realized the true nature of sport. She now says that her biggest regret is that she’ll never know if she could have made the Olympic team without the dope.

Knowledge and virtue are the heart of sport, even today, and they have the power to save its soul.

(*The arguments in this paper are based on previously published work. If you are interested in a particular source, please contact me at reid@morningside.edu)