

## ARTICLE BY J. PARRY - FOUR LANGUAGES ABSTRACTS

### FAIR PLAY AND THE LOGIC OF SPORT

Fair play may range from rule-adherence to a general attitude towards sport (showing modesty in victory and serenity in defeat, per example).

This paper discusses fair play both in education and in competitions.

According to the author, playing fairly is not simply playing morally. It is necessary to acknowledge the internal logic of sports. A good example is the thin line between deception and cheating: the first is usually accepted in sports when it is employed as a tactic which does not break a rule.

The rules and qualities of a game constitute a laboratory for the values experimentation; they continuously challenge our moral intelligence. How we respond will be part of our development.

**Key words:** fair-play; ethics; sport values.

### FAIR PLAY ET LA LOGIQUE DU SPORT

L'esprit sportif englobe de l'obéissance aux règles jusqu'à l'attitude générale par rapport au Sport – démontrer de la modestie pendant la victoire et de la sérénité après l'échec, par exemple.

Cette étude aborde l'esprit sportif, soit au niveau de l'éducation soit à celui de la compétition.

D'après l'auteur, pour avoir de l'esprit sportif, il ne suffit pas suivre les règles ; il faut connaître la logique interne du sport. Un bon exemple, c'est la ligne subtile qui sépare un jeu adroit d'un autre déloyal : le premier est normalement accepté dans le sport s'il est utilisé comme tactique qui ne viole aucune règle.

Les règles et les caractéristiques d'un sport sont une sorte de laboratoire pour expérimenter des valeurs. Elles mettent au défi constamment notre intelligence morale ; et notre réponse à elles fait partie du développement humain.

**Mots-clés:** fair-play; éthique; valeurs du sport.

### FAIR PLAY Y LA LÓGICA DEL DEPORTE

El espíritu deportivo engloba la obediencia a las reglas y mismo una actitud general con respecto al deporte – demostrar modestia en la victoria y serenidad en la derrota, por ejemplo.

El presente estudio aborda el espíritu deportivo cómo educación y cómo competición.

Según el autor, para que se tenga espíritu deportivo, no basta seguir las reglas; es necesario conocer la lógica interna del deporte. Un buen ejemplo es la línea delgada que separa un juego astuto de un juego desleal: el primero se acepta en el deporte, cuando empleado cómo táctica, sin infringir las reglas.

Las reglas características de un deporte constituyen un laboratorio para experimentar valores. Ellas desafían constantemente nuestra inteligencia moral, y nuestra respuesta a ellas hace parte del desarrollo humano.

**Palabras-clave:** fair-play; ética; valores del deporte.

### FAIR PLAY E A LÓGICA DO ESPORTE

O espírito esportivo engloba desde a obediência às regras até a atitude geral em relação ao esporte - demonstrar modéstia na vitória e serenidade na derrota, por exemplo.

Este trabalho aborda o espírito esportivo tanto no nível da educação quanto no da competição.

Segundo o autor, para se ter espírito esportivo, não basta seguir as regras, é preciso conhecer a lógica interna do esporte. Um bom exemplo é a linha tênue que separa uma jogada astuta de uma desleal: a primeira normalmente é aceita no esporte se for utilizada como uma tática que não infrinja nenhuma regra.

As regras e características de um esporte são um laboratório para a experimentação de valores. Elas desafiam constantemente nossa inteligência moral, e nossa resposta a elas faz parte do desenvolvimento humano.

**Palavras-chave:** fair-play; ética; valores do esporte.

## FAIR PLAY AND THE LOGIC OF SPORT\* (E)

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### 1- THE CONCEPT OF FAIR PLAY

Fair Play is fundamental to the ethical and educational ideals of Olympism, and to the whole enterprise of sport. It is a central to an understanding of sports practice, and is a partly moral and a partly logical notion. It refers to a complex set of features emerging from principled engagement in competitive sporting activity, and we may distinguish three related meanings, as follows:

(a) fair play is primarily a virtue of rule-adherence, which is a duty upon all contestants to abide by the rules of the competition; since, by their participation, they are deemed to have entered into a 'contract to contest'. This is a partly moral notion, but it is also the basis of the 'logical' character of fair play (see section 5 below).

(b) fair play may also include a commitment to contesting in such a spirit as may lead to good actions over and above those strictly required by the rules.

(Such 'supererogatory' actions are often described as if they, too, were actually duties; but it is doubtful that they are.)

(c) fair play may also sometimes refer to a general attitude towards sport (and even life itself) involving respect for others, modesty in victory, serenity in defeat and generosity aimed at creating warm and lasting human relations (see Borotra, 1983, pp. 84).

### 2- COMPETITIVE SPORT IN EDUCATION

Although there is perhaps a distinction to be drawn between recreative and competitive sport it is the latter with which we are here concerned, and its defining feature has often been seen as raising problems of value. Bailey (1975) has argued that since competitive games are necessarily competitive they are merely ways of beating other people, and education has nothing to do with the demonstration of superiority over others. I have two observations: firstly, although competitive games are ways of testing one's abilities against another's they are not merely that; and secondly, education is about standards of performance, even if those standards are not necessarily contested between individuals. Bailey does not tell us why there should be no competition in education, whether or not the subject-matter entails it.

It is true that competitive games are contests, which entails competition with a view to establishing a winner and loser (i.e. superiority in respect of the game's required abilities – see Fraleigh, 1984, pp. 41-6). But this does not entail that we have to have winning as our overriding concern: rather, one can play to win, valuing (for example) the opportunity to exercise speed, strength and skill (see Reddiford, 1982, pp. 114-5). The inescapably competitive nature of the contest does not impose upon us a 'win at all costs' attitude – and it is this attitude which many have seen as anti-educational. The idea is that sport is interested in exclusive goods (if I win the cup, only I do – no-one else can), whereas education is interested in inclusive goods (my achievement in my History studies does not prevent you from achieving the same). But this is simply not true as a full account of what sport is. There are many inclusive goods in competitive sports, in which we need to co-operate to produce mutual outcomes.

### 3- THE NATURE AND VALUE OF A GOOD CONTEST

Fraleigh approaches this issue via the analysis of the logical requirements for a good contest, for which he suggests certain prerequisites (see Fraleigh, *ibid*).

Firstly, there is a presupposition of equality of opportunity to contest (equality under the rules), without which the game could not allow the expression of those characteristic skills and abilities called into play by the rules. Relative ability in regard to just those skills and abilities can only be demonstrated when all other variables are strictly controlled, so as to permit equality of opportunity to contest.

Secondly, no contest could exist without the opponent, which would seem to require at least the minimum respect due to a facilitator – to one whose own level of performance is a major contributor to the very possibilities for excellence open to oneself in that category of endeavour chosen by both.

Thirdly, although it is clearly possible to break the rules, to do so alters the conditions of the contest, so that a range of abilities not specified by the rules comes into play. A good contest will maintain the framework which secures the integrity of the contest, and this requires rules adherence and fair play (see Fraleigh, 1984, *passim*; and McIntosh, 1979 pp. 81-4).

There are two further features of contests to which we should draw attention here:

Fourthly, there is a knowledge of relative abilities which is an necessary outcome. Bailey sees this as a form of braggadocio, but Reddiford (1982) reminds us that 'you win some, you lose some'; and so to make the game the occasion for 'marking up superiorities and inferiorities' is a short-term and self-defeating attitude. We play:

to produce an outcome favourable to (our)selves but do not allow the actual outcome to be of persisting importance. (p.115).

Humility and generosity are the least as likely an accompaniment to a demonstration of one's relative abilities as overweening pride and conceit.

Fifthly, in games, there is a simple right and wrong, easily enforceable by a clearly identified authority. At the same time, there is some possibility of differing interpretation and judgement. In playing games, we learn how to follow explicit rules, how to bend them and evade them, and how to operate within a system of penalties and consequences, both official and unofficial. Games are laboratories for value experiments. We are put in the position of having to act, time and time again, sometimes in haste, under pressure or provocation, either to prevent something or to achieve something, under a structure of rules.

#### 4- VALUES EDUCATION

The settled dispositions which it is claimed emerge from such a crucible of value-related behaviour are those which were consciously cultivated through games in the English public schools in the last century; and which attracted the attention of de Coubertin.

Bailey argues against this 'traditional' view: that games provide a secure avenue to values education; that games are in some sense character-building. He argues that it is possible to play games effectively either morally or not; and this is surely incontrovertible. However, Aspin's (1975) counter-arguments suggest:

- that the very constitutive rules of games enshrine moral values, so that games must be moral enterprises;
- that games are by nature also collaborative enterprises, which ipso facto entails that they offer opportunities for learning about values (i.e. just because we must interact in order to play).

It seems to me that everyone is right here. Games are, in part, constructed out of values, but this does not guarantee that they will be played morally. Bailey's further assertion that moral values cannot be learned through games participation seems to me unfounded, for his concession that games can (only) be played morally if a player's morality is imported from without entails that games are the site of moral behaviour. He does not explain why a site of moral and immoral behaviour may not be a site of moral learning. It seems to me quite clear that it may, and so I am with Meakin (1981 & 1982): games provide opportunities for the presentation of values.

At this stage it might be objected that any collaborative human practice could be the subject of moral reasoning, so that to show that moral dilemmas arise in games is to show very little. In such cases, the game would be only the contingent occasion for a moral discussion, and any contribution to moral education should be credited to the discussion, not to the game. However, this would be to ignore the more important point made above: it is the constitutive rules and the intrinsic features of games and athletics which are necessarily presented to a participant, and it is these which require recurrent elucidation on the part of the teacher or coach.

To re-emphasise a point made above: the rules and qualities of a game constitute a laboratory for values experimentation; they continuously challenge our moral dispositions and engage our moral intelligence. How we respond will form part of our moral development.

We should also remember that all teachers are teachers of values, since whatever content they present to students will have value presuppositions, and so will whatever methods they use –

there is no escape from responsibility in these matters. As Peters says:

"Values are involved in education not so much as end-products, but as principles implicit in different manners of proceeding..." (1959, p. 87)

Such insights as to the holistic nature both of the engagement in physical activities and of the teaching enterprise lead Jerome Bruner to suggest:

"That PE for instance is pursued in accordance with a rational appraisal of the place and value of physical activities in human life, which we wish the pupils to acquire – that the activities themselves are viewed as those of a developing rational being not merely an animal, and that they therefore form part of the life of a rational person." (1962, p. 102)

### 5- FAIR PLAY AS A LOGICAL REQUIREMENT

It often goes unnoticed that the primary nature of fair play in sport is not as a moral requirement, or an educational tool, but as a logically necessary feature of successful engagement..

Let me offer a preliminary attempt to stipulate a rough and ready definition of 'sport', so that we might have some idea of the object of my attention: sports are rule-governed competitions wherein physical abilities are contested. They are more formal, serious, competitive, organised, and institutionalised than the games from which they often sprang. Such a definition is useful as a crude starting-point, because it begins to suggest certain characteristics of 'sport' as so defined:

- institutionalisation, (suggesting 'lawful authority')
- contest, (suggesting 'contract to contest')
- obligation to abide by the rules
- that the activity was freely chosen;
- that due respect is owed to opponents as co-facilitators
- and so on.

Such an account may begin to indicate the logico-moral basis of sport, and thus suggest arguments that may be raised against cheating or other rule-breaking. For we may ask how cheating relates to the practice of sport; and whether one can have a successful sports practice in which cheating regularly occurs. Obviously, the answer depends on the kind and level of cheating involved – but the primary wrong in (say) doping or unlawful violence lies in simple rule-breaking.

The rules function as a kind of pre-competition agreement which specifies an athlete's eligibility to compete and his rights, duties and responsibilities under the agreed rules. What's wrong with doping is the secretive attempt to evade or subvert such a contract to contest', an explicit example of which is the Olympic Oath, by which athletes swear that they have prepared themselves ethically, and will keep to the rules.

To freely choose to be accepted into a community of practice entails an obligation to duly respect the rules of the practice (or institution) as its lawful authority. To subvert such a contract to contest threatens the moral basis of sport, jeopardises the integrity of the sporting community and erodes public support and trust.

### 6- DECEPTION AND CHEATING – A MORAL PROBLEM?

One major problem for a principled approach to games-playing lies in the area of cheating and rule-infraction. McIntosh (Ch 2) notices that one form of cheating involves 'breaking a rule with the intention to deceive'. (Compare this with the immoral practice of lying, which involves not just telling untruths; but telling untruths with the intention to deceive). He also wishes to draw our attention to the fact that 'the intention to deceive' is not necessarily wrong in sports, but is even regarded as good strategy (selling a dummy, feinting, disguising a shot, executing a 'deceptive' change of pace, etc.).

This problem has also been noticed by Jeu et al (1994, p. 216), who remark that the internal logic of some sports:

"... consists in deluding the other ... Who does not approve of the feints of bodies or the dribble of football players who in this way mislead their opponent? How can we conciliate fair play with trickery ...?"

McIntosh suggests two criteria for distinguishing morally acceptable forms of deception from deception which counts as cheating:

- (i) that the deception is only momentarily secret  
(i.e. the result of the deception makes the means obvious)
- (ii) the means are acceptable to other participants  
(even if they had not thought of that means and wished they had)

But neither criterion will do, because:

(i) would make robbery acceptable, if it were achieved by only momentarily deceptive means.

(ii) smuggles in a moral criterion, for: surely a *sine qua non* of a means acceptable to all participants is that it is morally acceptable (in which case we remain in need of a criterion to distinguish morally acceptable means).

The problem presented by McIntosh vanishes if we remind ourselves of his starting-point: one form of cheating involves breaking a rule with the intention to deceive. This already suggests that deception is permissible in sport when it is employed as a tactic which does not break a rule. What makes such deception morally acceptable is simply that, under the contract to contest, I have agreed to abide by the rules. Indeed, since I have also agreed to contest (i.e. do my best to win) there might even be an obligation to deceive (if I'm any good at it). Deception involving rule infraction is morally unacceptable not because it is deception but because it is rule infraction.

To reinforce this point, we may return to McIntosh's two criteria: deception involving rule infraction is morally unacceptable even when the means are only momentarily secret; and even if those means were acceptable to other participants.

McIntosh goes on to suggest that we need to consult one another in order to establish 'norms of deception', without which a game would lack an ethical basis. This is important, he thinks, so that children might not be misled into thinking that, since trickery and deception are permissible in sport, then they might be permissible in other spheres of life, such as commercial, political or domestic life. But he does not himself suggest a solution to his problem, unless he is implicitly relying upon the above two criteria, which we have shown to fail.

The reason why he is still at a loss an answer is that he has not noticed that the 'deceptions' involved in feinting, etc., are not morally relevant deceptions. Not only are such deceptions permitted by the rules of the contest; but also are they encourage, as McIntosh observes. What he fails to realise is that makes them morally irrelevant is that they are precisely the kind of skills which the rules constitutive of the activity call into play.

Similarly, Jeu et al regard sport as 'paradoxical' because it is a practice within which deception and fair play can co-exist. I think that the foregoing discussion decisively demonstrates that there is no such paradox. Fair play outlaws deceptions which are against the rules, but allows deceptions that are within the rules. There is nothing paradoxical about that.

## 7- CONCLUSION

I hope to have demonstrated that the requirements upon us to play fairly are not simply requirements to play morally. They are also requirements to acknowledge the internal logic of the practices we call sports.

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