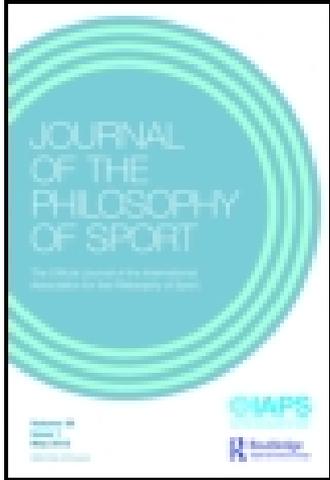


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Three Approaches Toward an Understanding of Sportsmanship

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It is strange, but true, that few recent attempts to analyze and clarify the concept or nature of sport make any significant reference to sportsmanship. Despite this neglect, however, few people would wish to deny that the connection of sportsmanship to sport is an important one. Certainly in the games playing ethos of the 19th century English Public Schools the use of one term without the other would barely have been conceivable. The same can be said of such terms as "amateurism" and "Olympism." Today, it would seem, especially if contemporary philosophy of sport literature is anything to go by, the matter is quite different. As far as I know, no serious endeavour has been made to look at the phenomenon of sportsmanship for nearly twenty years.¹ Even McIntosh (18: p. 1), who in his book *Fair Play*, sets out "to link an analysis of the ethics of sport with the theory and practice of education," makes only passing comment on it. What follows, therefore, is an attempt to help rectify what I see as a neglected dimension in contemporary debate in the general area of ethics and sport.

Sportsmanship, although most readily associated with particular types of commendatory acts done in the context of sport, is sometimes extended to apply to other spheres of life and living, especially those which are concerned with competing fairly and honestly as well as with good humor. I do not propose to embark upon these latter applications, but to concentrate upon what I see to be its central cases, all of which are to do with the actions and conduct of sportsmen and sportswomen when engaged in sport. There are, it seems to me, essentially three different, if related, views about sportsmanship and I propose looking at each of these in turn. They are:

1. Sportsmanship as a form of social union,
2. Sportsmanship as a means in the promotion of pleasure, and
3. Sportsmanship as a form of altruism.

It should be made clear that, although I shall be looking at each of these views separately and in turn for purposes of exposition, I do not necessarily wish to maintain that they are not to some extent overlapping. In any one person, at different times, (and maybe even at the same time) all three views can be partially represented.

First, I would like to make a preliminary comment. The idea of sport as justice maintains that when a player enters into the institutionalized social practice of a sport he tacitly agrees to abide by the rules which characterize and govern it. It implies that sport involves a proper understanding of and a commitment to the two principles upon which it is based, namely freedom and equality.² The idea of sport as a social union reflects these same undertakings and values. It recognizes that if the practice of sport is to be preserved and flourish, a great deal is dependent upon the players, and officials, understanding and acting in accord with what is fair. They will accept and realize that breaches of the rules, especially if flagrant and deliberate, will destroy the very activity that they have agreed to participate in and uphold. They will appreciate further that if “fairness” is interpreted too contractually or legalistically there is always the danger that the aspect of sport known as “sportsmanship” will be construed as being concerned only with these acts which demonstrate a ready acceptance of the rules and a willingness to abide by them. It will be seen, however, that this is a reasonable expectation of all players and the notion of sportsmanship connotes something more. What must be emphasized is that fairness, if understood only in a legalistic or formal rule-following sense, can only be regarded as a necessary condition of sportsmanship, but by no means a sufficient one. This point applies to all three views of sportsmanship I intend to outline.

Sportsmanship as a Form of Social Union

The idea of sport as a social union takes into account, but goes beyond an agreement to willingly abide and play by the rules in the interests of what is fair. It is also concerned with the preservation and continuation of its best traditions, customs, and conventions so that the community which makes up the social union cannot only cooperatively participate in sport, but successfully relate to one another as persons through an understood, shared, and appreciated mode of proceeding. “The Sportsmanship Brotherhood” (22) which was founded in 1926, while itself indebted to the English Public School ethos of games playing, may be regarded as a forerunner to this view. Its aim was to foster and spread the spirit of sportsmanship throughout the world which it saw, in part at least, as a form of social and moral well-being. By adopting the slogan “Not that you won or lost—but that you played the game,” it brought home the point that the *manner* in which sport is conducted is no less important than its outcome, if amicability and brotherhood are to be encouraged and upheld. Rawls (19: pp. 525-26), in speaking of games as a simple instance of a social union, suggests that in addition to it being concerned with its rules, it is also concerned with an agreed and cooperative “scheme of conduct in which the excellences and enjoyments of each (player) are complementary to the good of all.” The idea of sport as a social union, then, is not just concerned with getting players to accept and abide by the rules but also with the maintenance and extolling of a way of life in which sportsmen find value, cooperation, and mutual satisfaction. If this view of sportsmanship is to flourish and be furthered, it is not a matter of merely adopt-

ing a particular code of etiquette or set of shibboleths, but of having a genuine commitment to the values of fellowship and goodwill which are held to be more important than the desire to win or the achievement of victory. The central purpose of the social union view of sportsmanship is to preserve and uphold fraternal relationships that can arise in and through a participation in sport. More than this, it sees this purpose as being intrinsically involved with the nature of sport itself. Any attempt, therefore, to characterize the nature of sport without reference to it would leave the conceptual map of sport incomplete and considerably impoverished.

It is important to stress that the social union view of sportsmanship is not to be seen merely as a socially cohesive device in order to help regulate and oil the institutional practice of sport, though this effect may well come about. Rather it should be perceived as a community of individuals united by a particular practice in which the arts of chivalry are practiced in the interests of mutual affection, comradery, and fellowship. It is seen by the participants as the kind of practice which places a high premium upon those qualities and forms of conduct such as good humor, respect, politeness, and affability which are conducive to, rather than destructive of, good interpersonal relations and cooperative, if competitive, endeavor. In other words, the idea of sport as a social union is a particular kind of social system in and by which players and officials come together in order to share a commonly valued form of life, a part of which is concerned with the manner in which one should ideally participate if the system is to flourish.³ An example of this is provided by an incident at the French Tennis Championships of 1982 when Wilander, a Swedish player, was awarded match point against his opponent Clerc on the grounds that a drive down the line was out. Wilander, instead of accepting the umpire's decision, as the rules state, asked for the point to be played again because he thought the ball was "good and that he didn't have a chance." Mr. Dorfman, the referee, at some risk to his official position, but conscious of the good of the players and game alike, agreed (3: p. 10).⁴ Another example comes from the World Athletic Championships of 1983, when Banks, the American world triple jump record holder, was defeated in the last round by the Pole, Hoffman. Instead of being grieved and withdrawn, as is often the case when victory eludes an athlete by a hair's breadth, Banks demonstrated his delight at Hoffman's success by running around the track with him as an act of respect and comradery. For both, a moment between them had been forged. The system requires of all members a commitment to live out the ideals cherished by the union in a way that predisposes towards its convivial continuance. When sport is viewed in this way, sportsmanship can be seen as an evaluative term which is attributed to those who not only uphold and play according to the rules, but keep faith with their spirit by acts and forms of conduct which are not required by the rules but which are freely made in accordance with the best traditions of competitive, but friendly, rivalry. The social union view of sport then, apart from a ready acceptance of what is fair, sees acts of sportsmanship as chiefly having to do with maintaining the best traditions of sport as a valued and shared form of life. In this view, sportsmanship is more in keeping with a particular kind of socialization or ideology which predisposes group members to act in ways that are supported and admired by the social union of which they are an integral part. Because of this, the social union view of sportsmanship is best understood as having more to do with an idealized form or model of group mores rather than as an individual and principled form of morality.

Sportsmanship as a Means in the Promotion of Pleasure

Keating's (12: p. 265) analysis of sportsmanship, although it has some things in common with the idea of sport as a social union, arises more from the etymological meaning of sport. In essence, he maintains sport is "a kind of diversion which has for its direct and immediate end fun, pleasure and delight and which is dominated by a spirit of moderation and generosity." He contrasts sport with athletics which he says "is essentially a competitive activity, which has for its end victory in the contest and which is marked by a spirit of dedication, sacrifice and intensity" (12: p. 265).

What it is important to realize is that when Keating speaks of "sport" and "athletics" he does not necessarily have in mind a difference between particular activities (i.e., field games and track and field) so much as an attitude or motivation towards them (13: p. 167). With the term "sport," he associates the notion of play and the doing of something for its sake, and with "athletics" he associates the notion of contest and the struggle for victory. I do not intend to dwell upon the difficulties of holding such a simplistic either/or position. Nonetheless in the interests of clarity a few brief comments seem desirable. First, while it may be true that play is more readily associated with some activities than with others, it should not be assumed that play is confined to them or that play can be adequately expressed only in terms of them. Play can enter "serious" activities, like war, just as it can enter "nonserious" ones like games.

Second, the fact that an activity is "competitive" does not necessarily preclude having a play attitude towards it. This point holds true even when recognizing that a preoccupation with winning can sometimes inhibit, even neutralize, a play spirit. To acknowledge this however, is not to say, as Keating suggests, that if an activity is competitive it *necessarily* follows that a given attitude accompanies it.⁵

Third, it is needlessly confusing to imply, as Keating does, that "athletics" is concerned with competition whereas "sport" is not. The fact is most, if not all, physical activities commonly known as sports are competitive in one sense or another. This is a logical, if trivial point, about them. In view of this it might have been said less perplexingly that the "sportsman's" attitude towards that family of physical activities known as sport differs from that of the "athlete's." This difference in attitude, however, stems not from the constitutive nature of the activities themselves, as Keating (12: p. 266; 13: p. 170) suggests,⁶ but rather from the way they are viewed by those who participate in them. Fourth, it does not follow either, as is suggested by some other writers,⁷ that because an "athlete" is concerned with "victory" rather than with "pleasure" that his motives are necessarily undesirable or immoral in some way. There is a big distinction, for example, between a contestant setting out to gain an honorable victory and a contestant setting out to defeat at all costs (and maybe to humiliate) an opponent.⁸

At this point, I wish to examine and comment upon—accepting for the moment Keating's two ways of regarding competitive activities—what amounts to two ways of looking at sportsmanship. It would seem that for the "athlete" given his goal of "exclusive possession" rather than cooperative endeavor, sportsmanship can never be much more than a means of taking some of the rawness out of competitive strife. Its purpose is to mitigate the effects of what is seen as a confrontation and challenge between two adversaries. Sportsmanship in these circumstances, Keating seems to be saying, can only ease, soften, and in some way make more civilized, what is essential-

ly a contest between two prize fighters. Athletes will see the need for disciplined conduct and self-control, even courtesy, but they will not be inclined towards expressions of cordiality or generosity. Sportsmanship for the athlete above all means achieving victory in a dignified and honorable way. They will see the need for "an impartial and equal following of the rules" and the need for "modesty in victory and quiet composure in defeat," but that is all. "Fairness or fair play," says Keating (13: p. 170), is "the pivotal virtue in athletics." His chief and driving motive, however, will be the outcome of "winning" rather than amicability or joy. In summary, Keating's presentation of sportsmanship in athletics sees pretty commensurate with the idea of sport as justice and which, as I suggested, should be an expectation of all participants. It should not perhaps, therefore be regarded as a genus of sportsmanship at all. It meets minimal requirements, but no more than this.

For the "*sportsman*," on the other hand, sportsmanship becomes something more expansive. Here sportsmanship is more than simply following a legislative code (which the justice theory of sport might be wrongly accused of being); nor is it best understood as being represented by those virtues which often accompany the admired player such as courage, endurance, perseverance, self-control, self-reliance, sang-froid, and self-respect (with which the character theory of sport is largely associated). Rather it is concerned with those "moral habits or qualities" which essentially and characteristically have to do with generosity and magnanimity (12: p. 266). Unlike the merely "just" player, the true sportsman adopts a cavalier attitude towards his/her rights as permitted by the code. Instead he prefers to be magnanimous and self-sacrificing if, by such conduct, "he contributes to the fun of the occasion" (12: p. 266). It is important to see in Keating's account of sport that competition is not seen in logical terms of "exclusive possession," by one or the other of the vying parties, but more in terms of a cooperative enterprise, which is seen to be a potentially shared source of pleasure. For Keating then, sportsmanship for the sportsman, is essentially a desirable or efficacious manner or way of acting in sport which is in keeping with the promotion of pleasure and the spirit of play.

From the moral point of view at least three questions arise from Keating's account of sportsmanship. The first question is: can sportsmanship in relation to sport be considered moral if it is seen only as a *means* or as an instrument in the promotion of pleasure? The answer to this question is very closely related to whether or not he is taking a utilitarian stance towards moral issues and he does not make this clear.

The second question is concerned with the sense in which Keating uses the phrase sportsmanship as a "moral category." If he means it in the sense of being "self-contained" then it cannot properly be said to be moral since it is inapplicable to life outside of sport. Similarly, if he wants to regard it as a form of play, as he seems to, then at least at one level of analysis, it is "nonserious" as opposed to "serious" and therefore nonmoral in consequence. If, on the other hand, he is intending that sportsmanship is concerned with the type of actions that fall within the general category of the moral and therefore somehow related to the "business of life," this should have been stated more explicitly. If this is the case, however, the problem remains as to how this interpretation is to be reconciled with the notion of play. One way around this dilemma might be to say that although play is generally regarded as a nonserious affair, this is not to say that players cannot take what they are doing seriously (in the psychological sense) or that serious incidents (e.g., death, injury, or acts of malevolence) cannot occur. To say, in other words, that play as a category is nonserious and therefore nonmoral, is to say that this is the way it is best

understood, but recognizing, at the same time, things occasionally occur that transform it momentarily into something else, which may or may not have moral significance.

The third question is related to the first one. Even if utilitarianism is adopted as a general ethical theory, it is not clear why conduct that is conducive to fun is necessarily more pleasurable and therefore more moral than conduct that is conducive to “honorable victory.” One is tempted to ask here, is it not the case that the best examples of sportsmanship in terms of generosity and “magnanimity” arise out of the pursuit of “honorable victory?” A case which gives some support to this thesis is when Brasher, at the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956, was disqualified from winning the 3000 meters steeplechase for allegedly hindering his opponents. The point here is that it was these same athletes (Larsen, Loufer, and Rosznyi) who protested on Brasher’s behalf and got the decision reversed, thus sacrificing the medals they would otherwise have won.

All in all Keating’s attempt to look at sportsmanship in terms of “athletics” and “sport” by reference to competition, or its relative absence, is not altogether clear or helpful. It does, however, emphasize the importance of the play spirit of sport and the desirable attributes of magnanimity and generosity.

Sportsmanship as a Form of Altruism

It should be apparent by now that the term sportsmanship and its relation to sport and morality is a more complex and subtle one than is commonly supposed. In the social union view of sportsmanship it was suggested that sportsmanship largely has to do with the preservation and exemplification of a valued form of life which puts a premium upon an idealized and amicable way of participating. The pleasure view of sportsmanship sees sportsmanship as being chiefly and characteristically concerned with generous and magnanimous conduct that is conducive to the promotion of fun and pleasure. The view of sportsmanship I shall now present takes a different stance. This view is concerned more with seeing sportsmanship as a form of altruistically motivated conduct that is concerned with the good or welfare of another. Again it should be stressed that I do not see these three views of sportsmanship as mutually exclusive. I see them rather as providing a different focus or perspective on a form of social phenomenon which is essentially both recognizable and understood.

What then, more precisely, is the altruistic view of sportsmanship and how and in what way, if at all, can it be considered as a moral form of conduct? In order to look at the second part of the question first I propose to contrast the Kantian view of morality with what I shall call the altruistic view. For Kant, morality is primarily a matter of reason and rationality. It resides in and is based upon the adoption of principles which are universalizable, impartial, consistent, and obligatory. It emphasizes choice, decision, will, and thoughtful deliberation.¹⁰ Williams, in writing of Kantian tradition points out that:

The moral point of view is specially characterised by its impartiality and its indifference to any particular relations to particular persons and that moral thought requires abstraction from particular circumstances and particular characteristics of the parties, including the agent, except in so far as these can be universal features of any morally similar situation. (24: p. 198)

Williams continues:

The motivations of a moral agent, correspondingly, involve a rational application of impartial principle and are thus different in kind from sorts of motivations that he might have for treating some particular persons differently because he happened to have some particular interest towards them. (24: p. 198)

It will be seen that the Kantian view of morality has a lot in common with the justice theory of sport as well as with those preconditional features of sportsmanship which are to do with fairness. In stressing the universal and impartial, however, the Kantian view seems to overlook or disregard some aspects of interpersonal relations which are as morally important in sport as in other spheres of life. I refer to such virtues as sympathy, compassion, concern, and friendship. What needs to be clarified is that the 'moral point of view', while it is importantly connected with the impartial and obligatory, is by no means totally taken up by them. In speaking of sportsmanship then as a form of altruism, I am particularly concerned to show that sportsmanship in this sense, while obligated to the following of impartial rules which govern play, at the same time gives moral scope to go beyond them. In order to say more about this and at the same time point up the differences between the Kantian view of morality and those aspects of morality and sportsmanship that place greater emphasis upon the importance of personal and particular relationships, I propose to look now at sportsmanship as a form of altruism. At the same time I shall indicate that acts of supererogation are more in keeping with the Kantian view than with the altruistic view.

Altruism is perhaps best understood as having to do with those forms of action and conduct that are not done merely because of what is fair and just in terms of playing and keeping to the rules but because there is a genuine concern for an interest in and concern for one's fellow competitors, whether on the same side or in opposition. At first sight it may seem as if sportsmanship in this altruistic sense has to do with supererogatory acts in that they go beyond duty or what the rules expect. In common with other forms of supererogatory acts, these acts in sport are to do as Hare (10: p. 198) puts it with those acts which are "praiseworthy but not obligatory." Stated another way, to say that an act in sport is supererogatory is to say two things about it. First, the sportsman is not morally (or by role) obliged to perform it. He is, in other words permitted not to perform it. Second, the action is morally praiseworthy; it would be commendable if it were performed. Urmson, in speaking of the need to make room for the moral actions which lie outside the realm of obligation, could well be speaking of the kinds of situation with which the sportsman is confronted. He argues that there is a large range of actions whose moral status is insufficiently expressible in terms of the traditional classification of actions into morally impermissible, morally neutral, and morally obligatory and that it is necessary to allow "for a range of actions which are of moral value and which an agent may feel called upon to perform, but which cannot be demanded and whose omission cannot be called wrongdoing." (23: p. 208)

There seem to be at least two ways in sport in which an act can go beyond duty (or demands of fair play). The first way is by acting out of concern for the other or at some risk, cost, or sacrifice to oneself. An example here might be the marathon runner who, at the cost of victory, stops to help a fellow runner in a state of distress. The second way is by acting on behalf of another so that more good is brought about than if one had merely acted out of duty or in accordance with the rules. An actual

case is provided by Meta Antenan, who although leading in a long jump competition against her great German rival, asked of the presiding jury that her opponent have a longer rest period than is provided by the rules, because of her having just taken part in another event (6: p. 8).¹¹

Such examples of sportsmanship, it might be thought, are both supererogatory and altruistic in that they go beyond what is required by duty or a proper observance of the rules, but it should be pointed out that although acts of supererogation and altruism have certain things in common—namely that they have moral value and that they are not morally obligatory—they also have certain important differences which prevent one being assimilated to the other. Whereas supererogatory acts tend to stem from a traditional framework dominated by the notions of duty and obligation, and by some writers (9: Chapter 4) are even spoken of as “doing more than duty requires” in a sacrificial or ennobling sort of way, altruistic acts are prompted by various forms of altruistic emotion. Whereas “supererogatory” sportsmen may be prompted into acts which, to them, have the force of duty, but they would not recognize as being encumbent on others, “altruistic” sportsmen may be prompted into acts by the emotions of concern and care.¹²

In referring to the two examples of the “going beyond duty” forms of sportsmanship cited above, it will be seen that either or both could be considered “supererogatory” or “altruistic.” The correct interpretation would depend upon the considerations or states which prompted them. Moral actions in sport, like other actions, cannot be properly understood only by reference to their external form.

It will be seen then that supererogatory or altruistic forms of sportsmanship are essentially different from those forms which are to do with a conventional set of values to do with preservation of amicability and group harmony or with the successful pursuit of pleasure.

What characterizes altruistic forms of sportsmanship particularly is that sympathy, compassion, and concern are directed towards the other in virtue of his or her suffering, travail, misery, or pain. The altruistic sportsman not only thinks about and is affected by the plight of the other, but acts in such a way that is directed to bring help or comfort in some way. Altruistic acts of sportsmanship stem from a desire for the other’s good. This sometimes leads to impulsive or spontaneous forms of conduct that arise from the sporting contest as when, for example, Karpati, the Hungarian fencer, reached out and tried to console a defeated and disappointed opponent. Such acts, it will be seen, are not motivated by such Kantian virtues as obligation and duty so much as by a perceptive and human response to another’s plight. On the rationalistic Kantian view such acts based on altruistic emotions would be considered unreliable as moral motives because they are too transitory, changeable, maybe emotionally charged, and not sufficiently detached, impartial, and consistent. Yet the question arises are they less moral on account of this? Blum (5: p. 93), who has addressed himself to this very problem argues, for instance, “that the domain in which morally good action takes the form of universalizable principles of obligation does not exhaust the areas of morally good action.” He argues further that there are different kinds of virtues. Some are articulated by the Kantian view such as justice, impartiality, conscientiousness and so on while others, such as kindness, concern, and compassion are articulated better by the altruistic view.

Whereas the Kantian view is predominantly concerned with what is right and what is just for all, the altruistic view is more concerned with the good of the other, even if this sometimes means acting particularly and personally rather than objec-

tively and impartially and/or in a strict accordance with what the rules decree. All in all, the altruistic view of sportsmanship, in contrast to the social union view or the pursuit of pleasure view, arises not from a concern for the preservation of a valued and particular form of interpersonal life or the promotion of pleasure as an ethic, but rather from a particular and genuine concern for another's welfare. When acts in sport go beyond that which is expected of players generally and are done only out of concern for another's good and for no other reason, they are not only altruistic, but exemplify the best traditions of sportsmanship.

Notes

1. J.W. Keating's article (12: pp. 264-271) first appeared in *Ethics*, 75 (1964), pp. 25-35.
2. For an interesting article along these lines see Keenan (14: pp. 115-119).
3. This conception of the way sport can (or should) be conducted is not out of keeping with what some writers have referred to as the "radical ethic" which recognizes that "the excellence of the outcome as important, but holds equally important the way that excellence is achieved." See Scott (20: pp. 75-77). It also holds that "the winning of the game is subservient to the playing of the game" in which such qualities as "corporate loyalty and respect for others" are encouraged. All in all "The game is viewed as a framework within which various aims may be realized, qualities fostered, needs met, and values upheld." See Kew (15: pp. 104-107).
4. Two points can be made about this incident. The first is that Wilander, on being asked about why he had challenged the umpire's decision, replied that he could not accept a win "like that" by which he was taken to mean not only unfairly but in a way which would have brought dishonor to himself, and discredit from his opponent, who also thought his drive was in, as well as his from fellow circuit players.
5. See Gallie (8: pp. 167-198) who argued that competition is a normative concept and as such is open to being contested since the evaluative frameworks surrounding it (e.g., a 'Lombardian ethic', where winning is everything, as opposed to the 'radical ethic', referred to in Note 3 above) are sometimes irreconcilable.
6. Fraleigh (7: pp. 74-82) has touched upon some of the complexities of this issue.
7. Bailey (2: pp. 40-50) argues that since competitive games are concerned with winning, especially when they are made compulsory, they are not only morally questionable but morally undesirable in that those behaviors and attitudes that are conducive to the defeat of the other side and all that this implies for both the winner and loser.
8. Arnold (1: pp. 126-130) attempts to refute Bailey's view of competition and point out the difference between 'trying to win' when competing and the attitude and outcome of 'winning at all costs'. He also points out the intrinsic values of competitive games.
9. For an explication of play seen in this way see Huizinga (11: p. 32), Lucas (16: p. 11) and Schmitz (22: pp. 22-29) among others.
10. Consult Beck (3) for a good statement of the Kantian position.
11. As a result she lost the competition by one centimeter.
12. Lyons (17: pp. 125-145), in keeping with the points I am making, speaks about a "morality of response and care." This she contrasts with a "morality of justice," which stems more from the Kantian tradition, grounded in obligations and duty.

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