

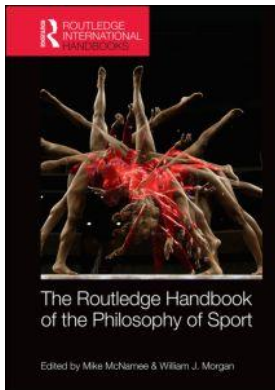
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## 2

# INTERNALISM AND SPORT

*Robert L. Simon*

Internalism is a theoretical approach to understanding and assessing sport that provides a framework for examining questions such as the following: Is athletic competition morally defensible or does it by its very nature overemphasize winning and denigrate those who don't win as losers? How should we understand sportsmanship and what does it require? What is fair play? How should coaches distribute playing time among their team members? More broadly, what if anything accounts for the interest and passion shown by participants in and spectators of sport around the world? Do the features that account for fascination with sport morally legitimize it or is sport, especially elite competitive athletics, a practice that perniciously distracts us from the issues of the day and instills an unethical win-at-all cost attitude that carries over in all aspects of our culture?

Theorists of sport have developed philosophical frameworks to provide intellectually defensible responses to these and many other conceptual, explanatory, and ethical questions about sport. These frameworks for inquiry may be called theories of sport.<sup>1</sup> These theories can be assessed by how well they meet at least the following criteria: Do they provide a characterization of sport that distinguishes it from other practices, do they offer an explanation or account of what so many people find attractive or fascinating about sport, and do they provide resources for the moral and aesthetic evaluation of sporting practices? Internalism, the subject of this chapter, is one approach or strategy for developing a theory of sport.

### **The internalism–externalism distinction**

In understanding a social practice, we might on one hand try to place it in a social context, for example by examining the function or role it plays in a broader social setting. Thus, we might explain what goes on in college classrooms, such as discussion, writing papers, and taking examinations, in terms of the role grading plays in sorting students so they can be assessed for employment or admission to selective graduate programs. On the other hand, we can look at values that might be embedded in the practice itself. For example, an internal assessment of the ethics of discussion within college classrooms might find not only that students are to be treated with the respect due them as persons (the broad Kantian ethical principle of not treating others as mere means) but also that the manner in which they are respected requires that all parties encourage open discussion, that the professor normally has the right to select texts and direct

participation in the classroom, and that following the argument where it leads may sometimes make some students uncomfortable, as when they are confronted with philosophical arguments that conflict with their previously unexamined religious beliefs. These latter considerations, while they need not conflict with broad ethical principles, such as the abstract Kantian formula, are presupposed by a paradigm or interpretation of the internal values that normally should govern college classrooms.

With this distinction in mind, is the best way to understand and assess sport and sporting practice to place it in a broader social context or to attend to its internal features? The first approach, often called “externalism,” is the view that sport is best understood and assessed in terms of the social role it plays, the social function it serves, or its place in a broad sociocultural context. Perhaps the best example of an externalist approach is functionalism; the idea that sport is best looked at *as* fulfilling some social need or goal. For example, sport may be identified and assessed according to whether it produces social cohesion among some group, such as fans, residents of an area, or even at a national or global level.

“Internalism” can be defined minimally as asserting that some internal features of sport are necessary to understanding and evaluating it or more strongly as maintaining that it is the internal features of sport alone that are fundamental for conceptual, explanatory, and justificatory purposes. On this account, minimalist versions of internalism may be compatible with some weak or modest forms of externalism since all it asserts is that any satisfactory theory will have to consider some internal features of sport. Stronger forms of internalism, however, may be less easy or impossible to reconcile with externalist approaches.

Moreover, the externalism–internalism distinction itself may be problematic, not only because some combinations of each approach may be compatible but also because of lack of clarity about what constitutes an “internal” feature of sport and what is “external.” For example, is the pursuit of new records in swimming and track and field inherent to the presumably internal ideal of athletic competition as the pursuit of excellence, or is identifying breaking records as opposed to say simply doing one’s best, a goal fostered by some social and historical contexts but not others?

Nevertheless, even if the internal–external distinction is not always sharp, it may nevertheless be useful. It not only suggests differing strategies for theorizing about sport and athletic competition but also, at least where strong internalism is concerned, a way of taking sport seriously as an important practice in its own right, independent of its social roles.

Functionalism, which, as we noted above, is a form of externalism, seems particularly deficient on this point. Even if sport does serve the social goals of promoting social unity, promoting health by combating obesity, or discharging aggression harmlessly, or some other social function, this approach tells us nothing about why sport in particular serves this goal rather than some other practice. Still less does it tell us whether fulfilling the function is morally valuable (or even morally required), let alone whether sport is the morally best way (or even a morally defensible way) of doing it. Finally, it also provides little if any basis for resolving ethical issues that may arise within athletic competition, such as how much importance to assign to winning, whether doping should be permitted or prohibited, what counts as fair play, and many others.<sup>2</sup>

Internalists, then, believe that attending to what William J. Morgan has called “the gratuitous logic of sport,” its internal characteristics, values, and principles, not only sheds the most light on sport but best provides the resources for assessing it morally as well (Morgan, 1994, especially Chapter 5).

### Internalism: formalist approaches

An important form of internalism suggests that sports are best understood in terms of their formal structures, which consist primarily of the constitutive rules of various sports. Much as a developed legal system can be viewed as a system of different kinds of rules, sports also can be understood along such lines. For example, baseball, soccer and basketball can be distinguished from one another because the rules of each are so different.

But not all rules are of the same logical type. Thus, in law, we can distinguish what H. L. A. Hart called primary rules, such as the legal rules for making wills, or buying a house, or designating certain acts as crimes from secondary rules, such as rules for identifying and changing the primary ones. Different kinds of rules can be found in sports as well (Hart, 1997).

In his fascinating analysis of the nature of games, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Bernard Suits (2005) emphasized the importance of constitutive rules. Constitutive rules are those that define what counts as permissible moves within a game and what counts as winning. Thus, in American football, they transform pursuit of an easily obtainable pre-lusory goal, such as carrying a ball of a certain shape over a line drawn in the ground, to a lusory goal of scoring more touchdowns than the opposition. The lusory goal can be achieved only within the framework of existing rules; in this view, (American) football would not exist without the constitutive rules that define it. These rules create the conditions under which achieving an otherwise unchallenging state of affairs – carrying the ball over the line – becomes a challenge that can test our mettle. Indeed, Suits' informal definition of games is that they are “voluntary attempts to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits, 2005: 55).

Formalism is a theory of sport (or, better, a family of related theories) that draws on Suits' analysis. As I consider it here, however, its main point is that, just as the legal system, as suggested by Hart, may be seen to be characterized by its formal structure of rules, so too sports may be characterized and distinguished from one another by their formal structures of constitutive rules as well. Of course, sports also contain others sorts of rules, such as regulative rules which may recommend good strategies for winning, but it is the constitutive rules that define the sport.

Formalism is an internalist theory because it identifies sport by the internal features of its formal structure rather than by any social or psychological function it serves. Formalism also at least suggests a normative framework for ethical assessment in sport; namely, respect for the rules and fair play understood as the prohibition of cheating.

Formalism does shed important light on the nature of sports, and games generally, through its emphasis on constitutive rules. Fans of the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*<sup>3</sup> will remember the fictional game called “Calvinball” in which the players make up the rules as they go along. Of course, “Calvinball” is not a game, since anything can count as a move within the activity as players make up new and more complicated “rules” as the game goes along.

Player A: You lose because your car has more than 15,000 miles on its mileage meter.

Player B: But that rule doesn't apply in this universe, only elsewhere in the multiverse.

Player A: Except that clause is negated when stated in North America.

Formalists, as “Calvinball” illustrates, are quite right to assert that without the formal structure of constitutive rules, we would not have sports in the first place.

I have argued elsewhere, however, that formalism is deficient on at least two fundamental grounds. Most important, the resources it provides for the moral assessment of behavior in sport seem far too limited (Simon, 2010: 3–8). Although respect for the rules and the prohibition of

cheating are important moral guidelines, many significant moral issues that arise in sporting contexts require a broader moral perspective than that provided by the model of rules. For example, consider such issues as whether a proposed rule change is an improvement to the game, how playing time should be distributed among players on a team, whether opponents always have an obligation to play their best against opponents, whether the winning team should seek to correct a crucial but egregiously bad call by an official in its favor and whether trash talking is an acceptable practice at different levels of athletic competition. Dealing with these and many other complex issues that arise in sport requires richer resources for moral inquiry than provided by narrow forms of formalism.

A second line of criticism has been advanced by theorists who are often called conventionalists. They argue that, in addition to rules, sports involve the application of social conventions (which may differ among different social, historical or cultural contexts). Since all actual games involve some form of rule breaking – a soccer game does not cease to be a soccer game if a player, without being detected by officials intentionally uses her hands to guide the ball in violation of the rules – we also need to understand the social conventions or “ethos of the game” to understand sport (D’Agostino, 1981).

Is conventionalism an internalist or externalist theory? I suggest that it depends: if sports in a particular socio-historical context turns out simply to mirror values imported from elsewhere, then conventionalism in that context is externalist. On the other hand, if the conventions arise from within the sporting community (itself a notion without clear boundaries) and reflect internal features of sport, it may be internalist. For example, if the broader society practices strict racial segregation but the sporting community allows participation and evaluates players solely on their merits, its conventions may be internalist, especially if it views sport as essentially a meritocratic enterprise where players should be judged on their athletic skills alone.

Be that as it may, conventionalism of the kind I have described so far is open to the same objection made against narrow versions of formalism; namely, it lacks adequate resources for the moral evaluation of sport. Surely conventions are not morally acceptable just because they are followed or exist in a given context. Thus, if diving became the norm in soccer, that would not necessarily make the game of soccer better, let alone make the practice of diving morally acceptable.<sup>4</sup> In other words, unless modified, conventionalism lacks the resources for the critical evaluation of sport; it runs the risk of confusing what is (what conventions are followed at any given time) with what ought to be.

Later in the chapter, we examine a more sophisticated form of conventionalism that claims to overcome this difficulty. But first, we need to explore an internalist theory that arguably overcomes the weaknesses of narrow forms of formalism.

### **Broad internalism: an interpretive account**

In his now-classic contribution to jurisprudence, *The Concept of Law*, Hart (1997) offered a characterization of law that can be thought of as a relatively complex version of formalism. In his view, sophisticated systems of law can best be thought of as the union of primary and secondary rules. Primary rules include the prohibitions of criminal law but, as Hart pointed out, also include enabling rules, such as rules for how to enter into a contract, make a will, or marry. Secondary rules (which may be thought of as meta-rules), include rules for changing the primary rules, rules for adjudicating disputes about their meaning, scope and application, and a rule of recognition (perhaps the United States Constitution is such a rule) for identifying the other rules of the system.

This influential approach to the characterization of law was challenged by Ronald Dworkin (1977) who pointed out that, in complex cases, which he called “hard cases,” judges not only do rely on more than the rules but also should do so as well. Dworkin was not suggesting that judges be permitted to simply apply their own moral or political views to the law, as the following example of his illustrates. In an early New York State case, *Riggs v. Palmer*, a grandfather makes a legitimate will leaving his estate to the grandson. Apparently lacking patience, the grandson hurries things along and murders his grandfather. The issue at stake is whether the grandson, although charged for murder, nevertheless should get his inheritance. In considering the case, the New York court looked at a variety of factors. For one thing, under the law, the will was valid (i.e. it was properly drawn), was signed by the required number of witnesses, and so forth. Yet the majority of the court overturned the will, citing the legal principle, sometimes applied in other areas of criminal law, that a wrongdoer should not profit from his own wrongdoing. Dworkin argues then that the law consists of *principles* as well as *rules* (I discuss this distinction more fully below). Legal principles on Dworkin’s account are not the personal moral values of the judge but are presupposed by or embedded in the best overall interpretation of the areas of law relevant to the case at hand.

In an influential paper that explicitly acknowledges Dworkin’s influence, J. S. Russell (1999) cites several examples from the history of baseball that raise questions about formalism, or the model of rules, that are similar to those raised by *Riggs v. Palmer*. One case involves an 1897 Major League baseball game between Louisville and Brooklyn. A Louisville player, Reddy Mack, crossed home plate to score and then apparently reasoned that the rule restricting interference with fielder as worded at the time implied that he was no longer a base-runner since he already had scored. Mack then held the opposing catcher down while his own teammate also scored. Should this act have been allowed, assuming (as was the case) it was not explicitly prohibited under the rules?

Russell (1999) argues that the umpire of the game, Wesley Curry, was correct in calling the runner out for interference. If Mack’s play had been allowed to stand, Russell points out, the game of baseball would have been radically changed. Wrestling fielders to the ground would become a skill valued in the sport. The beauty of great plays by fielders might be negated. Conversations such as the following would become intelligible and pertinent.

A: Jones is a better hitter and fielder than Smith so he clearly is the better player.

B: Ah, but Smith is much better at knocking catchers and other fielders down after he has crossed home plate.

Russell suggests that Curry’s decision to call interference was justified, not by an explicit rule, but by a governing principle. The principle, which Russell calls the internal principle of sport, states that “rules should be interpreted in such a manner that the excellences embodied in achieving the lusory goal of the game are not undermined but are maintained and fostered” (Russell, 1999: 15). Since allowing Reddy Mack’s tactic would undermine the lusory goal of determining which team is best at exhibiting the fundamental skills of baseball, such as hitting, fielding, throwing and base-running, Curry was justified in disallowing it.

What distinguishes Dworkinian principles from rules? On Dworkin’s account, rules such as the “three strikes and you are out” in baseball are applied in an “all or nothing” manner while principles can conflict and often must be weighed against one another as well as against other relevant factors, as in *Riggs v. Palmer* (Dworkin, 1977: 101–5). More important, principles must be supported by their role in a coherent theory of the sport (or the law) that best applies to the case in hand and views the sport (area of law) in its best light (Dworkin, 1977; Russell, 1999:14; Simon, 2013: 52–4).

That is, according to broad internalism, we can support many ethical judgments in sport by appealing to an overall theory or account that satisfies the criteria of “fit” and “normativity”. The theory satisfies the criterion of fit if it explains the salient features of a sport (or possibly competition in sports more generally); for example, by explaining which skills are fundamental to the sport, offering a coherent account of the challenge the sport is best construed as testing, or in other words, explaining the point of the constitutive rules of the sport. Although the exact meaning of “fit” in this context is debatable, fitting together the various elements of the practice being interpreted into a coherent and mutually reinforcing whole seems central. The second criterion of normativity is satisfied when the theory presents the sport (or athletic competition more generally) in its morally, and, as Cesar Torres (2012: 299–320) has reminded us, in its aesthetically best light.

Two examples may illustrate the application of this interpretative approach to understanding and evaluating sports.<sup>5</sup> One is Cesar Torres’s distinction between the primary and restorative skills of a sport. The former are the fundamental skills the sport is best understood as testing while the latter skills are employed when the rules are violated and the game needs to be restored to its proper track, for example by compensating the offended competitor or team. Shooting from the field during the course of play is a primary skill of basketball while foul shooting is a restorative one.

This distinction seems to fit not only our intuitions about basketball but also the priority we give when evaluating players to such skills as dribbling, passing, and shooting from the field as opposed to foul shooting.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the priority given to primary skills implies that excessive fouling (such as strategically fouling to stop the clock) not only harms the game aesthetically by interrupting its flow but also makes the game worse by elevating a mere restorative skill to overriding importance down the stretch of a close or hotly contested game. While the latter implication surely is controversial, it does illustrate how an interpretation of a sport can have implications for practice.

A number of proponents of broad internalism have defended a specific interpretation, applying broadly to athletic competition across sports, that such competition should be understood as what I have called a mutual quest for excellence (Simon, 2010: 24–8; see also Boxill, 2003: 1–12). While critics of athletic competition have accused competitive sport of promoting selfishness (or a kind of team oriented nationalism – “My team right or wrong!”), a disregard for the humanity of opponents, and a tremendous overemphasis on winning as the sole criterion of success, I maintain that the model of sport as a mutual quest for excellence (sometimes called mutualism) offers an important response to such a critique.

According to the mutualist model, athletic contests are seen in their best ethical (and perhaps aesthetic) light when conceived of as the result of a voluntary (if sometimes unspoken) agreement by the competitors to test one another in the contest. Opponents of this model are not enemies or obstacles but facilitators engaged in a mutually beneficial activity, the test or contest, through which they challenge one another while striving for excellence. This activity is viewed both as valuable in itself – the testing of oneself through meeting challenges in sport can be viewed as a good for human beings, or a significant component of human flourishing, since it requires us to employ our higher-order physical and mental capacities. I also argue that athletic competition is educational, since we learn about ourselves and others through striving for achievement and competitive success (Simon, 2008).

The mutualist model arguably meets the test-of-fit criterion since it explains key features of athletic competition, such as why the rules (as Suits pointed out) create obstacles to what otherwise might be done quite easily and why sports fascinate so many, participants and spectators alike.<sup>7</sup> It also meets the criterion of “normativity” since the mutual quest for excellence

normally is voluntary or uncoerced, does not require reducing opponents to mere objects or enemies but regards them as partners in a partially cooperative endeavor, and does not overemphasize winning. Winning, on my own view, is normally a sign of athletic success but not always. For example, is an athletically superior team that barely wins in spite of sloppy play over a vastly inferior opponent really successful?<sup>8</sup>

The argument in this section maintains that first, the broad internalist approach provides the kind of reasoning that should be used to develop an explanatory and justificatory model of competition in sports and, second, that mutualism (the mutual quest for excellence) is the model best supported by the broad internalist approach. Of course, whether this overall internalist approach is successful is debatable. While that issue is rightly subject to future inquiry and discussion, we can consider two important criticisms of it in the final sections of this paper.

### First criticism: The relativity of ideals

Suppose we accept a broad internalist approach to understanding and assessing normative issues that arise in sport. Does a broad internalist approach lead to one account of sport that is most defensible, several that are about equally defensible, or does it lead to a kind of relativism of sport in which a multitude of theories of sport compete for our allegiance with none being more justifiable than any other? Let us call the first outcome “monism,” the second “pluralism,” and the last relativism. To put the question another way, is the ideal of the mutual quest for excellence (mutualism) a favored account or must it contend with rivals that would be equally reasonable to adopt?

John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice* (1971: 50), raises a similar question concerning reflective equilibrium (an ideal balance in which our principles and our considered reaction to cases are in harmony) when he asks “does a reflective equilibrium (in the sense of a philosophical ideal) exist? If so, is it unique? Even if it is unique, can it be reached?”

Rawls was undoubtedly correct in indicating that such fundamental issues will continue to be the subject of further inquiry for the foreseeable future. In the passage quoted above, he also expresses doubt about whether we can answer such questions definitively at present. However, while debates about the justifiability of the mutualist approach and whether it is the most defensible interpretation of competitive sports surely will continue, several considerations suggest that currently it is the most warranted approach to the philosophical understanding and evaluation of sport.

First, it is plausible to conclude, along lines argued recently by Ronald Dworkin (2011: 23–98), that relativism is not in any privileged position. That is, the claim that no philosophical theory of sport is more defensible than any other is itself a first order assertion to the effect that the available evidence for all approaches is equal in force, either equally, strong, weak or even entirely absent. But that itself is a claim that requires justification that may be quite difficult for the relativist to provide. At the very least, such a claim is far from self-evident.

On the contrary, if we are to take a broad internalist approach, some version of mutualism has a claim to be the best existing internalist account and so needs to be taken seriously. First of all, it fits with central features of sport, explaining the value of artificial challenges created by the constitutive rules. These create challenges that we may value both for their own sakes, as meeting such challenges can be seen as an intrinsically valuable activity grounded in an ideal of human flourishing, and which, when carried out properly, may help participants and spectators to develop important character traits and learn about themselves and others. Because participation normally is voluntary, and because contests are unscripted narratives, sports provide a perhaps not unique but very public “moral laboratory” in which the nature and role



of concepts such as fairness, sportspersonship, and respect for persons can be illustrated, expressed and debated. Finally, the drama of trying to overcome what Suits (2005) called “unnecessary obstacles” may also explain the attractiveness of athletic competition not only to participants but to spectators as well.

Similarly, a broad internalist approach, with its emphasis on principles as well as rules, provides resources for moral analysis of such hard cases as Reddy Mack’s use of the fielder-interference rule of his time. While broad internalist approaches are open to the charge that they allow sports philosophers to spin abstract theories at will without evidence that the theories are actually well grounded, this itself is a claim about the nature of justification in philosophy of sport that also faces critical scrutiny that broad internalists claim has decisive force. That is, as we have seen, broad internalists claim to have improved upon both narrow versions of formalism and conventionalism, and have supported the ideal of the mutual quest for excellence by defending it as the model of competitive sport that both fits the main features of the practice and presents it in its best light.

### **Morgan’s deep conventionalism: A critical contextualism**

In a series of articles, William J. Morgan (2012, 2013) has argued for three theses. First, he maintains that many broad internalists such as myself have construed conventionalism too narrowly (or unsympathetically). Second, he argues that conventionalism properly construed can have critical force against prevailing conventional accounts of sport. Third, his “deep conventionalism” implies that different theories may be the best interpretation of sport in different social and historical contexts and so the search for a universal theory that is justifiable to all reasonable people is fruitless.

Our earlier discussion suggested that conventionalism lacked the resources to allow for a moral critique of sport. Conventions might be morally acceptable but they need not be. In addition, externalist versions of conventionalism, which suggest the conventional ethos of the game merely mirrors broader social conventions dominant in the culture generally, seemed to give the broader culture a free moral pass by exempting it from critical scrutiny. On the contrary, if moral critique is possible at all, existing conventions should not be simply accepted as given to us but should be subject to searching moral examination.

Morgan, however, maintains that this objection to conventionalism fails to distinguish between surface (or coordinating) conventions and what he calls deep conventions (Morgan, 2012: 70–9). The former might include some commonly accepted prescriptions as “Losing teams in basketball games may intentionally foul opponents so as to stop the clock and force the opponents to make free throws to hold their lead.” As a number of writers have argued, this surface convention is not shown to be acceptable or justifiable just because it is accepted.

Perhaps Morgan’s key contribution to an internalist defense of conventionalism is his argument that, in addition to surface conventions, such as the convention of basketball specified above, there also are deep conventions that do have critical force. These conventions express the underlying theory of sport that critical reflection finds to make the best sense of existing social practices.

According to Morgan, however, these social practices differ according to the historical social context in which they are embedded. Thus, strategic fouling in basketball *may* be morally acceptable in a deep reconstruction of the semi-professional ethic dominating much of contemporary American sport, but may be considered totally unethical in sporting contexts dominated by the ethic of gentlemanly generosity towards opponents prevalent in upper-class nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England (Morgan, 2013: 66–73).

Note that Morgan's approach is quite compatible with, and may even presuppose, broad internalism, in that it requires us to find the best overall interpretation of sporting practices within given sociocultural contexts. The dispute between Morgan and such writers as Russell, Nicholas Dixon and myself, if this account of Morgan's view is accurate, is not between internalism and externalism, or between broad internalism and non-interpretive approaches, but is over whether interpretations can justifiably be claimed to transcend particular contexts and at least make a claim to universal assent. Indeed, in Morgan's view, different deep conventional paradigms of sport are incommensurable and so reasoned dialogue between their supporters is bound to fail (Morgan, 2013: 70–1).

Morgan's deep conventionalism is an important variant of broad internalism and as such will continue to be the subject of further inquiry and discussion. I have suggested several criticisms of it elsewhere but after briefly summarizing two of them, I pursue the second in greater depth in what follows.<sup>9</sup>

First, Morgan's deep conventions seem to have many of the characteristics of the principles appealed to by broad internalism as discussed so far. They are not rules, often need to be weighed against one another when they conflict, and are derived from a broad interpretation of the practice under consideration. Second, principles are not ahistorical in origin or transcendent in any pejorative sense, but always are defended within a given historical context and so are always open to further refinement or even refutation (fallibilism).

What I want to question here, however, is the incommensurability thesis and the subsequent charge of transcendentalism that Morgan makes against his philosophical opponents. Morgan acknowledges "that the argumentative process of giving and asking for reasons presupposes that everyone so engaged is on the same page as to what qualifies as a reason" but cautions that "aiming for such universality in our rational judgments about sports, or anything else for that matter, is wishful thinking at best" (Morgan, 2013: 70).

As noted above, however, there is no reason to regard such skepticism about even the possibility of achieving universality as the default position. Whether or not it turns out to be acceptable depends on whether the arguments for it are stronger than those for other views.

Morgan, however, has provided an argument for his view that certainly deserves our consideration. I believe it goes something like this: different culturally embedded paradigms of sport embody different accounts of what counts as a reason. But since critical inquiry or discussion involves a common set of standards, norms or reasons to even get off the ground (see the quotation from Morgan above), critical inquiry or discussion designed to reconcile competing paradigms can never even get started. The common framework presupposed by inquiry is absent. How might the proponents of universalistic versions of broad internalism respond?

First, following a line of argument famously advanced by Donald Davidson, they can maintain that there can be no conception of sport radically different from our own since, if the difference was sufficiently radical, it would not be a conception of sport to begin with (Davidson, 1974).

Be that as it may, this point alone is insufficient to establish the possibility of universalism since it may be that while different paradigms have common elements or share family resemblances, different values may be weighted differently in different cultural and historical contexts. Consider the following quotation, cited by Morgan, from the novel *Chariots of Fire* (Weatherby, 1982), where the runner Harold Abrahams responds to the Cambridge dons who criticize him for his professional, and thus ungentlemanly, attitude that involved hiring a coach, that violated the dominant amateur paradigm of sportsmanship.

You know, gentleman, you yearn for victory just as I do. But achieved with the apparent ease of gods. Yours are the archaic values of the prep school playground ... I believe in the relentless pursuit of excellence – and I'll carry the future with me."

(Weatherby, 1982: 91–2, quoted by Morgan, 2013: 263)

On what I take to be Morgan's view, the dons and Abrahams, while their conceptions of sport are intelligible to one another, weigh values differently, with Abrahams giving much more weight to excellence and victory than do his critics. But this hardly shows that the argument cannot be resolved or even that there is no best resolution capable of attracting the allegiance of all reasonable discussants. Thus, parties to both sides of the debate, if they are broad internalists, need to offer an interpretation of sport that does justice to its main features and presents them in what is arguably their normatively best light.

Morgan might object that there is no common conception of sport shared by both sides. That point is doubtful, since both sides view sport as a rule governed activity creating obstacles that exist to challenge the competitors and both sides presumably view the attempt to meet those challenges as valuable.<sup>10</sup> But even if Morgan's point is correct and there is no identical conception of sport shared by all, the Davidsonian argument implies there will be at least some commonalities that will enable proponents to at least understand each other's perspective. After all, it cannot be the case that the "gentlemanly amateur" view defended by the dons is unintelligible to us, since it is characterized all too well in *Chariots of Fire*, and gives the work its bite, as well as by Morgan himself. Given that, it is plausible to think that the different parties will at least appreciate or understand the points made by the other side. That suggests that given a common framework for discussion, the emergence of a hybrid view more acceptable to all parties than their starting point surely cannot be ruled out.

In fact, the ethics of elite golf competitions can be reconstructed as just such a hybrid. Competition at the better amateur and professional levels in golf certainly involves such "professional" aspects as coaching, hard training, a quest for excellence, and an intense desire to win. At the same time, golf etiquette (expressed in the formal rule book) requires courtesy towards opponents and respect for the excellences they exhibit. Indeed, generosity towards opponents is part of golfing lore. For example, in one of the most famous acts of sportsmanship in modern sport, Jack Nicklaus, in the hotly contested 1969 Ryder Cup, conceded a very short but tricky putt to Tony Jacklin on the last hole of the last day, allowing the British team to tie the Americans. If Jacklin, one of the greatest golfers of his time, had missed, it not only would have forever tarnished his stature as a player but might have negatively affected his play from then on.<sup>11</sup> While such examples are perhaps rare, when compared with the world depicted in *Chariots of Fire*, they occur at various levels of sport, and not just in golf, and at least suggest that sport cannot neatly be divided into isolated paradigms immune from examination from any external viewpoints.

A number of philosophers of sport have also suggested approaches to competition which might represent a hybrid blend of tempered competitiveness that reasonable advocates who start from differing paradigms might well agree on. To take two recent examples. John Russell has argued that coaches, at least at certain levels of sport and in some contexts, have a duty to correct the competitive injustice of bad calls by officials that provide their own teams with unfair benefits (Russell, 2013: 103–19). His argument appeals to values that have a rational pull not only on those closer to the nineteenth-century gentlemanly model discussed by Morgan but also on contemporary athletes, coaches, and spectators, who believe that outcomes should reflect the skills of their contestants and their abilities to meet the challenges of the sport (Russell, 2013). On the other hand, Scott Kretchmar has reminded us that winning involves

special skills, “knowing how to win,” and that mutualists who regard winning as only one criterion of athletic success among many may give it much too short shrift (Kretchmar, 2012). Indeed, as Russell concedes, athletic contests at higher levels may, in addition to being a mutual quest for excellence, also reflect controlled ritualized rivalry as well.

Whether these values can be brought into a harmonized theoretical framework, a kind of Rawlsian reflective equilibrium, of course, remains debatable. Deep conventionalists may respond that debates take place within a specific sociohistorical context and community (twentieth- and twenty-first century Anglo-American philosophy) with its own criteria of what counts as reasonable. However, my examples above at least suggest that skepticism about achieving a reasonable universal consensus is itself open to very serious challenges. Even more, the examples suggest that current debates in the philosophy of sport do not represent a professional paradigm incommensurate with earlier ideals of sport but, at their very best, contain hybrid elements that make dialogue among proponents of different viewpoints not only possible but fruitful as well.

## Conclusion

Be that as it may, internalism remains a fruitful approach to the understanding and assessment of practices in sport, including athletic competition at various levels of skill. After all, as noted above, deep conventionalism is a form of internalism. Both deep conventionalists and broad internalists such as Nicholas Dixon, John Russell, and me, who are sympathetic to universalism and moral realism, take what Morgan has called “the gratuitous logic” of sport seriously and regard the internal features of sport as both morally and explanatory salient. Thus, while broad internalism (interpretivism) will continue to be discussed and refined in the theoretical literature, it provides an approach to the understanding and evaluation of sport that is not only theoretically plausible but also, through its account of mutualism, has great potential to significantly affect practice as well.

## Notes

- 1 I discuss the role of theories of sport more fully in “Theories of Sport” in Cesar Torres (ed.) *A Companion to the Philosophy of Sport*, (Bloomsbury Press, 2014).
- 2 Functionalists presumably would respond by saying such disputes should be resolved instrumentally by selecting the response that best achieves the function of sport, e.g. promoting social cohesion. But this begs two crucial questions: whether the alleged function itself is morally acceptable and whether other values besides or instead of instrumental ones need to be considered.
- 3 *Calvin and Hobbes*, by Bill Watterson, was published between 1985 and 1995. See [www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes](http://www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes) (accessed 4 October 2014).
- 4 Diving is the practice in soccer of faking an injury to stop play, with the intent of depriving the opponent of a tactical advantage gained through skillful play.
- 5 Broad internalism often is appropriately called interpretivism since, like Dworkin’s approach to law, it requires us to try to formulate and defend an interpretation – say an interpretation of the fielder-interference rule in Russell’s example.
- 6 However, the distinction does face a number of criticisms. For example, killing a penalty in ice hockey might be a restorative skill but is a highly complex activity that is fundamental to the game. Also, as Mike McNamee has pointed out to me, primary skills seem identified by their importance in the sport at issue, while restorative skills are identified by their function, which suggests different kinds of distinctions are being blurred together.
- 7 Presumably, the participants relish the process of learning to or trying to meet challenges, and spectators appreciate not only the skills and virtues exhibited in such a pursuit, but also the drama or twists and turns of the story of each contest, even each season or longer, as the sporting narrative develops over time.

- 8 See Dixon (1999) for an analysis of the factors that can diminish the importance of winning as a criterion of athletic superiority. For arguments that assign more significance to winning than many mutualists would allow, see Kretchmar (2003, 2012).
- 9 The first objection is also discussed in my paper (Simon, 2014). I first developed these criticisms of Morgan's position in an early pre-publication review of one of his papers for the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* but also am greatly indebted to discussion and correspondence with John Russell, who kindly allowed me to see his unpublished paper ("Does Metaethics Make a Difference in Philosophy of Sport," presented at the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport Conference on September 6, 2013, at California State University) well before the preparation of this chapter. Of course, I am fully responsible for any deficiencies in my analysis.
- 10 I owe this point to a suggestion from Mike McNamee.
- 11 Was Nicklaus applying an external value here; namely, that no one should be put under that sort of extreme pressure in a sporting contest? Perhaps; although golfers play under extreme pressure in elite tournaments all the time. More plausibly, Nicklaus was applying a principle internal to the ethics of golf, according to which one should win by hitting golf shots of quality and not because of an opponent's miss of a very easy shot owing to the pressure of the situation. Indeed, both accounts might apply since, as noted earlier, the internal–external distinction is not a sharp one and borderline cases surely can arise.

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