SPORTS AND MORAL EXCELLENCE:
THE INTERSECTIONS OF SPORTS AND AUTHENTICITY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates sport’s role in the ongoing struggle to live the good life – it is about gaining a better understanding of the relationship between sports, morality, and human culture. The current ethos surrounding sports is one of individualism, instrumentalism, and market efficiency. This perspective led to a morally troublesome hyper-competitive orientation toward sports. Characterized by a win-at-all-costs, individualistically motivated attitude, our instrumental perspective of sports caused their morally educative potential (if indeed any exists at all) to be inadequately realized. This study constitutes a reassessment of sport’s potential to act as a resource for promoting moral education employing perspectives provided by virtue ethics in general and ‘existential’ authenticity and civic virtue specifically.

Following an introductory chapter outlining the sequence of my overall argument, the second chapter will provide a snapshot of moral life for modern Americans, effectively substantiating the need for my research. Relying on the work of prominent social theorists and commentators, chapter two will be a brief analysis of American morality, noting the rise, entrenchment, and consequences of our individualistic commitment to private gain and personal success. Chapter two will conclude with a discussion of the previous efforts in American history to appropriate sports as a technology to help articulate and institute a shared moral philosophy. Although never fully realizing their aim, these previous attempts to utilize sports as a form of social and moral development show the necessity, and provide a precedent, for investigations into the intersections between American moral and sporting lives.

However, my efforts to review the historical practice of using sports as a vehicle for teaching core moral values, such as hard-work, determination, and perseverance, represents only the beginning of the discussion. Thus in chapter three I will identify and review three foundational theoretical approaches relating to the ‘sports as a moral laboratory’ metaphor that have been developed within the philosophy of sports literature, namely: (1) Sports as Equality and Justice, (2) Sports as a Domain of Play, and (3) Sports as the Mutual Quest for Excellence. Taken together, these opening three chapters will form the theoretical framework within which I will situate my own approach.
Chapter four will outline the ethical theory I used to substantiate my claim that sports promote the development of authenticity and civic virtue as I have described them. I will begin by showing the utility of virtue ethics in general, and finish the chapter by examining the cogency of a specifically ‘existential’ virtue ethics, where existential authenticity is considered the primary virtue, and civic virtue the primary mode of expression in practice. Assuming an existential understanding of the human condition – as being intersubjectively constituted – I will explain how existential authenticity can be considered the cardinal virtue in an existential virtue theory, and why the practice of civic virtue, or engagement, should be considered its fullest expression.

Chapter five comprises perhaps the most important contribution in this discussion: my analysis of sports and MacIntyrean virtue ethics, and their convergence with existential authenticity and civic virtue. Following an evaluation of how MacIntyrean virtue ethics inform the quest for morally educative experiences in sporting situations, the first half of the chapter will conclude with a sketch of certain characteristics, attributes and dispositions displayed by the MacIntyrean athlete, in direct reference to the characteristic of virtue ethics outlined in chapter four.

The second half of chapter five begins with a description of the convergence of sports and the existential principles introduced in chapter four, laying the groundwork for the argument that sports represent a valuable social practice in the promotion and development of an athlete’s moral excellence. In order for sports to promote the choice of authenticity, and demonstration of civic virtue, caution and precision must be exercised in the way these concepts are presented, taught, learned and played. In order to provide interested participants of sporting practices with a sense of how the arguments might be used in practical applications I will complete my analysis in this final chapter with a brief sketch of the characteristics and attributes that a virtuous existential athlete would exhibit in their ongoing development of their existential virtues.
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The seeds of this project were planted while conducting research for my undergraduate thesis. My thesis focused on the problems generated by what I considered to be an over-emphasis on the value of winning – and, perhaps more importantly, not losing – within the world of sports, particularly in youth athletics leagues. Rather than the wholesale elimination of competition that some scholars argue is necessary in order to avoid the ills of a win-at-all-costs attitude within sports, I argued for a model of cooperative-competition that emphasized the power and potential of non-zero-sum outcomes in zero-sum, competitive activities.

Alongside my intuitions about the meaningful experiences these non-zero-sum outcomes could provide, I found myself drawn to the raw honesty of ‘existentially’-oriented philosophical insights. The notion of creating meaning for and within one’s self and in concert with other similarly situated human beings, rather than looking for meaning wholly from external sources, resonated with my own prior experiences. This seemed to fit with my own intuitions about the human experience. In ‘existentialist’ terms, individuals and their experiences take center stage, though only as a way to eventually reconnect that individual with other members of their community. According to well-known philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, the most fundamental aspects of the human condition include freedom of choice, the concomitant responsibility to create meaning for oneself, and ultimately the importance of intersubjective relations to others.1

Despite my ardent search for ways to incorporate these ontological principles into a normative ethical model, I continually hit roadblocks. Many philosophers argue there is a radical divide between ethics and existentialism. They argue that the fundamental subjectivism and
individualism inherent in existential philosophy renders the development of a normative ‘existential’ ethics impossible. However, a more careful (and perhaps more charitable) examination reveals this general skepticism toward an existentialist ethics to be unsubstantiated, or at least partially unwarranted. When arguing against existentialism’s capacity to support a normative ethics, some critics appear to rely mainly on superficial and stereotypical understandings of existentialism, often caricaturizing it as a systematic philosophy irrevocably bound by radical free choice, inherent meaninglessness, and the inevitable slip into nihilism, anxiety, and despair – an anti-ethics, one might argue. In fact, as I dug deeper into various works of ‘existential’ philosophy I became convinced of quite the opposite. A more rigorous and honest investigation of some of the leading ‘existential’ thinkers discloses a quite suitable foundation upon which a normative ethics can be built.

It has been my intuition for a number of years that, when seen from a certain perspective, sports might provide a ‘practical workshop’ where the values and principles of existential ethics might be fostered and developed. By introducing the concept of virtue into the existential framework, the potential application to sports became much clearer to me. My parents, coaches, and teachers relentlessly repeated the cliché: “sports build character;” and I listened; only vaguely and tangentially understanding the meaning of that statement. As I continued playing sports, mainly basketball and football, I experienced many situations where the parents, coaches and fellow players acted in ways that seemed contrary to ‘good character’, at least in the way that I understood it. I began questioning the veracity of this most cherished sporting shibboleth. I wondered what character traits I was supposed to be building, contrasting that with which traits I was actually building.
While not rejecting the idea outright, I felt there needed to be a more concrete explanation of good character, and how sports aided in its development. My early sporting experiences led me away from what I believed I should be learning. Rather than developing interpersonal skills like teamwork, leadership, and empathy, coaches and other parents taught me to exploit my opponents’ weaknesses, bend without breaking, (unless you can get away with it) the rules to my advantage, and above all else, do whatever it takes to win the game. My experiences, as it turned out, were not unique to me.

As many sports ethicists have reasoned, the quality of character developed in sports depends largely on the context in which the sports are presented, and this depended on the philosophical approach employed by the coaches and administrators. In other words, the moral development of the athletes largely depends on the values and beliefs that contextualize the sporting situation for the athletes involved. Unfortunately, most of those involved in the youth leagues I was a part of were not even aware of the need for an articulated philosophical approach to sports, much less which type of philosophy to adopt. I believe that, to positively influence the athletes, especially in the context of youth, interscholastic, and recreational sports, coaches and administrators must explicitly identify positive moral values and be deliberate in choosing in cultivating them in their players. Based on my experience, everyone involved suffers when these steps are not taken.

Sports are very much like fire: they carry with them an immense power – the power to do great good, but also the power to do great harm. Fire demands our caution, care and respect to ensure its potential harm is minimized, while capitalizing on its potential to aid in our survival. Sports deserve to be treated with the same kind of attention and reverence, the same fascination and amazement. It becomes incumbent on us – the players, coaches, organizers, and spectators –
to act as ambassadors of the game; to be intentional in how we promote and present the social
value of sports, while maintaining an acute awareness of their potential to inflict emotional,
psychological, and physical damage when utilized improperly or haphazardly.

Over-competitive, win-at-all-costs attitudes toward sports corrupt the ‘spirit of the game’
and prevent their potential to foster goodwill and build communities among players and between
teams from being realized. However, despite the potential harms associated with this orientation
toward winning and competition, we should not rush to remove the competitive elements from
the sporting equation. Like the yin and the yang of eastern philosophies, winning and losing are
inseparable, mutually-reinforcing concepts. Winning and losing are essential components for
gameplay, essential components of the struggle and drama of sport. The possibility of obtaining
the potential goods that sports offer is directly linked to the value and importance we place on
the outcome of a contest—that is, in keeping them competitive.

Instead of worshipping winners and feeling sorry for losers, I will argue that we should
cultivate an ethos of competitive sports that values the development and demonstration of moral
excellence shown through the process of mutually questing for victory. Following seminal
thinkers, such as Bob Simon and Bernard Suits, I argue that we should seek out methods that will
help us re-conceptualize our view of winning and losing, and the social connotations of each.
The value of victory is inextricable bound with the means employed to secure it, i.e. a victory has
no inherent value; victory has no value independent of the way it was achieved. This is precisely
the aim of my current research. My hope is that by examining the specific ways that sports
might aid in the promotion and development of moral excellence, understood through the moral
lens of virtue ethics generally and ‘existential’ virtue ethics specifically, we might come to form
an admiration and respect for sports for the essential role they might play in the development of a
morally sound society, and, in turn, for understanding their potential as a core component of the
good life.

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1 For more about Jean-Paul Sartre’s early theories regarding his phenomenological ontology, see *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943).
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I shall defend the thesis that sports are highly valuable social practices and should be seen as resources that can promote moral excellence by inculcating a range of virtues, including authenticity and civic virtue. Stories abound chronicling the influence sports have on individuals and on societies. The more charitable accounts claim that sports foster a sense of community among individuals by instilling lessons of teamwork, fairness, and sportsmanship; or that sports teach the virtues of courage and perseverance by providing an opportunity to battle through adversity, bravely meeting challenges head-on. The less generous appraisals identify sports – based primarily on the belief that they are inherently individualistic – as having a corrupting and disillusioning effect on participants, damaging their self-esteem and stunting their emotional development.

With such impassioned rhetoric on both sides of this debate, convincing rationale can be found to support both those in favor of and those opposed to the view that sports can act as a resource to promote moral excellence. The purpose of this research, then, is to better understand, and possibly ease, the tension that exists between these two opposing viewpoints. To do this, I will examine in close detail the convergence of sports and moral excellence – more specifically the convergence of sports, virtue ethics, and existential ethical theory as it pertains to moral excellence – so that individuals and their communities can develop the most advantageous relationship with the pervasive social phenomenon called sport.

This study begins from the assumption that sports have within them the capacity to provide a morally educative experience, and in turn seeks to provide a sensible explanation for
how the view of sports as a resource for promoting moral excellence might best be understood in theory and implemented in practice. Significantly, this study does not wrestle with the various debates about the perceived moral or immoral nature of certain sports, such as the paternalism-versus-autonomy debates surrounding violent sports like American football, MMA and boxing. Instead, this study assumes a general understanding and acceptance of sports as a potentially significant resource in the quest for moral excellence, while acknowledging the legitimacy and indispensability of other debates that more specifically call into question the moral shortcomings of certain sports.

While anecdotal evidence for the correlation between moral virtue and competitive sports already exists in large numbers – and while the intuitive plausibility between the two remains strong – this study aims to provide a more concrete and systematic explanation of how the process of developing moral excellence through participation in sports might work in our everyday sporting experiences. Doing so, however, first requires the identification of a specific normative ethical theory to use as the model for defining good character – i.e. what characteristics best express moral excellence and adjudicate one’s success or failure in the process of developing moral excellence based on these characteristics. As noted above, I have chosen “existential” virtue ethics – as articulated by scholars, such as Charles Taylor and T. Storm Heter – as the ethical model I believe to be well suited to conduct this inquiry into the morally educative potential of sports. As such, I will provide an account of how sports stimulate awareness, understanding, and implementation of existential moral excellence – in terms of virtue ethics generally, and more specifically, the development of the primary existential virtues of authenticity and civic virtue.
a. **Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of the study is to examine sport’s potential to foster moral excellence in terms of virtue ethics generally, and existential virtue ethics specifically. To accomplish this, the following examination will be guided by two primary research questions: Do sports provide a promising venue for promoting and developing moral excellence, specifically characterized by existential authenticity and civic virtue? If so, what aspects of sports engender confidence in their capacity to promote the development of moral excellence?

b. **Significance of the Study:**

There are several important reasons for investigating sports and their capacity to promote moral excellence. The following are three of the most central reasons. First, the clichés that surround sports and their role in producing social capital and civic virtue through building character, promoting sportsmanship and teamwork, fostering a good work ethic, and the like are as generic and abstracted from experience as they are ubiquitous. Because of the potential impact sports might have on a community, the clichéd claims about their morally educative potential deserve closer scrutiny than they have received to this point.

Second, popular culture has come to regard sports as a domain of human activity separated from other more noble and morally relevant human conventions, such as religion or politics. By paying closer attention to the various characteristics of sports that cohere with other, more ‘serious’ institutions, we might begin rebuilding severed connection between sports and the morality of our communities. By paying attention to these characteristics, we are able to see that sport contains within it a diverse and varied set of characteristics that align with other, more traditional and accepted spheres of morality and moral education. As such, identifying the
relevant characteristics of sports and analyzing the impact these characteristics have on their potential to promote moral excellence becomes of paramount importance to this discussion.

The third and final reason for this study’s significance is that it forms a response to the broader questions and concerns that many social commentators have variously identified as a growing trend of American moral disorder.³ The current condition of moral fragmentation described by these commentators demands a response that articulates a more fruitful pathway toward improved interpersonal ethical conduct and developing skills of moral decision-making.

In short, there is a significant need for research that reveals to us social practices that have the potential to promote moral excellence. To be sure, sports represent only one possible social practice, among many others, that might achieve these lofty goals. However, given sport’s ubiquity, popularity, and visibility on both domestic and international stages, it is reasonable to argue that sports offer possibilities not available in other, less commonly practiced, domains of human activity.

Despite what I see as sport’s considerable potential for moral education, scholars continue to debate fundamental questions concerning the relationship between ethics and sports. Following Warren Fraleigh’s lead, as outlined in his foreword to McNamee and Parry’s, *Ethics and Sport* (1998), I will attempt to situate my approach and assumptions within what he calls the “four basic questions” that inform the contested positions held with respect to the discourse surrounding ethics and sports. Laying bare my assumptions about the relationship between sports and morality will hopefully lend transparency to my argument and therefore give the reader a clearer sense of the purpose of my research.

c. **Four Basic Questions for Ethics and Sports:**
The first question is: “Is a common morality for sport possible?” This question cuts right to the heart of the issue. Whereas some scholars believe there to be a ‘soft metaphysic’ inherent in all sports, which gives them their foundation for a common morality, other scholars argue, on relativistic grounds, that the variance in moral values from culture to culture leads to variance in how the nature of sport is understood, and that the lack of a clearly articulated ‘nature of sport’ leads to the lack of a common morality in sports. In this dissertation I proceed from the assumption that sports do have a common morality, based on the mutually beneficial condition of interpersonal recognition and intersubjectivity that characterizes both the nature of sport and the human condition. Understood as an intersubjective practice, sports foster ethically ‘good’ behavior by revealing how close the connection between self and other truly is, and that acting morally toward others is simultaneously acting in one’s own best interest. I will have much more to say on these topics in chapters four and five.

Building on the first, the second basic question, “Is a common morality for sport desirable?” casts doubt on the value of identifying a common morality for all sports. In other words, does the identification of a common morality enhance the experiences, or otherwise benefit, those who participate in them? In my estimation, the fullest expression of sports’ value to human experience is not achievable without a common understanding of how sports can be utilized as a resource to promote moral excellence, and how best to guide those who participate in them toward this potential. While individual creativity and expression of one’s autonomy may not be fully realized within a potentially restrictive moral framework, I believe that the force of sports’ potential as a resource for promoting moral excellence is all but lost when the principles that inform their moral structure are left undiscussed and open to individual interpretations.
The third basic question relates to the previous two, but is more specific about sports’ potential for being a source of moral education. The third question asks, “Is sport, properly understood, an inherently moral practice which contributes to moral education?” The contested difference here lies in whether or not a given scholar believes either that sports have a core moral value that contributes to moral education, or that sports are merely diversions engaged in outside of normal life, therefore not subject to rules of morality. It is probably obvious where I stand on this issue but, for the sake of transparency, I firmly believe that, when properly understood – an explanation of what constitutes ‘proper’ will comprise the central argument of this dissertation – sports provide an effective laboratory through which moral excellence, understood to include authenticity and civic virtue, can be learned, practiced, refined, and implemented. Although sports can certainly be engaged in ‘improperly,’ the potential for sports to act as a resource for promoting moral excellence is a latent potential that is available to all participants, even though many who participate never realize, let alone capitalize, on these benefits.

The final basic question Fraleigh asks us to consider in order to better understand the debates within the discourse on ethics and sports is, “Can moral rules or principles provide the complete content of sport ethics?” To be sure, in light of the ethical commitments argued for here, the quick answer to this question is, no, rules cannot provide the complete content of sports ethics. However, the rules and principles in sports can assist in the identification of virtues and the development of moral excellence in a number of ways. Sports provide a laboratory where moral behavior is tested and retested, and results analyzed, refined and implemented based on best practices. Rather than simply providing the particular content of the virtues and the vices, such as sportsmanship, justice, and determination, I believe sports help to reveal the nature of the human condition, which in turn provides the individual with a particularly persuasive reason to
pursue virtue over vice and to desire moral behavior as the baseline condition of all interpersonal interactions, within sports, or without. To put it another way, I argue that, in addition to offering situations of concrete moral dilemmas where the athlete must decide the right way to act, sports help develop the skills of moral deliberation, while also reinforcing one’s desire to behave morally in the first place. All of which directly contribute to the development of one’s moral excellence, and their understanding of their social and civic responsibilities.⁴

d. Methodological Starting Point:

Given my position on these four basic questions regarding the intersection between sports and ethics, I must elucidate two further starting points in order for my argument to proceed. The first assumption that needs to be made clear involves the ethical lens chosen to view sports’ potential to promote the development of moral excellence. The philosophical field of ethics is vast, and most prominently includes varying versions of deontological, utilitarian and virtue-based theories for how best to conduct ourselves. Some of these theories, have met with a greater degree of acceptance and practice than others. Although a complete defense of existential virtue ethics against other theories in this dissertation is not possible, I will provide rationale for why and how this ethical model provides a suitable lens through which to understand the promise and plausibility of sports’ potential to aid in the development of moral excellence.

The second starting point that needs to be identified is tied to the arguments about the socio-moral situation that animates the significance of this research. Although the moral malaise described in the proceeding chapter concentrates primarily on the current moral principles and practices of American society, the issues are not limited only to contemporary culture in the United States. The benefit of research that identifies ways in which we can correct current moral
practices and principles, and renew a shared sense of a common good and the best ways to obtain that good, is not only applied to US citizens, but has a social significance for any member of any community throughout the world.

Finally, I use the term “moral excellence” as a pragmatic objective, rather than a reified metaphysical achievement, in which one can be said to possess in its entirety in any one moment. Such an objective speaks to the need for continuous moral development, progressing slowly and steadily over time. Moral excellence includes, and is partially defined by, the existential concepts of authenticity and civic virtue. As an ongoing, process-oriented concept, the pursuit of moral excellence becomes a shared quest between oneself and one’s fellow community members.

e. Chapter Organization:

Subsequent to the Introduction provided in the current chapter, the aim of chapter two is fourfold: (1) to describe the current state of the modern American moral landscape, which by many accounts is characterized as being in some stage of decline and disorder, (2) to outline the primary factors contributing to these reportedly unfavorable conditions, (3) to explain past attempts to utilize sports as a resource to repair moral degradation, and finally (4) to provide an overview of the various philosophical approaches scholars have utilized in their attempts to understand the relationship between morality and sports, and therefore to better understand how to use sports as a resource to improve moral conditions. It is through an examination of both the contemporary state of moral disorder and the ways sports have been used in the past to combat that disorder that provides the reader with the appropriate context needed to understand how sport’s potential to promote moral excellence has been squandered, while simultaneously
revealing the harmful social factors that sports must ultimately have the capacity to address if my argument is to be convincing.

In chapter two I will briefly reconstruct the narrative of American morality and its historical relationship to sports, relying heavily on the work of well-known social commentators and critics who have variously discussed the tribulations American morality has undergone to arrive at the conditions found today. The discussion will concentrate on the seemingly irreconcilable tensions between individual and community that remain at the core of ethical disputes in modern societies. Chapter two will also include a brief historical account of how the relationship between sports and American society existed in past eras. This discussion necessarily touches on a variety of topics and time periods including, Victorian England, Baron Pierre de Coubertin’s Olympism, and a discussion of the role that Progressive Era social theorists played in the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to define a national identity through sports. Not intended to be an exhaustive compendium of everyone or every work to consider these issues – a project that could fill a library on its own – I acknowledge and include the work of formative thinkers, such as Clifford Geertz, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Rawls while focusing the majority of my review on a small selection of highly respected scholars and their social critiques and ethical analyses.

Primarily focusing on Christopher Lasch’s, The Culture of Narcissism (1979), Robert Bellah et al.’s Habits of the Heart (1985), and Alasdair MacIntyre’s, After Virtue (1981), chapter two contains important insights and analyses detailing the chaotic and fragmented condition of modern morality, and the inevitable alienation and lack of genuine community that has ensued. Each of these authors provides a stinging critique of the modern love-affair with individualist and emotivist bases for moral principles and behavior. Each of these authors identifies the
primary culprit of American culture’s wandering morality as the lack of substantive moral and social tradition that inevitably follows the inculcation of an individualistic national ethos. While these works remain primarily descriptive and diagnostic in their treatments of American morality, prescriptive attempts to identify a remedy to the social and moral troubles are legion. One such school of thought focuses attention on the convergence of sports, community, and morality.

I proceed in chapter two by identifying the various responses sports scholars have offered to the moral concerns created by a radically individualistic conception of ‘the self’ that is characteristic of modern western societies, and America in particular. Chapter two concludes with a discussion of Dyreson’s, *Making the American Team* (1998), and Morgan’s, *Why Sports Morally Matter* (2006), both containing investigations into the ways in which sports have been utilized as a potential corrective to the individualistic American ethos by cultivating community and emphasizing shared values and a common national identity.

Both Dyreson and Morgan investigate the ways in which sports were used as a Progressive Era technology. However, Dyreson examines this process mainly through the lens of the modern Olympic Games, while Morgan probes the political utilization of sports during the Progressive Era as a vehicle for social progress to understand it as a blueprint that, when updated to fit contemporary needs, can be an effective remedy for today’s moral and social ills.

Dyreson’s and Morgan’s analyses will both be important in framing the problems facing contemporary sport within the American moral landscape, and both will provide a precedent for explaining how sports have been used as a technology to correct these issues. The examples presented in the second chapter will help situate the reader within the larger discussion of individualism and communitarianism in America, and help them better understand the impact
these ideologies have had on the American moral landscape. These are important insights because I contend that the tensions and apparent misunderstandings surrounding the ‘individualism vs. communitarianism,’ or private life vs. public life, debate is a component of modern society that has had devastating consequences on American moral life by undercutting the perceived value of expending precious resources on strengthening civic virtue.

Chapter three will provide a brief review of previous efforts to identify sport’s educative potential for moral development and further solidify my acknowledgement that I am by no means the first to be intrigued by sports’ potential in this regard. In fact, the body of scholarship on this topic is immense. Thus, in the interest of brevity, I will attempt to distill this scholarship into what I believe are three representative and useful intersections between sports and morality. Chapter three will function not only to detail the long history of efforts made to articulate the potential of sports to promote moral excellence, but will also serve to formulate a theoretical context for my subsequent analysis of sports. That is, the three views of sports cited below will allow the reader to better appreciate the shoulders upon which this research stands, while at the same time provide a theoretical context that will help situate the reader within the particular view of sports, and their common structural elements, that make sports especially well-suited for promoting moral excellence.

As will be explained in greater detail in chapter three, these three approaches to sports will be situated within the overarching metaphor of sports as a moral laboratory, within which the participants are provided an opportunity to test various moral principles and practices for their potential contributions to their own quest for moral excellence. As I will argue, gathering evidence, analyzing effectiveness, and choosing the best course of action is precisely what is involved in the process of developing one’s moral excellence. Voluntary choice of how one will
behave is the cornerstone of existential virtue ethics, and sports offer a laboratory where this process of moral choice is learned, practiced, and potentially developed.

Once the general laboratory metaphor is explained, the remainder of the chapter elucidates three different ways to view one’s participation in sports in order to maximize their potential to promote moral excellence. These approaches include, (1) sports as equality and justice, (2) sports as a domain of play, and (3) sports as the mutual quest for excellence. To be clear, the laboratory metaphor provides the baseline for understanding of how the relationship between sport and the player can be conceived, while the three subsequent approaches to sport provide what could be called the experimental material to be tested and retested for their potential to promote moral excellence. In other words, the three approaches to sports I explain in this section will provide the player with a moral framework through which to view their participation, revealing to the player through experimentation sports’ tacit moral dimension.

In light of the preceding discussion in chapter three of the different ways sports have been viewed as phenomena that promote the development of moral excellence, my argument will require an explanation and rationale of why I chose to examine sports’ through the ethical lens of existential virtue ethics. Chapter four will thus provide the reader with a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of existential virtue ethics that make my argument plausible.

The purpose of chapter four is to identify key characteristics of virtue ethics in general and existential virtue ethics in particular. I will need to makes several arguments in this chapter – that virtue ethics, as articulated primarily by MacIntyre, holds promise as a useful way to aid in the development of moral excellence, that a specific existential variation on virtue ethics is compatible with the MacIntyrean approach, and importantly, that existential morality complements virtue ethics in important and specifiable ways. That is, an existential version of
virtue ethics holds greater promise for moral development than other versions of virtue-based theory. Although some of these claims are contentious, they will be addressed and defended in due course in chapter four. With these important clarifications and analyses related to virtue ethics in general, and existential virtue ethics in particular, made clear I can proceed to chapter 5 in which I examine the intersection of these key ethical characteristics and the nature of sporting projects.

Chapter five is structured in two parts and mirrors the structure established in the preceding chapter. The first section details the intersections of sports and the various characteristics of virtue ethics, in general, such as intentionality, telos, the development of virtues, and narrative unity. Following this analysis, the first section concludes with a description of what virtues and values a morally-conscious athlete would be committed to in their pursuit of moral excellence. The aim of the second section of chapter five is to link the various themes of existential virtue ethics to specific characteristics of sports, emphasizing how and in what ways these themes appear and operate in sports. The themes that will be investigated include the fragility of games and play, ambiguity and diversity, and the affirmation of the Other in sports. With a greater degree of conceptual clarity about these themes and characteristics of sports, the concluding section of chapter five aims to complement the earlier discussion of the values and intentions of a virtuous athlete with the newfound ethical insights specific to existential virtues, including authenticity and civic virtue.

I hope this research will lead to a host of questions that reach beyond sports and touch on more fundamental questions of how we to best live our lives; such as, how can our approach to sports alter the way we organize other social institutions? What impact will this approach to sports have on the way popular culture consumes professional and recreational sports? How will
this approach influence the cultural attitudes toward sports, both in mainstream and in academic settings? Will seeing sports as a cultivator of authenticity and civic virtue enhance its status as a significant cultural institution, or at least give people a more powerful reason to regard it as culturally significant?

While philosophically fascinating, speculating on questions such as these must await further scholarship... While the present study in no way purports to resolve the tensions surrounding the ostensibly interminable debate about the social status of sports – i.e. do sports simply reflect a society’s values back on to its participants, or can they be regarded as an active agent of changing the social values already in place? – I hope that I will have contributed at least one more argument to this most important debate.

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2 I would like to clarify the use of single quotation marks around the term: existentialism. The use of this literary device is designed to set off this term for the reader, letting them know that this term is simply the best one available to describe the philosophical and ethics theories I wish to work with. As will be explained later, the term “existentialism” is quite loaded, meaning different things to different people. As far as I am aware, there is no coherent, inclusive, encapsulated, and complete philosophical system which can properly be labeled “existentialism”. However, the use of the term is so widespread and familiar to many people that I will use this term throughout the paper, though with the necessary “setting off” to remind the reader of its contested definition.


4 For a more complete discussion of what Warren Fraleigh intended by introducing these “four basic questions” please refer to the foreword from Mike McNamee and Jim Parry’s, *Ethics and Sport*, (New York: Routledge, 1998).
Taking a global view of humanity’s modern history, noted philosopher and ethicist, Jonathan Glover offers a striking indictment of twentieth century morality. Citing the unspeakable atrocities of the twentieth century, such as – to name just a few – the genocide and eugenics of the Third Reich and the brutal warfare of Stalin’s and Hussein’s ill-fated regimes, along with the virtually countless death tolls they amassed, Glover paints a rather grizzly picture of human civilization’s post-Enlightenment (im)morality. However, despite his attention to and emphasis on the carnage and bloodshed that litters his approximately one hundred year timeline, Glover’s message is ultimately one of hope for the future. Glover argues that, although the narrowing understanding and continued erosion of humanity’s moral identity greatly aided, and partially accounted for the commission of these heinous acts of violence and wonton disregard for human life, a recovery of our moral identity and re-invigoration of our moral imagination remains an immutable possibility. However, the question remains: What is the *best* way to accomplish this recovery and re-invigoration?

While Glover provides some prescriptions on how best to treat the root causes of our modern-day moral maladies, his main intention, as philosophers are wont to do, is to agitate, and hopefully initiate a dialogue concerning the fate of humanity’s moral identity. My aim for this project is to add yet another voice to this conversation. Focusing specifically on contemporary American moral life, and the factors that have led to its purported disorder, I will follow Glover’s lead in isolating my inquiry to roughly the last one hundred years. The specific aim of this chapter is to provide the moral backdrop against which – and only within which – my subsequent
arguments concerning the role sports have played in this story, and might possibly play in the future, will be understood.

While there exists in many different parts of America people and communities who work tirelessly to ensure the spread and propagation of goodwill and exhibit admirable altruistic propensities, it is also the case, as Glover points out, that many of our communities are falling into moral and cultural disrepair, and that there is an urgent need to identify remedies to this increasingly pervasive condition.

Critics of modern American society are legion. While these social critics seem to mostly disagree on when this turning of the moral tide occurred – if indeed there ever was an identifiable time period of moral virtuosity to turn from – the majority of these critiques do share various points of overlap in their diagnoses of modern America’s moral failings. Despite the disagreements, there does seem to be one point on which critics agree: once the free market was divested of its moral dimension in-practice, i.e. when the principles of efficiency and expediency wholly replaced concerns of fairness, justice, and equality to become the guiding criteria for evaluating the ‘rationality’ of any action, the grand experiment of a democratic republic was dealt a potentially fatal blow.

The wound inflicted on American moral lives by an unfettered free market seemed minor at the time, yet was deceptively toxic. The existence of a morally-tethered market began to slowly bleed-out under the guise of contented consumerism. Exactly when the conversion to conspicuous consumption, and its adoption as a value on a national scale, occurred and what factors – economic, political, social, cultural or otherwise – contributed most to its widespread adoption in the American imaginary is an extremely complex and, some might say, would generate an interminable debate. Rather than the naïve attempt to carry-out the task of settling
this debate about American moral turpitude between the late-nineteenth century and today – a task which would itself fill volumes – my current purposes require only a brief survey of the primary and near-consensus contributing factors within this general timeline of the American moral landscape.

The opening section of this chapter will introduce and elucidate the set of factors that critics of American society have variously identified as largely contributory to what they occasionally refer to as the current state of ‘American moral disrepair.’ Although this section will take us afield of our sports-specific discussion, the second section will be devoted to providing a better, more explicit, understanding of how sport fits into this larger socio-moral picture. The relationship between a culture and the sports played within it is a fascinating and highly complex story.

As such, the second section tries to clarify this complex relationship, focusing on the history of the debates between proponents of sports’ positive role in society, who believe sports have an important social utility when understood as an agent of social change, and their opponents, who believe the ‘market mentality’ has irreparably corrupted the purity of sports – if indeed it ever existed at all – and that they now contribute, like any other market-based institution, to the decay of American moral identity.

In order to populate this review I first trimmed the reading list down to a manageable number while making every effort to preserve a quality and representative sampling of the available literature; to say that the number of books written on this topic is vast, would itself be a vast understatement. While I cannot include in my review every word ever written on the topic, I will be mentioning and referencing a large number of these critiques of American society throughout the chapter. However, in the interest of advancing the subsequent arguments about
sports’ potential as a resource for promoting the development of moral excellence, I have chosen to focus primarily on three highly renowned texts written by widely respected scholars to inform my survey of American moral identity. These include, Christopher Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (1981), and Robert Bellah et al.’s *Habits of the Heart* (1985). When analyzed synoptically, these texts identify the core issues facing America and its slippery, and quickly disappearing moral footing. Although these scholars approach similar issues in differing ways, and employ an assortment of varying terminology to explain comparable concepts, I believe the texts exhibit a high degree of compatibility in their diagnostic evaluations about the issues facing American moral identity.  

In the interest of clarity and brevity, and at the risk of over-simplifying an extremely sophisticated discussion, I have broken this section up into three sub-sections that I believe encompass much of what the social critics agree on, in terms of the primary factors contributing to modern American morality. By no means do I intend this separation into categories to imply the separation of these societal factors in experienced reality; I am aware of the intricate interconnection and mutual reinforcement that exists among and between these different concepts. However, I believe my approach allows for a clearer understanding of the principal factors that those in charge of organizing and administering sports would need to address if they in fact had potential to act as a resource for promoting the development of authenticity and civic virtue. The three factors I will address in this section are: (1) Fragmentation, (2) Individualism, and (3) Bureaucratization.

**I. Factors of Social Change**

a. **Fragmentation:**
As is the case with this and each of the two other factors yet to be discussed in this chapter, the notion of fragmentation appears, in some form or another, within each of the social critiques previously mentioned. Though not all the critics I surveyed employed the same language to document, describe, and/or diagnose the notion of fragmentation, each of them traced the core of this concept to what, in broad terms, can be described as a severance from our own personal and cultural historical narrative. While each author identifies different reasons for how this disconnect occurred, and the subsequent consequences arising from it, the consensus remains that the moral practices of a society divorced from the continuity of its traditions, of its own past can hardly be considered a truly moral society; in this scenario there exists no footing upon which a true moral scheme can gain traction.

What we are left with, if these social theorists are correct, is an incomplete and fragmented morality – not only of what morals and morality are, but of their meaning, significance, and most importantly their proper role within American social dynamics. Without this moral foundation – i.e. the historical narrative of which we are an enduring part – morality is detached from any historical context and simply becomes another commodity to be bought and sold in an amoral marketplace. In this social structure, efficiency becomes the standard by which “moral” action is judged. MacIntyre sums up this most important point by writing, “What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, plans which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality; we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have - very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.”

Of course, as I mentioned, the fragmentation of American moral language has a deep and intimate connection to the atomization of American public life and its symptomatic
individualism, a topic we will look more closely at later in this chapter. However, the social
problems that arise because of this fragmented moral language remain important in their own
Bellah and his colleagues described this inability to convey any enduring meaning within our
moral utterances as a distinction between a first and a second moral language.

Closely related to the notions of individualism they examine in their book, the first
language of American morality reflects a radical form of satisfying self-interests, thus failing to
capture any true sense of common interests. In situations where this first language seems
counter-intuitive, i.e. when the egoistic-self needs a social veil, we adopt what Bellah et al. refer
to as our second moral language. This second moral language is created out of necessity, yet is
cobbled together from the failing fragments of our first language. Incoherent and baseless as this
second language is, it remains promising for Bellah et al. in that there is at least an attempt made
to articulate a community of commitment to a shared conception of public responsibility, or as I
am referring to it herein, civic virtue.

Whereas the first moral language is bound up with a notion of self-reliance, the second
moral language develops a sense of self that includes social responsibility. Bellah et al. explain
that the notion of self that informs the second moral language is drastically different than the first
in three important ways.

(1) One’s sense of self is articulated by reference to a narrative of long-term
commitments rather than personal desires and feelings. (2) One’s sense of self is rooted
in virtues that define a worthwhile life and have been passed on and modeled by others
who have shared that tradition, not in a content barren freedom attained by leaving
concrete commitments behind. [And] (3) One’s notion that community means solidarity
based on a responsibility to care for others because that is essential to one’s own experience of the good life.\textsuperscript{11}

What this notion of self reveals, without the authors ever using the phrase explicitly, is that the moral self is best understood as \textit{intersubjectively} constituted. The intersubjective self, as Bellah et al. are in fact describing above, realizes her dependence on the Other in order to sustain herself. “Perhaps [the public and the private life] are so deeply involved with each other that the impoverishment of one entails the impoverishment of the other…in a healthy society the private and the public are not mutually exclusive, not in competition with one another. They are, instead, two halves of the whole, two poles of a paradox. They work together dialectically, helping to create and nurture one another.”\textsuperscript{12} Unfortunately, the commitment to private goods and the satisfaction of personal desires results in an abandonment of our second moral language and the loss of any shared understanding of how our actions and behaviors could and/or should contribute to the public good.

Christopher Lasch also identifies the unbridled pursuit of self-interest – a symptom of the fragmented nature of our moral understandings – as a primary factor in the decline of American moral well-being. Lasch argues that,

The growth of bureaucracy, the cult of consumption with its immediate gratifications, but above all the severance of the sense of historical continuity has transformed the Protestant work ethic while carrying the underlying principles of capitalist society to their logical conclusion. The pursuit of self-interest, formerly identified with the rational pursuit of gain and the accumulation of wealth, has become a search for pleasure and psychic survival.\textsuperscript{13}
In other words, our concern and responsibility for others, i.e. our social engagement and civic virtue – along with the recognition of our mutual interdependency with others that ensues from a sense of historical continuity and solidarity – has been replaced with the pursuit to satisfy individualized appetitive desires, resulting in a loss of any firm moral foundation. Without a moral substrate within which our morality can be rooted, we cannot expect a substantial sense of morality to flourish, let alone any desire to satisfy our social responsibilities. In fact, we may not even make it to the point where we can take action. The interminable character of any modern moral debate severely inhibits social progress.

Although he wrote in an earlier time period and from a necessarily different social perspective, many of the points MacIntyre makes regarding the interminability of moral discourse remain relevant today. In speaking about the never-ending nature of disagreements in matters where morality is concerned MacIntyre avers, “There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.”14 To support this claim, MacIntyre provides three such disagreements which he attributes to the lack of any terminus to the moral disorder created by our fragmented understandings of moral principles themselves.

Not only have these examples of war and peace, abortion and murder, and private vs. public healthcare and education not found suitable resolutions, our modern situation adds ever-more moral crossroads to this discussion; for example, the debates about equal marriage rights for same-sex couples, recreational and medicinal marijuana use, and the escalating illegal immigration of child-refugees from Central America. It is true that representatives occupying each side of these debates employ valid rationality and sound logic. What is lacking, MacIntyre argues, is any “rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another.”15
In a cultural context of moral relativism, how do we find consensus about which reasons outweigh any other? Absent any objective and complete consensus about the set of criteria determining which values and reasons outweigh any rival values or reasons, the appeal to reason and rationality as the ultimate arbiters of moral rightness is fatally flawed. In the following quote, Lasch describes the impotence of reason in adjudicating moral goodness and its connection to the amoral pursuit of self-interested desires,

In a society that has reduced reason to a mere calculation, reason can impose no limits on the pursuit of pleasure – on the immediate gratification of every desire no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or merely immoral. For the standards that would condemn crime or cruelty derive from religion, compassion, or the kind of reason that rejects purely instrumental applications; and none of these outmoded forms of thought or feeling has any logical place in a society based on commodity production.16 Detached and distant from each other and from ourselves as we are, however, the process of securing moral consensus through reason alone has, as Lasch so eloquently notes, no solid foundation to be built upon.

The interminable nature of ethical debates too often leads to a feeling of exasperation and ends in surrendering to the inevitable sense of futility – agreeing to disagree, as it were. However, this model is neither productive nor sustainable. The questions for social theorists have moved away from what moral values we should find agreement about, and toward what we need to do as people, as a society, in order to reinvigorate the debates surrounding the articulation of a common/shared/public good. In other words, how do we motivate people to commit themselves to developing and demonstrating their civic virtue? It is only with a shared understanding of what constitutes our end-goals as a society that we can effectively evaluate,
from a moral standpoint, our own actions and the actions of others. Without a well-defined common good as the baseline for judging the morality of human action, our actions remain unintelligible, and worse yet amoral. Although worded differently, the notion of a common good is expressed by MacIntyre in terms of humanity’s teleological nature.

MacIntyre explains that the loss of a shared understanding of human nature, and its teleological foundation, occurred during the Enlightenment project. Making no pretense to subtlety, MacIntyre is unequivocal in his condemnation of the Enlightenment project. Not only did the proponents and scholarly heirs of the Enlightenment project, of which MacIntyre specifically mentions Kierkegaard, Kant, Diderot, Hume, and Smith, publish ill-conceived moral justifications, but their projects were necessarily doomed to failure because of the very premise they all shared in common: “[They] all reject any teleological view of human nature, any view of man as having an essence which defines his true end. [T]o understand this is to understand why their project of finding a basis for morality had to fail.”17

As MacIntyre explains, the Aristotelian link between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos is founded on ethical precepts that necessarily imply a certain conception of the human telos. This forms the basis for MacIntyre’s claim that modern ethical precepts have become fragmented; severed from a teleological view of human being, modern ethical precepts have no identifiable end toward which they aim. The unity for human experience, and the meaning derived from it, is shattered as a result of this severance. To what do we appeal when deciding which actions to take and forming evaluative judgments about the actions taken by others? Not only is our evaluative basis for virtues, and for vice, rendered impotent when this breaks down, but the potential to experience the meaning, which is so foundational to living the good life, is also challenged.
Proponents of virtue-based ethics have long understood the importance of narrative unity in human experience. The designation of virtuous behavior, as opposed to behavior steeped in vice, depends necessarily on a concept of human life as temporally conditioned. One’s intentions – a primary component for properly assigning virtue or vice – are made intelligible only through the understanding that one’s past informs one’s present in order to predict one’s future behavior. In his attempt to introduce a Neo-Aristotelian account of the virtues, MacIntyre argues that human life unfolds along the lines of a dramatic narrative.

Each human life will…embody a story whose shape and form will depend upon what is counted as a harm and danger and upon how success and failure, progress and its opposite, are understood and evaluated. To answer these questions will also explicitly and implicitly be to answer the question as to what the virtues and vices are. [I]t reveals how belief in the virtues being of a certain kind and belief in human life exhibiting a certain narrative order are internally connected.18

The internal connection between narrative order in one’s life and the virtues one exhibits is no trivial point. Reinforcing the detachment of a person from their narrative order, historical fragmentation relegates human action to a succession of singular moments, each new moment interpreted independently of its predecessor.

Calling into question the labeling of any mere physical movement as “action”, Paul Ricoeur, the late French philosopher, argued that true human action and our meaningful engagement with temporality must take place and be understood within a cultural context that involves intentionality, motives, and goals. Ricoeur argued that narrativity is a necessary condition of human experience, and to be severed from such narrative order consequently restricts our ability to find meaning in our own lives. Ricoeur explains that, “Time becomes
human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.” 19 The features of temporality are experienced by humans through the well-worn triad: past, present, and future, but Ricoeur employs Aristotle’s account of narrative unity introduced in his Poetics, wherein Aristotle understands the structure of a narrative to have a beginning, middle, and end. Ricoeur, however, only uses Aristotle’s description of narrative structure and the necessary plot expressed within it as a starting point for thinking about the importance of narrative unity and the meaning it necessarily confers onto human projects. Further developing the importance of the narrative structure in human experience, cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz offers a very helpful analysis in his seminal essay, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”.

Geertz noticed the dearth of serious inquiry devoted to what most anthropologists who had studied Balinese culture before him dismissed offhandedly as a superficial pastime: the cockfights. Geertz believed there was much more going on within and around the cockfighting ring than was immediately apparent. Comparing the cultural influence of Balinese cockfights to American sports and recreation, Geertz famously writes, “As much of America surfaces in a ball park, on golf links, at a race track, or around a poker table, much of Bali surfaces in a cock ring. For it is only apparently cocks that are fighting there. Actually, it is men.” 20 Geertz goes on to describe the cultural ‘depth’ on display in the cockfighting ring as a symbolic representation of the shared ethos to which all Balinese people belong. The cock itself acts as a symbol of masculinity and virility; employed deliberately as a double entendre. And the honor and status at stake in one’s involvement in the cockfights occupies a central role in Balinese social interactions.
For Geertz, the cocks and the cockfights play an integral role in constructing Balinese social dynamics by teaching each new generation the ‘ways,’ so to speak, of the Balinese people. It is in this sense that the importance of Geertz’ analysis becomes relevant to the discussion of moral fragmentation. Without the symbolic (re)production of Balinese social hierarchies provided by the cockfights, the people would be cut-off from an important, and effective, source of Balinese social and moral understandings. In this way, the cockfights provide a narrative where Balinese values and social structure are transmitted, reproduced, and negotiated in a public forum.

Geertz understands the social function of cockfighting as a narrative when he states, “Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves.”21 He continues by adding, “Attending cockfights and participating in them is, for the Balinese, a kind of sentimental education. What he learns there is what his culture's ethos and his private sensibility (or, anyway, certain aspects of them) look like when spelled out externally in a collective text; that the two are near enough alike to be articulated in the symbolics of a single such text.”22

Connecting Geertz’ words here back to Ricoeur’s notion of narrativity, a culture’s text, when read and reread, offers the audience a robust source of understanding, both of one’s self and of one’s culture. Without such cultural texts, or perhaps without awareness of what such texts transmit, the people of a society lead fragmented and isolated lives; leading to what MacIntyre describes as life lived in “thoughtlessness.”23

b. **Individualism:**
Although the “thoughtlessness” of modern western societies MacIntyre describes is a consequence of our fragmented understandings of moral principles and ethical utterances, he argues that the sense of radical individualism it creates is a primary symptom of the dominant modern moral framework – what MacIntyre refers to as emotivism. Individualism, a primary component of American exceptionalism – a term that can be traced back to de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1840), and subsequently developed further by many sociologists and historians, most notably Seymour Lipset and Dorothy Ross – has historically been, and continues to be, a fundamental tenet of American ideology. Due to the widespread and wide-ranging use of the term ‘individualism,’ it would be helpful to begin by explaining the use of individualism employed here.

According to Bellah et al., at its most basic level individualism contrasts with what these authors refer to as “social realism”; the primary distinction between the two concepts being the relationship believed to exist between the individual and society. On its broadest level “ontological individualism” develops from a belief that the individual exists prior to and independent of any society to which they belong. Social realism, on the other hand, finds its roots in the American religious tradition; a belief that the church exists prior to the individual, temporally and ontologically.24

Although *Habits of the Heart* (1985) presents a much more nuanced account of various types of individualism operative in American society – such as expressive, utilitarian, and religious individualism – their critical stance toward individualistic tendencies in American culture challenges the social efficacy of any type of institutionalized individualist ethos. Rather than abandoning any notion of the individual, however, the central problem that Bellah and his colleagues set out to address centers on identifying “those cultural traditions and practices that,
without destroying individuality, serve to limit and restrain the destructive side of individualism and provide alternative models for how Americans might live.” They hope their efforts to identify these traditions and practices contribute to the creation or enhancement of a morally coherent life.

While debates about the proper role and utility of individualism in American society remain hotly contested, with no terminus in sight, Bellah et al. describe the relationship between individualism and freedom as a parasitic one. Viewed as symptomatic of modern moral (mis)understandings, critics of American individualism, such as Bellah and his colleagues, view the increase of individualistic mentalities as a direct threat to the survival of freedom itself. They reason that the more individualistic people within a society become, the more isolated they become; the more isolated they become, the less involved and connected to the community they are; the less involved and connected to the community they are, the quicker individual rights and freedom erode.

The sustained maintenance of a free society requires a collection of connected and engaged citizens, not – contrary to a Lockean social arrangement – an atomized group of individuals concerned only with maximizing the satisfaction of their personal self-interests. Bellah et al. describe in great detail perhaps the most significant of these social consequences: the thorough separation of private and public lives.

To introduce the modern conception of perceived separation between different ‘spheres’ of life, Bellah et al. contrast the modernized urban and suburban-based lifestyle enclaves with the rural, agrarian communities of America’s past. The authors contend that, “The most distinctive aspect of twentieth-century American society is the division of life into a number of separate functional sectors: home and workplace, work and leisure, white collar and blue collar, public
and private...All this is in strong contrast to the widespread nineteenth-century pattern in which, as on the often-sentimentalized family farm, these functions had only indistinct boundaries.”

26

The creation of distinct boundaries between the public and the private lives of Americans corresponds to a split between what Bellah et al. describe as expressive individualism (private life) and utilitarian individualism (public life).

Similar to what MacIntyre refers to as ‘emotivism,’ Bellah et al. view expressive individualism as a subjectivist refuge for religious beliefs and moral sentiments, and view the relegation of expressive individualism to the American private life as a consequence of the rise of scientific and rationalistic explanations of the world. Reserved for the public sphere of American life, utilitarian individualism, according to Bellah et al., accords primary importance to protection of self and property, and the utilitarian individualist believes society exists simply because it remains the safest and most reliable method for achieving these ends. The private vs. public – expressive vs. utilitarian – dichotomy inures American social atomization and reinforces the belief that Americans lead separate, isolated, and self-interested lives; and importantly, that we share no common values or morals, other than self-interestedness itself.

MacIntyre expresses similar concern for the socially deleterious effects of the branching apart of the modern social order and the subsequent emergence of the emotivist self when he argues,

The bifurcation of the contemporary social world into a realm of the organizational in which ends are taken to be given and are not available for rational scrutiny and a realm of the personal in which judgment and debate about values are central factors, but in which no rational social resolution of issues is available, finds its internalization, its inner
representation in the relation of the individual self to the roles and *characters* of social life.  

MacIntyre describes the tension created by the split between the public and the private lives of ‘modernized’ societies as a split between the social roles, or characters, one inhabits and the individual’s social and ontological sovereignty – or, characterized in another way, the split between bureaucratization and individualism. However, as MacIntyre argues, this dichotomy – set up as an interminable debate between the bureaucrat who installs policies and regulations designed to limit free and arbitrary choices, and the individualist who seeks to eliminate regulatory power over one’s free and arbitrary choices – reinforces the perception that these two models of social order are in fact the only models available to choose between, creating a perfectly fertile social substrate from which the emotivist self can flourish.

The interminable nature of this debate allows individuals to distance themselves from any obligation to find consensus about or act in accordance with the common good of one’s community. Much like Bellah et al.’s utilitarian individualist, MacIntyre’s bureaucratic individualist understands the social utility of certain roles, or characters, and the constitutive responsibilities associated with them, but locates moral agency in the self, effectively severing moral agency from any procedures aiming to eliminate moral disagreement. The result of this modern ‘moral self’ is that it “has no necessary social content and no necessary social identity.” The severance of the self from any substantial or meaningful sense of community results in social atomization and indifference to civic virtue, or the need to articulate and work toward a shared conception of the common good within one’s community.

Although it remains difficult to ascertain which factor catalyzed the other, if that matters at all, the loss of a shared conception of the common good and the atomization of American
society share an intricate and intimate connection. Lasch addresses this transformation of American social dynamics – from sharing an understanding of and working together toward a common good, to an amoral quest for personal advancement – by describing early America as a society substantially informed by and fortified through the Protestant work ethic. The work ethic exemplified by Protestant religious convictions viewed hard work, determination, and prudence as virtues representative of one’s faith, and considered self-enhancement to be inextricable from social-enhancement.

Lasch explains that, “Until recently, the Protestant work ethic stood as one of the most important underpinnings of American culture…America’s reputation as a land of opportunity rested on the claim that the destruction of hereditary obstacles to advancement had created conditions in which social mobility depended on individual initiative alone.”

Even as America lay poised to embark on what Mark Twain referred to as America’s Gilded Age – that era in American history characterized by what Thorstein Veblen referred to as the age of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure – Lasch contends that the common good remained a guiding principle in human social interaction for some time.

Lasch emphasized the intimate connection between self and community, even in a time of rapidly expanding wealth, by arguing, “Even the most unabashed exponents of self-enrichment clung to the notion that wealth derives its value from its contributions to the general good and to the happiness of future generations.” However, as Americans marched toward what Lasch called a “new narcissism,” the concern for community and for preservation characteristic of the Protestant work ethic was replaced by what could be called ‘The Ethic of Personal Survival.’ Lasch refers to this transformation in American’s definition of success as a transition from self-improvement – which included a concept of ‘self’ that was unintelligible independent of one’s
community – to self-preservation or self-advancement. Lasch sums up this notion with the quip, “The happy hooker stands in place of Horatio Alger as the prototype of success.”

Lasch argues that the “happy hooker” perfectly symbolizes the increasingly warlike conditions of everyday social life in which exploiting the weaknesses of others in order to advance one’s own financial standing is the rule not the exception, and that “even the most intimate encounters become a form of mutual exploitation.” The dominant mode of mutual exploitation that Lasch argues is characteristic of modern American society inevitably results in a breakdown of community. A community cannot operate effectively without a baseline of trust among the individuals who comprise it. However, without a shared understanding of the common good, it becomes impossible for other members of the community to be committed to its pursuit. The resulting social organization is what Bellah et al. call a lifestyle enclave.

Opposing it to a true community, or what they call a “community of memory,” Bellah and company believe the lifestyle enclave to be the dominant form of American social interaction. While communities exhibit interdependence between members, discuss and act together politically, and share a history, those belonging to a certain lifestyle enclave share only a tenuous connection founded on similar features of their private lives. “Members of a lifestyle enclave express their identity through shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities…lifestyle is fundamentally segmental and celebrates the narcissism of similarity.”

Importantly, the lifestyle enclave celebrates only the similarities found between the private lives of people, affirming selfhood through social acceptability and respectability. Directly linked to the rise of suburbanization and patterns of consumption and leisure, the lifestyle enclave thrives in a radically individualized society, such as contemporary America. But despite its effectiveness as a form of social support, it only serves to further cement the
mutually exploitive quest for personal success, or at least the appearance of success, measured not against a universal notion of one’s contribution to the sum of their community’s progress, but by ‘out-consuming’ other members of one’s lifestyle enclave.

The transition from an economy of production to an economy of consumption paved the way for the rise of the lifestyle enclave and the subsequent failing of true community, at least in the way Bellah et al. envisioned it. As early as 1950, David Riesman famously described this transformation in American culture as going “from the invisible hand to the glad hand,” or in other words, the nature of one’s social utility being transformed from the pursuit of one’s own ends in order to maximize the total social good, to the pursuit of one’s own personal ends at all costs, even at the expense of one’s community. 36

The culture of consumption lies at the heart of this transformation. Lasch’s indictment of American culture is again relevant: we have, to remind the reader, “transformed the Protestant work ethic while carrying the underlying principles of capitalist society to their logical conclusion. The pursuit of self-interest...has become a search for pleasure and psychic survival.”37 Positioning consumption as the primary measure of achieving success, and the inevitable breakdown of true community, frees people from the interdependent obligations and civic engagement necessary to identify, refine, and work toward matters of public concern.

In addition to a commitment to individual autonomy and an inability to articulate and pursue the common good, the widespread absence of civic engagement results in an American society unwittingly relinquishing control of the democratic process, ceding ultimate managerial power to the administrative bureaucracies that order daily life. The rise of bureaucratization, identified by the majority of social critics as a principle cause of the deterioration of American morality, is where we now turn.
c. **Bureaucratization:**

The fetishization of consumption and the subsequent reluctance of true civic engagement have long been understood to be primary contributing factors in America’s excessively-bureaucratic political and economic organization. However, bureaucracies are not inherently parasitic on civic participation in a society. In fact, many sociologists believe that the presence of bureaucratic coordination within a society is a hallmark of modernity.

Max Weber, well-known German sociologist, contends that the bureaucratic form was the ideal, i.e. most rational, way to organize governmental operations. But even Weber himself, alongside the same worries echoed by Bellah et al., understood that bureaucracy, unfettered from moral constraints and given sovereignty over all aspects of public life, would severely limit personal autonomy and threaten to dismantle the democratic process altogether. As it is with any mechanism of social order, bureaucratic oversight must function as a subsidiary process within the larger aim of achieving the common good for the people.

Due to its widespread and varying use, similar to the term ‘individualism’ discussed in detail above, the term bureaucracy has adopted a somewhat negative connotation in common vernacular. It would be helpful, then, to identify exactly how the term is employed herein. Bureaucracy, as I use the term, refers to a body of non-elected administrative officials who have been granted power to create and enact policies that impact the lives of those they govern.

Bureaucracies are structured into hierarchies with each level above controlling the level below through the use of formalized rules in hopes of generating a consistent approach between and among the various levels of the hierarchy. Appropriate bureaucratic functions typically include tasks of implementing new policies and laws, public administration – such as collecting fees, issuing permits, and conducting tests – and the creation of rules and regulations by
specialized departments designed to protect and advance the public good. As long as concern for the public good remains the aim of any bureaucracy, it provides an indispensable service for large-scale political and economic systems, such as America’s. However, many social critics have argued that bureaucracy’s propensity and susceptibility for dehumanization, apathy, and/or being excessively rational and paternalistic in its administrative or regulative roles threatens individual autonomy by forcing people into an “iron cage” of overly-rationalized, hyper-efficient automatons.³⁸

_Unfettered_ bureaucratization, much like _radical_ individualism, erodes moral order by first establishing and then reinforcing a false and rigid dichotomy. As discussed above, there exists a perceived irreconcilability between the bifurcated views that a society functions in only one of two ways: either “one in which the free and arbitrary choices are sovereign,” or “one in which the bureaucracy is sovereign, precisely so that it may limit the free and arbitrary choices of individuals.”³⁹ This bifurcation is troublesome because regardless of which view succeeds the resulting social order is untenable.

Of course, the emotivistic moral pluralism that results from a view of the sovereignty of individual choices has been condemned by social theorists, such as MacIntyre, for its inherent severance from any historical tradition and subsequent interminability of moral debates. Likewise, the excessively bureaucratic form of social organization in which control over social governance is handed over to specialists and technical experts equally promotes political and civic apathy, not to mention emotivistic moral disagreement. As MacIntyre contends, “it is in the cultural climate of this bureaucratic individualism that the emotivist self is naturally at home.”⁴⁰
The American ambivalence about which form of social organization to adopt has created a profound social tension that grows more unsustainable by the generation. MacIntyre’s bureaucratic individualist, exemplified by the manager or administrator, reveals the frightening ambiguities and contradictions seemingly inherent in modern life. Freedom to make private decisions is bought at the cost of turning over most public decisions to bureaucratic specialists and experts.

De Tocqueville expressed his concern over this disturbing trend by labeling it “administrative despotism.” Far from affirming the ability to make private decisions free from bureaucratic oversight, only the illusion of freedom remains in administrative despotism. De Tocqueville explains that this state of American social order would look like, “A kind of orderly, gentle, peaceful slavery which…could be combined more easily than is generally supposed, with some of the external forms of freedom and…there is a possibility of getting itself established even under the shadow of the sovereignty of the people.”

Unlike the explicit and heavy-handed control exhibited within totalitarian dictatorships or tyrannical autocracies, the administrative despotism described by de Tocqueville operates in a much more insidious way; frustrating, hindering, or stifling one’s political and civic engagement rather than categorical displays of control and power. The danger, as critics of this form of government identify it, lies in the distancing effect that takes place between the citizenry and their political and civic engagement. Bellah et al. identify the danger as being the acceptance of only an illusion of freedom, remarking that “A private freedom purchased at the price of public despotism is finally no freedom at all.”

Directly connected to the firmly entrenched culture of consumption, the administrative despotism de Tocqueville was worried about threatens the modern American social landscape.
now more than ever. It seems Americans are increasingly at ease with a minimal amount of political and civic engagement, content to let the ‘experts’ or ‘specialists’ negotiate the all-too-complex world of national and international politics and economics.

Lasch contends, “American capitalism has rejected priestly and monarchical hegemony only to replace it with the hegemony of the business corporation, the managerial and professional classes who operate the corporate system, and the corporate state.”\textsuperscript{43} The result of this handing-over of social control to the corporate state run by the managerial elite turns out to be a great irony for those seeking the autonomy and independence in their private lives.

As Americans cede more control to the corporate state, their dependence grows proportionately. Lasch avers, “The psychological expression of this dependence is narcissism. In its pathological form, narcissism originates as a defense against feelings of helpless dependency in early life, which it tries to counter with ‘blind optimism’ and grandiose illusions of personal self-sufficiency.”\textsuperscript{44} If Lasch is correct in his assessment, the trend of surrendering social control to the experts or specialists, or as he calls them the managerial and professional elite, will result in nothing more than atomized individuals loosely bound by the common narcissistic fantasy of success, “which consists of nothing more substantial than a wish to be vastly admired, not for one’s accomplishments [or contributions to the common good] but simply for oneself, uncritically and without reservation.”\textsuperscript{45}

Like Weber, Lasch understands the need for bureaucratic technologies in an increasingly modern and complex society such as America. However, also akin to Weber’s critique, the rise of bureaucracy must not outweigh or usurp the common good of the community. When the balance of power shifts too far to the bureaucratic and governmental, Lasch sees what he terms, ‘monopoly capitalism’ – i.e. a monopoly between bureaucracy in government and bureaucracy in
industry. Lasch opposes this all-encompassing monopoly of bureaucratic control to competitive or free-market capitalism – economic systems he believes would represent an effectively balanced government.\textsuperscript{46}

Not far off from Lasch’s assessment, Bellah et al. describe the modern American social ethos in different words, yet similar sentiment. Echoing Lasch’s indictment of the managerial and therapeutic forms of social interaction, Bellah and his colleagues refer to the American way of life as “bureaucratic consumer capitalism,” and describe it as the social context within which the manager and the therapist represent a normative order of life, complete with character ideals, images of the good life, and methods of attaining it. The autonomous individual rests at the center of this image, deciding which roles he will play based not on older, traditional modes of moral order, but in accordance only with his own concept of self-preservation and satiation of personal appetitive desires.\textsuperscript{47}

In an American culture characterized by bureaucratic consumerism the re-definition of success is the achievement of personal, private ambition. Bellah et al. understand, however, that the processes that have led America here were necessary to progress beyond the shackles of monarchic rule, but they worry that Americans are complicit in the process of a solipsistic and narcissistic re-shackling they believe to currently be underway; they explain, “Though the processes of separation and individuation were necessary to free us from the tyrannical structures of the past, they must be balanced by a renewal of commitment and community if they are not to end in self-destruction.”\textsuperscript{48}

Despite the harsh indictments of American culture levied by social critics such as Lasch and MacIntyre, Bellah et al.’s prescriptive response to the problems associated with fragmentation, individualism, and bureaucratization offers at least a glimmer of hope for
restoring a sense of the common good and reclamation of the true communities of memory that these authors believe will reinvigorate moral and political obligations among Americans.

Bellah et al. are not alone in their cautious optimism, either. Both Lasch and MacIntyre offer at least a fleeting glimpse of how American morality might be wrested from the morass. Unsurprisingly, a more engaged and committed citizenry lies at the heart of that effort. Lasch focuses specifically on the recovery of the moral principles associated with the Protestant work ethic that once defined personal and societal success. Lasch pronounces, “The will to build a better society, however, survives, along with traditions of localism, self-help, and community action that only need the vision of a new society, a decent society, to give them new vigor. The moral discipline formerly associated with the work ethic still retains a value independent of the role it once played in the defense of property rights.”

While Lasch understands that in order to salvage a morally decent American society, there must be an effort to put in place what he calls “communities of competence” that snatch back control from the dependence on expertise of the professional elite, MacIntyre unsurprisingly locates the recovery of moral life in finding ways to reawaken a community’s awareness that the attainment of virtue and the avoidance of vice should constitute each community’s commitments. MacIntyre writes:

What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time.
II. Sports’ Role in Combating the Moral Crisis

a. Mens Sana in Corpore Sano:

Despite the hope and optimism for a revolution of morality cited by these scholars, there remains the crucial issue of which social technologies will be best suited to herald this transformation. Sports have long been a recurring theme in the discussion of effective tools utilized for the purpose of moral recovery through the means of civic engagement. Although many contemporary scholars situate their studies of this topic within a relatively recent historical time period, namely the late 19th & early 20th centuries, the practice of viewing sport as a method for (re)building a sense of community among its individual members has had a long and storied history.

The Ancient Greeks may have been the first civilization to fully appreciate and understand the (trans)formative dimensions of organized athletic activities, exemplified most notably in the PanHellenic Games, of which the Ancient Olympic Games were a part. Held on a rotating schedule every other year in various city-states throughout Ancient Greece, these games highlighted and celebrated the displays of excellence, both moral and sporting, exhibited by the athletes. Winners of these illustrious events were held in high social esteem, attaining country-wide recognition and mythical status in their native city-states.

The contributions sports made to the development of virtue, excellence, or what was in the Ancient Greek language known as arête, occupied the central focus in why Ancient Greek citizens were so fascinated and dedicated to athletic contests and feats of athletic skill. Aristotle famously writes of athletics and competition, “And just as at the Olympic Games the wreaths of victory are not bestowed upon the handsomest and strongest persons present, but on men who
enter for the competitions – since it is among these that the winners are found, - so it is those who act rightly who carry off the prizes and good things of life.”\textsuperscript{51} The virtues one develops and exhibits through one’s participation in athletic contests made these athletic competitions, for the Ancient Greeks, a primary component of their cultural ethos; quite similar to the insights Geertz offered in his investigation into the Balinese cockfighting rings, the Ancient Games were a deeply ingrained institution that taught its people the importance of virtue in all areas of life.

The Ancient Roman civilization also incorporated forms of athletics into their culture, such as the gladiatorial games and the chariot races of, for instance, the Circus Maximus, though for ostensibly less noble purposes. As indicated by the practice later referred to as “Bread and Circuses,” these mostly theatrical and contrived events served the Emperor’s agenda of satiating the appetite desires of the Roman masses, diverting their attentions away from their dismal living conditions, and ultimately staving off any effort by the people to rebel or revolt.

Aside from assuaging the masses, these events drew large crowds of spectators to watch, slaves, foreigners, and criminals, rather than honorable Roman citizens compete fairly against one another. The emperors of the Ancient Roman Republic understood well the slaking effect these games had on their people, and spared no expense in giving them the carnage they so desired. However, the appeasement of their citizenry was not the only utility the Ancient Romans understood sport to have.

In their interminable conquests of new territory, the Roman emperors adopted some Greek sports due to their military practicality. William Baker, renowned ancient civilizations scholar, claimed that for the Ancient Romans, “If an activity was not militarily practical, it was not worthwhile. Roman boys swam, ran, and wrestled in order to become physically and mentally tough for the ultimate purpose of serving in the legions.”\textsuperscript{52}
Whether for enlightened, nefarious, or reasons otherwise most human civilizations have to some degree incorporated sports (or their pre-modern athletic ancestors) into their cultural milieu as a means to social and/or political ends. The modern American sports narrative, although different in social and historical contexts, is no outlier in this practice. However, despite the nationalistic propaganda stating the contrary, most iterations of modern American sports locate their roots in Georgian and Victorian England.

Of the so-called “holy triumvirate” of modern American sports: baseball, football, and basketball, only basketball boasts a truly North American origin story. While football’s history is perhaps more straightforwardly a contemporary version of rugby and association football, modern-day baseball, along with cricket and other bat, ball, and running games, claims a more contested origin story. However, many historians believe the origin of these games to be different versions of informal and non-codified 18th century English bat-and-ball folk games.

The famous quote generally attributed to the Duke of Wellington that, “The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton” is perhaps the most well-known example of the English understanding of the relationship between sports, morality, and social ethos. Whether apocryphal or not, the Duke’s famous words indicate the level of awareness of sport’s potential for character-building and development of virtues in England during the 19th century.

Aside from the Duke’s telling proclamation, another interesting, and highly entertaining, account of the sports-as-character-building motif appears in mid-nineteenth century popular fiction. Tom Brown’s Schooldays, a novel written in 1857 by Thomas Hughes, depicts the coming-of-age travails of a young boy who goes away to private school at Rugby in Berkshire, England. Throughout his exploits a theme begins to emerge about the centrality of honest competition in the process of developing young boys into men.
Hughes makes it clear that the competitive endeavors in which his protagonist experiences throughout the novel contributed directly to his personal and moral growth. Hughes writes, "Don’t let reformers of any sort think that they are going really to lay hold of the working boys and young men of England by any educational grapnel whatever, which isn’t some bona fide equivalent for the games of the old country...something to try the muscles of men’s bodies, and the endurance of their hearts." Sports, especially football (i.e. rugby) for Tom Brown, represented the toughness, ruggedness, and fearlessness characteristic of ideal manliness, while also signifying the importance of honesty, fairness and gentlemanliness essential to forming fraternal bonds.

Speaking of what was known as ‘muscular Christianity,’ Hughes’ novels, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857) and *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1895), capitalized on a growing anxiety surrounding the physical and mental weakening of the British people. Known as one of its chief architects, Thomas Hughes’ portrayal of athletic competition as germane to the private school’s mission of preparing young men for life is characteristic of muscular Christianity’s ideology.

Muscular Christianity infuses religious ideals into the practice of promoting physical and mental strength and well-being. Central to the concept that sports serve the social function of physically and morally developing the people who play them, the earliest forms of ‘amateurism,’ a concept so deeply rooted within the sport-as-social-technology theory, is closely connected to the athleticism and muscular Christianity that lies at the heart of Hughes’, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*. Unfortunately, the historical development of amateurism is not quite as noble as the term connotes for modern readers.

Fearing an influx of working-class men into their gentleman’s sports, the British aristocracy found ways to keep the deleterious consequences of profiteering, and the degradation
brought about by playing sports for external rewards, out of their sporting practices. The upper class aristocrats established a division between the banal, ignorant practices of professional sport played by the working-class, and the sophisticated, pure amateur sports they played. At its best, amateurism represents the “Corinthian spirit” through a commitment to preserving the ideals of fairness, honor, and sportsmanship; the hallmarks of any intrinsically-oriented approach to the value of sports. Within this dichotomy, professionalism was characterized by an indifference to the internal goods of sports, eschewing the quest for moral excellence in favor of cash prizes or other rewards external to the game itself.

Although different ideologies guided each approach to and view of sports, as the concept of amateurism took hold in the public consciousness the distinction became codified: someone who played for the good of the game and received no payment for athletic services (amateur), versus someone who played expressly as a means to earning an income (professional). As an effective social utility, the view of sports as a tool to correct the economic and political excesses – which many, including Thomas Hughes and Baron Pierre de Coubertin, believed was primarily responsible for the lack of national masculine vigor – began its dissemination from Britain’s public schools and gentleman’s clubs to other western societies and their sporting practices.

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, architect of the modern Olympic Games and, perhaps more importantly the modern movement known as Olympism, held steadfastly to the intimate connection between the moral and athletic ideals espoused by the British school’s headmasters. In admiration of the qualities that characterized British public school, such as liberty, patriotism, morality, commitment to helping the disadvantaged and pursuing the common good, Coubertin sought to bring the same model to the schools of his homeland, France.
Less convinced by the Christian, and more by the muscular aspect of muscular Christianity, Coubertin believed that sports itself should be seen as a ‘religious’ experience. Coubertin used the metaphor of a holy temple when discussing the sports field, and said that sport was, “a laboratory for manliness…an incomparable pedagogical tool.” For Coubertin, the archetypal example of this model was found in the English public schools, which Hughes made famous through the various passages littering the pages of Tom Brown’s Schooldays.

In his own writings, Coubertin celebrated real-life Rugby School headmaster, Thomas Arnold, as the father of the organized sport movement he so explicitly strove to emulate in his own sporting philosophy. In fact, the Baron loved so deeply the model of English sport and education that he made a pilgrimage to Rugby school in 1886. Meditating near Arnold’s tomb, Coubertin had a flash of insight: “In the twilight, alone in the great gothic chapel of Rugby, my eyes fixed on the funeral slab upon which, without epitaph, the great name of Thomas Arnold was inscribed, I dreamed that I saw before me the cornerstone of the British Empire.”

Arnold, in Coubertin’s estimation – though not wholly historically accurate – not only formalized the English sporting model and founded the muscular Christian movement, but also through doing so reinvigorated the very moral soul of the British Empire. Coubertin wanted the same reinvigoration for his home country of France; a country he saw falling victim to similar symptoms of moral and physical despair.

In order to enact the same kind of moral reinvigoration he saw as necessary in France that he perceived Arnold had brought to England, Coubertin decided that what the world needed was a sporting experience that could, as John Lucas and Robert Osterhoudt claim, “bring together in a radiant gathering all of the principles contributing to the perfection of humanity and the fulfillment of a distinctly human life.” Olympism, as Coubertin’s Olympic philosophy came to
be known, incorporates principles found in a variety of ideological sources, but focused primarily on a conception of sport as pedagogical.

Esteemed Olympic scholar, John Lucas explains that, “Pierre de Coubertin’s philosophy of sport or ‘Olympism’ is a hybrid of the ideal Greek, the ideal chivalric, and the ideal English…the gentlemanly code, the deeper meaning of the amateur spirit.” Embracing the well-worn Latin idiom, mens sana in corpore sano, Coubertin firmly believed that physical education and athletics were capable of performing two highly useful personal and social functions, “the one physiological, the other touching on morality. They both must be habitual, voluntary, and intensive to the point of perfection.”

Although seemingly quixotic, and perhaps anachronistic, Coubertin’s dreams of reviving the Olympic Games were born from his commitment to the unity between body, mind, and spirit that he believed epitomized the Ancient Greek’s fascination with athletics. Coubertin himself stated that the very reason he revived the Olympian Games was because he believed that, “political and social stability among nations is less possible without mutual understanding of the worth and inseparability of the mind, the body, and the spirit.”

Despite the fact that Coubertin may have harbored nationalistic motives in his quest to revive the Olympic Games, he also believed that the values and principles embodied by these games represented humanity’s greatest hope for “the cultivation of social peace and universal brotherhood.” Whether this peace and brotherhood has ever come to fruition is open for debate, but Coubertin was not alone in his idealistic view of Olympic, and therefore human, future. In fact, the American sporting republic also used the Olympic Games as a social technology meant to both unify their national identity domestically and signal to the rest of the world that democracy, and the republican virtues that guide it, are alive and well.
b. **Sports as a Social Technology:**

Dyreson’s, *Making the American Team*, offers an informative and insightful account of how the American sporting republic began and how the newly minted international spectacle, Coubertin’s modern Olympic Games, played a primary role in its formation and proliferation. Dyreson claims that the leading intellectuals in postbellum America used sport to capitalize on an opportunity to solidify a national identity within a splintered and chaotic populace. Dyreson contends that tailoring the country into what he called a ‘sporting republic,’ “signals [his] assertion that sport is intimately related to the way in which people understand power,” and that, “the idea of a sporting republic represents both the popular American fascination with sport and the intersection of political and athletic ideas in American minds.”

In a time period sorely lacking in genuine community ties, members of the American sporting republic viewed sport as a social technology, capable of unifying the nation under a singular national identity and reviving the pursuit of a common national purpose. The architects of the sporting republic desired to use sport as a tool to inform and disseminate the value of civic virtue and the benefits of community oriented social organization. Dyreson explains that,  

They defined a sporting republic as a polity in which the new athletic technology and the public dialogues it spawned could shape culture. They believed that sport could inculcate public virtue. They asserted that sport could mold citizens. They argued sport could solve troublesome social conflicts. They insisted sport could reform American institutions. They were certain that sport could produce a nation committed to fair play and rule by law.”
In short, sport provided a potential panacea for curing social ills. In light of the continuation and worsening of the social ills identified in the preceding section, the effectiveness of using sports as a social technology remains a promise yet to be fulfilled.

Crucial to his analysis, Dyreson explains his view of what a technology is, and how sport should be considered a highly effective one. Not to be limited merely to inanimate objects, machines, or ‘things’ crafted by human hands, technologies should be considered more broadly as, “organizations of human energy designed for problem solving.” The sporting republicans believed that when used as a tool for social progress, sports could counteract the atomizing and fragmenting effects of the increasingly industrialized and bureaucratic governmental and economic structures.

As American agrarian communities dissolved, being replaced by urban consumer lifestyle enclaves, the sporting republicans knew that they needed something that had enough social force to bring people together in a new way. Dyreson argues that, “These Americans wondered whether the new machines and factories, the railroads, the reapers and harvesters, and the expanding cities would strip the vitality from their human creators.” The unifying power of sport, they reasoned, functioned as a common language, creating a community of discourse where the social, political, and economic issues could be broached and resolutions more likely found. As a social technology, language is absolutely indispensable for human societies. Not only was sport a source for establishing a common language, which would in-turn function as a system for community-building, but Dyreson’s convincing claim is that sport itself is a social technology.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century America – heavily influenced by the rapidly modernizing effects of technological advancements and the dominance of policy-making
procedures being increasingly dependent on rationality rather than morality – faced the increasingly problematic issue of an imbalanced and disorderly political system that threatened to dismantle the American dream. The rise of the market economy, where individual standards of success became more tethered to conspicuous consumption than to the growth and prosperity of one’s community, ushered in a new era of interpersonal relationships.

Coupled with an influx of immigration and the increasingly concentrated urban centers, the intellectual elite foresaw the erosion of social and moral life. What they sought were social practices and cultural traditions that had the capacity to unite the people; a universal language that symbolized the democratic and republican values of the American experiment. What they found was sport, and specifically the Olympic Games.

The first modern Olympic Games, held in Athens in 1896, was seen as a beacon of hope for the intellectual class hoping to use sport as a catalyst for social unification in America. Dyreson argues that, “From the beginning, the United States sought to turn the Olympics into an American spectacle,” and that, “The Athens Olympics provided the sporting republic with the perfect forum for proving to Americans the powers of sport were at work reforming society.”

In response to the fractured social conditions of modernizing American life, brought on by the ambivalence between the “promises of wealth and progress that the new systems offered and the customary comforts of traditional patterns,” members of the sporting republic knew that the public masses needed a hero, and the Olympic games provided a bountiful source. Dyreson declares, “In 1896, the past held George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and other heroes of the American Revolution and Civil War. The present had a boatload of possibilities sailing to the inaugural Olympic Games.”
Coubertin’s vision of Olympism was alive and well in turn-of-the-century United States. Like Coubertin, the American intellectuals who formed the sporting republic were highly convinced of sport’s educational and social potential. The international language of the Olympic Games, both Coubertin and the American sporting republic hoped, would form alliances and contribute an articulation of a common good with which to pursue in solidarity. Coubertin believed that the Olympic Games would give “the world a chance of a happy and brotherly encounter which will gradually efface the peoples’ ignorance of things which concern them all, an ignorance which feeds hatreds, accumulates misunderstandings, and hurtles events along a barbarous path toward a merciless conflict.”

At stake for the American side, however, was more than the realization of a “happy and brotherly encounter.”

The Americans saw an opportunity, on an international stage, to show the rest of the world the superiority of democratic and republican values. Dyreson claims that, “American thinkers were sure that the global adoption of American understandings of sport would lead the nations of the world to convert to the American political system.” The inherent exceptionalism of the sporting republic’s approach to the Athenian Olympiad resulted in a degradation of Coubertin’s Olympic spirit.

In order to have the ability to conclude the American way to be superior, the members of the sporting republic believed the American team needed not simply to compete well, but to win the day. Dyreson quips, “Baron de Coubertin’ Olympic maxim insisted that ‘the essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.’” The Americans had, in their mind, conquered. Fighting well was fine, but winning was the important thing. The result of the Athenian athletic adventure allowed Americans to judge themselves superior to the rest of the world.”
Dyreson reinforces this claim by arguing that the Americans sought to turn the Olympic Games into an American spectacle from the very beginning. The Olympics provided a golden opportunity for assuring Americans of their place atop the international hierarchy. Dyreson contends, “The American Olympic mythology taught that Olympic success sprang from the same forces that shaped the idealized portrait of the American republic: political liberty, hard work, free competition, egalitarianism, respect for and understanding of law, and innovation – the cornerstones of the democratic experiment.”

Importantly, the version of American imperialism implicated in this mythology necessitated unequivocal victory by American athletes on the field.

In order to maintain this mythology, American media outlets took the liberty of conveniently establishing the standards of athletic success by limiting the criteria of Olympic victory to track and field events. Dyreson explains that, “The American press decided that triumph in track and field indicated victory in the Olympic Games, a tradition it continued in the reporting of later Olympics.” And with the victories secured by American athletes in track and field events, “The sporting republic, the press insisted, had proven its vigor.”

The lengths that the American press, as vital members of the sporting republic, went through to frame the Olympic Games as American victories – directly contradicting the spirit of Olympism championed by Coubertin – indicates perhaps the first signs of ideological weakness in the efforts of the sporting republic. Positioning ‘the win’ as the only sure sign of American political and social superiority established the conditions for the morally questionable sporting republic inherited by contemporary Americans.

The sporting republic’s failures to construct a national culture, restore community, and reinvigorate civic virtue – everything promised to the American public – was directly related to the fixation on winning that was created through using Olympic contests as litmus tests for the
efficacy of the American way of life. Despite sporting republican’s best intentions, the replacement of Olympism, as Coubertin imagined it, by the cult of winning in American athletic mythology found a quite suitable home in the modern win-at-all-costs, hyper-competitive quest for personal achievement, even at the expense of the common good.

The individual success indicated by whether one lost or won a contest translated nicely into the market-driven standards of economic success predicated on earning and spending more than one’s “opponent”, otherwise known as one’s fellow community member. As it was in economic life, the sporting life of Americans was just as intimately bound with winning. Referencing Harper Magazine’s illustrious journalist and founder of college football’s All-America team, Caspar Whitney, Dyreson states, “Clearly, Whitney understood that winning, not whining, was everything in the struggle to assert the sporting republican’s claims of special providence.” As the Progressive Era began to dominate the American social and intellectual ethos, the pragmatic utilization of sport as a technology took on added importance.

Progressive Era reformers had high hopes for sport. Fully embracing the sporting ideology constructed by sporting republicans, social reformers such as Jane Addams and Jacob Riis believed sports could revive American culture. To these intellectuals, culture “represented the repository of values that gave strength to modern republicanism…a lifestyle dedicated to high ideals and civic engagement. Culture served as the antidote to destructive modern forces – the harsh grind of work in the industrial system, the anonymity of life in urban mass society, and the greedy society spawned by corporate capitalism.” Commitment to civic virtue and informed engagement in the democratic process is a prerequisite for the success of any democracy. Progressive era reformers understood this and saw sport as a tool for bringing it to fruition.
Sport was seen by social reformers as a uniquely useful tool in repairing the nation because of the very principles that governed it. Fair play and rule-based practices were seen as mirrors of the democratic and republican values undergirding the American polity, and the strong interpersonal bonds supposedly forged on the playing fields were supposed to carry over into daily social life. In fact, William James, American philosopher, psychologist and physician, famously wrote that sports could function in social ways similar to war.

In his famous 1906 essay, “The Moral Equivalent of War,” James sought a social institution powerful enough to catalyze a nation the way war did, but without its life-and-death seriousness; how to sustain political unity and civic virtue in the absence of a credible threat. Dyreson comments that, “Sport prepares men to win the competitive struggle of the marketplace, to apply the lessons of ‘fair play’ to society, and to understand regulation, power, and conflict.” However, as Dyreson quickly acknowledges, despite the idealistic rhetoric surrounding the purity of playing fairly for its intrinsic value, “sport had as much to do with power as with fair play.” Regardless of the altruistic intentions on behalf of the social reformers, sports failed to live up to its promise as a panacea for the moral and social ills besieging modern(izing) American life.

While Dyreson’s account of the American sporting republic – and their progressivist views of sport acting as an international language capable of uniting Americans under the pursuit of a common goal – remains primarily descriptive, Morgan utilizes this account of the progressivist notion of sports to identify its failings and takes a more prescriptive approach in ascertaining the potential effectiveness of re-introducing a progressivist view of sports in modern-day America.
Morgan’s book, *Why Sports Morally Matter*, examines the relationship between the decline of moral life in America and contemporary American sports. Morgan argues that, “Sports in this case are no mere reflection of larger society’s growing indifference to moral considerations but in part because of their prominent standing in contemporary society, both a conspicuous exemplification of such moral callousness and an important sign of things to come.”

c. **Sports as the Progressive Prescription to Moral Decline:**

Morgan begins his examination by questioning the contemporary American resistance to contemplating sports in moral terms and wonders how and why Americans have abandoned the notion that sports can act as a vehicle to serve larger moral purposes. Echoing what has already been said by the social critics surveyed throughout this chapter, Morgan offers some preliminary answers.

Morgan points to the radical individualism, and the severed social ties it creates, as a primary factor in the decline of moral life in America. Symptomatic of this American brand of atomization, “market” patriotism compels individuals to satisfy their social obligations through consumerism; to help one’s fellow citizens not by creating genuine communities of memory, but by “shopping-’til-you-drop.” Morgan argues that this market patriotism sours American attitudes toward sports by reducing these activities down into simply another commodity to be bought and sold; just another part of the vast entertainment complex, rather than a potentially morally useful tool.

Morgan nuances his critique of sport by separating the critics into two categories – those who view the main source of moral corruption in sports as sadism, i.e. the degradation of groups
marked by racial, ethnic, and sexual identity, and those who view the primary factor in sports’ moral decline as the influence of money. While both groups have contributed mightily to the awareness and understanding of sports’ present-day moral condition, each have also contributed to an inability to recover any power sports have left to act as an agent of social change.

Morgan criticizes each group by arguing that, whereas the group who focuses on the sadistic aspects of sports, and for example, their institutionalized marginalization of women, athletes of color, and homosexual athletes, has “rendered the moral reform of sports more difficult by not paying enough attention to money,” and that, “they have had almost nothing to say about the political economy of sports,” the group who has concentrated their time and attention on money in sports have stubbornly insisted that “any genuinely critical talk about the role of money in sports must take its point of departure from Marxist theory in one form or another.”

Despite these shortcomings, Morgan’s project stems from a deeper point of departure: hope. Morgan believes that a good social critique, i.e. one that stirs the hearts and minds of people, and causes them to actually do something, must strike a balance between hope and despair. Morgan explains that, “the two groups of critics in question here have generally gone too far in the debunking department, with the predictable result that much of their work evokes pessimism rather than hope for the future.” Without trending too far in the direction of “excessive romanticism,” Morgan hopes his efforts to “explore the legacy of the Progressive conception of sports as a moral model for the criticism and reform of contemporary sports” will reignite the passion of pursuing goods internal to the sports themselves.

Opposing these internal goods of sports, i.e. those that can be gained only through impassioned participation, to external goods, which might be gained otherwise and outside of
sports, Morgan sets up an important distinction for what he calls “the state of play.” Although more will be said about Morgan’s state of play in the subsequent chapter, it is helpful here to understand that he describes it as an alternative to what might be called the ‘market mentality’. Rather than an extrinsically motivated approach toward sports characterized by the win-at-all-costs, instrumental pursuit of external goods – such as fame and money – the state of play requires intrinsically motivated participation.

Morgan stipulates that, “play is an intrinsically motivated way to engage in informal, unorganized, unstructured and, occasionally, elite forms of sport.” Based primarily on a commitment to the pursuit of excellence, the state of play incorporates trust and cooperation as its two core principles. In order for these principles to be infused with social value, Morgan explains, the state of play must take place within a social setting conducive to it. Specifically, Morgan has in mind a society that is “long on trust in others and short on insensate egoism,” and one where “mutual regard for and trust in others typifies our general social engagements as well as our particular sporting ones.”

Further, the state of play requires an awareness of the false dichotomy between competition and cooperation. Morgan clarifies: “Competition itself in sports demands that we cooperate with others in accepting certain rules and conventions and – perhaps more importantly – in mutually agreeing, better mutually committing, to push each other to the limits of our capabilities.” What, then, are the barriers to achieving an attitude toward sports that acknowledges and respects their potential contribution to the moral life of Americans?

Echoing many of the sentiments from the first section of this chapter, both Dyreson and Morgan concur that ultimately the lack of a well-articulated common good lies at the heart of American’s failure to recognize and act upon sports’ moral potential. But the question then
becomes: what has caused the deterioration of America’s recognition of the common good? The answer to this question, for Morgan, and many other social theorists, comes down to the institutionalization of an unfettered market.

As it was in everyday life, the sporting life of American’s has been inundated with materialistic criteria for the achievement of success. The market mentality aims to commodify and set prices on every consumable good available. In this free-market system in which everything can be bought or sold, the cost of a good confers its value, whereas under morally constrained market conditions the cost of an item or service was based on its relative value to the lives of the potential buyer. What this amounts to is a genuine lack of awareness of and appreciation for the concept of intrinsic value. Just as Oscar Wilde quipped in his famous novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), “Nowadays, we know the price of everything, but the value of nothing,” the price and the value of contemporary American goods and services has been inverted from its originally intended relationship.

The existing moral ethos in America merely gestures toward the theoretical concept of intrinsic value. In other words, on a conceptual level Americans fully grasp the idea of intrinsic value, but few have ever truly had an experience of what intrinsic value is, or perhaps more importantly, what pursuing intrinsic goods feels like. Replacing the inherent, durable satisfaction that accompanies the pursuit of intrinsic goods is the fleeting illusion of satisfaction that appends the individualistic pursuit of satiating private desires. This has had a devastating impact on our interpersonal interactions; reducing them to mutually exploitative and self-interested agendas, characterized by the mentality such that, “if it does not result in a net gain for myself (financially), then I would be a fool to pursue it.”
In this mentality, ‘foolish’ is a placeholder for actions which demonstrate compassion for others devoid of personal gain, otherwise known as altruism. When wealth, fame, and power assume the qualities of intrinsic value, we have lost its most important characteristic: namely, that its value is independent of and wholly separate from its cost, thus transforming it into extrinsic value. Stripped of any hope for intrinsic appreciation of sport’s value to society, sports devolve into yet another product to be commodified and sold to the highest bidder.

In spite of the hopelessness that the notion of sport-as-commodity engenders, Morgan holds steadfast to the possibility of recovering sport’s intrinsic value, and for good reason. However, in order for this to happen, Americans must (re)gain the substrate of social awareness and interaction that is a requisite of the state of play, i.e. a moral order founded on the principles of trust and (competitive) cooperation. For this, Morgan recommends a return to those inchoate experiences that initially drew us to them in the first place, or “to bring out the child in all of us lovers of sports, to make more vivid our first, tentative step on the moral ladder of sports that propelled us on our winding athletic journeys.”

Although this might be the brand of “excessive romanticism” Morgan warned against in his assessment of quality social critiques, he firmly believes that sports represent a cogent technology that have the capacity to agitate just such a return to a more altruistically motivated and community-oriented society. In particular, Morgan calls for a specifically Progressivist reformation of American sport and society.

Building on what Dyreson described in his investigations into the sporting republic, the modern Olympic Games, and American national identity, Morgan carries forward the torch of Progressive reform through sport. What seems to appeal to Morgan about the Progressive ideology is that it “captures not only the moral soul [of sports] but that of America as well.”
Morgan explains that a Progressive reform agenda seeks to tell the American story that depicts democracy in its proper, informed and engaged light. A story that avoids the overly-simplistic notion that democracy is simply another name for the “freedom to exploit others in the marketplace.”

The Progressivist conception of interpersonal interaction works to undermine the dominant social ethos that dictates the market as the best way to order American political lives. Morgan claims that, “what needs changing here is Americans’ social and moral outlook on themselves as reflected through the forms of life that they share,” and continues by saying that, “if we can make some headway in undermining this outlook we should be in a much better position to crank out a political solution to our present difficulties.” Progressive conceptions of sport, and their capacity to act as an agent of just such a reformation of social and moral outlooks, provide Morgan with a rich source of modern-day moral reformation.

For that reformation to take place, however, Morgan argues that, what Charles Taylor refers to as, the “social imaginary” must be equipped with a robust explanation of sport’s unique qualities that cause them to capture our attention and excite such a passionate response, and simultaneously how they add something significant to our national narrative. What Morgan envisions, similar to what Geertz realized about cockfighting in Balinese culture, is a way to present sports as an integral and irreplaceable character in the story we tell ourselves about ourselves.

Although ultimately a failed project, the Progressive Era reform effort failed not because of an erroneous ideology, but, as Morgan argues, because of its inadequacy in the face of a changing nation; a nation no longer committed to a social imaginary conceived as a moral commonwealth, but one consumed by the entreaties of self-interest and private success. The
Progressives’ treatment of sport is founded on the understanding that the moral commonwealth must be readopted into the social imaginary, and that sports provide the best vehicle for the realization of that purported truism.

At the heart of the American social imaginary lies the concepts of freedom and equality. For the Progressive account of American society, and also for Morgan, a liberal democracy could not function without at least a vague sense that citizens operate and choose freely, and that no one’s choice would count for more than anyone else’s. Furthermore, exercising these rights takes place within a social practice. Morgan contends, “That means that what goes on in these social practices is essential to our agency, to our capacity to accomplish the aims that we set for ourselves within them.”

Therefore, the social practices that Americans endorse should be protected and managed to ensure that they allow for the expression of freedom through an ability to forge a life as one chooses, and ultimately of the meaning that freedom brings to our lives. But this spurs Morgan on to the further question of which social practices are best suited for this expression of freedom, and inspiration to regain their commitment to civic virtue.

To complicate matters further, Morgan identifies a distinction between the conceptions of freedom and necessity employed by Americans. For Morgan, echoing the words of William James, those social practices that reveal our sense of human agency through the pursuit of voluntary means and ends, rather than those that remind us of our dependent, instrumental relation to the world, should be held in esteem. The fact that sports are not included in the ‘realm of freedom’, and are instead considered to be a practice housed within the ‘realm of necessity’ becomes a primary reason why they are not imbued with a morally educative potential in the American social imaginary.
The Progressive view of sport, conversely, “firmly believes sports should be slotted into the realm of freedom and, therefore, that they have only an incidental connection to the sorts of things that we do to secure our existence as natural beings.” In short, sports enhance, rather than detract from, one’s meaningful experience of human freedom.

The belief that fragmentation, social atomization, bureaucratization, and the subsequent dissolution of genuine human freedom represents the thread that runs through and ties together all of the critiques of the American moral and sporting landscape highlighted in this chapter. If it is consented to that American morality is in need of repair, then the fact that a need exists to find some social practice capable of reforming American moral lives is not open for debate. That sports are a social practice capable of such a reinvigoration of the American social imaginary, too, seems certain.

Morgan prescribes ushering a return to the social prominence of Progressive Era ideals, including fair play, egalitarianism, trust, cooperation, and civic virtue – ideals that Americans say they stand for, but fail to live up to in practice; ideals that sports offer to its participants in spades. Over the decades since the height of the Progressive Era, many other champions of sport have waxed and waned about sport’s morally instructive potential, to varying degrees of consensus and success. However, despite their differences in how best to view sport and its potential contribution to the moral education of its players and spectators, the philosophy of sport literature dedicated to investigating sports from a moral perspective do offer the interested reader a series of philosophies of sports, and their moral dimensions that, like Morgan’s ‘state of play,’ condition sport’s capacity to operate as a source of promoting moral excellence, including authenticity and civic virtue. The next chapter represents a survey of relevant literature, and an identification of those conditions.

While I am aware that these three texts, which form the bulk of my discussion on contemporary American morality were written prior to 1990, the moral condition of American society has, arguably, not progressed to a point where social critics would declare a victory against immorality. Granted, social critics, such as William Bennett, former education secretary, has in recent times tempered earlier negativity on the issue due to his (conservative-leaning) metrics of falling crime rates, fewer abortions, and a decline in teenage pregnancies. Despite this progress, and the sheer numbers of well-intentioned people doing good things in their communities, an individualistic ethos continues to envelop American society, and those critics who have identified rampant individualism as a primary agent of moral decay, such as Richard Stivers, continue to worry about the American moral condition. Stivers has written extensively about individualism and its deleterious consequences for American society. Stivers argues that moral education in public schools has taken morality out of its cultural context, rendering it abstract, and presents morality to students as a subjective phenomenon, leaving the student to decide which moral values they will accept or reject. These examples provide reason to believe that the texts chosen to represent modern American morality, though published in the previous century, are anything but outdated.


For a more charitable discussion of how moral relativism and the individualism that has given rise to its institutionalization in American society has benefited American morality, see: Alan Wolfe, *Moral Freedom: The Search for Virtue*, (W.W. Norton & Co., 2002).


Ibid., p. 163.


MacIntyre, p. 6.

Ibid., p. 8.

Lasch, p. 69.

MacIntyre, p. 54.

Ibid., p. 144. (Ricoeur, 1984)


Ibid., p. 448.

Ibid., p. 449.


Bellah, et al., p. 246.

Ibid., p. vii.

Ibid., p. 43.

MacIntyre, p. 34.

Ibid., p. 32.
The “invisible hand” is a metaphor used by Scottish philosopher and political economist, Adam Smith, and refers to an understanding by each individual that embedded within the pursuit of their own interests the community to which he belongs also benefits, and would benefit more if the individual intended his actions to benefit society.

69 Dyreson, 35.

70 Ibid., p. 50.

71 Ibid., p. 52.

72 Ibid., p. 48.

73 Ibid., p. 139.

74 Ibid., p. 123.

75 Ibid., p. 109.

76 Ibid., p. 118.


78 Ibid., p. 4-5.

79 Ibid., p. 6.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid., p. 17.

82 Ibid., p. 18.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid., p. 24.

85 Ibid., p. 166.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid., p. 166.

88 Ibid., p. 172.

89 Ibid., p. 174.
CHAPTER THREE: SPORTS AS A RESOURCE FOR MORAL EDUCATION:

SETTING THE STAGE

At their inception – dating back at least to Ancient Greece – codified athletic competitions fascinated and enthralled both scholar and layperson alike. A curious merger between seeming opposites, described variously as serious non-seriousness, playful hard-work, or delightful agony, the modern-day equivalent we call sports, continue to captivate and excite human beings throughout the world. Although many have eschewed the more reflective routes to understanding the phenomena of sports in favor of simply experiencing their more immediate, non-intellectual benefits, recent decades have produced a procession of intellectuals who have developed a separate philosophical sub-discipline dedicated to the scholarly pursuit of understanding sports and their effect on human being, known today as the ‘philosophy of sports’ or ‘sports philosophy.’

This chapter represents not only my effort to situate my research within the robust body of scholarly inquiry devoted to sports philosophy, but also to provide a framework for my argument that sports have the capacity to act as a uniquely effective, though not exclusive, venue for the realization of authenticity and civic virtue, and to combat some of the social and moral ills currently affecting American society. To carry these two aims out I will begin by briefly chronicling the inception and formalization of sports philosophy to better understand its origins, thus the shoulders on which this research stands.

I will follow this introduction with a detailed account of each of the three primary theoretical constructs I believe undergird the overarching ‘sports-as-moral-laboratory’ view of sports that I argue best exemplifies the potential of these activities to aid in the development and
demonstration of one’s moral excellence. These approaches include: (1) sports as a domain of equality and justice, (2) sports as a domain of play, and (3) sports as a quest for mutual (moral) excellence. Taken together, these three theories will reveal the conditions under which sports might be engaged to fully realize their potential to develop moral excellence, including authenticity and civic virtue.

I. The ‘Philosophy of Sport’ and its Origins:

Despite its roots as a rigorous field of study in Ancient Greece, serious philosophical inquiry into sport fell into obscurity following the demise of the Ancient Greek civilization, and with it their love affair with the intrinsic benefits of athletics and organized physical activity. Thousands of years passed before sports would reclaim their status as a legitimate and worthwhile area of scholarly investigation. For centuries, the prevailing perception of sports as vulgar, unenlightened, violent, or simply common, relegated these important social practices to the peripheries of scholarly interest. Though the social status and impact of sports on the community has fluctuated over time, their voice in the national conversation has never been fully muted. Perhaps it was their persistence as a fixture in American culture or their perseverance in spite of various condemnations, but whatever the reason, sports’ resurgence as a serious mode of scholarly inquiry occurred in the decades leading up to the turn of the twentieth century and continues as a robust field of philosophical inquiry to this day.

As a response to the increasing social anxieties of American anomie, the Progressive Era was largely characterized by attempts at social and political reformation. Returning to Morgan’s argument from the preceding chapter, but with greater detail, the ‘progressives’ sought to combat
the problems brought about by industrialization and urbanization, such as poverty, social
inequality, greed, racism, and class warfare, by providing safe and efficient environments for
Americans. Ensuring safe and non-hostile workplaces, neighborhoods and schools topped the
list of priorities for such social reformers as Jane Addams, Jacob Riis, and John Dewey.
However, the development of a robust and flourishing middle-class required, first and foremost,
an overhaul of the American educational model.

At the heart of this reform lied an expanded notion of what education was and what it
should contribute to a student’s life. Whereas prior to these reform efforts pedagogical
approaches focused primarily on rote memorization, standardized school experiences, and, most
infamously, the “three R’s,” Progressive Era theorists, most notably John Dewey, believed that
education should incorporate all aspects of human life in order to prepare humans to live well.

Discussing such reformers and their reformations, preeminent philosopher of sport, R.
Scott Kretchmar writes, “People like…John Dewey in *The School and Society* (1899) attacked
pedagogical traditions that placed order over freedom, work over play, effort over interest,
prescription over election, and intellectual content over a broader range of subjects that prepared
human beings for what Herbert Spencer (1860) had earlier called ‘complete living’ (p. 31).”90
Dewey’s pedagogy revolved around the idea that true learning was an interactive, hands-on
process. The experiential nature of education, Dewey rationalized, requires a new vision of
schools and their function in American society. Importantly, Dewey’s new vision of school’s
contribution to the student did not simply end once the student left the classroom.

Dewey passionately pursued the notion that what one learns within the confines of the
classroom can, and should, contribute to one’s life as an autonomous agent in the world. For
Dewey, education should be regarded as those experiences which enable one to further develop their abilities to deliberately and intelligently enact one’s purpose. Dewey remarks, “Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience...Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted.” Dewey’s pedagogy, founded on the interconnectedness of education and experience, set the stage for Progressive Era reformers to take seriously the student’s physical experiences in schools and to develop curricula that included physical education as a fundamental component.

Despite the long-standing awareness of physical activity’s instrumental benefits, such as physical health, longevity and functionality, few had taken the time to reflect on the inherent, educative value of sport, play, games, dance, and other forms of expressive movement. Like many of his contemporaries, Dewey identified an integral relationship between sport and exercise, and human freedom, agency, and flourishing. The educational reform policies implemented during this period reflected an understanding of this relationship as physical education became an irreplaceable facet of overall human education. “The New Physical Education,” as it came to be known, received a lot of attention from turn-of-the-century educators, though a few names and faces formed the core of scholars eager to implement the new curricula into school settings.

Although Clark Hetherington coined the new discipline’s name, Thomas Wood represented the most accomplished architect of the early physical education blueprints. However, a third figure presided most prominently over the nascent scene of physical education. Jessie F. Williams’ foundational text, *Principles of Physical Activity* (1927), became the standard bearer.
for all subsequent theories of physical education. Originally published in 1927, Williams’ book survived eight editions and influenced the theory and practice of at least two generations.

Despite the widespread popularity of his ideas, however, many of Williams’ colleagues believed their own approaches to physical education superior and set out to distinguish themselves and their ideas. Although the in-fighting and disagreements between prominent physical education theorists was well publicized and dominated the early days of this discipline, the truth was that their theories about the relationship between physicality and education differed only slightly, having much more in common than their disdain for one another indicated.

Williams’ claim, that positive social change and personal growth could be achieved through deliberate and controlled physical education experiences, was met with resistance and countered, for example, by at least one contemporary, Charles McCloy. McCloy believed that Williams’ emphasis was misplaced. Instead of focusing on the social benefits of a physical education curriculum in schools, the teachers should spend the majority of their time on skills-based training in order to improve the conditioning and overall physical health of the students; the social benefits, argued McCloy, would necessarily ensue.

The slight shift in emphasis between the two thinkers, though a minor point in contemporary physical education pedagogy, represented well the nature of those early debates. Kretchmar argues that:

While each maintained distinctive emphases – Hetherington: mind-body wholeness; Williams: social responsibility and moral values; Wood and Cassidy: natural interests and inclinations, activity in the out-of-doors, and the integration of physical education with
other subjects; McCloy: organic objectives, strength and vigor; and Nash: recreation, and
a balanced and full life – they were more nearly alike than different.⁹³

Regardless of what amount to, in today’s standards, petty disagreements over the nuances of
their distinctiveness, the cadre of original physical education theorists all shared one thing in
common: each of them understood the urgent need to respond to major issues plaguing their
shared society, and they all believed that physical education, including play, games, sports, and
dance, represented the most effective response.

Importantly, these theorists agreed that the exigent collective anxieties created by
unrestrained immigration, swelling urbanization, and the socio-psychological issues arising from
industrialization and changing workplaces could largely be mitigated through participation in the
“laboratory” settings of physical activities. In other words, they believed that physical activity
settings were places where the whole human being practices the skills required to live the whole,
good human life. Williams proclaimed that, “education for life requires the development of
those skills, attitudes, knowledges, and habits that make for fine living. The part to be played by
physical education in the lives of boys and girls, men and women, in this enterprise of fine living
must be studied increasingly. Perhaps its greatest value will be in the interests it arouses, in the
values it emphasizes, in the attitudes it forms.”⁹⁴ Although Williams, along with the other
pioneers of physical education, championed the educational impact and social welfare
engendered by incorporating physical activity into the school curricula, their vision was,
understandably, short-sighted and underdeveloped.

More concerned with identifying physical activity’s capacity to respond to the pressing
social issues of their time, the early physical educators were, predictably, more educators than
they were philosophers; more interested in improving pedagogy through empirical methods than gaining metaphysical insights through philosophical rigor. Although he refers to them as philosophers, Kretchmar discusses the lack of philosophical interest in physical activity in favor of a more scientifically-based approach, claiming that, “Their subject matter was narrow. They were more interested in sport, dance, exercise, play, and games as vehicles for education than as phenomena in their own right. Accordingly, they produced little knowledge about the nature and promise of these activities apart from their role in schooling.”

In light of the socio-political and economic circumstances of turn-of-the-century America, however, the narrowness of their objectives was understandable. Despite these apparent shortcomings, however, these innovators thrust open the door and paved the road that sports philosophers continue to traverse to this day. In fact, the present study owes much of its theoretical context to these trail blazers. Thanks to these innovative thinkers we are now in a position to carefully analyze sports and their potential to promote moral excellence in the form of authenticity and civic virtue.

In the following section I will explore the various ways in which previous scholars have characterized the relationship between sports and morality. In doing this, I will begin to formulate a theoretical context for my argument of why an existential virtue ethics might be an appropriate lens through which to understand sports’ potential to promote moral excellence.

II. The Intersections Between Sports and Morality:

I begin this section about the intersections between sports and morality with a brief discussion of the concept of a metaphor in general, paying particular attention to the erosion of a
metaphor’s meaning and significance through overuse, before turning to the common metaphor of sport as a moral laboratory, used both by the original architects of physical education and contemporary philosophers of sport. Next, I will turn to a more in-depth discussion of sports’ potential to promote certain aspects of moral excellence to illustrate the metaphor’s rationale and efficacy, while simultaneously introducing and analyzing the relevant literature on this topic. Of particular concern here will be the notion of sports-specific activity being conceived of as a metaphorical ‘laboratory’ where participants are offered a setting in which to ‘test’ the best practices in the quest for moral excellence. The laboratory metaphor, then, represents the ideal perspective of any sports participant wishing to develop their existential moral virtues.

a. Metaphors and ‘Sports as a Moral Laboratory’:

At their best, metaphors provide a sharper and more vibrant image for an audience, offering a valuable resource when attempting to clarify concepts and complex relationships. Throughout the history of philosophy, metaphors have appeared not only as rhetorical tools in the scholarship itself, but also as a topic of investigation in its own right. Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Nietzsche, Riceour, Derrida, and Max Black have all, at one time or another broached the topic of metaphor in their work; though metaphor has received the majority of its scholarly attention from analytical philosophy, and philosophy of language in particular.

In her discussion of metaphors and the nature of learning, in Educational Researcher (1998), Anna Sfard wrote, “Metaphors are the most primitive, most elusive, and yet amazingly informative objects of analysis. Their special power stems from the fact that they often cross the borders between the spontaneous and the scientific, between the intuitive and the formal.”
Used appropriately and parsimoniously, metaphors offer an excellent way to illustrate complex points. However, care needs to be taken in how and when metaphors are deployed.

Careless and imprecise use of a metaphor can actually have the opposite effect of clarification, further clouding the issue at hand. This danger is especially present in overused metaphors. A metaphor becomes overused, and therefore ineffective and commonplace, when the conceptual similarity between two things – illustrated through metaphor – becomes conflated to the point where the audience no longer recognizes the phrase as a metaphor, taking the conceptual relationship for granted, and replacing the illustrative and insightful with the mundane.

Indeed, there exists a scholarly contingent that argues against the actuality of the purported notion of a “dead” metaphor, as Max Black – who has offered some of the most influential work on the philosophical treatment of the metaphor – wrote, “[A] so-called dead metaphor is not a metaphor at all, but merely an expression that no longer has a pregnant metaphorical use.”

The laboratory metaphor, as it pertains to physical education activities, has been discussed by educational theorists and philosophers alike for decades. However, its particular evolution as an effective and persisting metaphor of sports-specific activities follows the general evolution of sports philosophy as an academic field of study. Whereas the focus of the early physical educators – owing in particular to the ideologies handed down by Progressive Era reformists – was tied most directly to combating perceived social ills through the promise of physical education’s contribution to citizenship and community enhancement on a national scale, more recent investigations have centered on the intrinsic philosophical, and moral, dimensions of sports as an enlightening phenomenon and intriguing human convention.
Many of the early physical educational theorists characterized the relationship between physical activity and social welfare to be one of instrumental value, teaching individuals how best to benefit their community with lessons of teamwork, reliability, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. However, as time went on the instrumental attitude toward sport and its social utility was transformed, replaced by winning as the *summun bonum* of sports participation. As Morgan puts it, “winning trumps fair play; an assertive egoism triumphs over mutual moral respect; an anything-goes-as-long-as-I-don’t-get-caught attitude prevails over expressions of good will toward others; and a pervasive mistrust poisons most interactions and relations in sports, undercutting any sense of solidarity – of community – within them.”

Put another way, the social view of sports has degenerated into the belief that they contain only a zero-sum instrumental value, revealing nothing more than winners and losers, where winners reap all the reward and losers are left empty-handed. Although this instrumental attitude toward sport dovetails nicely with the increasingly unfettered capitalistic ethos that dominates social as well as economic life in America, the social practice of sport and its reputation on a national level might suffer because of it.

In order for sports’ potential to promote a reinvigorated civic virtue, I argue that one’s participation in sports should be viewed as an experimental process. Just as the scientist experiments in their laboratory, testing and re-testing hypotheses to find the highest degree of statistical significance between causes and effects, so too the athlete can likewise be seen as ‘experimenting’ in sports. Rather than the quantification and interpretation of data sets, however, the athlete tests out certain moral principles through their actions to assess their effectiveness and applicability in playing sports well—that is in a virtuous way.
The primary focus of this metaphor is on the similarity between the theoretical structures of sports and laboratories. The laboratory metaphor is an effective one because laboratories, like many sports, are ‘distinct’ and ‘separate’ locations for very limited or specific experiments or projects. Laboratories are flexible – experiments can be planned for, modified to do more work or test certain ideas. Experiments are limited by the nature of the material – in this instance: sports – on which experiments are conducted.

Understood through the metaphor of a laboratory, sports offer a venue where the potential to develop such traits as authenticity and civic virtue is emphasized by ‘experimenting’ with interpersonal ethical conduct, such as fairness and equality among competitors, a recognition of the interdependency between intrinsic and instrumental values of sports, and the inseparability of athlete and competitor in their mutual quest for excellence. Much like the scientific laboratory, scholars that emphasize this metaphor take seriously sport’s ‘separateness’ from every day, ‘real life.’

I will argue that this “distance” from the routines of everyday life allows sports to function as an important part of the process of choosing virtuous competition including authenticity as one’s fundamental project, and the demonstration of that choice through civic virtue. Similar to William James’ famous remark that, “sports are the moral equivalent of war,”99 I understand sports as offering a ‘low-stakes’ arena where ethical decision making can be practiced and habituated into our behavior without fear of the foreboding imminence-of-death that is inevitable in war.

Through ‘experimentation’ in sports we can better locate and define its instrumental value. In the laboratory model, a person’s character should develop through their understanding that participation in sports is distinctively structured to provide instruction on socially-
constructed moral principles, i.e. that they are engaged in an experimental process of questing for moral excellence, and not ‘just playing a game’. It is here that I will need to discuss certain preferred moral principles that the athlete seeking moral excellence should observe as potential reasons for participating in sports, pending the outcome of their ‘experiments’, such as the commitment to civic virtue and political engagement. In this case, I will be discussing justice and equality, the domain of play, and the mutual quest for excellence as they relate to sporting experiences.

Regardless of the outcome of the debate about the efficacy of the “sport as moral laboratory” metaphor, it certainly rests on the precipice of the cliff of becoming a “dead” metaphor, and its rescue will depend on how society comes to view the social value of sports. In the laboratory metaphor, the social values of sports are more readily apparent, and the possible counter-arguments to sports’ social value are properly addressed.

Rather than a deleterious and potentially damaging social practice, sports might provide a significant resource for the promotion of authenticity and civic virtue. The laboratory metaphor, then, establishes, on my view, the preferred theoretical relationship one should adopt when participating in sports, i.e. the laboratory provides the theoretical framework with which to understand the potential social value of sports, though at this point stops short of offering any specific content.

To help rescue the ‘sports are moral laboratories’ metaphor, seemingly on its deathbed from overuse, I will begin by filling-in what has to this point been merely a structural starting point. A laboratory without a scientist conducting experiments is a non-operational facility. In order for the scientist to conduct any experiment, a research question and working hypothesis
must first be put forward. To further the metaphor of sports being a ‘moral laboratory’, the same
principles apply.

With the general understanding in place that sports can operate in ways similar to
scientific laboratories, we must now give content to our experiments. In other words, we must
now provide the specific moral content that the participants of sports will be testing. In the next
three sections, I offer three different but related concepts regarding the intersections between
sports and morality.

These three concepts, (1) sports as a domain of justice and equality, (2) sports as a
domain of play, and (3) sports as a mutual quest for excellence, all represent normative standards
of the player’s engagement with their chosen sport, against which it will become possible to
assign morally praiseworthy or blameworthy judgments. In other words, as long as the player
plays their sport with an open and honest recognition that they are engaged in an experimental
process where certain moral principles, such as authenticity and civic virtue are taught, tested,
learned, and performed that player’s engagement in sports can be deemed ethically praiseworthy.

III. **Sports as a Domain of Equality and Justice:**

In his discussion of the nature of sport – in particular their rules and values – Graham
McFee identified both ‘fair play’ and ‘level playing-field’ as the two most important moral
metaphors related to the morally educative potential of sport. For McFee, fair play and a level
playing-field represent the strongest aspects of sport’s moral dimension, operating on its players
through the inculcation of moral virtues – most notably a sense of justice and equality. McFee
argues that, “learning to deploy the principles, and the moral metaphors they support, might offer
a picture of the value of sport. For, in learning the exact application of these key metaphors, by
learning how to make sense of these ideas as they apply in particular sports, one is at the same
time learning the general moral principles.”¹⁰⁰

McFee explains that the sense of justice inferred through exposure to the moral
imperatives of ‘fair play’ and ‘level playing-field’ in sport are then applied to wider life
experiences, indicating “two major constraints on justice: namely, the ideas of equal treatment
and of equality of initial condition.”¹⁰¹

To be sure, McFee is not the first to intuit a moral dimension in sports, but he has offered
a striking philosophical account of how the moral imperatives found in sports infuse these
activities with significant intrinsic social value. As was earlier discussed, the modern Olympic
Games as imagined and instituted by Coubertin were a product of the largely athleticist notion
that sports held great moral possibilities; Coubertin’s ‘Olympism’ relied heavily on the notion
that sport could be morally educative.

In his book, *Fair Play*, Peter McIntosh discusses sport’s moral possibilities, and explains
the concepts underlying some of Coubertin’s influences, such as the British public schools and
their characteristic athleticism, saying that, “competitive sport [has] an ethical basis, and…that
training in moral behaviour on the playing field was transferable to the world beyond.”¹⁰² In
other words, the famous quote referring to the training at Eton leading to victory at Waterloo
once again appears and illustrates sport’s value as an agent of imparting valuable moral
principles to those who play them. McFee goes as far as to say that the only potential intrinsic
value sports contain is located in their internal moral structure. However, he urges caution and
careful analysis when assuming all sport contains within it a requisite outcome of moral behavior
in its players.
While it is true that many scholars, myself included, proceed from the initial supposition of sport’s intrinsic moral dimension and the consequent social value this can imbue, there exists a faction of people who remain wholly unconvinced by this supposition, and who in fact argue forcefully that sport has a necessarily deleterious effect on the morality of not only those who play them, but on the whole of humanity.\textsuperscript{103}

Variously described through other, more negatively connoted metaphors, such as sport is the ‘opiate of the masses’ or a ‘prison of measured time and space’, critics have disparately attacked sport’s role in institutionalizing, or at least normalizing, sadism, cheating, winning-at-all-costs attitudes, and capitalistic and corporate ideologies. This disconnect, the detractors argue, occurs as a result of a gap between sport-as-it-ought-to-be and sport-as-it-is-actually-practiced. That is, the theoretical position that sport should be viewed as a moral practice, where commitment to following the rules in sport results in one valuing and following the rules of other, non-sport related social practices, simply does not translate to the playing field, nor, perhaps more importantly, to real people leading real lives.

Evidence of this perceived disconnect is found not only within the scholarly community, but also in the skepticism (at best) or outright disinterestedness within the general American populace. Though the less reflectively-inclined members of American society have not identified particular aspects of sport that fail to invite the adoption of moral principles – nor have they taken the time to identify the more vulgar aspects of sport that supposedly vitiate moral standards – the average citizen views sports more as a commodity than a potential moral vehicle. Morgan illustrates this point nicely when he writes, “For most modern Americans, sports are considered just another commodity to be consumed, simply an extension of the vast entertainment industry and so a big part of the problem rather than a part of the solution.”\textsuperscript{104}
As Morgan goes on to argue, the morally redeeming value of sports has been undermined by the conceptual likening of sports mentality with the unrestrained market mentality abhorred by the masses who find themselves in the “99%.” Despite the ineffectual place sports inhabit in American society today, Morgan maintains an optimistic outlook for the future potential of sports to one day reclaim its vaunted status, or at least to be taken seriously as a promoter of moral excellence.

Indispensable to his optimism, however, Morgan goes to great lengths to delimit his proclamations of sport’s resurrection as a valued source of morality, restricting its potential social value to a limited array of its iterations, excluding professional and intercollegiate sport precisely because of the ‘professionalized’ structure that, “as they continue to remind us…are mainly businesses and, therefore, are usually content to let the market do their bidding for them.”

Like Morgan, McFee, who is also a supporter of the “sport as morally educative” ideology, sets stipulations and limitations on sport’s morally educative capacity, though in a more analytical fashion that leads him to conclude that only certain types of sport – ones that meet his necessary and sufficient conditions of specific inherent moral imperatives – qualify as having the capacity to offer a morally educative experience to its players. McFee’s analysis of the moral efficacy of (certain) sports to act as a moral laboratory – the moral imperatives that he believes must constitute morally educative sport – rests heavily on the two moral metaphors mentioned above: ‘fair play’ and ‘level playing-field.’ As such, McFee offers a very detailed and nuanced understanding of the notions of equality and fairness that constitutes each.
In general, the primary concern of both fair play and level-playing field emphasizes just and equitable playing conditions. To achieve the justice thought to reside at the core of sport, McFee explains that certain rules are formed in sports that aim at neutralizing unfair advantages and other inequalities. Fair play, writes McFee, rather than being understood more generally as “fairness, [which] might relate to the starting point of the contest, [in fact, relates to] the manner of the contest, having implications for how to interpret the rules as they relate to the manner of playing.”\(^\text{107}\) The topic of many books and peer-reviewed articles, ‘fair play’ has been consistently identified as a primary component of morally educative sport. Sigmund Loland, who has written several influential analyses of the fair play ideal in sports, disambiguates two types of fair play: formal and informal fair play.

Citing the work of German sports scholars, Pilz and Wewer, Loland explains that, “formal fair play is expressed as a norm on keeping the written rules of the game, whereas informal fair play prescribes a certain attitude towards the game in terms of doing one’s best and respecting one’s opponents.”\(^\text{108}\) However, McFee identifies a problem with a straightforward conception of what constitutes fairness with regard to fair play. Instead, McFee argues that rather than deciding whether or not a sporting situation is fair, the primary mode of adjudication is deciding that a given situation is \textit{not unfair}. McFee explains, “the content of fairness in a particular sporting context is wholly given by what is proscribed, explicitly or implicitly. Then arguments will always turn on whether or not such-and-such is unfair, in relation to the specific rules of \textit{this} sport...we arrive at what is fair by contrast.”\(^\text{109}\) Because of the complexity in the notion of fair play, McFee argues that no “really sharp account of \textit{fair play} is possible.”\(^\text{110}\)

Despite the cautious approach McFee takes to the blanket application of fair play to all sporting contexts, he argues that the focus is not fairness or equality, in general, but is really on
equality of opportunity. The level playing-field metaphor, in its ideal form, operates to ensure that competitors begin the contest on equal footing. McFee argues, “Real equality is not to be expected…Rather, equality of opportunity is taken as meaning that certain specific ‘advantages’ have been ruled out (in principle).”

Further complicating the level playing-field metaphor, McFee explains that not all inequalities are created equal, and that care and consideration needs to be exercised when attempting to neutralize inequalities among competitors.

McFee identifies at least two different types of inequalities, and questions whether and how far inequalities should be eliminated. Natural inequalities, such as different heights and weights between different people, are accounted for, up to a point, but McFee questions how far we should go in eliminating these kinds of inequalities. He asks, “What about limiting matches between basketball teams of different (average) heights? Or, perhaps, basketball teams of different skills?”

Also, inequality in access to resources have been an issue in various sports. Not having the same means of access to certain equipment or the discretionary income required to spend vast amounts of time training for the sport, has created significant barriers to the reality, in practice, of a true level playing-field in some sports. In fact, the capacity to inculcate both a sense of justice and equality of initial conditions are values ethics have derived from sport, and ultimately form McFee’s criteria for granting sport the power of acting as a moral laboratory. As such, those sports that fail to embody these moral principles have no potential to act as a moral laboratory.

Based on these ethical notions of justice and fairness McFee offers three examples of sports which fail to satisfy his stipulations for truly offering a moral laboratory to its participants:
(1) boxing, due its inherent violence, (2) synchronized swimming because of its apparent lack of justice and fairness as guiding principles, and finally, (3) basketball, owing to its formalization of rule-breaking activities as part of the accepted behavior of players, and thus the lack of the proper sense of justice and fairness required for the proper cultivation of moral principles that the sport as moral laboratory metaphor insinuates. “For clearly,” McFee explains, “not all sport operates by emphasizing fairness and suchlike (the rules of basketball [as interpreted] require players to foul) – a horrible possibility here is the morally harmful side of sport. That is, the moral force in some sports might be towards immoral action…it is not clear that [all] sport is always committed to the educative matters.”

Stipulating that sport must possess an explicit commitment to the following of rules designed to emphasize the moral principles of justice and equality of initial conditions enables McFee to appropriately identify (certain) sport’s intrinsic moral value, and, importantly, to link the ‘laboratory’ metaphor to one’s involvement in sport.

This final element of the metaphor, the laboratory, embodied most notably in Coubertin’s notion of Olympism, which itself drew largely on the Victorian and Edwardian athleticist ideals developed at British public schools, requires first the realization that sport does in fact offer a morally educative experience, and second, that the moral insights gained from participation in sports translate in practice to situations outside the field of play. McFee explains that,

Sport has the possibility of providing us with just such concrete cases where we can behave fairly (or justly) – examples of fair play – and also cases where inappropriate initial advantage can be taken (cases where there isn’t a level playing field): hence, sport offers people a chance to operate with these concepts, and to act on them; to use them in discussion and to have others offer them. It also offers opportunities to confront others not acting on them – and, even, to fail to act on them oneself. In this way, one can
explore the contours of morally-relevant possibilities. This is what I mean in speaking of sport as a moral laboratory.\textsuperscript{115}

Using terms, such as ‘operating,’ ‘exploring,’ and ‘discussing,’ all work to represent the experimental processes that occur within laboratory settings that make it an appropriate metaphor to use in a sporting context. Laboratories suggest a separate, distinct and controlled environment apart from everyday life. Laboratories provide a setting where specific projects and scrupulous experimentation is conducted. Laboratories require a standardized protocol, and for those involved in the experiments to follow these protocols to the letter; with failure to do so resulting in tainted or unreliable outcomes. Laboratories offer a flexible venue where experiments can be adjusted and modified to test certain aspects of different theories by isolating relevant variables. In short, laboratories allow the researcher to potentially gain important insights, i.e. statistically significant relationships of theoretical causation, and to then apply the theoretical outcomes to real life practices in order to, in some way, improve the quality of human experience. As McFee illustrates in the above quote, when viewed as a source of moral education, sports function in exactly the same capacity.

Despite this confident view of sport’s intrinsic value, McFee understands that the moral laboratory itself does not always result in the desired outcomes. “The moral laboratory may teach immorality;” McFee reasons, “or some people learn nothing from it – there is no guarantee of learning; and also no guarantee, even for those who have picked up the moral dimension of sport, that there will be any transfer to the rest of behaviour.”\textsuperscript{116} Here, McFee is quick to urge caution in applying the label of ‘moral laboratory’ to all sport, and indicates that the efficacy of this metaphor breaks down when an overly-instrumental attitude toward the value of sport is employed. While the morally educative capacity of sport is not guaranteed, the force of the
argument is by no means wholly undermined. In other words, regardless of the realization of its morally educative potential in particular cases, the inherent intrinsic value, produced through an autotelic commitment to the constitutive rules of the game, remains an ever-present potentiality for those willing to seek it out.

To claim that sport exists as a laboratory where moral ‘experiments’ are conducted and insights gained transcend the confines of the laboratory’s ‘walls’ and enhance moral reasoning in all areas of life is to suggest a powerful instrumental value of sport. McFee locates the efficacy of this instrumental value, and I think rightly so, in one’s awareness of and commitment to sport’s intrinsic value – for McFee, a sport’s emphasis on the moral imperatives of justice and equality of initial conditions. The principles of justice and equality certainly have a long and persistent history within the field of ethical theory. I consider justice and equality to be foundational values that any worthy ethical theory must begin with and hold sacred as its bedrock principles. As such, sports’ potential to promote moral excellence, in this context, depends largely on its potential to promote the principles of justice and equality for its participants. In other words, sports should be viewed as having the potential to provide opportunities where justice and equality can be tested, learned, and then performed in areas of life other than sports, i.e. the instrumental value of sports must be acknowledged.

While the instrumental value of morally educative sport ultimately rests upon the transference of moral principles learned within sport to situations outside of sport, there remains an additional, underlying attitude one must adopt for these moral principles to genuinely be learned, and therefore adopted in practice. Although different scholars have described the attitude in a number in a number of ways, I will refer to it here as the ‘play spirit.’ The play spirit derives from an awareness of the false dichotomy between the instrumental and intrinsic values
of sports. Instrumental value lies in a sport’s capacity to promote moral excellence, i.e. when a player commits themselves to their experience of sports’ intrinsic qualities. To this end, sport’s capacity to act in this manner relies directly on the player’s understanding of these intrinsic qualities. In other words, one must bring the ‘play spirit’, or ‘play attitude’ with them to the game if the potential to develop moral excellence is to be realized.

IV. Sports as a Domain of Play:

The second approach to the intersection of sports and morality will thus be called “sports as a domain of play.” This approach focuses primarily on what some scholars have referred to as the “play stance.”\textsuperscript{117} The play stance is an attitude or perspective regarding the intrinsic qualities of sports that maximizes its instrumental value. Once again bringing into focus the conspicuous instrumental/intrinsic paradox, this second category highlights sport’s powerful intrinsic qualities. The instrumental value (the capacity to promote the development of moral excellence) depends on the player’s awareness of and commitment to the intrinsic value of sports (the capacity to add a rich and vibrant component to one’s own good life). The play spirit might be characterized by recognizing the ironic and paradoxical aspects of competitive sports.

To regard sports as paradoxical means maintaining awareness that they hold quite a serious and meaningful place in our lives, but that when compared with other more grave, life-or-death situations they take on an absurd and downright foolish patina. Rather than deter us from playing, however, the acknowledged absurdity inherent within competitive sports aids us in revealing the conventional nature of the process of human meaning-making in general. It is important to note here that recognizing, appreciating, and pursuing sports despite their seemingly
inherent absurdity, known as the ‘play stance,’ mirrors the type of ‘stance’ toward life recommended by an existential virtue ethicist, as I will attempt to explain shortly.

The second part of the ‘sports as a domain of play’ approach that makes it crucial for my argument rests on what I call “acknowledged interdependency,” and highlights another seemingly paradoxical relationship. In competition, our relationship to the game and to the opponent exists as being both ‘for-us’ and ‘against-us’ – friend and foe, simultaneously. By agreeing to the rules of the game and to try their hardest to win the contest the opponent makes the very playing of the game possible, yet every action must be an attempt to frustrate the other’s efforts to win the game in order to secure victory for themselves. In other words, game players fundamentally require the opponent’s cooperation in order to play, but the game also requires each of us to honestly and earnestly compete against the opponent – i.e. to act as a barrier to the other’s efforts to gain victory.

At first glance, this relationship between player and opponent seems contradictory. How can the other be, simultaneously, both one’s opponent and one’s collaborator? This fundamental interdependence, as I will show, is a hallmark of not only sports, but of existential virtue, and of the human condition as well. Sport’s capacity to model and reveal this incredibly important insight into the human condition rests on the ‘play stance,’ or the perspective the player brings with them to the game. The play stance, then, requires the player to play to win the game – not only in order to gain and secure a victory, but also in order to make possible the playing of the game, and to enjoy the process of trying to win the game. In other words, the instrumental value of sports is derived from the player’s acknowledgement of and commitment to its intrinsic value.118
I will, therefore, proceed in this section with the aim of satisfying dual purposes, beginning with a description of the most notable theories and theorists that have contributed to our understanding of the phenomenon we call play. This will include the explanation of such insights as the nature of play, and the features that make it a paradoxical and ultimately intrinsically valuable part of human experience; how work and labor might be considered anti-play; and an understanding of the difference between play, viewed as a concrete activity, and play viewed as an attitude or stance toward one’s activity. Secondly, and building upon the first part, I will show how the paradoxical nature of play echoes and reveals the paradoxical nature of the human condition (of which, to be sure, play is a primary component), and how it therefore enables the play-experience to not only function as an expression of human freedom and be considered an essential component of human flourishing, but also to act as an contextual prerequisite for the inculcation of moral excellence.

a. Origins of Play Theory:

Understood as a fundamental aspect of human being, play has had a wide-ranging and extremely prolific history as a topic of serious inquiry. Beginning perhaps with Johan Huizinga’s provocative and seminal 1933 lecture, “The Cultural Limits of Play and the Serious,” the scholarly treatment of play has experienced profound interest and scrutiny from biologists, anthropologists, economists, sociologists, and philosophers alike. Hoping to gain greater insight into the relationship between play and human being, the academics who examine the presence of play in human culture continue to uncover insights about its essential and intertwined role in the lives of human beings. Although these investigations have led to differing definitions, conceptual analyses, and ultimately to conflicting conceptions regarding play’s exact function in
human life, the one thing agreed to by all is that the inextinguishable presence of play solidifies it as an extremely important mode of human experience and expression of humanity.

As noted above, Johan Huizinga is considered by many as the original architect of the contemporary trend of serious scholarly investigation into play. Before Huizinga, play had not been completely accepted as a legitimate topic of philosophical inquiry in the modern world, following the rise and institutionalization of the scientific revolution. Although classical philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas all commented on play and games as a mode of human behavior, these aspects of their work was largely passed over in favor of their more weighty philosophical concepts and contributions.

In time, play, as a serious field of scholarly inquiry lost its footing and was relegated to the peripheries of academia. When the phenomenon of play was again taken up in academia, it was principally found in discussions in scientific communities. In these investigations, play was seen as an important aspect of humanity, though mostly because of its instrumentality in providing, for instance, a period of psychological decompression after intense exertion, a venue for training or preparing someone for the rigors of future, more-serious, endeavors, or as a biological mechanism for the healthy expenditure of excess energies.

American psychologist Michael J. Ellis, for example, published his book, Why People Play, in 1973, in order to investigate from a scientific perspective the psychological underpinnings of play and play-like activities in human behavior. Despite the belatedness of its publication date, Why People Play represents Ellis’ attempt to bring together under one roof the various scientific theories of play, and specifically why play persists as a valued human behavior. Ellis understands well the complementary relationship that exists between theoretician and practitioner, and the implications that a sound theory has for its implementation in practice. In
order to develop the most efficacious theoretical position to hold, Ellis sets out to identify the theories previously put forth regarding the principles of play.

What Ellis refers to as the classical period of play theory – occurring largely before the turn of the twentieth century – focused principally on human behavior and the instinctual drives that propelled it. Ellis claims, “[classical] theories were concerned with those elements in the nature of man in general that lead him to play, and with the purposes play serves.”119 The words of famous American pragmatist and psychologist, William James, certainly resonate with this claim. To James, play exists for a reason and one not entirely in our control. Play, for James, is an instinctual behavior. Humans cannot escape the urge to play, and in fact one would be foolish to do so since the experience of play in childhood conditions the experiences one will have in adulthood. James believed that the utility of play was, for children, to capacity to develop the habits and skills that will influence their adult behaviors most effectively. James states that, “If a boy grows up alone at the age of games and sports, and learns neither to play ball, nor row, nor sail, nor ride, for skate, nor shoot, probably he will be sedentary to the end of his days.”120

Building on this notion of play-as-instinct, other theorists of this were interested in the idea that excess energy expended during play, or non-work activities, constituted a biological instinct. Play, thus understood as an instinctual drive, reduces to merely all behavior being performed in the absence of work. When all useful operations have been completed the resulting, ‘useless’ behaviors are thusly called play. Ellis cites a number of theorists who fall into this camp, such as Spencer (1855), Groos (1898), and Tolman (1932). The theory essentially amounts to, as Ellis puts it, “the notion that an organism is capable of generating a finite level of energy that must be expended. The energy is available to the animal for expenditure on the struggle for survival. To the extent that the animal successfully and
efficiently meets the challenges of its environment with the expenditure of less energy than is available, a surplus results.”

This surplus is then expended on what Ellis calls non-productive activity or play. The theory continues by extrapolating a cause of higher rates of play in children – because they have less-frequent demands on ensuring their own survival – than in adults, since they are constantly saddled with the burden of ensuring not only their own, but oftentimes the survival of multiple family members. Ellis, however, is ultimately concerned with developing his own, modern theory of play and works to reveal the shortcomings of these early theories.

Despite his noble intentions, Ellis still maintained his commitment to approaching the phenomenon of play from a scientific perspective. To Ellis, the primary task of the play-theorist was to find the best way to utilize play as a tool for improving the human experience. In Ellis’ mind, play had the potential to greatly benefit humanity, and he wanted to find a rigorous, scientific, and broadly applicable theory of play that allowed practitioners to implement play-experiences for the greatest educational and social benefit. In Ellis’ words, he was “intimately concerned with the search for principles of play behavior that will enable management to begin,” and to simplify the, “bewildering task of designing and managing play environments for people.”

For all of his good intentions to try and formalize or universalize the ‘right’ way to design play-experiences, focusing his approach on the psychological aspects of play minimized their intrinsic or inherently meaningful subtleties through a behavioristic, clinical analysis, rather than leaving to play the inspiration, wonder and awe they invoke. Ellis’ analysis, in other words, seemed to take playfulness out of the play-experience.

Huizinga, however, did seem to recognize the human propensity for and fascination with play and play-like activities as something much more provocative and mesmerizing: a phenomenon with great implications for better understanding humans and human culture.
Whereas the 1933 lecture, given as the rector of the University of Leiden, outlined the initial blueprints of his philosophy of play, it was Huizinga’s book, *Homo Ludens*, published five years later that represents the edifice within which most scholarly interest in play originates. 

Huizinga’s central aim in *Homo Ludens* was twofold, (1) to identify the defining characteristics of play and (2) to demonstrate play’s foundational role in the development of human cultures. 

To Huizinga, play infiltrates every aspect of human culture; our education, politics, economics, and even war, all fail to escape the grasp of play’s long reach.

As to his first aim, identifying the essence of play, Huizinga first leads the reader through an explanation of its psychological and biological significance as a form of not only human behavior, but of all sentient creatures. Play, for Huizinga, means something. Counter to the early scientific treatments of play – whose main aim was to identify its function, be it psychological or biological – in human experience, Huizinga saw play as much more intrinsically oriented in its capacity to engender meaningful experiences. Huizinga claims that psychologists, evolutionary biologists, and physiologists, for example, all failed to tell the whole story of play’s role in creating human cultures because they all “started from the assumption that play must serve something which is not play, that it must have some kind of biological purpose. They all inquire into the why and wherefore of play.”¹²³ Huizinga believed the real source of play’s meaning in human experience lied not in its functional utility, but in its “aesthetic quality.”¹²⁴

Huizinga wondered more about what play was at its core; what made it so fun to engage in? His concern focused not as much on the scientific explanations for play’s enduring presence – primarily the gathering of quantifiable data through empirical methodologies – but on answering questions such as, “Why does the baby crow with pleasure? Why does the gambler
lose himself in his passion? Why is a huge crowd roused to frenzy by a football match?” This intensity of, and absorption in, play,” Huizinga continues, “finds no explanation in biological analysis. Yet in this intensity, this absorption, this power of maddening, lies the very essence, the primordial quality of play.”

Huizinga is certainly not the first to identify this “aesthetic” quality of play and its ability to satisfy something “primordial” in human beings, though his work on the subject endures foremost in scholars’ minds.

Friedrich von Schiller’s investigation of human nature – an important work entitled, *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) – was written in response to the feelings of disappointment and disillusion he had over the unrealized potential following the French Revolution. *Letters* takes the eighteenth century German philosopher, historian, playwright, and poet on a winding journey that ultimately rests on beauty; namely, its capacity to educate humanity so that similar failures of human potential witnessed in the aftermath of the French Revolution are not repeated. The aesthetic character of human life, for Schiller, represents the pathway to moral salvation. In Schiller’s formulation of human nature human beings constantly struggle with the tension between the two conflicting drives of human behavior. On one hand, human beings are driven to satisfy their sensuous nature, or *sinnestrieb*, in which one’s sensual faculties, feelings, and emotions endeavor to control one’s physical existence, reducing decision-making to merely material concerns. On the other, the individual is pulled in the opposite direction by what Schiller calls *formtrieb*, or the formal drive. The formal drive insists on morality, rationality, reason, and logic to rule the process of any form of decision-making process. Schiller explains that,

The sensuous is awakened with the experience of life – with the beginning of the individual; the rational impulsion with the experience of law – with the beginning of his
personality; and it is only when these two inclinations have come into existence that the human type is realized. And thus we see that directly the two opposite and fundamental impulses exercise their influence in him, both lose their constraint, and the autonomy of two necessities gives birth to freedom.¹²⁶

While the force of these two aspects of human nature brings about humanity’s greatest struggle, their unity gives rise to the possibility of experiencing human freedom.

The ostensibly irreconcilable tension that exists between these two fundamental aspects of human nature, Schiller argues, is the source of humanity’s predilection for violence, oppression, and various other forms of interpersonal depravity. When the drive to satisfy the sensuous overtakes the rational, wonton disregard for others inevitably ensues. However, Schiller argued that the tension between these two states of being is merely a perceived irreconcilability and that with the right education – i.e. beauty’s gentle touch on the human soul – humanity can extricate itself from the ethical morass and find balance and harmony. Schiller posited a middle position between the physical (sensuous) and the logical or moral (rational), one that “mutually destroys their determinant power” over the other, and thus creates the occasion for the experience of true human freedom.¹²⁷ Schiller referred to this middle, unifying position as the beautiful, the aesthetic, speiltrieb, or otherwise known as the play drive.

“Beauty,” Schiller explains, “can neither be exclusively mere life…Nor can beauty be pure form…it is rather the common object of both impulses, that is, of the play instinct.”¹²⁸ When consumed by the beautiful, the tension between the two competing sides of human nature subsides and the person can then begin to experience the ideal state of being: perfect harmony, freedom. The play-instinct puts into order the chaos that results from the competition between
the two other instincts. Schiller argues that, “[the play-instinct] lessens the dynamic influence of feeling and passion, it will place them in harmony with rational ideas, and by taking from the laws of reason their moral constraint, it will reconcile them with the interest of the senses.”

Playing, for Schiller, becomes the activity of the complete human being. “It results from this,” Schiller reasons, “that the instinct of play, which unites the double action of the two other instincts, will content the mind at once morally and physically.” Where the seriousness of rationality or sensuosity intervenes, one cannot be playing. But where beauty resonates, play must have struck the chord. Schiller declares, “For, to speak out once for all, man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays.”

Although Schiller makes a persuasive case for the play-instinct’s primary role as an essential element of a well-lived life and in the moral and aesthetic education of humanity, the question of what exactly play is has been left largely unanswered.

Returning to Huizinga’s book, Homo Ludens, and his effort to identify the essential characteristics that define the phenomenon of play, he states that play is first and foremost a voluntary activity that has no immediate bearing on one’s survival. And Huizinga is not alone in his assessment of play as voluntary behavior. Allen Sapora and Elmer Mitchell’s, The Theory of Play and Recreation (1961), conveniently provides a short-hand reference to many mid-century play-theorist’s definitions of play:

Lazarus – Play is activity which is itself free, aimless, amusing or diverting.

Dewey – Activities not consciously performed for the sake of any result beyond themselves.

Gulick – What we do because we want to do it.

Stern – Play is voluntary self-sufficient activity.
Patrick – Those human activities which are free and spontaneous and which are pursued for their own sake. Interest in them is self-sustaining, and they are not continued under any internal or external compulsion.

Rainwater – Play is a mode of behavior.. involving pleasurable activity of any kind, not undertaken for the sake of reward beyond itself...

Pangburn – Activity carried on for its own sake

Common to all these definitions of play is the feature of autotelicity, or ‘doing’ play just for the sake of ‘doing’ play. Huizinga refers to this aspect of play as the *fun*-element, and says that, “it resists all analysis, all logical interpretation.” Play is irrational, yet fundamental to the human experience. Play, claims Huizinga, must exhibit this absurd, unproductive, yet freely-chosen, quality for the activity to rightly be considered play. “Play to order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it. By this quality of freedom alone, play marks itself off from the course of the natural process…child and animal play because they enjoy playing, and therein precisely lies their freedom.”

So, in addition to play’s voluntariness, play is also the purest expression of human freedom. Huizinga says, in fact, that it is freedom itself. Part of the freedom experienced in play rests on one further characteristic: its ‘separateness’ from ‘ordinary’ life. Play, as Huizinga eloquently puts it, adorns ‘ordinary’ life with something extra, an interlude from the mundane. Play, “is rather a stepping out of ‘real’ life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own.” This distinctness from the ‘everydayness’ of life in general and its temporariness in practice both combine to formulate an additional characteristic, namely play’s “secludedness, and its limitedness.” Play, Huizinga argues, takes place within a separate time and place. “Play begins,” he declares, “and then at a certain moment it is ‘over.’ It plays itself to
an end.” But play also has a separate place where it occurs. Explaining the concept of a ‘playground,’ Huizinga states, “All play moves and his its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course…i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of and act apart.”

Playgrounds, the separate sphere of play, come in all shapes and sizes, and are not limited to the ball-courts and arenas of popularized and formalized kinds of play, namely games and sports, but expand beyond the playing fields and every venue of human activity. The limitlessness of playgrounds, however, is limited and finds order in actual instances of play.

Creating order, for Huizinga, is one of play’s most important features. Huizinga declares, “Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it ‘spoils the game’, robs it of its character and makes it worthless.” In fact, Huizinga goes as far as to equate play with order. And it is this close relationship between play and order that Huizinga finds a welcome home for play in the aesthetic. An individual’s ability to perceive both rhythm and harmony in the world owes to the human compulsion to play. Much in the same way that Schiller identifies beauty as one primary element in the ordering of the human soul – in the reconciliation between the sensuous and the rational – Huizinga identifies tension as a primary element of play. What Warren Fraleigh referred to as the “sweet tension of uncertainty of outcome” brings to life the inherent beauty and meaning humans find in play, and in playing games and sports. “Though play as such is outside the range of good and bad,” Huizinga explains, “the element of tension imparts to it a certain ethical value in so far as it means a testing of the player’s prowess…[and] despite his ardent desire to win, he must still stick to the rules of the game.” The rules of play, and all play has rules, are largely responsible for their ‘ordering’ ability. The rules of play, and
of playing games in particular, “determine what ‘holds’ in the temporary world circumscribed by play. The rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt…as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses. The game is over. The umpire’s whistle breaks the spell and sets ‘real’ life going again.” Though, the end of a game is not the extinguishing of play once and for all.

Huizinga identifies one last element of play before summing up his definition. The tendency toward a certain type of secrecy, he claims, inheres within all forms of play. But the secrecy is not simply for secrecy’s sake. What Huizinga has in mind when referring to the ‘secrecy’ of play is that a ‘play-community’ is generated when one plays with other people. “A play-community,” Huizinga notes, “generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over. Of course, not every game of marbles or every bridge-party leads to the founding of a club. But the feeling of being ‘apart together’ in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, or mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game.” The camaraderie, sense of belonging, and, ultimately, the enhanced charm brought about by the ‘secrecy,’ or exclusivity of play excites and enthralls, keeping people coming back for more.

Now, we have arrived at Huizinga’s definition of play. Bringing together all of the aforementioned characteristics he believes play must necessarily exhibit, Huizinga is ready to offer his conceptual analysis of play and the beginning of his argument for play’s cultural value. Huizinga famously states this as follows:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious’, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material
interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.\textsuperscript{143}

Although Huizinga does not go as far as providing taxonomy of play, games, and sports he does delineate between certain forms of play commonly encountered in human experience. In broad terms, Huizinga claimed that the human experience of play appeared in two forms: “as a contest \textit{for} something or as a representation \textit{of} something. These two functions can unite in such a way that the game ‘represents’ a contest, or else becomes a contest for the best representation of something.”\textsuperscript{144}

Huizinga continues his captivating investigation into the social and cultural significance of play, arguing that – as the title of the book insinuates – in addition to understanding human beings as \textit{homo sapiens}: man the knower, or \textit{homo faber}: man the maker, we should be identified first and foremost as a species that plays, as \textit{homo ludens}. As important as his insights are to understanding the relationship between humanity, its culture and the games they play, arguing for the cultural significance of play is not the aim here, though even if it were, I could not come close to approximating the skill and ingenuity Huizinga employed in attempting that project. For the purposes of concluding this section, I offer Huizinga’s shorter, less cultural-significance-based definition: “play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary’ life.”\textsuperscript{145}
Though Huizinga’s definition of play has become the standard bearer and starting point for play-theorists, there remains certain murky aspects of play, as mentioned above, that would benefit from being summed-up and stated in explicit terms. Play is at once both an attitude, or a stance, and an activity. It is a certain manner with which one interacts with the world, and thus contains two poles: the subjective, or the play-act, and the objective, or the playground. Each pole influences and changes the other; the strong player finds a playground in the most unlikely of places. Play, at its heart, is paradoxical; as I alluded to above, the instrumentality of play – i.e. play’s potential contribution to the human good life – wholly depends on the genuine recognition of its intrinsic value. Once play is stripped-down and demystified, the intrinsic ‘magic’ is lost along with it. In other words, play is autotelic; for play to have utility, awareness of its inherent ‘uselessness’ must be maintained; though caution in citing autotelicity as play’s only criterion must be exercised.

Critics of Huizinga’s definition of play cite autotelicity being a single criterion as a primary counter-argument, arguing that this broad definition of play is too expansive, includes potentially every human activity, and excludes other extremely important features of play, such as play being freely chosen, for example. In partial agreement with some of the utility-based scientific theories of why humans play I cited earlier, Bernard Suits added that proper forms of play will always include a “temporary reallocation to autotelic activities of resources primarily committed to instrumental purpose.”146 Play differs in both kind and quality. Although Huizinga helped to disambiguate two kinds of play – the competitive and the representational – Roger Caillois took this analysis one step further. Caillois noticed that Huizinga neglected to mention certain types of activities, such as games of chance and mimicry, in his analysis and sought to
improve upon Huizinga’s definition by expanding and clarifying what should and could be considered playing a game.

Further complexifying Huizinga’s notion of play, Caillois identified a distinction between what he called “paidia,” or informal play, and organized, rule-governed play, or “ludus.” Caillois explains that the “primary power of improvisation and joy, which I call paidia, is allied to the taste for gratuitous difficulty that I propose to call ludus.” In fact, Caillois understands the moral implications of such a delineation of game-types. A culture’s various modes of engagement with the games they play indicate much about their moral condition. “[Paidia and ludus] reflect the moral and intellectual values of a culture,” Caillois argues, “as well as contribute to their refinement and development.”

According to the play-theorists introduced in this section, and the multitudes that limitations in space have omitted, play is a fundamental part of the human experience. For better or worse, human beings must contend with the foundational role that play plays in their lives. From a morally educative standpoint, Schiller, Ellis, Huizinga, Suits, Caillois, and a host of other prominent play-theorists have identified the human capacity to reallocate time and energy that is normally occupied with satisfying necessities as a primary condition of social and moral development. In the “state of play” section that follows I will turn to one specific instance of this play pre-condition in the attempt to build a more moral civilization.

b. The State of Play:

Agreeing with the aforementioned play-theorists that play is “an intrinsically motivated way to engage in informal, unorganized, unstructured and, occasionally, elite forms of sport,” though cautioning against using sport as interchangeable with play, Morgan introduces an
imaginary social setting within which sport is played that he calls, “the state of play.” Although imaginary, the state of play that Morgan describes, “sketches a state of affairs and an accompanying state of mind that, both from a phenomenological and a historical perspective, have been closely approximated and in some (admittedly rarer) cases actually achieved – even though seldom clearly articulated.”149 In other words, just because the state of play is an imagined state, its efficacy as a tool for jarring loose the status quo, in terms of what motivates players to play, rests not on its historical precedent, though one does exist, but on its ability to show contemporary players a more fruitful and meaningful engagement with sport exists, and to convince them that this is the way they should approach their sporting practices.

Morgan describes his state of play in a three-part explanation: the actual social setting, the state of mind congenial to it, and the goods pursued in sports conceived as such. For the social setting best suited to the state of play Morgan borrows from Bernard Williams’ book, Truth and Truthfulness, to outline his idea. Morgan states that in this state of play social setting people would, “live under rules and values… [that] shape their behavior in some degree to social expectations, in ways that are not under surveillance and not directly controlled by threats and rewards.”150 Williams continues by adding that people living in this type of social setting would exhibit interpersonal interactions that were “long on moral trust in others and short on insensate egoism.”151 Morgan sums up this social setting by claiming that in such a setting “fairness is parasitic on solidarity.”152

The next aspect of Morgan’s state of play is the state of mind that would be best fit to such a social setting as just described. As we will look at more closely in the following section on the mutual quest for excellence in sport, Morgan describes the state of mind one must have in order for the social setting to coalesce in the state of play as primarily the state of “single-
mindedness.” What he means is that one’s excellence in sport, and the lifestyle one needs to lead in order to attain that excellence, should dominate the player’s attention. “It is this single-mindedness that marks the transition in a person’s life,” Morgan explains, “when sport ceases to be simply one interest among other interests and becomes a passion.”¹⁵³ Though, Morgan cautions, the single-mindedness described here should not be read as individual-mindedness for that would obscure the power and impact of collective action embodied in Morgan’s state of play.

Sporting practice in the state of play should strive for a common purpose among players. “For what we see in action here,” Morgan writes, “is a group of people finely attuned to the thoughts and actions of one another, a group with a unity of purpose that defies any easy individuation: a meshing of wills and actions that makes it difficult to tell where one will and action end and the others begin.”¹⁵⁴ Anecdotes abound of situations where the game seems to ‘slow-down’ for the players, and an innate sense of spatial and temporal location persists unencumbered; where the five players of a basketball unit, for instance, weave themselves into a poetic tapestry of mental and physical movements. This is the “commons of the mind and of the body” that Morgan describes as the ideal state of mind necessary to enact the state of play he imagines.

The third element of this state of play promised to identify the various goals or purposes that motivate the players. Most simply, the players are motivated to play by striving to achieve the goods of the game internal to the game itself, rather than those contingent goods that are merely external to it. Morgan explains the difference between these two types of goods simply as, “goods worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else (external) and goods worthy of pursuit in themselves (internal).”¹⁵⁵ That is not to say that no instrumental, or external, goods
may ever be pursued. Rather, it means only to stipulate that the goods internal to the game itself constitute the primary orientation toward one’s motivation in playing the sport. External goods, such as the physical health benefits from participating in an aerobic sport like basketball, can certainly be aimed for by the player, but “would largely be unobtrusive of the good particular to sports themselves.”

With the state of play sufficiently described, we can now see how these imaginary preconditions must exist if we are to attach to sport (play and games) the capacity to act as a source for the development of moral excellence. Defending his depiction of and argument for the efficacy of his state of play, Morgan asserts, “The idea was that providing contemporary practitioners a view of sports in the state of play would lead them to see both those features of sports that have been either pushed to the background or simply sacrificed in the pursuit of the almighty dollar and why it would be rational and moral to redeem them, to find some vital role and place for them in the modern landscape of American sports.” This ideal state of play, and its concomitant attitude and focus on internal goods, includes and encompasses the various characteristics of play outlined in the previous section, but institutes them in relation to the capacity to develop moral excellence in players who play sports under these conditions.

This is why, for the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to use Morgan’s state of play to inform and illuminate the type of psychological preconditions necessary for sport to be effective as a moral laboratory for developing moral excellence. Without an awareness of the play element and its role and function in human experience, the play attitude, with its requisite focus on the goods internal to sport; and an understanding of how sports have regressed morally due to the corruptive force of commercialization (i.e. the profit motive) and the blind pursuit of winning-at-all-costs, then the utilization of sport as a moral laboratory, capable of developing
moral excellence, becomes an impossibility. In the following section, I will turn my attention, not wholly away from Morgan’s state of play, but toward a more in-depth discussion of its conditions, i.e. the proper state of mind and pursuit of sports’ internal goods, though conceived of in different terms.

V. **Sports as the Mutual Quest for Excellence:**

This final section of the chapter serves in part as a concluding comment, bringing together many of the insights discussed in the previous sections. This approach concentrates on the *mutuality* inherent in competitive sports, and the moral and non-moral excellences – or virtues – that sports might promote for its participants. Various scholars of sports have recognized that part of competitive sports’ allure, purpose, and value derives from the potential to both teach excellences and provide a forum to demonstrate these excellences. Understanding that competitive sports are an integral part of a practice community allows them to be viewed as a ‘forum for moral debate’ – a way to recover moral agency and unify a community through the ‘dialogue of (cooperative) competition.’

Much of what has already been said about sports’ potential role in the promotion of moral excellence has been leading to this final section. Like Morgan’s state of play narrative, viewing sport as a mutual quest for excellence is a benchmark; an ideal state that we should be striving to attain in our sporting practices. Though unlike Morgan’s state of play, the necessary conditions for realizing sports potential to act as a laboratory for moral experiments are already in place, however obscured by corruption and commercialization they may be.

To be sure, Morgan’s state of play rests mostly on the attitudes and perspectives held by sports players, and on society writ large. Changing their perspective on their social
responsible for the failure of various movements to establish sport as an important mode of education, and also responsible for the deleterious impact sports have on young people who play them, much of the blame is directed toward sport’s competition and the competitiveness it breeds. This competitive perspective sports breed, opponents argue, pits people against one another in what Lasch earlier described as a mutually exploitative relationship. The response has been to de-emphasize the competitive aspects of sport in an attempt to limit the potential for exploitative, instrumental, win-at-all-costs attitudes to dominate the ethos of these phenomena.

While my approach to generating civic engagement through the quest for authenticity may be applied to all iterations of sports, perhaps the greatest impact this view of sports can have would be in youth and interscholastic sports.158

In the minds of those who deny the power of sports to act as a moral laboratory, eliminating competition would solve all the problems of any potentially harmful psychological side effects of playing sports. With nothing but the purest of intentions, youth sport advocates and reformers wished to provide a safe and healthy environment where any child had the opportunity to flourish. Although their intentions were pure, the effect of their reform policies not only deprived the children of any real moral education they might have gained, but dented the institution of sport as well.
Similar to Morgan’s state of play and the mutual quest for excellence, demands for reform in youth sport, coming from various sources such as Fred Engh and Jay Coakley, 159 seek to change the attitude of the players, coaches, administrators and parents, to alter the reasons and motivations behind why they participate in youth sports, to, as Torres and Hager say, “re prioritize the values inspiring participation in organized youth sports, which necessitates moving away from organizational models that mimic adult-oriented priorities.” 160 Without the competitive elements of sport, however, sport remains only in name. It is true that a fun, enjoyable, and ostensibly safer experience may be created by preventing the formation of permanent teams, not keeping score, and limiting travel to venues within the community. However, for the meaning and morally educative potential of competitive sport to be fully realized for the players, sport must retain zero-sum, comparative outcomes.

Others, in addition to Torres and Hager, have commented on the trend to reform organized youth athletics, formulating an alternative approach to sport that retains its competitive elements while simultaneously eliminating their potentially damaging side effects. Torres and Hager themselves call not for a reform of the sporting practices themselves, but a “reeducation of the parents and coaches about the best interpretation of competition and what it can and should be.” 161 One of these other scholars to attempt to provide a better, more effective interpretation of competition and its relevance to the social value of sports is Robert Simon.

In his highly influential book, *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport* (2010), Simon investigates the defensibility of competition in sport. Working his way through the various counter-arguments suggesting that competition is an ethically dubious feature of sport, and the seemingly inevitable slide down the slippery-slope to overly-competitive behavior, Simon agrees that when studying the consequences of competitive behaviors – complex a process as it may be – there are
no slam-dunk arguments for the retention of competition in athletics. However, Simon argues that competition is not inherently selfish, or that it necessarily leads to egoistic behavior. “Even though team sports involve competition between opponents,” Simon explains, “they also involve cooperation among team members. In many sports… it is common for opponents to encourage and even instruct each other in the off-season or between contests.” Competition can be saved and deemed ethically defensible, Simon argues, if it is utilized in the ‘right’ way.

The ‘right’ way to view sports and competition, in Simon’s estimation, requires a reformulation of what the intended goal – their central aim – should be. Those who wish to eliminate competition from sports see a necessary relationship between competition and the obsessive quest to secure victory, no matter the means used to secure it. Simon tempers this perspective by understanding winning not as the sole pursuit in sports, but as an important subsidiary goal of the game. In other words, the value derived from playing sports lies not in winning the game, but in trying one’s hardest to win the game; regardless of the outcome, the players all find value in their participation.

Edward Delattre, quoted by Simon on this topic, says that, “The testing of one’s mettle in competitive athletics is a form of self-discovery… The claim of competitive athletics to importance rests squarely on their providing us opportunities for self-discovery which might otherwise have been missed… This is why it is a far greater success in competitive athletics to have played well under pressure of a truly worthwhile opponent and lost than to have defeated a less worthy or unworthy one where no demands were made.”

Overcoming the challenge posed by a worthy competitor, striving one’s hardest to cross the finish line first, the agony of being defeated in spite of your intense efforts all provide elements of sports’ social value that would be lost without the zero-sum, comparative and
competitive environment offered within sporting practices. The presupposition of cooperation that inheres within every competitive endeavor enables sport to exemplify the mutuality and intersubjectivity found in all types of social practices.

The emphasis on mutuality, cooperation, and obligation to compete as hard as one can to secure victory undergird Simon’s ethically defensible version of competition. Simon states, “Competition in sport should be regarded and engaged in not as a [strictly] zero-sum game but as a mutually acceptable quest for excellence through challenge. Underlying the good sports contest, in effect, is an implicit social contract under which both competitors accept the obligation to provide a challenge for opponents according to the rules of the sport.”

In a Neo-Aristotelian, or MacIntyrean sense, competition in sports can be seen as a deeply social, intersubjective human practice. As such, the virtues gained through participation in sports are acknowledged, substantiated, and given value only through the acknowledgement of other members of the practice community, i.e. the practice community partially determines whether or not one’s efforts satisfy the moral and non-moral responsibilities associated with the social role one inhabits. This socially embedded view of sports helps the reader understand the existential concept of the ‘self’ as having an intersubjectively constituted relationship to others in the practice community – further revealing the deeply intersubjective nature of the human condition.

Rather than a wholesale reformation of sport’s structural characteristics, such as removing its competitive features, Simon, along with Morgan and myself, all believe that in order to reinvigorate the moral dimension of sports, to return sport to its proper place as an ethically defensible cultural institution, and to reveal sport’s capacity to function as a forum for
moral debate – effectively becoming a laboratory for testing and demonstrating moral
excellence, authenticity and civic virtue – one’s primary motivation for playing sports must be to
obtain the goods internal to them. In short, the play attitude must be adopted and the intrinsic
values of justice and equality must be pursued in earnest.

With an understanding of the metaphor that sport can act as a moral laboratory where the
foundational principles of justice and equality can be tested, retested, and implemented, and
where the play spirit thrives as a serious choice to compete well and strive to overcome the
challenges presented by the opponent in the mutual pursuit of excellence, in both performance
and moral behavior, we have arrived at an understanding of the preferred relationship between a
sport and its players. When this relationship is achieved, sports’ potential to promote moral
excellence, authenticity and civic virtue can take root.

The discussion, to this point, has mentioned ‘moral’ excellence, authenticity and civic
virtue often, but has done so without the benefit of a full explanation of what these terms refer to
in the context of this dissertation. In any discussion of the moral dimensions of sport and its
propensity to develop virtues for its participants, a specific ethical framework and its
concomitant principles lies beneath. The present discussion does not escape this truth.

The notions of the authenticity and civic virtue, the play-paradox, responsibility to others,
intersubjectivity, and freedom have loomed large within the preceding chapters. The lived
ambiguity of the human condition is a cornerstone tenet of existential philosophy. I will argue
that the struggle to live in authenticity, i.e. to develop moral excellence, demonstrated through
one’s civic engagement and achieved through the voluntary adoption of a fundamental project of
authenticity, represents the greatest good for a human being, and perhaps more importantly for a
human society.
In the fourth chapter, I will try to unite these concepts under one ethical framework: ‘existential’ virtue ethics, though with the necessary caveats to that term previously explained. I will provide a description of the additional features found in this extension of the traditional virtue ethical framework, which will help me explain why I have chosen to utilize this particular variation of virtue ethics as the lens through which to investigate sports and their potential to promote the development of moral excellence, authenticity and civic virtue.

As the reader will discover, virtue ethics is an incredibly complex field of ethical theory – to say nothing of other competing ethical theories, such as consequentialism or deontology. As such, trying to provide an argument for the superiority of a specifically ‘existential’ version of virtue ethics over the Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, or other competing ethical models, is not possible. Instead, chapter four will simply provide an argument for the plausibility that the features present in an ‘existential’ virtue ethics, as I will describe it, can indeed shoulder the theoretical weight of my assertion that sports, when ‘properly’ conducted, do indeed have the potential to promote the development of moral excellence, authenticity and civic virtue.

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Ibid.


Morgan, p. 2.

The politically charged slogan, “We are the 99%,” was originally used in connection with The Occupy Movement, which began in 2011, as a reference to the inequality inherent in the concentration of the vast amount of wealth and assets among the top 1% of wage-earning Americans. For an interesting and more in-depth discussion of this topic, see: *Occupy the Future*, ed. Grusky, McAdam, Reich, and Satz, (Cambridge: Boson Review Books, 2013).

Morgan, p. 25.

McFee, p. 134.


McFee, p. 135.


Ibid., p. 136.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 146.

For the most comprehensive discussion of the origins of athleticism and its British public school roots, see J.A. Mangan’s seminal text, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

McFee, p. 140.

Ibid., p. 148.

Drew Hyland is one notable scholar who has described this ‘stance’ toward play. Hyland has discussed this concept in various places, but most clearly and explicitly in his Presidential Address at the 1980 International Philosophy of Sport Conference: Drew Hyland, “The Stance of Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, VII, 1980, p. 87.


Ellis, p. 27.


Ibid.

Ibid., p. 2-3.


Ibid., p. 265.
128 Ibid., p. 250.
129 Ibid., p. 249.
130 Ibid., p. 248.
131 Ibid., p. 252.
133 Huizinga, p. 7.
134 Ibid., p. 8.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., p. 9.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid., p. 10.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid., p. 11.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid., p. 12.
143 Ibid., p. 13.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., p. 28.
147 Roger Caillois, Man, Play and Games, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 27.
148 Ibid.
149 Morgan, p. 17.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Morgan, p. 19.
154 Ibid., p. 20.
155 Ibid., p. 22.
156 Ibid.
161 Ibid., p. 207.
164 Ibid.
The purpose of this chapter is to identify key characteristics of virtue ethics in general and existential virtue ethics in particular. In order to accomplish the former I will highlight the work of G.E.M. Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre and will discuss concepts of Neo-Aristotelian ethical theory including intentionality, human telos, social practice and narrative unity. In order to describe existential variations on general virtue theory, I will rely primarily on writings by Charles Taylor, Jean Paul Sartre, and T. Storm Heter. I will discuss authenticity and civic virtue as fundamental projects, the importance of choice and moral deliberation skills for the development of civic virtue, and the primacy of intersubjectivity that all lie at the heart of this variant of virtue ethics. The claim here and in the next chapter is that an existential version of virtue ethics increases the ethical educative potential of sport. In short, existential thinking as articulated by Taylor, the later Sartre, and Heter complement Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics in useful ways.

The preliminary analyses in this chapter are required for two reasons. First, my claims about sport’s potential to cultivate moral excellence are specific to virtue ethics. Sports may have educational value for deontological or utilitarian ethics as well, but that is not a topic for this research. In short, we must be clear on the type of ethics at issue before attributions about sport’s capacity to advance that form of ethics can be made. Second, I will use characteristics identified in this chapter as a framework for my analysis of sports in Chapter 5. In other words, present analyses will provide a vehicle for structuring my comments about the relationship between sports and the virtues of authenticity and civic responsibility in the following chapter.
I. Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics:

1. Anscombe’s Ethics:

   Writing during the mid-nineteenth century, G. E. M. Anscombe’s research was far-reaching and influential. As a student of Ludwig Wittgenstein, her work in the field of analytic philosophy is counted among her greatest accomplishments. In fact, Anscombe became Wittgenstein’s best-known editor and translator, which included her translation of Wittgenstein’s most widely read and significant text, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). In spite of her important contributions to the field of analytic philosophy, however, Anscombe’s work on ethical theory is perhaps the most enduring aspect of her philosophy.¹⁶⁵

   As for her own career, many scholars celebrate her book, *Intention* (1957) as her most important philosophical contribution. In it, Anscombe argues that one’s intentions represent the most important aspect of judging the morality of one’s actions. In other words, the actions one takes are inextricably linked to one’s stated reasons for acting. This is a very important insight for all forms of virtue ethics. In a separate, but no less influential, essay, “Modern Moral Philosophy” (*Philosophy*, 1958), Anscombe builds on her discussion of the relationship between intentions and actions.¹⁶⁶

   In “Modern Moral Philosophy”, Anscombe argues that what modern moral agents understand as statements of ‘ought’ or ‘should’, in a moral sense, are merely “survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it.”¹⁶⁷ The “earlier conceptions of ethics” she discusses include primarily a Christian-derived law-based conception of ethics that maintains an over-emphasis on concepts of obligation, duty, and presumed guilt when these ‘laws’ of action were left unsatisfied by the moral agent. In light of modern society’s increasingly secular orientation
to all matters, even those of a moral nature, Anscombe believed that any ethical theory whose
foundation relies on laws can make no sense whatsoever without the presumption of a divine
giver of those laws.

Anscombe argued for the removal of certain moral language from modern vocabulary,
such an ‘ought’, which means ‘morally obliged’, because these abstracted and largely
disconnected phrases have no real meaning outside their original context. Despite what some
moral philosophers would have their audiences believe, the transition from ‘is’ to ‘ought’
indicates some kind of verdict about the actions of others, which in turn requires a law giver to
first issue the moral injunction and also to condemn the failure of such an action that ‘ought’ to
have been taken. Without such a divine law giver, such as a universally recognized divine being,
or God, within a given culture this transition becomes an extremely difficult one to make, and in
fact Anscombe claims this move to be an impossible one.\textsuperscript{168}

a. \textbf{Intentionality:}

In the absence of such a divine law giver Anscombe saw the competition among ethical
theories, whose foci were on defining proper rules with which to morally govern oneself and
one’s community, as inherently misguided. In place of this misguided competition among
ethical theories Anscombe argued for a greater emphasis on one’s intentions, rather than on the
consequences of one’s actions or on one’s compliance with rules ‘divined from nowhere’, in
morally adjudicating human action.

Consulting another in order to find out why they acted in such-and-such a manner
indicates that they made a choice to act in the way they did, and therefore, could have chosen a
different action. In the context of intention, Anscombe argued, inquiring about one’s choice to
act in one way and not in another, is a question of meaning and not of causation. It is only in
cases of intentional action, i.e. actions whose meaning is known only by the actors themselves, in
which the questions of ‘why’ are properly applied.

Unlike the separation between causes and effects, intentional actions cannot be separated
from the intentions that motivated them; the intentions are an actual aspect of the action, not a
cause that occurs prior to the action, and it is intentional actions that are typically thought to be
within the purview of ethics. Thus, one’s intentions provide perhaps the most profitable line of
inquiry when judging the morality of human action. This is the reason why much of
Anscombe’s work focused on developing a robust moral psychology that included philosophical
treatments of concepts such as intention, desire, and action.

Although much of “Modern Moral Philosophy” represents a critique of the two dominant
models of moral theory, namely consequentialism and deontology, Anscombe argues that it is
the task of modern moral philosophers to develop an alternative theory, one that fits with the
increasingly secular nature of modern institutions and other forms of social practices. Anscombe
provides a few hints at what a secularly-based moral philosophy would entail, suggesting that, “It
would be a great improvement if, instead of ‘morally wrong,’ one always named a genus such as
‘untruthful,’ ‘unchaste,’ ‘unjust.’ We should no longer ask whether doing something was
‘wrong,’ passing directly from some description of an action to this notion; we should ask
whether, e.g., it was unjust; and the answer would sometimes be clear at once.” Anscombe’s
suggestion to eliminate the language of ‘morally’ from the phrase ‘morally ought’ does indeed,
at first sight, seem curious.

However, what Anscombe had in mind in making this suggestion is that we find a way to
provide an account of ‘morally right’ or ‘morally wrong’ that has a foundation outside the
domain of divine legislation. Anscombe argued that the only route to a secular morality is to begin by developing an account of moral psychology and to identify which conditions best lead to human flourishing, or in her words, “an account of human nature, human action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all human ‘flourishing.’”\textsuperscript{170} Despite Anscombe’s failure to produce a complete ethical theory of virtue that could satisfy her own entreaty, many of her philosophical successors picked up the mantle, perhaps the most notable of whom was Alasdair MacIntyre.

2. \textbf{MacIntyre’s Ethics:}

In a closely related and overlapping criticism of modern morality, MacIntyre argued that the loss of a shared, public and rational justification for morality has led to an overly individualistic, bureaucratic, and, ultimately, emotivistic moral structure in modern societies. As we learned in chapter two, MacIntyre believes that modern society is largely ignorant of the process of morality’s historical evolution, and is detached from the historical circumstances that once breathed meaning into moral utterances. It is due to this disconnect, according to MacIntyre, that the post-Enlightenment project of morality was necessarily doomed to fail. In agreement with Anscombe, MacIntyre argues that modern societies employ a moral language that amalgamates various fragments from bygone eras resulting in a lack of substantial connection to the theories of human being and moral behavior that these theories were originally founded upon. MacIntyre explains, “What we possess…are the fragments of a conceptual scheme…We possess indeed simulacra of morality.”\textsuperscript{171}

To make his point MacIntyre imagines a fictional world where the promise of truth and objectivity – ostensibly found through the empirical method – has been detached from its
historical roots, shattered and shunned by the public, only to be reclaimed and reconstructed much later in the future. In this future reclamation, people take up the principles of science and begin practicing it once again. However, the scientific principles have at that point lost their meaning, disconnected as they are from the historical context in which they were created. The resulting fragmentation of science from its guiding principles leaves the practice of science in a grave state of disorder and incoherence. MacIntyre worries that the “grave state of disorder” currently plaguing modern morality is a result of the same type of fragmentation process, and will continue to be eroded by the lack of awareness and connection to the specific time and place within which the theories were created.

Absent a context to ground moral theory, the resulting moral language will remain “simulacra”, or an unacceptable imitation of bygone moral theories. It is this soft relativism that separates MacIntyre’s virtue ethics from Aristotle’s. MacIntyre’s ‘Neo-Aristotelian’ virtue ethics takes seriously the evolution and proliferation of human civilizations, accounting for the importance of cultural traditions and histories, without devolving into either radical relativism or absolutism. Deprived of a ‘grounding’ in some specific cultural context, competing moral values are interminably at odds, and no consensus, even within a community, can ever be reached. MacIntyre explains that without context moral debates involving two arguments of equal validity “possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another.” As was briefly discussed in chapter two, when two values that hold seemingly equal weight within a community come into conflict with one another, the argument devolves quite quickly into an irrational, and seemingly arbitrary, ‘assertion, counter-assertion’ impasse.

Arguments of this nature are doomed to interminability because these moral terms animating them have been so thoroughly disconnected from the historical context in which they
were originally developed. MacIntyre argues that the authors of our moral vocabulary have been wrested from their own historical context and treated as contemporaries, both of ourselves and of each other.\(^\text{174}\) The resulting moral framework becomes characterized, and justified, by a purportedly ‘rational’ interminability, described by MacIntyre as ‘emotivism.’

Emotivism, the plague of modern moral theory according to MacIntyre, is defined by him as, “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.”\(^\text{175}\) Essentially, emotivism is primarily about the sentences uttered in order to justify moral judgments. According to C.L. Stevenson, a leading proponent of emotivistic theory, the sentence, ‘This is good’, captures both the speaker’s approval of that thing and the normative force for the audience to whom that claim is uttered. MacIntyre argues that emotivists, therefore, believe their moral claims express the meaning of moral language, such as ‘right’ and ‘good,’ when in fact these claims only express their use in particular situations.

Much like Anscombe’s argument for the elimination of ‘moral’ terminology from our evaluative utterances, MacIntyre argues that in an emotivistic moral structure the theoretical bridge between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ presents an ethical impasse. No universal or objective authority can exist from which to issue a claim that all ‘must’ or even ‘morally ought’ to obey. Emotivism remains, in MacIntyre’s view, simply a theory of how moral claims are used by individuals as a way to mask, or give some gloss of objectivity to, the pursuit of their own personal agendas, and most assuredly not a theory of the objective meaning of those moral claims.\(^\text{176}\)

Without someone or something that transcends human experience to issue what Anscombe referred to as a ‘divine law’ each of these moral injunctions simply reduce to a
means-ends relationship; to the speaker of such evaluative judgments who lacks a divine law-giver, the other must necessarily remain a means to their own ends. As MacIntyre explains, “The sole reality of distinctively moral discourse is the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preference and choices of another with its own. Others are always means, never ends.” The speaker who insists on appealing to some transcendent source to ground their moral commands may truly believe their commands have universal authority, however their moral command remains their own desires, reasons, intentions, and/or motives. Emotivism, in MacIntyre’s estimation, is a direct result of society’s inability to provide rational justifications for objective and impersonal claims, and further, that the history of moral theory dating back to the Enlightenment has been a succession of failed attempts to provide these justifications.

Prior to the Enlightenment project, religion provided the basis and rational justification for the normative force a moral claim had on the individuals of a given society. Similar to Anscombe’s argument explained above, MacIntyre too identifies the loss of a shared, public conception of moral theory as the culprit primarily responsible for the “grave state of disorder” in modern societies. In an increasingly secularized society, where the loss of a divine law-giver also means the loss of a shared conception of human nature, what do moral agents have to genuinely appeal to when formulating claims about what a person ‘ought’ to do? After all, without a shared concept of human nature, there can be no shared understanding of how best to fulfill the proper ‘ends’ of human existence. What is at stake in any discussion of ethics is human flourishing, or a lack thereof. In other words, as MacIntyre explains, ethics “presupposes some telos.”

b. Human Telos:
In a three-part teleological scheme, of which Aristotle is said to be the historical ancestor and in which theistic ethics finds a natural home, the starting point of human being is human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be, and through ethical instruction, “practical reason and experience” is transformed into human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-his-essential-nature. ‘Ethics’ is defined here as, “the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter… reason [therefore] instructs us both as to what our true end is and as to how to reach it.” If MacIntyre is correct in arguing that ethics involves the reason and rationality which humanity employs in order to understand how to transition from one’s untutored state to one’s true end, then “the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of a telos leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship becomes quite unclear,” i.e. the relationship between ethical injunctions without a teleological context, and untutored-human-nature-as-it-is. The rejection of an identifiable end toward which human beings should aim their efforts also implies the loss of the ‘functional concept’ of all things.

The functional concept refers to the clearly definable “purpose or function which [any one thing is] characteristically expected to serve.” This represents an important loss for MacIntyre’s moral philosophy because the notion of a functional concept represents the only rational means for validly moving from a factual statement to an evaluative one. For example, a watch that performs its function well and satisfies the purposes for which the owner of the watch expects it to satisfy, such as reporting the time accurately and consistently, is simultaneously and inextricably referred to both as a watch as such, and a ‘good’ watch. In other words, the factual and the evaluative characteristics cannot be separated, in terms of it being understood as a functional concept.
The human being, understood as a functional concept, requires a notion of what its essential nature, purpose, or function, truly is. For Aristotle, and the sophists who predate him, a human’s function was intimately tied to the social roles he inhabited, such as family member, citizen, philosopher, servant of God, and so on. Moreover, one’s success or failure in satisfying the responsibilities associated with those roles dictated the moral praise or blame attributed to his actions.

The beginning of the end for a rationally based ethics, therefore, is the replacement of a human *telos* with a reified autonomous individual, independent of any essential nature, or functional concept, and therefore divorced from any social role and the responsibilities associated with it. MacIntyre explains that, “It is only when man is thought of as an individual prior to and apart from all roles that ‘man’ ceases to be a functional concept.” If human beings are no longer thought of as having a function or purpose, how is any ethical theory – the role of which is to tutor humanity about how to rationally and reasonably identify and act in accordance with ethical precepts that lead to human flourishing – to be rationally justified or substantiated? For MacIntyre, the answer is that it cannot. Any evaluative statement must have a specific purpose or function with which to appeal and corroborate said statement; if, that is, one wishes their statement to properly bridge the gap between the purely subjective and the seemingly objective. In other words, without some shared sense of what ‘good’ refers to, the statement: “He is a good father” is a purely subjective evaluation, and becomes quite meaningless in the context of moral discourse. This is the crux of the matter.

In MacIntyre’s words, “Within this [Aristotelian] tradition moral and evaluative statements can be called true or false in precisely the way in which all other factual statements can be so called. But once the notion of essential human purposes or functions disappears from
morality, it begins to appear implausible to treat moral judgments as factual statements." The interminable nature of modern moral debate is symptomatic of the principle that no ‘ought’ conclusions can be derived from ‘is’ premises. The removal of human beings from their particular social roles, and the responsibilities associated with those roles is a direct result of the rejection of human beings as functional concepts, or as having a common human nature. This, in turn, wrested from humanity its telos.

Without a shared, public, or ‘core conception’ of the true end toward which humanity should be striving, ethics devolves into an exploitative quest to satisfy one’s own individual desires, leading to the interminability of ‘moral’ debate, and creating the social conditions in which bureaucratic individualism replaces communitarian notions of interdependency, and secularly-based managerial expertise and ‘effectiveness’ fills the role once inhabited by some divine source of rational justification – traditionally speaking, by God.

MacIntyre argues that the development of a core conception of the virtues within a society should progress in logical order as a three-stage process. Firstly, one must develop a background account of a social ‘practice,’ the second stage involves an understanding of what MacIntyre refers to as the “narrative order of a single human life,” and lastly, one must develop a robust account of what constitutes a moral tradition."

**c. Social Practices:**

This theory of the core conception of virtue represents an incredibly important aspect of MacIntyre’s project to recover moral agency. MacIntyre explains that although his treatment of the term ‘practice’ may be an uncommon one, it is nonetheless a crucial concept for his moral
MacIntyre famously describes what he means when he refers to a practice, as it relates to his virtue-based moral theory, in the following quote:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.  

Important to both his own analysis of practices and to my later analysis of sports, the notions of internal and external goods need further explication.

The example MacIntyre uses to explain internal and external goods of a practice involves a hypothetical scenario in which a very intelligent, yet very young child is being taught the game of chess. In the scenario the child does not have an explicit desire to learn the game, but he does have a strong affinity for candy, though with no means of obtaining it on his own. The child’s play is thus incentivized through a reasoning process external to the practice itself. He is told that if he plays regularly he will be rewarded with candy, and if he wins, he will be rewarded with an extra allotment of candy. Clearly, the child plays chess only for the purposes of obtaining the promised reward, in this case the candy. The external goods which the child desires represents the aim of his activity, and therefore the means with which he obtains his desired end (i.e. the candy) is incidental to his activity.

With this being the case, if more efficient means presented themselves to the child, such as circumventing the established rules of the game, the child would have no reason not to employ such subversive and dishonest means. After all, obtaining more candy is the goal, not playing
well, honestly, or even by the rules. However, if the child developed an appreciation for the
nuances, complexity, and creativity the game of chess demands from its players, then the goal of
the game would no longer be obtaining the most candy possible. The game itself and the
satisfaction of playing that game well would displace the desire for obtaining more candy, and
any dishonest attempt to secure a victory would preclude him from obtaining this newfound goal
of satisfying gameplay. The satisfaction from a well-played game of chess would then be an
example of an internal good of that social practice.

In this latter stage of the scenario, the child adopts new reasons for playing chess, and the
new aims which those new reasons create would supersede simply winning the contest to obtain
more candy. With the internal goods now understood and sought after, the child must win in a
particular way; a way that preserves his ability to demonstrate his excellence in precisely the way
that the game of chess both requires and makes possible, i.e. the internal goods of the practice.
This is what MacIntyre means when he refers to “goods internal to that form of activity” that are
“realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence” that the practice itself
makes possible.¹⁸⁷

Closely related to the internal goods of a practice, i.e. those good which can only be
achieved through honest, just, and courageous participation in said practice, are the standards of
excellence and obedience to rules that attach to these practices. These standards of excellence
and rules that govern one’s ‘proper’ engagement in a social practice must be adopted and
accepted by the practitioner for their activity to be deemed morally praiseworthy, while the
rejection of them necessitates a morally blameworthy evaluation. The shared understanding of
these goods, and their ‘proper’ attainment, necessarily precludes any subjective or emotive
assessment of one’s performance. As MacIntyre succinctly states, “In the realm of practices the
authority of both goods and standards operates in such a way as to rule out all subjectivist and emotivist analyses of judgment.”\(^\text{188}\) Attaining the goods internal to a practice, along with satisfying the standards of excellence which help to define that practice, should comprise, MacIntyre argues, all of an individual’s motivations and reasons for entering into a practice in the first place.

External goods, due to the fact that they can be obtained in a variety of different ways and places in human experience, deal primarily with one’s property and possessions, and are thus scarce goods in the sense that greater possession by one means less possession by others. External goods, therefore, necessarily deal with and emphasize competition, and are the province of institutions. Internal goods, on the other hand, represent the ‘competition’ to demonstrate excellence. However, the demonstration of excellence is not a scarce good, and therefore can be attained by all deserving members of a practice community. In fact, MacIntyre argues that internal goods are such that “their achievement is a good for the whole community who participates in the practice.”\(^\text{189}\) But how does one achieve these goods and demonstrate these excellences? MacIntyre’s answer is by developing one’s virtues.

Virtue, then, as MacIntyre defines it, is any “acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”\(^\text{190}\) In other words, the dispositions and inclinations that lead one to pursue and obtain the goods internal to a practice become habituated behaviors. These behaviors are what MacIntyre, and Aristotle, believe to comprise the relevant catalogue of virtues within the society that that practice is practiced. It is important to emphasize here the intimate and constitutive relationship between the virtues and the practices, and to notice that all practices are necessarily social practices.
MacIntyre argues that “It belongs to the concept of a practice as I have outlined it…that its goods can only be achieved by subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners.” Alongside this realization of our dependency on other practitioners to make possible the practice itself, MacIntyre explains that we must therefore embrace the interpersonal behaviors that best exemplify these standards of excellence and choose those actions in relation to other people which best allow for the realization of the practice’s internal goods. In other words, practices aid in one’s development and demonstration of moral action, or one’s virtues, such as courage, honesty, and justice. Without the development and demonstration of these virtues, the internal goods of the practice cannot be fully realized, i.e. the value of the intended ends are intertwined with the quality of the means employed to achieve them.

Cheating, or acting dishonestly or unjustly, bars us from these internal goods and “renders the practice pointless except as a device for achieving external goods.” As institutions emphasize the attainment of merely external goods – and the competitiveness required to attain them – and practices lead practitioners toward the virtues required to attain their internal goods, it follows that a society concerned with establishing a moral order must be founded upon sound social practices that necessarily include an account of the virtues. Or conversely stated, “Without the virtues there could be a recognition only of what I have called external goods and not at all of internal goods in the context of practices. And in any society which recognized only external goods competitiveness would be the dominant and even exclusive feature.”

MacIntyre takes his cautionary tale about the relationship between virtues, practices, and institutions one step further by stating that, although external goods are still genuinely goods, in that they are objects of human desire, in a society devoid of a core conception of virtue, where
the dominant feature is the pursuit of external goods – not wholly unlike contemporary American society – the commitment to such virtues as honesty, justice and courage become potential barriers in one’s pursuit of external goods, such as money, fame, and power, for instance. In MacIntyre’s words, “Thus although we may hope that we can not only achieve the standards of excellence and the internal goods of certain practices by possessing the virtues and become rich, famous and powerful, the virtues are always a potential stumbling block to this comfortable ambition.” Therefore, the virtues must be emphasized by and nurtured within institutions, which are in turn held in moral order through maintaining social practices. The crucial role that virtue plays in maintaining moral order in a particular society is now clear. However, one objection and response remains to be understood, namely that of the arbitrariness, and ultimate incompatibility, of a moral life without some ordering unity, or telos, that can be applied to the whole human life. As described in the above section, an ethics without a functional concept for human existence devolves quickly into either emotivism or baseless injunctions.

The multiplicity of goods able to be generated through an indefinite number of practices led MacIntyre to remind his readers that his definition of virtue remains incomplete without some conception of what constitutes the good of a whole human life, i.e. a telos. In fact, as a direct result of losing a conception of the whole human life, the modern emotive self emerges as the most viable conception of self, where the goods internal to a practice are in fact substantiated by individual, criterionless choices. The lack of a telos, for MacIntyre would invalidate what he believed to be the most crucial virtue he identified as integrity or constancy. These virtues are not intelligible except in reference to the wholeness of human life. For these reasons, MacIntyre completes his definition of virtue with his explanation of the importance of conceiving human life as a unified whole.
d. **Narrative Unity:**

Modern society, MacIntyre tells us, divides human life into a variety of distinct segments, each with its own norms and expected behaviors; work is separated from play, private from public, corporate from personal, individual from social role, and so on. Unfortunately, the consequences of this separation are devastating for our projects of morality. An individual’s experiences are also seen as distinct moments, rather than as one part of a larger life project. Life itself, then, begins to appear to the individual as “nothing but a series of unconnected episodes.”¹⁹⁵ As a result, virtues are seen as nothing more than a set of skills that allows one to satisfy the discrete responsibilities of certain roles in certain situations.

Genuine virtue, for MacIntyre, is a disposition that manifests itself in one’s actions in a variety of different types of situations. One’s true possession of virtue entails, in and of itself, a unity of action, rather than a succession of singular actions. Therefore, in order for one to genuinely possess a virtue, the self must be conceived of as being a narrative unity, rather than a succession of segmented social roles; “a concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.”¹⁹⁶

Understood only as segments, independent from one another, human behavior is wholly unintelligible. MacIntyre provides the example of the gardener and the variety of answers to the question: “What is he doing?” Without some understanding of his primary intentions, the answer to this question will remain opaque, at best. In order to give an intelligible account of human action, i.e. to give a genuinely accurate answer to this question, one’s intentions must be understood – additionally, only by reference to one’s long-term intentions can one’s short-term intentions be understood, and clearly, a human life must be conceived of as a unity for long-term
intentions to have any meaning. MacIntyre reasons, therefore, that the intelligibility of human action rests on both a causal (intentional) and temporal (short-term/long-term intentions) understanding, which both make reference to a particular setting, with a particular narrative history.

In order to understand and evaluate those intentions, MacIntyre argues further, the context, or setting, must also be understood, and all settings necessarily involve some account of a historical narrative, within which the history of the individual is situated. MacIntyre then concludes that, “Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions.” Human action, in other words, is intelligible only through one’s intentions within a particular setting, which entails a narrative history that binds all of the elements together. Human beings being unique in the fact that they alone can be held accountable for their chosen actions, or inactions, provides MacIntyre with the evidence to then argue for the importance of evaluating human action, i.e. that intelligible actions, rather than just actions as such, represent the only evidence we have for evaluating the moral praise or blame of one’s actions.

With this understanding of the narrative unity of a human life, MacIntyre introduces the notion of a narrative quest, and claims that, “The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest,” where a quest is defined as, “an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge.” To this end, MacIntyre argues that virtues, therefore, are those dispositions which lead one toward the attainment of the goods internal to practices, and also those qualities of character that enable the pursuit of the good life, furnishing the moral agent with an increasing understanding of self, and of the good life itself.
Thus, “the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.” What is needed, then, to recover moral agency and maintain the strength of a moral life within a society is a unifying tradition of sound social practices, bolstered by institutions founded on notions of civility and local moral communities, in which the virtues of integrity, honesty, justice, and courage are fostered, and the moral and intellectual lives of its practitioners are sustained and extended.

3. Conclusion:

Prior to transitioning into the next section that will highlight an existentially-specific variation of virtue ethics, it is useful to take a general inventory of the relevant features already discussed that will form the foundation of the moral aspect of my argument for how sports can be considered a resource in the development of moral excellence. Intentionality, human telos, social practices, and narrative unity comprise important concepts that underlie all types of virtue ethics. A person’s intentions represent a significant component of the morally praise-or-blame-worthiness of one’s actions. The reasons why a person does what he does are more important to the virtue ethicist than are the consequences of those actions. And so it is in sports. The reasons behind why the player chooses to play are far more significant than the outcome of a single zero-sum contest or any statistics compiled in the course of playing in such a contest.

Within a virtue ethics framework, the intentions motivating a person’s actions dictate what fundamental project they have chosen. Acting in ways that cohere with this voluntarily chosen fundamental project constructs an individual’s narrative and will ultimately lead one toward the fulfillment of their telos. It is through the participation in morally sound social
practices, as MacIntyre has described them, that an individual is able to demonstrate through their actions their chosen fundamental project. This establishes a coherent narrative unity for the individual, which in turn, aids them in their pursuit to fulfil their telos. Sports, I am arguing, not only expands the choices that are available to the properly situated participant, but also provides just such a morally sound social practice where one’s intentions can be deliberately chosen and where this narrative may be constructed.

Additional educative potential, I claim, is available when adding existential themes to the aforementioned characteristics of virtue ethics. (I trust this is also now in the Intro.) MacIntyre rejected existentialist conceptions of virtue, and therefore of any coherent existentially-based virtue ethical theory, but other writers believe his conclusions were misguided. I will not debate the merits of their arguments against MacIntyre’s views, but will use their analyses to expand the scope of virtue ethics. The next section will continue my analysis of virtue ethics from an existentially-based perspective, adding five more concepts that I will combine with the four already discussed to formulate the foundation for my analysis of sport in the subsequent chapter.

II. Existential Virtue Ethics:

4. Authenticity and Civic Virtue:

Although ribbons of novelty run throughout the my explanation of virtue ethics as viewed from an ‘existential’ ontological starting point, I am by no means the first to advance the notion of a plausible existential ethics. Most recently, Heter wrote extensively on the topic, outlining what an existential ethics, based on attaining the primary values of authenticity and civic virtue, would look like. Heter shows that, “the struggle for recognition, which forms the core of
Sartre’s theory of self and human relations, is the social-ontological underpinning of a defensible, intersubjective existential ethics.”

Heter continues by arguing that authenticity and civic engagement represent the two chief existential virtues, of which mutual recognition is a primary element. Heter writes, “Following Hegel, the existentialist can root rights and obligations in the phenomenon of mutual recognition, which is in turn moored in the actual social relations of existing human communities.”

Authenticity and civic virtue, or political engagement as Heter has described it, are therefore central concepts in our attempt to establish sports as a plausible venue for the enrichment of our moral lives.

By introducing and including the following existential themes into this discussion of virtue ethics I will expand the moral framework, and provide further support for my claim about the morally educative potential of sports. At the heart of each of the themes I identify lies the recognition that the human condition necessarily entails an intersubjective relationship within all interactions between human beings. Importantly, for the purposes of the current analysis, that recognition must be mutual, therefore introducing a social or ‘community-based’ aspect to the moral framework. With a clear understanding of human intersubjectivity one must then choose which type of fundamental project will guide their day-to-day (inter)actions. One’s fundamental project then becomes the standard against which their everyday choices are judged, and ultimately how their personal narrative is constructed.

According to Heter, in order for one’s personal narrative to be a unified story, one’s everyday choices must cohere with their chosen fundamental project, or else they will not experience the freedom and selfhood that this moral perspective offers. Although I will provide much greater detail and defense of this view in what follows, for now it is important to note that
‘existential’ freedom is the condition one reaches when they have chosen authenticity as their fundamental project, and then acting in ways that reaffirm that project on a decision-by-decision basis, and is demonstrated though one’s civic virtue and engagement. The embrace of our intersubjectivity and the reaffirmation in each social interaction of the need for mutual recognition, along with our commitment to civic engagement – i.e. ensuring that we do what we can to eliminate and alleviate structures of coercive power in our society – demonstrates our choice of authenticity, and therefore our experience of freedom.

This freedom, however, is a tenuous one and is never a completed project. Either undone or affirmed with the passing of each choice we make, the achievement of freedom is never a settled state-of-affairs, but a perpetual (re)negotiation between oneself and those with whom they interact. In other words, as long as an individual manages to sustain a coherent narrative, their experience of freedom, and therefore of the good life itself, remains possible. Fulfilling our telos should be our primary aim. The following existential themes present a unique twist on both the understanding of what this ‘proper function’ entails and on how best to achieve it. Authenticity and civic virtue, being the primary components of an existential virtue ethics, will comprise the major subheadings of this section, although I will provide a more detailed explanation of the various subsidiary themes I have introduced in these opening paragraphs, including existential authenticity, fundamental projects, horizons of choice, intersubjectivity and mutual recognition, and civic virtue.

e. **Existential Authenticity:**

Existential authenticity represents perhaps the most widely known, and unfortunately, the most widely misunderstood theme in ‘existential’ philosophy. Typical usages of the term
‘authenticity’ include notions of ‘genuineness’, ‘being true to some thing’s origins’, ‘credibility’, or having a ‘proper claim to legitimacy’ regarding one’s lifestyle or background; in common parlance, an ‘authentic’ person is believed to be someone who truly is what they purport to be. Used in a philosophical context, however, to be authentic goes beyond a superficial notion of being ‘the genuine article’ or avoiding being ‘fake’ or a ‘fraud.’ To be sure, ‘being true to one’s self’ does represent an important topic in many academic and scholarly discussions surrounding such issues as ‘authentic’ gender identity, social conformity, and racial diversity and ethnic heritage. But for the purposes of the current discussion, authenticity will be restricted to its ‘existential’ philosophical treatment.

To be sure, the existential concept of authenticity defies any overly-simplistic or condensed, or otherwise abbreviated definition. Perhaps it is because of this that the concept often has been misunderstood and mischaracterized in recent scholarship. As it is a crucial concept for an existential version of traditional virtue ethics to get off the ground, I will attempt to provide a characterization of existential authenticity that cuts right to its relevant aspects for the current discussion.

T. Storm Heter begins his chapter, entitled “Authenticity,” by saying that “Authenticity is the chief moral virtue of existential ethics, just as bad faith is the chief vice of existential ethics… [It] is a deeply social project that requires, in addition to transcending bad faith, respecting others.”203 Although it is the most often overlooked component of authenticity, the “deeply social” structure of authenticity owes to the deeply social configuration of human beings themselves.

Since the self is inextricably intertwined with other ‘selves,’ or intersubjectively constructed, the social and community oriented nature of authenticity is not only a necessary
component of one’s project of authenticity, but also a rationale for how the ‘authentic’ individual escapes the problem of the authentic Nazi, murderer, or oppressor. Heter explains that, “To be authentic I must respect others because others make me who I am. I need the recognition of others for my selfhood and my freedom. So, my reasons for respecting others are simultaneously self- and other-regarding.” Thus, in addition to the two canonical tenets of Sartrean authenticity, namely lucid consciousness of one’s intersubjectivity and accepting the responsibility that inheres in the requirement to choose meaning for oneself, one must satisfy the third condition of respecting others to be said to have chosen authenticity as their fundamental project.

With this brief primer on Sartre’s and Heter’s combined understanding of authenticity, we can now turn to a more complete description of the specific components of authenticity, especially as they relate to the creation of and choices involved with one’s fundamental project, the importance of intersubjectivity and mutual recognition, and the practical demonstration of authenticity, i.e. civic virtue.

f. **Fundamental Projects:**

As a choice that each person must make, whether they are aware of this choice or not, the actions of each individual accumulate over time and eventually make up an individual’s identity. These daily choices and actions dictate each individual’s orientation toward their own being. Sartre refers to this orientation as one’s “fundamental project”. Hazel Barnes characterizes this project as, “the for-itself’s chosen orientation toward being, its way of making itself be, its nonreflective creation and pursuit of values, the process whereby it chooses to make itself.”
The choices one makes helps to ground that individual in something more concrete than abstract moral principles, and works to provide a stable, coherent sense of self. To be sure, the choices and actions can lead down the road of either authenticity or self-deception; either affirming the truth of one’s for-itself condition, or deceiving one’s self into believing that one exists in-itself, i.e. having the ability to wholly constitute one’s complete self, in-itself. Authenticity, therefore, is the project of the for-itself recognizing and embracing the fact that each instantiation of human consciousness exists simultaneously as both factual and transcendent.

I will have more to say on this concept in the following sections, however, for now it suffices to say that the primary component of one’s freely chosen fundamental project of authenticity is the choice to embrace this lived ambiguity of one’s human condition, and the social responsibility that inures in this recognition and willful acceptance. Importantly, the choices one makes with respect to their fundamental project determines, in a strong sense, that person’s character and their intentions, and is ultimately an expression of their freedom and a demonstration of their virtue.

g. Existential Freedom:

David Detmer, renowned Sartrean scholar, has also identified the possibility of an existential ethics. In his book, Freedom as a Value, Detmer claims that freedom is the highest existential value. In fact, Hazel Barnes, Sartre’s primary English translator, remarked that, “Freedom is both the starting point and ultimate goal.” Likewise, in Angel Cooper’s thesis entitled, “Prolegomena to a Sartrean Existential Virtue Ethics,” Cooper claims that the telos of an
existential virtue ethic would in fact be freedom. Cooper identifies four virtues (benevolence, creativity, integrity, and honesty) that flow from freedom, when viewed as the human *telos.*

Freedom, understood from an existential perspective, is understood as lucid consciousness and an absence of physical, external coercion. Freedom is an interpersonal byproduct of an individual’s authentic engagement with themselves and others, i.e. their choice to embrace authenticity as their fundamental project. Engagement, in Heter’s use of the term, refers to, “an individual’s basic disposition to care about the liberty and suffering of other members of her community.” Authenticity, therefore, ensues from an existential engagement with the human condition, both with one’s own condition, and the role of the other in the structure of that condition.

Whereas authenticity – according to the existential virtue ethics model – results from maintaining a balance between the oppositional features of the human condition, bad faith results from failing to maintain this balance. Falling out of balance can occur in one of two ways: either (a) one denies their subjectivity and identifies themselves as being wholly determined by externalities, or (b) one denies their objectivity and identifies themselves as being wholly determined internally. Either form of bad faith eliminates the choice of authenticity as one’s fundamental project, and, importantly, making it impossible to experience human freedom and flourishing, thus the good life itself.

According to these proponents of existential ethics, the good life – the one consistent with a fundamental project of authenticity – involves creating one’s self within an awareness, acceptance, and genuine embrace of the role and influence that both their own and the other’s perceptions play in the creation of one’s ‘self.’ Existential authenticity is about recognizing and embracing one’s responsibility in the creation of meaning and the experience of freedom in one’s
own life, along with the recognition that every individual has the same responsibilities; the same choices they must make. Authenticity and civic virtue are choices that individuals make of their own accord. Inherent in an understanding of authenticity and human freedom, according to Heter’s interpretation of Sartre, is that the ‘self’ who chooses is itself predicated on the free and uncoerced existence of ‘the Other.’ Without this recognition of the intimate role the Other plays in an individual’s choices, there is a partial denial of one’s objectivity, and therefore one’s ‘buffet of options’ is limited to only various forms of bad faith.

h. **Horizons of Choice:**

Despite the fact that renown scholar Charles Taylor, along with the majority of the other “existentialist” philosophers introduced in this chapter, would not regard himself as having commitments to an “existentially”-based philosophy, many of his theories behind authenticity and its relationship to ethics have import in the current discussion. Taylor explains that there is a powerful moral ideal underlying the notion of authenticity. It is an ideal not typically noticed by those offering superficial critiques of authenticity’s effects on society.

Taylor writes, “It seems true that the culture of self-fulfillment has led many people to lose sight of concerns that transcend them. And it seems obvious that it has taken trivialized and self-indulgent forms,” but there, “is something I nevertheless want to resist in the thrust of the arguments that these authors present.” What Taylor resists is the attempt to jettison altogether the concept of authenticity. Taylor understands that common expressions of authenticity have indeed harmed societies. However, he wants to bring attention to the moral potential of authenticity by showing how authenticity, in fact, presents a “picture of what a better or higher
mode of life would be, where ‘better’ and ‘higher’ are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire.”

What gets lost when we maintain a myopia toward authenticity, seeing it merely as a “soft relativism” or a “screen for self-indulgence,” is its moral force. The assumption is that in what Taylor refers to as, “the culture of authenticity,” there must be silence on the topic of what constitutes the good life, since each person’s version of the good life is just as good as any others’. And in Taylor’s estimation this is a false claim. What these critics are attacking, Taylor argues, are debased and corrupted expressions of authenticity, and are therefore ignoring the moral force of authenticity as an ideal, and its inherent appeal to transcend the monolithic self.

Authenticity, for Taylor, should be seen as an ideal that emphasizes the expectations of each person to exercise self-determining freedom and to create an identity of self-fulfillment and self-realization. In this process of giving shape to one’s own life, Taylor sees one of the greatest triumphs of modernity, though he also understands what is at stake. Although Taylor recognizes that by emphasizing the detachment of the individual from a fixed social role, the meaning or purpose that attaches to the life of the embedded individual is potentially lost, he nevertheless locates the genuine retrieval of authenticity as an ideal in two interrelated realizations.

First, Taylor takes seriously the idea that identity is formed only through recognition by others, or as he describes it, the “dialogical character” of human life, or as I have similarly referred to it as the intersubjective constitution of human being. What Taylor intends is to make clear the place and the role of the ‘other’ in creating one’s identity; that, in fact, it is impossible to create one’s self in isolation from others.
Second, Taylor wants to show that the process of identity formation can only take place “against a background of things that matter.” Taylor calls the backgrounds against which things take on significance, “horizons.”

The “shared horizons of value,” therefore, are those options already in existence that one must choose among in order for that choice to have any meaning whatsoever. In other words, one’s choice only takes on significance when there are other options not chosen, so that what was chosen is then deemed ‘higher’ or ‘better’ than the other available choices. This means that “the ideal of self-choice supposes that there are other issues of significance beyond self-choice. The ideal couldn’t stand alone, because it requires a horizon of issues of importance, which help define the respects in which self-making is significant.” Importantly, the ‘self-making’ Taylor refers to here happens as a result of a dialogical, or relational process.

Taylor’s understanding of authenticity revolves around the freedom to choose, within a shared horizon of value. The free individual, the person who effectively exercises moral agency, should embrace the irreplaceable role of other people in recognizing and ratifying not only what one ultimately chooses, but the value of that choice in relation to the other available options left unchosen. The intimacy between self and other, found in Taylor’s conception of authenticity, as a foundational value in his ethical theory is precisely what I have intended to emphasize in an existential virtue ethics.

The concept of specifically ‘existential’ authenticity is rooted in the existential interpretation of freedom. Existential freedom as Taylor intimates, “is not an abstraction to be generically applied to ‘man’ as such, but a risk, a venture, a demand. In a sense we are all free, but we are free to achieve our freedom or to lose it. There are no natural slaves, but most of us have enslaved ourselves.” Taylor views freedom as the act of choosing – within a horizon of
shared value choices – one’s self for one’s self; a choice that only gains intelligibility when ratified by others, thereby remaining unintelligible in isolation, whether that isolation be actual or theoretical.

Some critics who believe authenticity should not be considered a virtue worry that in holding isolation and loneliness as baseline conditions for authenticity, and therefore freedom, one will confuse creation of choices with choosing among available choices. However, as Taylor points out, “by singling out the act alone by which a man faces his own ‘condemnation to be free,’ the existentialist isolates part of a complex situation which cannot in fact be so isolated. It is true that it is I who have-always-already-chosen the values by which I live. But I have chosen, not created them; if they were not in some sense there to be chosen, if they did not somehow compel me to choose them, they would not be values at all.”

As can be seen in Taylor, and many other philosophers not so wedded to the ‘existential’ moniker, the notion of authenticity is, in fact, a deeply other-concerned, intersubjective project that each individual must freely choose for themselves, and certainly not the radically isolationist project that critics of this theory often assert. If authenticity, for Taylor, is to be viewed as a virtue it must be a socially established phenomenon. As Taylor stresses, authenticity contains an inherent structure of mutual interdependence between individuals. Taylor’s emphasis on community is consistent with the basic tenets of existential authenticity that were noted previously. The authentic individual experiences a tension between the actual and the possible, determination from outside and radical freedom from the inside. Our embeddedness in culture and in multiple relationships with others is part of the actual situations that require choices to be made, and therefore our character to be formed.
i. **Intersubjectivity and Mutual Recognition:**

Recognition that is *mutually* shared between self and other, or intersubjectivity, represents the bridge that (re)connects the individual to her community; to which she is inextricably and existentially bound. From the view of authenticity and civic virtue, this bridge of intersubjectivity is an ontological necessity. Despite any atomized individual’s fervent attempts to obscure this intimate connection between one’s self and the others with whom one shares their existence, it nevertheless remains fixed as a constant in the equation of human being.

Modern societies have attempted to reify the individual into a radically independent being who is able to constitute their own objectivity through wholly subjective channels, i.e. a subjective proclamation of their own pure objectivity; having done so with disastrous consequences. In fact, the denial of ‘the Other’s’ role as co-constitutor of one’s own existence is an active rejection of the lived ambiguity of one’s human condition, and therefore a choice of bad faith.

On Heter’s view, when one denies the constitutive role of the Other and attempts to become a being-in-itself – or an isolated, independent, and self-constituting being – one has chosen their fundamental project in bad faith. The fundamental project of living with authenticity requires one to recognize and embrace the ambiguity of their human condition, or to embrace the tension that exists between the two poles of their being: being-for-itself and being-for-others. Sartre argued that the outcome of our inherently unattainable, yet foolishly persistent quest to exist as a being-in-itself is a futile attempt to be God.²¹⁹

Opponents who assert loneliness and isolated resolve toward death as the baseline conditions of authenticity miss the intersubjective ontological structure of human consciousness
that Heter and others claim lies at the heart of existential virtue ethics. While it is true that the individual must choose for themselves their fundamental project which underlies and constitutes their character, their chosen project – whether one of bad faith or authenticity – remains a choice chosen within a horizon of shared values, and ultimately ratified by others whose lives are affected by that choice. In other words, individual choices remain individual only in theory. In practice, choices are both constituted and evaluated within a socially-founded horizon of choice.

As some commentators on existential authenticity have argued, any existential ethical theory must wrestle with “the problem of the manner in which authenticity is determined or defined or influenced by the direct relation of one individual to another in his freedom.” According to scholars who see promise in an existential virtue ethics, understanding freedom as one’s ability to choose which fundamental project is adopted, and the realization that one must continuously choose to act in ways that are consistent with that fundamental project, should help to alleviate any concern regarding the interactions between isolated freedoms. Put another way, freedom itself is a deeply social phenomenon. Without mutual recognition and an embrace of intersubjectively constituted human existence, proponents of these theories argue, the fundamental project of authenticity is removed from one’s horizon of choice, and one’s pursuit of freedom is necessarily frustrated. The concept of freedom remains divided and incoherent as long as the concept of self is radically distinct from a concept of the Other.

Heter, and other proponents of an existential virtue ethics, argue that the social dynamic that is characteristic of freedom, and thus of authenticity, is founded on the concept of recognition. Recognition, according to Heter, substantiates any statement of ‘ought’ or ‘should’ in an existential ethics. Heter argues this, albeit strongly worded, point by writing that “If I did not receive the recognition of others, then I could not achieve a stable, socially verified sense of
In other words, the socially ‘verified’ self is a significant and partly constitutive aspect of one’s freedom. Said in yet another way, identity is negotiated interpersonally. To deny this pole of the human condition is therefore to reject the fundamental project of authenticity, and likewise to adopt a fundamental project of bad faith.

Heter continues his explication of the importance of balanced, or mutually reinforcing, recognition, through his discussion of the Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic. In Hegel’s dialectic the recognition between similarly arranged selves equipped with a similarly constructed consciousness can, and often do, devolve into oppressive or coercive relationships. In these instances the oppressive other is engaged in a futile attempt to secure their own selfhood through a sort of non-mutual recognition; the Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic.

In the Master/Slave dialectic, the master understands that recognition from another consciousness is necessary for a full sense of his own selfhood. And, further, the master understands that other forms of sentient life have dissimilar structures of consciousness, i.e. non-reflexive modes of consciousness, and that inanimate objects have no consciousness, rendering both incapable of supplying the requisite form of recognition. What the master needs is another similarly structured consciousness to affirm his existence and ratify his experience of himself as an object in the world.

However, rather than an invitation, or an appeal to the other to recognize him as an autonomous agent in the world, the master attempts to wrest this recognition from the other at all costs and against their will, if need be. The paradoxical nature of the master’s oppressive attempt to force or coerce the slave’s recognition is then revealed. In the attempt to take the slave’s recognition by force, the master has stripped him of the very thing that he needs in order
for the slave to ratify the master’s existence, i.e. his autonomy. The fundamental issue of a viable existential ethics arises within this attempt to force the recognition of the Other.

From this example, another important question arises. How can an existential ethicist condemn the oppressive actions of others if they are honestly, genuinely, and sincerely embracing the truth of their intersubjectively constituted human condition? Put another way, if the only requirements for the adoption of one’s fundamental project of authenticity were to earnestly embrace one’s human condition, recognizing the Other’s role in the formation of one’s own stable, explicit sense of self, then how is any behavior done with this awareness deemed morally blameworthy?

The answer for Heter, and demonstrated by the master’s frustrated attempts to force the recognition of the slave, is that the oppression of others is counterproductive to one’s own experience of freedom. A stable, explicit sense of self is impossible to achieve when the recognition between self and other is non-mutual, forced, coerced, or obtained through any other oppressive means. Freedom, then, becomes the ‘ordering principle’ within a socially-founded ‘existential’ version of virtue ethics.

Without the voluntary choice to pursue the fundamental project of authenticity, gained through mutually affirming forms of recognition, one’s freedom is stifled; in this scenario, one truly is “condemned to be free”, as Sartre famously wrote. Whereas MacIntyre wanted to focus his ethical interventions on the proliferation of social practices within a community – specifically on ensuring participants sought to attain the goods internal to social practices – the existential virtue ethicist focuses their ethical interventions on promoting the fundamental project of authenticity and the civically engaged mode of behavior characteristic of this chosen project.
However, these two emphases are not wholly divergent from one another. In other words, where there are morally sound social practices, one finds opportunities to choose a fundamental project of authenticity, and therefore of stable, equally affirming mutual recognition between participants of that practice. The quest for existential authenticity – demonstrated through one’s civic virtue – is a demanding project, to be sure. Mutual recognition requires more than just a simple awareness of the need for mutuality between moral agents. The Master/Slave dialectic demonstrates the disastrous results of one-sided or non-mutual recognition, and therefore the need to act in ways that ensure and enhance the freedom of others, if one wishes to experience freedom for themselves.

As long as ‘the master’ forces or coerces ‘the slave’ to recognize him as master, i.e. to ratify his selfhood through oppression, coercion, or intimidation the selfhood that results is an impoverished one. In order for true freedom, true selfhood – or authentically intersubjective and mutually supportive relations between people – to be experienced, the recognition must remain mutually reinforcing, mutually uplifting, and mutually affirming. In other words, only through a relationship of mutual recognition can a person gain a stable, explicit, substantial sense of selfhood, and this is prerequisite for the experience of freedom and living the good life. A paradoxical pursuit to be sure: in order for me to truly understand myself, I must abandon a sense of myself as untethered from other selves, i.e. to understand that I am intimately bound to these others with whom I interact; in other words, in order to find myself, I must lose my “self” and gain an “us.” It is precisely this type of socially-focused project that leads one to authenticity’s highest and fullest expression in practice: the demonstration of civic virtue.

j. **Civic Virtue:**
Civic virtue has been variously described by a great number of scholars, authors, and laypersons alike. It has been touted as a way to increase social capital, or an “essential binding agent” or “resin” that keeps American democracy functioning properly.\(^{222}\) Robert Putnam, author of the well-known book *Bowling Alone* (2000), wrote that “social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”\(^{223}\)

Although social capital and civic virtue are closely related, Putnam explains that, “The difference is that ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.”\(^{224}\) Regardless of how you term it, social capital or civic virtue, the point is that each person recognizes and embraces their role and responsibility in the proper moral and political functioning of a society. In motivating individuals to embrace this social responsibility, many methods have been tried. However, the baseline recognition of the reciprocal necessity to affirm each other’s freedom must be the starting point. Somewhere along the way American society has lost sight of that recognition and without it the motivation to respect others, especially in situations where individualist mentalities dominate social relations, is lost as well.

Historically, a person was defined primarily in terms of their relation to, and function within, wider society. People fulfilled the social roles assigned to them by virtue of where their birth placed them in the hierarchy of social life, and to deviate from this station was unthinkable. Charles Taylor explains that, “People used to see themselves as part of a larger order. In some cases, this was a cosmic order, a ‘great chain of Being,’ in which humans figured in their proper
place along with angels, heavenly bodies, and our fellow earthly creatures. This hierarchical order in the universe was reflected in the hierarchies of human society.\footnote{225}

While these hierarchies did seem to serve as a limiting factor, restricting the possibilities and choices one had in life, they also provided a structure and order that infused life with coherence and, an albeit externally assigned, meaning. One’s place in the “great chain of being” ascribed human life with a purpose, even if it was a ‘ready-made’ one. Without this purpose, some have argued, the “heroic dimension” of life was lost; there was nothing left worth dying for. Choosing the fundamental project of authenticity replaces the ready-made meanings and purposes with the personal responsibility to make meaning and find purpose for one’s self as a member of a their community. Authenticity, in this sense, is considered a preeminent virtue.

In existential virtue ethics, just as in traditional forms of virtue ethics, each virtue is accompanied by a vice. In the case of the virtue of authenticity the vice would also be known as ‘inauthenticity’ or ‘bad faith’. The vice that accompanies civic virtue results from choosing to act in ways that evade the personal responsibility inherent in one’s human condition to respect the rights and freedoms of other people. T. Storm Heter refers to this personal responsibility as a “basic obligation of civic respect.”

Following Sartre, Heter, in his book, \textit{Sartre’s Ethics of Engagement} (2006), explains that the basic obligation of civic respect “includes the responsibility to do what we can…to reduce the systematic social harms that cause suffering to others.” Heter’s understanding of civic respect and responsibility comes from his reading of Sartre’s text, \textit{What is Literature} (1949). However, unlike Sartre’s overestimation that writers alone carry the burden of catalyzing social change, Heter expands the scope of civic virtue to implicate each of us in the quest for justice, equality, and prosperity for our society. As such, Heter explains that the responsibility to end
such social ills as injustice, inequality, poverty, oppression, and suffering is a political responsibility each of us must respond to.

According to Heter, the *engagement* representative of civic virtue is of a ‘political’ nature for three reasons. First, our responsibility to act in ways that limits suffering and oppression of others is political because it necessarily concerns “coercive power”, which lies at the heart of harmful systematic social ills like poverty, sexism, and racism. Secondly, engagement requires us to demonstrate concern for the other members of one’s (practice) community (of memory), and to treat each person as an equal member of one’s democratic community. The second reason leads directly to the third reason that Heter considers engagement to be political. “To embrace one’s basic political responsibility is to care about the suffering of others.” Heter explains, “To care about the suffering of others is to treat others with civic respect.” Although this sounds very nice in theory, the question of why someone would choose authenticity and civic virtue as their fundamental projects remains.

To be sure, stating that civic respect and political responsibility is an ‘obligation’ sounds very similar to a Kantian injunction, and indeed there is certainly a specter of deontological formulations that looms over many forms of ethics. However, this obligation to respect others and their freedom as moral agents is not borne from an appeal to an abstract imperative of universalizability that must be applied to an even more abstracted concept of humanity. Kantian ethics makes demands of people, commanding individuals to live a certain way and act in accordance with a priori moral imperatives. The quest for authenticity and development of civic virtue simply appeals to each person, based on their own desire for an experience of selfhood and freedom not otherwise obtainable.
The “why” behind an existential virtue theory of obligation to others has its roots in the Hegelian concepts of human selfhood and relations to others. Rather than a demand, command, or imperative being issued to humanity writ large, authenticity simply issues an appeal to actual individuals to choose for themselves whether or not they would like to experience a full sense of their own selfhood. Heter explains that the intersubjectivity that lies at the heart of all social relations between selves holds the key. “If human selves are conceived of as deeply social creatures, ratified and made explicit only through the uplifting look of others,” Heter reasons, “then there is an obvious reason to respect others. I should respect others because my selfhood depends upon them.” Importantly, this mutuality of recognition between persons occurs in concrete social relations, where equal citizens meet on an equal playing field of democratic engagement, taking place in an actual and particular social setting.

As explained in detail above, in Hegelian philosophy any relation between people that obtains in coercion, oppression, suffering, or the like is considered non-mutual. Non-mutual recognition between self and other quickly devolves into mutually exploitative relations, and the Hegelian Master/Slave dynamic appears. Because the human condition is characterized by intersubjectivity, it consists of a lived tension between experiential opposites, i.e. the understanding that we simultaneously exist both as subject and object; transcendence and facticity; freedom and fact; being-for-itself and being-for-others.

5. **Conclusion:**

Sartre, Heter, Taylor, and many others who wish to establish an existential virtue ethics, with authenticity and civic virtue as its *summum bonum*, all make exceedingly similar diagnoses regarding the state of moral despair in modern western societies; and they all draw strikingly
similar conclusions about the prescription to cure it. In one way or another, these scholars contend that there must be a concerted attempt to establish, maintain, and see to the flourishing of various types of social practices that contribute to a community’s existential awareness, i.e. the recognition for each individual that they are part of something larger than themselves, intimately intertwined to one another, and that their actions and decisions have consequences on the moral health of their entire community.

A morally healthy community protects and nurtures those practices that aid in revealing the intersubjectivity inherent in each individual’s human condition, and the recognition of one’s social responsibility to engage themselves in matters of civic duty. The moral wellness of a community depends on ensuring the proliferation of practices that establish – as a voluntary though necessary choice – mutual recognition between the various individuals in their personal quest for selfhood, freedom, and the good life.

So it is in conjunction with a MacIntyrean notion of social practices – where one’s fundamental project can be tested and retested, chosen and perpetually re-chosen – that authenticity and civic virtue becomes a normative injunction. In other words, if sports were to be granted the status of ‘morally sound social practices’, they would become moral laboratories where the players are afforded the opportunity to choose the fundamental project of authenticity, and then to reveal its social value as one resource, hopefully among many others, for promoting the development of civic virtue. In turn, the player is offered the opportunity to experience their freedom in a way that is not available when one chooses projects of bad faith.

In chapter five I will use the framework that I have established in this chapter to begin identifying the specific features of sports that substantiate the plausibility of my argument, i.e. that they can be morally sound social practices, and that participation in these activities represent
a viable resource in promoting the development of moral excellence, authenticity and civic virtue – as understood through an existential virtue framework. The characteristics that I have outlined above, including intentionality, narrative unity, authenticity and civic virtue, intersubjectivity, the horizon of choice, and mutual recognition, are found and expressed in a number of ways within the various characteristics of sports I will introduce in the next chapter. Chapter five represents my efforts to explain how and where these themes of virtue ethics, including the existential variations I have introduced, exist in sporting activities.

165 Anscombe is credited with coining the term ‘consequentialism’ in her essay, “Modern Moral Philosophy.” She explains that Sidgwick made the primary philosophical move to transition between the “old-fashioned utilitarianism and the consequentialism, as I name it, which marks him and every other English academic moral philosopher since him” (p. 10).


167 Ibid., p. 1.

168 Ibid., p. 7.

169 Ibid., p. 7.

170 Ibid., p. 15.


172 Ibid.

173 Ibid., p. 8.

174 Ibid., p. 11.

175 Ibid., p. 11-12.

176 The concept of a ‘mask’ is detailed later in After Virtue in MacIntyre’s discussion of Nietzsche’s moral theory – in particular his ‘unmasking’ of ‘morality’ as nothing more than a non-rational ‘will to power’ that characterizes all things in nature. To MacIntyre, Nietzsche’s stinging and exhaustive critique represents the death knell for post-Enlightenment morality, in that his theory is the logical end of any moral theory where virtues are dependent on rationally-based principles of action, and not the other way around, since morality, and indeed all value-based claims, cannot have a rational foundation in an emotivist-based theory. MacIntyre ultimately sees his project turning on the question of whether it was right, in the first place, to embark on the Enlightenment project of displacing Aristotelian moral theory. In other words, a choice must be made between Nietzsche’s revealing discussion about the truth of morality (i.e. that all attempts to rationally justify morality must fail, and that all such attempts simply veil the fundamentally non-rational human will with unsubstantiated rationalizations and self-deceptions) and Aristotle’s ethics, and that no other alternative exists.

177 Ibid., p. 24.

178 Ibid., p. 50.

179 Ibid., p. 52-3.

180 Ibid., p. 55.

181 Ibid., 58.

182 Ibid., 59.

183 Ibid., p. 187.
Despite the example, a practice is importantly more than simply a set of technical skills one learns to perform a task. As MacIntyre notes, bricklaying is not a practice, while architecture is; throwing a football is not a practice, while the sport of football is.

It should be noted here that MacIntyre does provide an explanation of how institutions can rightly be considered practices. Despite the somewhat confusing disambiguation MacIntyre provides, institutions are not in and of themselves practices (i.e. chess is a practice, whereas chess clubs are institutions). In fact, it would be difficult to sustain any practices without the institutions which support them. However, because of this intimate connection between the two, institutions do have the power to corrupt practices, replacing the cooperative care for common goods, which is characteristic of all morally sound practices, with the base competition for external goods, characteristic of institutions. In this context, practices, and therefore the virtues they require, function to resist the corruptive power of institutions.

MacIntyre sought to reunite the individual and her community by developing a rich tradition of social practices designed to identify, emphasize, and nurture a set of virtues in those who participated in that practice. MacIntyre’s argued that the demonstration of the individual’s virtues would ultimately serve the good of the community. With this in mind, many scholars since MacIntyre have theorized about the best way to bring about the social conditions that would lead to the reunification of social and moral life. In spite of MacIntyre’s cynicism regarding existential philosophy – and apparent belief in the inherent inability of any substantial ethical theory to be founded on its tenets – various existentially-minded philosophers have reopened the case, seeking a way to utilize existential notions, such as virtue, freedom, and telos, to establish a conception of moral excellence that will recover the moral agency that has been obfuscated by contemporary social, political, and economic ideologies. As MacIntyre reminds his readers throughout his text, *After Virtue*, individualism, and its attendant emotive moral theory, represents the logical outcome of modern morality, and that this project is doomed to fail precisely because of the radical reification of the individual, who therefore exists independent of their community. John Davenport, noted Kierkegaard scholar, explains MacIntyre’s impact on the perception of existential individualism by writing that, “Although [his] full account was more subtle, one of the polemical effects of *After Virtue* was to fix an image of existentialism that associates it profoundly with the Hobbesian individualism that Nietzsche admired and in many ways extended.” (Davenport, p. 267) This atomistic, Hobbesian self, which views community as simply a loosely-bound collection of self-sufficient individuals, where ‘moral’ denotes nothing more than an arbitrary choice of one preference over another, does indeed preclude any genuine adoption of MacIntyrean moral theory. However, this depiction may not faithfully grasp the benefits of an existential conception of virtue, and of the telos of human activity. Alternative interpretations of existentially-tethered themes have been offered since the publication of *After Virtue* that put Neo-Aristotelian and existential virtue ethics in much closer connection, situating them within a similar historical and social context, and understanding each as offering slightly differing responses to similar social and moral concerns of the twentieth century. In his ‘unmasking’ of the cast of characters endemic to post-war
industrial democracies, such as the aesthete, the therapist, the manager, and the bureaucratic expert, MacIntyre emphasizes the dissatisfaction and emptiness that accompanies these characters’ lives. Davenport equates MacIntyre’s depictions of the hollowness of these characters’ lives with what Kierkegaard found in the “nominally Christian bourgeoisie of Renaissance Copenhagen or Berlin, or that Sartre finds in the ritualized numbness of Parisian social roles.” (Davenport, p. 268) The popularity of existential philosophy catalyzed a ‘movement’ that gained traction as a response to totalitarian political ideologies, and what Davenport explains as the “alienation produced by a mass consumer culture molded by distant, inaccessible, and bureaucratic corporations and state institutions.” (Davenport, 267) Likewise, as is now evident from the lengthy discussion of MacIntyre’s moral philosophy presented above, the mid-twentieth century revival of ethical theories that related to virtues of character were “propelled by the same set of interconnected social and theoretical concerns.” (Davenport, p. 267)


202 Ibid., p. 157.

203 Ibid., p. 75.

204 Ibid.

205 Despite the subheadings within this section, these concepts are all deeply interrelated and difficult to completely tease apart. With that being said, there will be many places where this overlap may seem repetitive, but this repetition is deliberate and designed to clearly demonstrate the close connection and inextricable nature of each of these components of authenticity and civic virtue.


209 Angel Marie Cooper, Prolegomena to a Sartrean Existential Ethics, (Thesis: Kent State University, 2012).

210 Heter, p. 6.

211 While there have been many voices – the common citation being Marjorie Grene’s essay, “Authenticity: An Existential Virtue” – that deny the possibility of an existential ethics, and of authenticity being a moral virtue, many other views have been offered in support of the project to establish an existential ethics. Grene’s essay does, however, shed light on some of the misunderstandings of the antiquated tenets of existentialism, primarily found in Sartre’s Being and Nothingness (1943). In one such instance, Grene states that, “the irrevocable loneliness of human life, however authentic, would be indeed too great to bear. But whether existential philosophy as such can produce an adequate solution for this problem – whether it can build again the bridge it has broken – is another question.” (Marjorie Grene, “Authenticity: An Existential Virtue,” Ethics, Vol. 62, No. 4 (July, 1952), p. 273.) Grene assumes, like many opponents of existential philosophy, that existentialism is best characterized by radical meaninglessness and the concomitant loneliness and despair. Existentialism is, in fact, as I will show, a philosophy of humanism, activism, and hope.


213 Ibid., p. 16.

214 Ibid., p. 17.

215 Ibid., p. 40.

216 Ibid., p. 39.

217 Ibid., p. 267.

218 Ibid.


224 Ibid.
It has been my contention that sports present an array of powerful and potentially educative experiences for participants. To speak plainly, I believe sports can change lives for the better. I depicted the failing socio-moral conditions of contemporary American society in order to establish both a social context and the need for some type of moral recovery. I followed this depiction by describing earlier attempts to position sports as a crucial social mechanism in the process of developing healthier communities and stronger relations between individuals in communities. Despite the inability of earlier attempts to catalyze an enduring and substantive progressive social reformation through viewing sports as a potentially transformative social technology, I suggest that the morally educational value of sports should not continue to be overlooked.

To be sure, these earlier attempts represented courageous and well-coordinated campaigns designed to vitiate social and moral turpitude. To these progressive era reformers in the late 19th and early 20th century sports offered a promising venue through which national solidarity and moral virtuosity could be practiced on a local community level and then instituted more broadly. However, despite their best intentions and well-formulated theories, the sporting ethos in American society began a slow and methodical erosion in the decades following progressive era reformation attempts.

Rather than instituting a new sporting ideology to lead a nation into a new age, American sports have fallen victim to the same market mentality threatening so many cherished American
institutions; finding commercialism, commodification, and individualism more comfortable bedfellows than moral excellence, sportsmanship, and solidarity. Not to be deterred, however, sport scholars have since been actively searching for a more effective moral theoretical framework to shape one’s sporting experiences – one with the requisite normative force needed to spark genuine social and moral change.

The unsuccessful outcomes of these previous attempts to utilize sports as a social technology, or as a moral laboratory as I have discussed it, should certainly not deter future scholars from seeking new theories that might reinvigorate the conversation around the use of sports as a resource for promoting the development of moral excellence, including authenticity, and civic virtue. I believe these earlier attempts failed not because reformers were mistaken about the potential of sports to affect moral change, but because the ideological and theoretical explanations of why sports had this latent potential and how to realize that potential missed the mark.

The success of any concerted attempt to utilize sports as a social technology will not be determined throughout the course of an essay, or even a dissertation, but rather in the social and moral impact that putting a potential theory into practice has on specific individuals and their communities. What can be accomplished within a scholarly analysis speculating on the morally educative potential of sports is simply, yet crucially, an investigation and analysis of a theory’s plausibility in order to establish its potential effectiveness in scenarios of practical application.

In short, identifying a theoretical model is a promising and fruitful place to start, but the true measure of its value is found only in its effectiveness in practice. Despite the experiential shortcomings inherent in an abstract theory, without it, practice is blind, and any positive outcomes derived from it would be considered serendipitous, at best. This dissertation, to this
point, represents an effort to provide a workable theory of sports as a rich educative vehicle that can one day be tested through practical application in real-life situations.

1. **MacIntyrean Virtue Ethics, Sports, and the ‘Good Athlete’:**

   My interest in authenticity and civic virtue from an existential perspective, as noted previously, is focused on modifying, complementing, and strengthening broader virtue ethics practices, not replacing them. In other words, practical application of a MacIntyrean take on virtue ethics provides a useful and necessary starting point, even if it does not fully capture the educative model I will describe later in this chapter. While the existential supplements I propose will help bring into clearer focus the educative potential of sports, understanding how the various themes of MacIntyre’s ethics are applied to one’s sporting experiences provides an indispensable foundation. Thus, I will begin with an application of how the general themes introduced in chapter four, including intentionality, *telos*, social practices, and narrative unity, might contribute to a better understanding of how to utilize sports as a moral laboratory for the development of authenticity and civic virtue.

   a. **Intentionality:**

      For MacIntyre, participation in a social practice, such as sports, should be motivated by an explicit intentionality to pursue the excellences internal to that practice. When sports are considered social practices, they represent both an established set of testing and contesting excellences, and a public forum where those excellences can be debated, demonstrated, and habituated. Importantly, the visibility of an athlete’s actions in sports, and therefore their choice to either pursue the goods and excellences internal to them, or not, sets them apart from other,
less public practices. Alongside the pursuit of sports’ internal goods and excellences, the athlete concerned with their own moral development must also choose to subordinate themselves to history of established standards of excellence and internal goods. Taken together, the respect for the standards of excellence an athlete inherits upon entry into a sport and the concerted pursuit of those excellences represent the primary themes for why intentionality is an important component of this discussion.

In social practices, such as sports, there must be a willful acceptance of the socially established and historically recognized standards of excellence that make possible the achievement of a practice’s internal goods. Importantly, in each person’s pursuit of goods internal to a social practice, the ability to achieve those excellences is simultaneously extended for both the participant and the wider practice community. MacIntyre explains that, “it is characteristic of [internal goods] that their achievement is a good for the whole of the community who participate in that practice.” 226 Making an exception of oneself by failing to subordinate themselves within the practice in their relationship to other practitioners excludes them from the possibility of achieving a practice’s internal goods or acquiring virtue, and therefore to exclude the possibility of benefiting the community.

When evaluated through this lens of MacIntyrean intentionality, the excellences of sports that one pursues lead to a host of virtuous characteristics, such as the recognition of just desert, an embrace of potential risk involved, and the confrontation of our own limitations in an open and honest way. It is only through the skills of deliberative judgment, or what Aristotle referred to as *phronesis*, that one can discern what is due to whom; to assess the proper amount of risk; or to have the ability to see past one’s ego and honestly confront their shortcomings. One’s participation in sports can aid in the development of both a proper moral intentionality and skills
of moral discernment. In short, through an embrace of sports’ standards of excellence and the intention of pursuing those excellences, sports can provide a laboratory where an athlete can develop their moral and intellectual virtues.

Although I will have much more to say about it in later sections, the aim of an athlete who chooses to view their participation in sport as, in part, a way to develop their moral acumen is said to be “at play” in their sport. The intentions of the athlete at play are typically different than those athletes who have chosen to simply engage in sports. The difference, however, cannot necessarily be observed by spectators. The choice to be at-play in sports is defined through an internal disposition and is often only verifiable through an athlete’s self-report. Rather than playing for external goods, such as fame, wealth, or ego, the individual at-play seeks only those goods internal to sports, such as the various excellences specific to sports like courage, generosity, cooperation, justice, and honesty, as well as the skills and attitudes required to perform well in both testing and contesting.

Because virtues are durable dispositions, the moral and intellectual virtues one develops through participation in sports are not likely to disappear once the player leaves the field of play. As MacIntyre notes, “a virtue is not a disposition that makes for success only in some one particular type of situation.”\textsuperscript{227} For someone to possess a virtue they, “can be expected to manifest it in very different types of situation, many of them situations where the practice of a virtue cannot be expected to be effective in the way that we expect a professional skill to be.”\textsuperscript{228} In other words, virtues are not merely skills with which one employs in situations where those skills allow one to effectively achieve some situational goal, but are aspects of oneself that tie together one’s personal narrative as a part of a whole life, lived within a community of other
practitioners. Since the concept of a virtue is necessarily socially embedded, maintaining one’s commitment to the quest for virtue in sports defines the player’s relationship to other players. Through the shared quest to achieve a common good, players develop an experiential understanding of their interdependence with others. MacIntyre solidifies this point by writing that, “Every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it. Now the virtues are those goods by reference to which, whether we like it or not, we define our relationships to those other people with whom we share the kinds of purposes and standards which inform practices.”

The mutuality and interdependence characteristic between those who play sports results in generating respect between them. Without one’s intention to subordinate themselves to the good of the community, one’s intentions remain merely self-serving.

Through the course of play, the shared pursuit of internal goods, and of a common good, reveals to the players the deeply interconnected relationship between player and opponent. To be sure, many examples exist in sports where the player demonstrates a closed skill, such as bowling, golf, gymnastics, or archery, where the testing environment is controlled and isolated from other competitors. In these indirect competitive sports, the moves one makes are predictable and allow the player time to plan-out moves in advance. These types of sports are typically self-paced and non-interactive. The athlete responds not to another player or opponent, but to a stable environment. While these types of sports have internal goods and standards of excellence, the skills required to achieve these goods and excellences seldom emphasize spontaneous responsiveness, timing, reaction speed, or anticipation. Interactive sports, on the other hand, such as basketball, baseball, or tennis require a more immediate response to the changing conditions created by an opponent.
Although respect between competitors can be developed in all types of competitive environments, whether the opponent presents a direct or an indirect challenge, respect for one’s opponent in direct or interactive sports is engendered through a recognition that their opponent enables their quest for goods and excellences in at least two separate ways. First, opponents in direct or interactive sports present good testing problems to their fellow competitor. Both competitors must react and respond skillfully to the moves and counter-moves made by the other. The competitors develop skills of timing, anticipation, and reaction speed, which aids in the development of their intuitive reactions and in habituating their behaviors. Whether the competition presents an indirect or direct competitive, however, each contains a certain set of testing and contesting excellences that must be mastered in order to achieve success in those sports.

The second way in which opponents enable the pursuit of contesting goods and excellences, which can occur in either direct or indirect testing environments, is the recognition that each competitor agrees to take the same test and follow the same set of rules. This pact between competitors enables a genuine comparison of testing outcomes, either immediately in the case of direct competition or subsequent to each separate testing performance, as is the case in indirect competition.

In closely contested games, regardless of the final outcome, the struggle to surpass an opponent and to secure victory, which is made available by virtue of the cooperative foundation of competition, furnishes a delightful drama that each player contributes to. Without an opponent who honestly intends to enable these challenges through their agreement to play in good faith, the unfolding of this drama, and the pleasure and excellences found through each competitor’s struggle to overcome the other, is lost. Likewise, when one player chooses to
pursue goods that benefit only themselves, the potential to develop both respect for opponents, as testing and contesting enablers, and the excellences or virtues of sports is severely compromised.

Athletes concerned with developing their virtues in and through sports will typically remain focused on their ultimate aim to develop their practical wisdom in order to discern the right way to act and then to act rightly without any hidden desire to act with the intention to benefit only themselves. The public nature of these practices, and the pursuit of their excellences, lends plausibility to the argument that sports offer a unique venue where these virtues can be habituated through repetitious experimentation. In sports, virtues like justice, courage, and honesty are rooted in publically demonstrating the shared pursuit of common ends, and the proper means used to obtain them. Sports offer a public venue where one’s virtues, or lack thereof, are on full-display. It is this public display of one’s intentions, through the demonstration of their virtues that infuses sports with the potential to aid in one’s moral development.

b. Telos:

The telos of sports, narrowly construed, is winning. In other words, the end-goal of any athlete who plays a sport should be to secure victory in any given contest in which they compete. Winning, from a moral standpoint, however, includes not only besting an opponent in a comparative outcome – which invites a mentality of winning the game by any means necessary – but also to care about the manner by which they win the game. The athlete must invest themselves in wanting to win, while not succumbing to abject failure in the face of defeat and internalizing the need-to-win as the only standard of success in sports.
The tension between wanting-to-win and having-to-win provides a distinct pedagogical advantage for moral education in sports. When athletes can subordinate their desire to win-at-all costs to their desire to benefit the good of their community, they demonstrate their excellence in sports. Sports should be seen as having a modified *telos*, in which athletes play to win the contest, while understanding that winning simply facilitates their ability to attain and develop the testing and contesting excellences and internal goods offered by sports.

As a social practice, sports feature an internal, socially established set of rules, norms, expectations, and skills that instruct athletes not only on the goal and the means of a game, but also on how to perform well and compete successfully. Rules of skill, for instance, establish the sports-specific testing and contesting excellences, or the technical and tactical rules that inform athletes on how to perform well. Sigmund Loland explains that, “The constitutive rules of a sport define how to win but not how to compete successfully.”\(^{230}\) Whereas, rules of skill establish a sports’ excellences, constitutive and regulative rules exist prior to them and lay the foundation for how a sport is played.

While the constitutive rules formalize the acceptable and unacceptable means used by the players within the course of trying to win a game, establishing the basic means-ends relationship in any sporting test, a sport ethos with its regulative rules exists independently and, in part, provide a socially established set of guidelines for proper behavior in ambiguous sports situations. Despite many instances of rule violations being relatively clear-cut, the implementation of rules, and of the consequences for violating those rules, all rules in sports must have some human interpretation, and, importantly, a *shared* understanding and acceptance of that common interpretation of how best to implement a game’s rules.
Sports feature a built-in and, in many cases, explicit doctrine of right and wrong and proper and improper modes of action. However, the sporting community engages in a dialogue to establish these rules, along with their interpretation and implementation, on proper and improper means of securing the ultimate aim of winning in sports. Each time an athlete decides to play a game, they enter into this ‘discussion’ as a participant in defining the shared norms of a particular sports competition. Loland argues that every sport, “can be seen as a verbal and embodied discourse in which shared norms for the interpretation of the rules are challenged, negotiated, and adjusted.”

An understanding of game rules and how those rules are interpreted and implemented is important because, in order to achieve the internal goods of sports, athletes need to understand their role in helping to define their modified telos. When the telos of sports is understood as a desire to win, but to win the right way, it becomes a shifting target, where the ‘right’ way to win is largely defined by the athlete’s recognition and acceptance of the shared norms governing that sport. Additionally, when an athlete understands what the right way to win entails, the wrong way to win then becomes an option.

It is precisely the distinction between wanting-to-win and having-to-win, and the ambiguity of how that distinction is interpreted, that puts sports into the ethical sphere and makes them rich laboratories for moral deliberation and experimentation. It is the tension between winning-at-all-costs and winning-the-right-way that enables sports to do the morally educative work argued for herein. While the telos of sports remains to win the game, the standards of excellence and internal goods invite the player to win the game in the right way.

As such, it is plausible to argue that sports have the potential to provide a moral laboratory where athletes can practice and experiment with the pursuit of the common good,
while being faced with the ever-present reality of the temptations to pursue external goods and narrowly personal gains. In short, sports offer an unobstructed view of the necessarily social character of virtue, excellence, and most importantly human *telos*, and offer the properly positioned athlete an infinitely renewable chance to experiment with the internal and external tensions that accompany the pursuit of winning in sports.

Although playing-well and winning are certainly not mutually exclusive concepts in sports, the morally-concerned athlete understands that the proper relationship of priority between these two mentalities in sports is to aim at winning, but above all else, to ensure that victory is achieved the right way. Without the temptation to do things the wrong way, however, the morally educative potential of sports would be impaired. Good laboratories, as I am arguing sports are, provide experiences and conditions where worthwhile experiments can take place.

Experiments where conditions are perfect, unchanging, and without apprehension are not particularly enlightening. Sports, however, provide a laboratory where genuine tension is continually experienced. Just as when we practice hitting in baseball, we need good fastballs and curveballs with which to challenge ourselves, as it is when we practice ethics. We need to be genuinely tempted to pursue external goods to produce ethical dilemmas to work through. The temptation to go beyond the rules and shared norms, and to fall victim to the win-at-all-costs mentality of sports, always remains and the *telos* of sports, or the desire to win, provides both the temptation and the tension that make conceivable the argument that they represent good laboratories for moral experimentation.

c. **Social Practices:**
Social practices are good laboratories for moral discourse, negotiation and experimentation. In MacIntyre’s logical and systematic account of how to recover moral agency, the expansion and proliferation of our forums for moral debate is a primary focus. These opportunities for moral discourse allow for all points of view to be heard, for questions to be asked, and challenges to be issued in response to unequal distributions of power and exploitative relations between people.

Without these forums for moral debate, MacIntyre worries that we will fall back on selfish, individualistic, and non-rational desires to supply justifications for our actions. This kind of thoughtlessness is avoided when members of a practice community come together to decide what the common good is, and the best practices for how to attain it, in a way that benefits all members of that community. As has been argued, sports represent just such a forum where these debates can and do happen.

To be sure, the cornerstone of MacIntyre’s moral framework is the social practice. Social practices provide the space for participants to not only develop their virtues, but through that effort to demonstrate the practice excellences, and in so doing to enhance the quality of life for all members of their practice community, including their own. In reference to the components of social practices outlined in the previous chapter, the following sub-headings of social practices detail how participation in sports aids in the recovery of moral agency, and the development of virtues such as courage, integrity, and honesty.

i. Developing Moral Agency through Social Practices:

The primary issue in MacIntyre’s call for a “recovery of moral agency” is to educate people about the thoughtlessness that ensues from the extrication of our moral language from any
historical narrative. The lack of moral agency inherent in this mode of thoughtless acquiescence to certain social orders and imbalanced distributions of power is of great concern to MacIntyre. Thoughtlessly acceding to non-rational influences, most commonly the various objects of desire, we become victims of what MacIntyre calls “dictatorial desires.” Social practices, or forums for moral debate, which on my analysis sports exemplify, offer “opportunities for ordinary citizens, for plain persons, to engage together in systematic and extended inquiry into the issues posed for them by debate.”

In so doing, social practices, such as sports, should facilitate the development of one’s ability to discern between objects of desire they seek just because they are objects of their individual desire, and those objects of desire that they seek to obtain because they judge them to be good in general for human beings. Referencing the ability to distinguish between these types of desires, MacIntyre explains that, “a form of practice that’s to educate the desires will be one that enables those engaged in it to make this distinction in their practice.” Making this distinction requires refining one’s skills of moral deliberation.

Linked to Taylor’s notion of horizons of choice, outlined in the previous chapter, moral deliberation is a crucial component of engaged and active moral agency. However, without the initial understanding that there is a moral difference between desires that lead to narrowly individual gain and those that lead to the betterment of one’s community, one cannot proceed to the next stage of moral development. Despite the whispers of Kantianism, the development of an athlete's moral agency is not tied to a duty to altruism over selfishness. Rather, developing moral agency through participation in sports is grounded in the responsibilities derived from the pursuit of sports’ modified telos to win, but to be concerned with the manner by which one wins.
Especially prevalent in team sports, the expansion of a player’s horizon of choice to include this distinction occurs when a player learns to subordinate himself and his own good to the good of the team and of the sport itself, and is learned through experiencing the inability to defeat an entire team of opponents on his own. To succeed in a team sport, teammates must act in ways that benefit the team, knowing that their own personal success is intimately tied to the success of the team. No one player, regardless of their individual superiority in talent or ability, is exempt from this self-subordination to the common goals of their team.

Athletes who choose to make an exception of themselves and place themselves and their own personal gain above their teammates, especially when that choice is based on a perceived importance due to superior talent or ability, define their relationship to others in an imbalanced, or non-mutual way. This kind of relationship to one’s teammates throws in to question an athlete’s allegiance to his teammates and their pursuit of common goods. The tension between achieving personal excellences and subordinating oneself to the team’s common good, again, presents the athlete with an opportunity to identify the manner of play that results in advancing the common good, and that which does not. The moral laboratory of sports is once again revealed.

The point of recovering moral agency is to put back into the hands of moral agents a genuine choice between right and wrong, rather than thoughtlessly pursing the satisfaction of appetitive desires without regard for the common good and one’s role in its achievement. To be sure, athletes are presented with a choice to either share in the pursuit of a common good, or not; to subordinate themselves to other members of the practice community, or not. After all, as MacIntyre reminds us, “Where the virtues are required, the vices also may flourish.”\(^{235}\) However, as MacIntyre clarifies, even these “mean-spirited” players “rely on the virtues of
others for the practices in which they engage to flourish and also deny themselves the experience of achieving those internal goods.”  

Playing sports provides opportunities to share in the pursuit of a common good and to expand the player’s horizon of choice to include distinctions between desires of personal gain and the common good. The virtuous athlete will understand, as MacIntyre puts it, that “we can generally achieve the goods of a practice only in systematic and structured cooperation with others who also recognize that only insofar as we and they achieve our common good can we achieve our individual goods.”  

In a team sports setting, this insight relates to the subordination of oneself and one’s personal good to the team and the common good.

This subordination can be repeatedly practiced and evaluated in a team setting for its effectiveness as a tool in the recovery of moral agency. Teammates provide opportunities to test the hypothesis that teamwork has better results than an individual or isolation style of play. Basketball is, arguably, at its best when all five teammates on the court at any given time operate as a seamless whole, or five fingers that make up one hand. As Mike Krzyzewski has famously quipped, “A basketball team is like the five fingers on your hand. If you can get them all together, you have a fist. That's how I want [my teams] to play.” Although Michael Jordan scored 50 points against the Cleveland Cavaliers in a 1989 playoff game, for example, the Chicago Bulls lost that game to a more balanced scoring output by Larry Nance, Mark Price, and Brad Daugherty.

As a social practice, sports can be seen as an experimental process of trial and error to not only expand one’s horizon of choices, but to also develop one’s moral deliberation skills and to aid in the recovery of moral agency and the acquisition of virtues. Although Michael Jordan is widely regarded as the best individual basketball player of all time, he has said that, “There is no
such thing as a perfect basketball player, and I don't believe there is only one greatest player either.”

Jordan’s recognition of his own limitations as an individual player in a team sport exemplifies the awareness that individual goods are inextricably intertwined with the common good of one’s team. However, the only way to fully understand this insight is to engage experientially with the process of testing this hypothesis against its alternative. Sports offer one such venue where this experimentation can take place.

The morally engaged athlete will test and retest themselves in moments of tension between the desire to win-at-all costs – along with the temptations to seek narrowly personal desires that attach to that mentality – and the thoughtful attempt to choose certain actions based on the athlete’s belief that those actions will result in the preservation of the game’s integrity and the proliferation of internal goods for oneself and other players. Repeatedly choosing to pursue sports’ standards of excellence and internal goods, in spite of the great temptation to pursue its external goods, develops one’s moral agency by habituating a wide range of virtues that can then be employed in other social practices, having a potentially transformative effect on the mode of all interpersonal interactions, both within sports and without.

ii. Developing Courage through Social Practices:

The risk involved with moral decision making demands courage from moral agents. Likewise, sports demand an athlete’s courage to risk public failure. Athletes must overcome the fear of not knowing the outcome of a given contest. Risking the embarrassment and public shame of failing either to complete a test, or to fail in winning a contest, athletes put themselves and their egos on the line each time they agree to play a game. Similarly, moral decisions, such as those the average person makes dozens of times each day, have uncertain outcomes and
consequences of those decisions. The courageous athlete, much like the moral agent, must walk the tightrope between fear and over-confidence. The mean of courage exists somewhere between the deficiency of fear and the excess of foolhardiness. Athletes learn to locate that mean through experimentation in the moral laboratory of sports.

Experimentally, sports frequently involve moments when the athlete faces a challenge issued by their opponent that requires an urgent response without the benefit of a deliberative calculation. Oftentimes in sports, as well as various other situations in life, the immediacy required in most in-game decisions prevents a protracted deliberative process and the athlete must act with urgency. Continually facing this challenge head-on, without fear of failure or rashness, the athlete demonstrates to both teammates and opponents that a personal investment has been made to share in the pursuit of a common good. In other words, not only does sports offer a venue where an individual’s virtues can be practiced and habituated, but they also offer a venue where the depth of virtue an athlete possesses can be demonstrated to the public.

MacIntyre argues that all social practices require courageous practitioners. In the process of recovering moral agency, his primary concern involving courage is how best to acquire and develop an ability to act in accordance with the standards of excellence of a practice when confronted with a situation that requires immediate action, where one’s past decisions inform the spontaneous action. In sporting situations, athletes must train themselves to respond to an exigent situation without recourse to a time-consuming deliberative processes. This requires the ability to, as MacIntyre terms it, “on occasion act when there is good reason to act without having to remind myself of what that good reason is.” Although courage is at times demonstrated through a reasoned and thoughtful response to situations where recklessness or fear might infiltrate one’s decision making process, oftentimes situations where courage is required
do not allow time for reasoned and thoughtful responses. When combined with practical wisdom, the virtue of courage may best be understood as the disposition to act without cowardice or carelessness in moments of urgency and uncertainty.

In the acquisition of courage, one must repeatedly practice making urgent and immediate decisions. Sports offer a clear and unmistakable laboratory where courage can be practiced. In the course of a contest such as basketball, any given player is pressed into immediate decision-making on almost every play, whether they are handling the ball or not. The ever-present necessity to counter the counter-moves made by opponents in basketball is but one example of how instantaneous decisions must be made in many sports, and how those decisions must be made intuitively. Many times in sports, there is no time to pause and deliberate the possible outcomes of a given move. The athlete must act from a place of habituated, intuitive behavior.

Responding to the moves of an opponent without the benefit of prolonged deliberation requires courage. Sometimes the right counter-move will be made, sometimes not. However, the repetitions of being forced into urgently making these decisions helps to develop an athlete’s trust their disposition to make the right move, where ‘right’ is based on their previously held concern for, and commitment to, the pursuit of sports’ internal goods and standards of excellence, and a shared pursuit of a common good.

iii. Developing Integrity & Honesty through Social Practices:

In addition to the immediacy of facing the test generated by an opponent, athletes must continuously make the decision to play fairly in a given contest. The temptation to circumvent the rules, and the integrity to resist the constant barrage of these temptations, represents one more component of moral education offered by the social practice of sports. Along with the
habituation of courage, one habituates their integrity through their repeated decisions to avoid the pitfalls of a win-at-all-costs mentality and to remain committed to the pursuit of sports’ internal goods and standards of excellence. The pursuit of external goods, however, frees the athlete to violate the rules of sports without concern, so long as one avoids detection – though even when caught, only major rule violations that result in elimination from competition would seem to matter.

The habituation of integrity through a commitment to rule-following, to be sure, can occur in any rule-governed activity. However, the majority of sports have explicit rules, and adherence to those rules is in many cases monitored by officials who swiftly enforce penalties for violating them. These components of sports take most of the juridical ambiguity out of the game for athletes. The removal of any guesswork related to permissible and impermissible means in the pursuit of victory frees athletes to focus on their own commitment to rule-following, and to continue to develop their integrity, rather than on less-central or distracting aspects of the game, such as worrying whether or not their opponents are breaking the rules.

In fact, it could be argued that many recreational sports, such as playing a solo round of golf where no officials are present, and adherence to game rules is left entirely up to the player herself, present an even richer venue for developing integrity. In cases such as these, the player is responsible to issue sanctions on themselves for rule violations, even though no other player is affected by those violations. Holding oneself accountable for rule violations in a solo round of golf requires an impressive level of integrity, and is often questioned by others who assume that because no one is affected other than the golfer there is no reason to follow the rules; no harm, no foul, as it were.
However, questions of this nature demonstrate a lack of awareness of – or a complete disregard for – the relationship that exists between the decision to accept and adhere to the rules and norms of a sport, along with the standards of excellence that attach to that sport, and the pursuit of a sport’s internal goods. Continually renewing one’s decision to accept and adhere to a sport’s rules, on the other hand, demonstrates a commitment to the continued development of one’s moral and intellectual virtues, such as practical wisdom, integrity, and honesty.

d. **Narrative Unity:**

Sports have the potential to promote narrative unity in a number of ways. Sports promote a historical, embedded, connection to the standards of excellence that were established by members of the practice community that came before them. Sports provide a consistency for their role as athlete, teammate, coach, administrator, or spectator. Sports promote clarity in the progression toward a common good. These components of sports aid in the creation and maintenance of an athlete’s narrative by unifying parts of their life in a coherent whole and allows them to view themselves as an individual within a community working toward a common goal by developing their virtues. MacIntyre explains that, “the unity of a virtue in someone's life is intelligible only as a characteristic of a unitary life, a life that can be conceived and evaluated as a whole.”

In the context of sports, the relationships that athletes define through their commitments and intentions in sports, such as their pursuit of either sports’ external or internal goods, define in large part what their roles are and the responsibilities attached to those roles. As an abstracted individual, disconnected from any sense of shared norms or standards of excellence, the athlete detaches himself from any historical context that formed the basis for the content of their role as
an athlete. That component of their personal narrative, as athlete, along with the other fragmented components, such as father, husband, teacher, church member, and community volunteer, become a disjointed and disconnected series of characters, rather than a coherent narrative in a single script. The narrative unity of an entire life must not only exhibit coherence, it must also be a persistent and enduring component of one’s story, which is lived as a quest that progresses toward an endpoint.

Persistence of the various roles one inhabits throughout the course of his life, including that of basketball player, for instance, creates an enduring component of one’s narrative identity, but only does so slowly, over time. Referring to the narrative unity of a whole life as a **quest** implies the importance of persistence, patience, and longevity in the struggle to create a coherent identity and to form the content of a stable and enduring conception of the good life for human beings. In other words, the durability of a person’s narrative identity, and their concept of the good life, is strengthened when a given social role is viewed as an ongoing story, rather than a series of unconnected episodes, each with its own norms and modes of behavior.

A person will adopt many roles as a member of various social practice communities along their journey. All of these roles contribute to the coherence of their narrative unity, but the longer one persists in any given role the more clearly they can see their progression towards a common **telos** as stages along their overall journey. Sports, I am arguing, represent one such practice where the role of runner, soccer player, or cyclist, for example, provide opportunities for life-long membership. The role-consistency offered by sports, in other words, can span an entire lifetime. Although one’s responsibilities may change over time, one’s membership in their sporting community never has to expire. The coherence of this narrative across a lifetime contributes a meaningful component to the unity, and therefore the satisfaction, of a whole life.

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It might be argued that repetitive nature of sports leads to a boorish, endless succession of tedious experiences. However, seen from a different perspective, the interminability of sports, conceived of as an infinite succession of renewable finite contests, equips these practices with limitless potential. The initiation of every new contest becomes a novel and stimulating experience where the uncertainty of outcome presents a new challenge to overcome.

Owing to the uncertainty of sporting outcomes and the variables that, in part, condition the way each separate game is played, no two races, even between familiar competitors, will be run exactly the same. Rather than viewing each game as an episodic moment, athletes who choose to enter into a sporting contest as an infinite player actively enhance their awareness of, and commitment to, developing the coherence of their narrative identity.

These aims are facilitated when an athlete views sports as a model of interminable progression toward a final goal and learning through their experiences in sports that, although this journey is never complete in the sense of arriving at a static destination, the closest one can get to completion is through the continuation of the quest. The social role of athlete can therefore span the entirety of a lifetime, satisfying both the coherence and persistence required in the struggle to establish a narrative unity across a whole human life. In this way, through the pursuit of sports’ internal goods and standards of excellence, a person becomes, for instance, a runner, a soccer player, or a cyclist through incorporating these roles as a fundamental and enduring component of their identity.

To be clear, athletes who choose to pursue sports’ external goods certainly cannot be reduced to having a malicious, disinterested, or even incorrect intent. There are a range of morally acceptable intentionalities. Oftentimes athletes exhibit a nested intentionality, wherein they seek both the external and the internal goods of sports with fluctuating degrees of emphasis.
in any given moment. It would be unrealistic to believe that a person would be able to sustain such a narrow focus on only one type of good offered by sports. In fact, the range of goods and joys offered by participation in sports is one of many reasons sports have endured as long as they have.

In other situations, athletes seek external goods exclusively, but do so with the noblest intentions of supporting their family or using their fame and wealth to advance social equality, to list only a few examples. The pursuit of external goods does not disqualify an athlete from developing the virtues or being a good person. Given the importance of coherence in the process of developing a unified narrative, sports simply will not appeal to everyone undertaking this journey. However, the choice to explicitly pursue the external goods of sports does diminish an athlete’s potential include their role as a cyclist, for instance, as coherent aspect of their identity, and reduces their participation in sports to an activity they do, rather than something they are.

2. The MacIntyrean Athlete:

Synthesizing the ideas that have so far been introduced in this chapter, the following section will formulate an initial sketch of the MacIntyrean athlete. The primary aims of this section will be to (1) describe the MacIntyrean athlete’s dispositional attributes, (2) to explain the MacIntyrean athlete’s value commitments, and (3) to illustrate the sport-specific theories that substantiate and legitimize the MacIntyrean athlete’s efforts to develop moral and intellectual virtues and to incorporate their role as athlete into their narrative identity. Additionally, the following depiction of the MacIntyrean athlete satisfies two goals in the overall aims of this research.

First, it establishes the groundwork for the claim that sports can promote the understanding and practical application of virtue ethics. Although this argument is well-
represented in the literature, it remains a necessary part of the current discussion because it represents the foundation for the subsequent claims of the value added by introducing existentially-themed variations to traditional virtue ethics. Secondly, though not wholly divorced from the first, the following depiction of the MacIntyrean athlete constitutes an initial and significant step toward making plausible the claim that sports contain resources to promote the development of existential authenticity and civic virtue. In other words, the following section represents the necessary point of departure in the larger goal to demonstrate the enhanced value added to the theory of promoting MacIntyrean virtue ethics through participation in sports, when it is combined with the aim of developing the existential virtues of authenticity and civic virtue.

a. **Respect for the Game:**

The MacIntyrean athlete demonstrates an overriding and abiding respect for the game. She is concerned primarily with the preservation of the game’s integrity and with maintaining an intentionality that honors the game’s tests and her fellow test-takers. The MacIntyrean athlete understands that the competitive nature of sports results in a continuous stream of temptation for players to suspend their quest for the sporting excellences in favor of the promise of fame, fortune, pride, or other such external goods. She understands that the temptation to replace her pursuit of internal goods with desires for external goods lingers constantly, and is never more than one choice away. However, her commitment to respecting the game’s integrity strengthens her ability to resist the temptation to use either the game itself or her fellow practitioners as means to narrowly personal gain.

b. **Commitment to Excellence:**
The game, for the MacIntyorean athlete, is respected because she realizes that it is the practice that enables the pursuit and realization of excellence. The MacIntyorean athlete remains steadfast in her examination and education of what counts as excellence in her sport, and likewise cultivates great respect for the community that helps to define those practice excellences. The MacIntyorean athlete is willing to advance the practice through experimentation and the identification of new excellences. She deems these goods of excellence to be worthy of her focus and her commitment because the MacIntyorean athlete understands that external goods are merely “accidents of social circumstance.”

Refusing to place a higher value on winning than on the attainment of excellence, for instance, the MacIntyorean athlete works diligently to resist the temptations of external rewards, to the greatest extent possible. To be sure, at one point or another, all athletes allow some level of desire for external goods. The difference for the MacIntyorean athlete lies in the fact that she, as swiftly as possible, redirects the objects of her desire back to her commitment to the pursuit of excellence. Despite any momentary lapses, her previous experiences in sports have refined her ability to discriminate between those objects of desire that contribute to the common good and those objects of narrowly personal desire.

Out of this ability to recognize and redirect the objects of her desires in sports, she solidifies through firsthand experience her understanding of the relationship that exists between playing fairly and accessing the internal goods available in sports. She refuses to compromise her commitment to pursuing excellence by making an exception of herself, or by treating the game or others as means for her personal gain, or by an attempt to unfairly gain a competitive advantage through the use of performance enhancing substances, or to spend time probing rule books for ways to licitly circumvent rules, and so on. She understands that these shortcuts
undermine her opportunities to develop and demonstrate excellence. To the MacIntyrean athlete, this is untenable. Ultimately, she chooses to focus her pursuits on a sport’s internal goods, the associated standards of excellence, and on her evolving understanding of what the common good entails, along with her capacity to contribute to it.

c. **Commitment to Practice Flexibility:**

As is now clear, the MacIntyrean athlete maintains a tacit commitment – based on a profound sense of responsibility – to the quest for the standards of excellence that attach to sports. She embraces the existing set of standards that define both her relationship to the game itself and her relationship to other players, whether they be teammates or opponents. Despite her diligence to achieve these excellences, she understands that the testing and contesting excellences, as well as the sporting practices themselves, are evolving phenomena. She accepts the fact that, owing to their evolving nature, the standards of excellence are not fixed and that they, along with the appropriate norms and modes of behavior used to achieve these standards, may be revised over time. In response, the MacIntyrean athlete remains flexible in her pursuit.

As such, the MacIntyrean athlete understands that it may be both necessary and appropriate to utilize her creativity in game contexts. She embraces the need to respond to the changing landscape of both her social practice and the responsibilities associated with her role as athlete. She relishes the opportunities to demonstrate her excellence through the immediacy of action required in many direct sporting situations, where she battles her opponent head-to-head. She has the resolve to reflect back upon her intuitive choices and adjust her tactics in case she faces a similar situation in the future, fortifying her moral agency along the way.
As an example of this, basketball players regularly scout their opponent’s tendencies to better anticipate the most effective counter-moves in future meetings. However, knowing how common the practice of scouting is, as their opponents assuredly catalogue player tendencies as well, players will purposely switch their in-game strategy, tactics, and style in order to catch their opponents off-guard. The resulting chess match creates an entertaining and captivating game of cat-and-mouse, frequently raising the level of play for both sides as each side attempts to outwit and outmaneuver the other. In game situations of this kind the competitors are typically well-matched in their skill level and the outcome is far from certain in any one game. Refining skills of creativity and spontaneity only enhances the drama of uncertainty that generates so much of the delight and joy found in sports. The MacIntyrean athlete fully understand and appreciates these aspects of her sport.

d. **Appreciating Opponents as Enablers:**

The MacIntyrean athlete understands that the integrity of the test is contingent on the cooperation and skill of her opponent. Furthermore, she recognizes that the integrity of the contest is dependent of the honest and concerted efforts of her opponent to overcome the challenges presented by both her and the test itself. The opponent therefore enables both the test and the contest. The MacIntyrean athlete holds an appreciation for her opponents because without their cooperation and honest effort the integrity of the game would be irreparably compromised. Aside from making the game possible, the MacIntyrean athlete seeks out opponents that present good game challenges, where the outcome is anything but certain.

In ideal situations, where both parties share in their pursuit of the common good, and where the competitive balance swings regularly between the two sides, a bond of friendship and
mutual respect can form. The MacIntyrean athlete actively seeks out these bonds between herself and others. She understands that when opponents are, in large part, equally-matched in skill level, talent, and desire to achieve the excellences in their given sport, the potential joy of those contests is enhanced considerably when compared to contests against opponents of unequal skill or talent. The MacIntyrean athlete craves contests that pit her best efforts against that of an equally-matched opponent. She respects her opponents because she understands that they enable opportunities to experience the pleasure and joy that attaches to an uncertain outcome.

Athletes who pursue a sport’s external goods are oftentimes focused on winning the contest, rather than on securing worthy opponents who present difficult challenges. Those who pursue a sports’ external goods typically seek to limit outcome uncertainty, preferring instead to play games where victory is easy and challenge is, to the greatest extent possible, eliminated. Conversely, the MacIntyrean athlete seeks play-mates that provide a high level of challenge because she is more interested in producing valid and meaningful competitive outcomes than in winning hollow victories. She embraces the indispensability of her contesting counterparts, she treats them with the appropriate respect, and most of all, she values them for enabling both her pursuit of the goods internal to sports and the opportunity to develop her moral and intellectual virtues through a mutual quest for excellence and the common good.

e. **Commitment to the Transmission of Tradition:**

The MacIntyrean athlete has a responsibility to transmit the traditions of her chosen practice to the next generation of players. This responsibility comes not from an abstracted or impersonal sense of duty to others, or even to the practice itself, but is born out of an abiding respect for the practice, its excellences, and the practice community that stewards those practice
excellences. The MacIntyrean athlete regards sports as a gift. The gratitude, and humility, she feels in response to having been given such a gift by others breeds a sense of responsibility to preserve and spread that gift to future generations.

In this sense, the MacIntyrean athlete is not only a student attempting to wrest back her own moral agency from the vagaries of thoughtlessness and “dictatorial desire” through the personally meaningful pursuit of excellences. The MacIntyrean athlete embraces her role as both student and mentor. She seeks out those who enter into a sporting practice for the first time in order to show them, primarily through her own example, how the pursuit of excellences can enrich their lives and add a meaningful component to their personal narrative. These students must go through the same process of displacement and transformation of their desires that others before them have, but they will need guidance in this process from someone who has gone through their own desire displacement and transformation. Enter the MacIntyrean athlete, whose respect for the practice generates her concern for its preservation. She slides easily between the roles of mentor, teacher, and student.

Just as the MacIntyrean athlete was tutored upon her first visit by a mentor eager to teach new arrivals, so too will she rejoice in her opportunity to guide an incoming athlete toward an appreciation for the internal goods and excellences of sports. Just as the MacIntyrean athlete did upon her first visit, the newly arrived apprentice entrusts themselves to their mentor. Rather than giving lectures or formal instruction on how best to define their relationship to others in the practice community, the MacIntyrean athlete provides an experiential role model through which examples of good practices are transmitted, in both intention and performance.

In short, they play games whereby the mentor demonstrates, through practical instruction, her own pursuit of excellences and the appropriate relationships one should be nurturing, both to
the game and to other players. If the MacIntyrean athlete provides quality instruction in the ways of good practices, the apprentice will become a MacIntyrean athlete in his own right and ready to then exercise his ability as teacher to the next wave of incoming students of the game. It is through this dissemination of tradition that good practices endure. In MacIntyre words, “Good practices are transmitted through traditions of good teaching.”

Whether she wins or loses, playing with an intentionality geared toward pursuing the excellences of sports, and fostering mutually beneficial relationships between herself and other members of that practice community, provides the MacIntyrean athlete with an opportunity to take the lessons she has learned throughout the course of playing her sport in this way and applying them to other social areas in her life where imbalanced power dynamics devastate the real lives of people in her community. It is the practical demonstration, in social settings outside the confines of measured time and space, of the moral and intellectual virtues she has acquired through her participation in sports that imbue these social practices with a fantastic potential to positively impact human lives. When relationships of mutual recognition, defined through a commitment to achieving excellences, are fostered in sports players learn how to address imbalances in the social order in other areas of life, or at least to be unafraid to question that order when they observe exploitative and non-mutual relations in society.

3. **Existential Virtue Ethics, Sport, Authenticity & Civic Virtue:**

   This section is divided into two parts. The first part of this section clarifies why and how the existential virtues of authenticity and civic virtue, as characterized herein, complement and add enhanced value to the previously-described MacIntyrean virtue ethics approach to sport. The second part will explain how the virtues of authenticity and civic virtue, and their
interrelated existential concepts, add important standards and attributes to the description of a virtuous athlete. The following remarks link the various themes of existential virtue ethics to specific characteristics of sports, emphasizing how and in what ways these themes appear and operate in sports. The social value of sports should, at least in part, be tied to their potential to provide a rich ground for moral education and development. As such, any plausible theory that aids in illuminating how the morally educative potential of sports might be revealed and applied in practice should also have value. This section aims to do just that. Accordingly, this section begins with a discussion of the existentially-specific themes of virtue ethics that lends plausibility to the claim that sports contain resources to develop existential authenticity and civic virtue.

a. **Fragility of Games/Conventions:**

Human conventions, such as sports, highlight the centrality and potency of human freedom by emphasizing choice, commitment, and responsibility. Human beings create conventions to suit certain needs and desires, and as such there is a responsibility to protect those conventions that contribute to the moral, intellectual, and physical health of a community. In sports, for instance, athletes help to preserve the integrity of sports by choosing, and re-choosing, in each testing or contesting moment, to follow game rules and honor the ethos of the game, which is an interminable process of development and evolution, over time.

The fragility of games, such as sports, highlights the increased emphasis on choice and the freedom that accompanies that choice, constrained as it may be by the availability of options to choose between. On a formal level, games require players to choose to follow the constitutive rules, or else that game cannot be played. Informally, games make an appeal to the players to
choose to honor the ethos that dictates proper modes of conduct and behavior. The fragility of games is revealed, and their integrity is undermined, when game-players choose to not follow the rules or to not adhere to the expectations and norms dictated by that game’s ethos.

Only the player who willfully adopts what Bernard Suits terms the ‘lusory attitude’ can be said to be playing a game. The lusory attitude is demonstrated by game-players who choose to adhere to the rules that govern those games just so they can play the game. Suits defines the lusory attitude as, “the knowing acceptance of constitutive rules just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur.”

Suits argues that the lusory attitude is a core element of all proper game playing. The lusory attitude represents the ‘first’ choice of game-playing. The first choice one must make in their attempt to play a game is simply the choice to abide by the rules, customs, and norms of a convention. This first choice must continuously be made throughout the course of gameplay, since the potential to choose otherwise remains an ever-present possibility, as long as the game is being played.

The presence and primacy of **continual choice** is an important mechanism in understanding the fragility of both the moral concept of existential authenticity and the phenomenon of sport. When the conventionality of sports is highlighted, the fragility and primacy of choice in these practices is easily understood as running parallel to the conventionality, fragility and primacy of choice in the process of acquiring existential authenticity. Both sports and existential authenticity exist as an ongoing process of deliberation and choice.

The excellences internal to sports are constantly being renegotiated and redefined to suit the needs of those who participate in one aspect of them or another. Likewise, the process of
acquiring existential virtues, such as authenticity and civic virtue, is perpetually ongoing and always reliant on one’s choice to pursue them. The choice to pursue a project of bad faith in making moral decisions, or to cheat or break the rules in sports, equally breaks the ‘spell’ of these conventions and their fragility is highlighted once more. One’s commitment to the process, in spite of knowing there is no endpoint at which the process is ‘finished,’ is ratified only through one’s continual choice to remain committed.

Understanding the parallels between the conventionality of sports and that of one’s moral life offers the athlete an opportunity to view their sporting experiences as occasions to expand their horizon of choice and to develop their ability to deliberate skillfully between the various objects of desire. The choice to pursue a project of authenticity, rather than one of bad faith is made only when one understands the difference between them. Sports offer a laboratory where these choices can be tested and re-tested in a controlled environment.

By choosing authenticity over bad faith in one’s sporting experiences, the athlete chooses to both preserve the integrity of the game, and to engage their fellow players in a balanced, symmetrical, and mutual exchange of recognition. The mutual recognition of their shared pursuit of a common good within sport, such as the achievement of excellence, emphasizes the importance of choice and fragility in conventions such as sports and morality. In other words, the choice to pursue the external goods of sports lurks in the background, waiting to remind the players of sports’ inherent fragility.

The choice to play sports for reasons other than the pursuit of its internal goods and achievement of the standards of excellence available in them not only threatens the morally educative potential of sports, but also poses a mortal threat to the convention itself. When goods external to the game become the primary aim of a player, there is an abiding temptation to ignore
the rules, and therefore undermine the integrity of the game. Without regard for a game’s integrity there is nothing that player will not do in order to secure whatever goods they seek. Unfortunately, in the process of undermining the game’s integrity, and potentially breaking the rules, the player who plays in bad faith exploits the game and other players for his own ends and extinguishes the game-playing in the process.

When the conventional nature of games is highlighted, the primacy of choice in the process of expressing human freedom and asserting agency in the world takes shape. On the other hand, the primacy of choice also reveals the lingering fragility of conventions such as these. The choice to accept and adhere to the rules of a sport, however, is only the ‘first’ choice one must make. As discussed in greater detail in the next section, there is a ‘second’ choice that athletes make in sports, which involves the recognition of sport’s internal goods and the choice to commit oneself to attaining those goods, in spite of continual temptations to choose otherwise.

b. **Play & Telos:**

In what I am referring to as the ‘second’ choice, an athlete can ‘intend’ sport as play, or not. When sports are seen from the perspective of play, there is a premium placed on choice, commitment, and responsibility. Sports can certainly be participated in by those who choose to pursue goods external to them. There is no penalty or point deduction for choosing to pursue the external goods of sports. However, sports offer rich playgrounds that lend themselves to a commitment to the pursuit of their excellences as ends in themselves. Those who make the second choice, choose to pursue a sports’ excellences because they believe this pursuit to be a worthwhile ‘end’ of their game playing activities.
To be at play in sports, or to make the choice to pursue the excellences available in sports as ends rather than mere means, involves a commitment to that pursuit as well as the associated responsibility to preserve the integrity of both the game and the other players. Suits’ definition of lusory attitude seems to indicate this awareness by insinuating that a game has an intrinsically satisfying value, which would ratify an athlete’s voluntarily engagement in it. Without the second move by the athlete, i.e. the recognition of the intrinsic satisfaction of playing the game just for the sake of playing games and the choice to pursue a sports’ internal goods and achieve its standards of excellence, the potential of sports to be a morally educative experience cannot be fully realized. The second choice that an athlete makes involves their attitude or perspective on why they have entered into the game in the first place.

If one’s free and voluntary choice to participate in a game is accompanied by an intentionality of being at play, or being committed to the pursuit of a game’s internal goods and standards of excellence, then they have affirmed the second choice. Being forced, compelled, or otherwise coerced by the promise of external rewards to participate in a game deprives the player of the game’s potential to act as a resource in developing their virtues, including authenticity and civic virtue. Choices in these instances are externally required, not internally desired. To be sure, someone can make the first choice and participate in a game by accepting the rules just to make playing the game possible, and still choose to pursue the games external goods. This scenario is not uncommon. However, to truly be at play one’s participation must be both volitional and in pursuit of that sport’s standards of excellence.

Noted scholar James P. Carse wrote that, “No one can play who is forced to play. It is an invariable principle of all play…that whoever plays, plays freely. Whoever must play, cannot play.” Of course, Carse is referring to the notion of being at play, as described herein, rather
than the normal usage of the term. To remind readers of the extended discussion of play in chapter three, being at play is an attitude one brings with them to their sporting activities and involves the voluntary choice to pursue the internal goods and excellences of sports.

Drew Hyland, noted sports philosopher, introduced the concept of the “stance of play” in his book, Philosophy of Sport (1990). Hyland describes this “play stance” as one’s “responsive openness,” which, he briefly defines as, “a heightened openness toward possibilities and at once a heightened responsiveness toward them.” The demands of responsive openness characteristic of playing games, Hyland explains, are not somehow absent from other activities, such as brain surgery or bridge building, but the nature of these demands are quite distinct in sports and other game playing activities.

Hyland reasons that although responsive openness is called for in many non-sport situations, “in those situations…the necessity of responsive openness is imposed by the exigencies of our life projects. In sport, however, the call for responsive openness is in every case invented by the constructors of the game.” We construct these artificial problems and enter in to contests just so we can see who is “the most responsively open.” Similar to the second choice implicit in Suits’ lusory attitude, Hyland’s stance of play requires a voluntary submission to the arbitrariness of the rules that govern the game, but not for any other reason than to make playing the game possible.

To voluntarily adopt the play stance means that the individual intends to obtain only those goods internal to the sport itself, rather than desiring to ‘use’ sports as a means to gain goods external to it. As MacIntyre explains in his definition of social practices, the internal goods of social practices are attainable only when one participates in that social practice for the purposes of securing the goods internal to that practice; or as previously described: the
intentionality to be at play in the game. In short, the connection between conventions and play is that good sport conventions are potentially good playgrounds. If gamewrights have done their job well, the player should find their pursuit of a sport’s excellences intrinsically satisfying. In MacIntyrean terms, the pursuit of sporting practice excellences is intrinsically meaningful – it adds chapters to a coherent personal narrative.

But even with the play potential contained in conventions, it does not follow that they always generate play experiences or that they cannot be used in the pursuit of external goods. There are always at least two interrelated dangers when it comes to making the second choice of playing games. First, the temptation to adopt a win-at-all costs mentality severely limits the potential to achieve the excellences of a sport, which diminishes the athlete’s ability to be at play. Second, an explicit pursuit of external goods, for example using the game or other players as means to one’s own personal gain, effectively shuts down the playground, as it were. There are certainly many examples of athletes playing for monetary rewards, with the intention of putting that money toward noble humanitarian efforts, but the spirit of play cannot thrive when the aims are goods external to the sport itself. Therefore it is incumbent upon the player to be mindful of their chosen intentionality toward their participation in sports.

Both Suits and Hyland agree that when sports are played for reasons external to the game itself, something quite meaningful is lost. Although the term play exhibits ambiguity in its connotations, i.e. one can play a game while not being at play, Suits explains the importance of the lusory attitude by saying that it is an element of sport that “without which it is not possible to play a game.” Hyland agrees, arguing that an inappropriate stance toward sports would nullify the ability to be genuinely playing that sport. Hyland writes that, “some activities which are
usually considered sport extensionally can, when the participants take an inappropriate stance, cease to be play or sport, even though the ‘motions’ of the activity resemble those of a sport.”

The state of being at play in sport, as expressed through concepts such as the lusory attitude and the play stance, facilitates the pursuit of internal goods and excellences that are available in sports and establishes these goods as a worthy ends toward which to aim. Furthermore, the explicit and emphasized pursuit to exploit sports and other participants of sports for external goods alone reduces these activities and the other people we play them with to mere means through which we pursue our own ends in isolation from others. The second choice entails recognizing a shared responsibility to remain “at play” for the duration of the game, along with an appreciation for the freedom experienced in that choice.

c. Ambiguity and Diversity of Sport:

When viewed as a project of perpetual achievement and transcendence, of constraints and freedom, the ambiguity inherent in sports is easily recognizable. Sport provides a robust, sometimes confusing, domain of human activity that in some ways restricts or constrains what moves are permissible and impermissible, while simultaneously offering opportunities to meaningfully demonstrate and experience freedom. The challenges faced in sport oftentimes seem daunting at first, but upon overcoming those roadblocks, new vistas of opportunity are revealed. Sports represent a paradox, of sorts.

Athletes are continuously reminded of their facticity through the realization that their speed and strength, for instance, are limited. However, the limitations oftentimes push an athlete to outperform their own wildest expectations, which allows for the experience of new freedoms not thought possible. Sports provide a venue where this ambiguity is experienced in forceful
ways. The continual choice to play again tomorrow, for instance, remains no matter the outcome of any one contest. The freedom this demonstrates liberates individuals so that they may choose to re-enter the next contest and once again face the facticity that adheres to the completion of the next contest.

The cessation of choosing, i.e. having chosen, in a final sense, is an invitation for bad faith to become rooted as one’s fundamental project. The determinism of bad faith is avoided through the embrace of the process-oriented, perpetually (re)chosen nature of authenticity and the application in practice of authenticity, namely civic virtue. The renewal and repetition inherent in sport models the importance of the infiniteness of choosing, within the punctuated framework of successive choices. Sports present the athlete with infinite opportunities to practice the skill of moral deliberation through successive repetitions, in which the athlete gains an experiential understanding of sports’ inherent characteristic of renewal. This process-oriented view of sports refers to the “sports as moral laboratory” metaphor discussed at length in chapter three.

As a potential product of this moral laboratory, the virtue of authenticity should be understood as having an “experimental” nature. Authenticity is a state of being in which we must continuously aim at various goals, while knowing that there will never be a point at which that pursuit is terminated in the name of victory, perfection, or any other such finality. In spite of this, we can think of each choice we make as either coherent with our fundamental choice of authenticity, or not; a ‘victory’ or a ‘defeat,’ as it were. While these victories or defeats matter insofar as they demonstrate one’s testing or contesting skill in a given situation, the next choice to be made lies in wait, and the seemingly absurd pursuit of that which cannot ever be fully attained is made clear. Authenticity, however, is a process-oriented, rather than a product-
oriented philosophical concept, and its attainment is promised only to those who choose to embrace the infiniteness of their pursuit.

In a laboratory setting, scientists conduct experiments through a sophisticated version of trial-and-error, testing hypotheses to refine their empirical knowledge. In a sporting venue, it would not be a stretch to consider athletes engaged in a similar process of refining their moral knowledge through *sporting* experiments. The key to this refining process, in both empirical and sporting contexts, is having the freedom to continually and repeatedly conduct these experiments in a controllable laboratory environment. Competitive sports offer a promising venue for renewing and repeating these kinds of moral experiments through the spirit of exploration.

As Graham McFee noted in his discussion of sports as moral laboratories, sports provide a venue where, “one can explore the contours of morally-relevant possibilities” in order to gain a deeper understanding about one’s moral possibilities in other situations life presents. It is precisely this perspective of sports as an ‘exploration’ of relevant possibilities that is at issue here. Experimentation is an exploration that leads to new discoveries, which leads to new understandings and new possibilities. The revelation of these new possibilities expands the options one has to choose between. With the broadened range of choices available to the athlete and the moral agent alike their repeated choices to embrace mutual recognition, to preserve the integrity of the social practice by questing for its internal goods, and to remain committed to the development of their civic virtue all take on a deeper level of significance.

Like the explorers of the Renaissance, the Age of Discovery expanded horizons, opened up new possibilities, and sparked a revolution in intellectual advancement. The expansion of one’s horizon of choices, as I discussed in the preceding chapter, also represents a positive move toward the continuation of one’s commitment to their project of authenticity. Alongside the
expansion of one’s horizon of choice, one must develop and maintain their awareness of the continuous need to (re)choose actions that align with their fundamental project.

The paradox of the interminable process of choice lies in the infiniteness of choice itself; in the fact that one must live in a perpetual state of choosing, rather than ever having chosen. This is so because once one thinks of their choice as having been chosen, their project is considered complete, which in itself would be a choice of bad faith. Although the processes of experimentation, transcendence, and interminable choice remain ongoing projects, the ambiguity inherent in them can engender confidence, rather than fear, since the cessation of any one of these processes would indicate a finality, and therefore a lack of continued growth. As long as the opportunity to play again tomorrow exists, things cannot be that bad.

d. Risks in Sports:

The uncertainty of a sport’s outcome provides the opportunity for players to experience risk – to put a piece of themselves on the line, with no guarantee the desired outcome will ensue. In a comparable manner, the uncertainty of outcome inherent in one’s interactions with others, places the moral agent in a similarly “risky” situation. As discussed in the previous chapter, mutual recognition requires both actors in a given situation to affirm their obligation to respect the autonomy of the other in a reciprocal manner. However, no action of one individual can ensure the reciprocation of the other’s affirming recognition.

Moral agents who are either ignorant to, or unconvinced by, the notion that respecting the freedom of others represents the access-point to their own experience of selfhood and freedom, choose non-mutual, or exploitative relations with others. As evidenced by the previously introduced Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic, there are those who choose relations of dominance,
coercion, mastery, or oppression in their quest to attain selfhood and freedom. However, as already discussed, these types of relations to others necessarily frustrate the attempt to secure selfhood and freedom.

In the face of an uncertain outcome, the master attempts to wrest recognition from the slave with the hope of guaranteeing the recognition of the other. Unfortunately, this very effort to take recognition by force undermines the slave’s ability to give true recognition to the master. And so it is in sports. The player who attempts to guarantee victory, eliminating uncertainty by any means necessary, bends the rules of the game, and corrupts the spirit of play that is so essential to the attainment of sport’s internal goods and excellences.

Where there is no uncertainty, there is no risk. However, where there is nothing of value at stake, there is nothing of value to be gained. The attempt to secure the goods of sport, such as winning, while undermining the very integrity that infuses victory with its meaning and value is a necessarily frustrating endeavor. As such, the promotion of uncertainty, and of the risk it inescapably presents, is of primary importance for athletes who quest for authenticity and maintain their commitment to civic virtue.

Without anything of value at stake, there is little incentive to defect. But when testing success and contesting superiority matter, much is at stake. Players risk displays of incompetence, embarrassing themselves by failing to complete a game’s test. By not winning a contest, the risk of losing and, perhaps of never winning at all. When we put ourselves on the line, in either testing or contesting situations, our moral feet are held to the fire, but we stand to gain significant self-knowledge as well.

In addition, uncertainty is a prerequisite for any form of engagement in what MacIntyre calls the practice excellences, both in a testing and in a contesting environment. When there is
no challenge the athlete faces, then there is no uncertainty. Without the uncertainty of a good challenge, which poses the risk of failing or losing, then the athlete has no chance to pursue the practice excellences. In fact, failing would be the result of un成功fully completing a test, losing the unfavorable result of a contest. In a failed contest one could potentially fail and lose. Thus, authentic participants, i.e. those who aim at achieving sport’s internal goods, must relish the uncertainty of both testing and contesting environments, and the risks they present. The temptation to avoid the challenges presented by both the test and the contesting other remains in both situations, and the need to overcome these temptations and remain committed to the promotion of uncertainty and risk makes both types of playgrounds rich venues to practice good decision making.

When the general topic of uncertainty in sports is raised, the discussion is typically held within economics discourses, specifically with reference to its effects on competitive balance. From a sports economics point of view, a sports’ uncertainty of outcome is directly related to how fans perceive that sports’ competitive balance. Likewise, the perception of competitive balance is directly related to the amount of time and money fans invest in that sport. In other words, a sports’ potential profitability is dependent on its uncertainty of outcome. This is what sports economists have called the Uncertainty of Outcome Hypothesis (UOH).248

This is a helpful concept for the present discussion because the UOH takes as a given the centrality of outcome uncertainty in terms of its integrity. As a defining feature of sports, outcome uncertainty plays an important role in not only the enduring allure of these activities but also in establishing their integrity. Preserving the integrity of sporting outcomes requires at least the perception of genuine uncertainty risks for the players involved. The ever-present threat of
defeat, alongside the abiding possibility of victory establishes the dramatic storyline that makes sports so compelling. The potential agony of defeat suffuses victory with its thrill.

For something meaningful to be at stake for athletes, the outcomes must be genuinely uncertain. For the outcomes to be genuinely uncertain, the athletes must develop a respect for the game and its rules, their teammates, and opposing players, otherwise the integrity of the game is easily sacrificed in the name of winning-at-all-costs. Respect, in this context, is predicated on an honest appreciation for and embrace of sport's internal goods. To subordinate a sport's internal goods to the pursuit of its external goods undermines its social and moral value. While there may be material or financial rewards at stake, without respect for the internal goods of a sport, there is little athletes would not do to secure those rewards. With a win-at-all-costs attitude, rules become barriers to expediency, and the sport's integrity becomes merely a quaint ideal.

According to the UOH, a fan’s interest in sports relies heavily on the perception of fairness, equality, competitive balance, and ultimately on the validity of outcome uncertainty. Broadening the scope of this discussion beyond its financial implications, uncertainty and risk represent something quite meaningful in the context of sports. The consumers of sport, including both the players and the spectators, find value in putting themselves on the line, risking possible anguish in the hopes of gaining a moment of joy. All of this is undermined when outcomes become certain and nothing of substance is truly at risk.

When we recognize and understand the value that risk of outcome uncertainty adds to our sporting experiences, we are in a good position to recognize the role of uncertainty and risk in our moral experiences. As in sports, our moral choices are not guaranteed to result in the outcomes we desire, and thus present a risk when we encounter others. To be sure, mutual recognition, freedom, authenticity, and the good life are not static points of once-and-for-all
achievements, but are only found through continually making the ‘right’ choices in each novel encounter we experience.

Not only do sports model the need for perpetually renewing one’s choices to act in ways that cohere with their fundamental project, these activities offer the kind of ‘moral laboratory,’ discussed at length in chapter three, where these moral insights can be tested and retested for their efficacy and applicability to one’s life outside of sports. In the same way that scientists require a testing environment where multiple trials are required to ensure reproducibility and verifiability, sports offer athletes the chance to renew their hypotheses and repeat their ‘tests’ with the beginning of each new contest.

e. “Infinity” of Sporting Tests/Contests:

In an interesting discussion about what he has termed ‘infinite’ and ‘finite’ games, James P. Carse viewed the relationship between playing games and human existence as inextricably intertwined.\textsuperscript{249} In his short, but profound, book entitled, \textit{Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility}, Carse describes finite games as those whose purpose is to bring the game to some favorable end – in most cases, winning. This is similar to what I have described as a product-oriented view of sports. Opposed to finite games, infinite games are played “for the purpose of continuing the play.”\textsuperscript{250} Despite the rhetorically oppositional and seemingly mutually exclusive terminology used to identify them, finite and infinite games can in fact exist simultaneously.

In paradoxical fashion, players can play a series of finite games within the larger, infinite game, but not the other way around. Or, in Carse’s words, “Finite games can be played within an infinite game, but an infinite game cannot be played within a finite game.”\textsuperscript{251} Carse explains
that the primary point to be made is not whether one is engaged in either a finite game or an
infinite one, but that the game player views themselves as infinite players, rather than as finite
ones. Viewing one’s play as infinite requires one to embrace the paradoxical nature of infinite
games, i.e. to play a finite game according to its rules and in order to secure victory, but to
understand that a new game must always begin at the conclusion of the previous game, which is
in fact simply an extension of the infinite game.

In this sense, there is no true ‘end’ of the game, but only the occasion for the infinite
game to continue. Carse writes, “Infinite play is inherently paradoxical, just as finite play is
inherently contradictory…The contradiction of finite play is that the players desire to bring play
to an end for themselves. The paradox of infinite play is that the players desire to continue the
play in others…The joyfulness of infinite play, its laughter, lies in learning to start something we
cannot finish.” 252 Rather than undermining the value of winning in finite games, however,
becoming infinite players simply shifts the focus of winning away from being a static end,
possession, or title one holds.

The focus for an infinite player is on ensuring the continuation of play, or the recognition
that no finite game can ever tell the whole story. The best a finite game can do is relay
information about what happened in a particular game in a particular time, while the infinite
game remains purposefully open to the possibilities of the future. As a social practice that offers
possibility as an ostensibly interminable feature, sports uncover the vast horizon of choice
awaiting each properly situated, infinite player, while offering moments of comparison between
themselves and other infinite players. As long as finite games continue to be played winning and
losing remain, though in a somewhat paradoxical fashion.
Within the infinite game, of which one’s quest for moral excellence becomes a primary example, the endless series of finite games, each one renewed with the conclusion of the previous one, represents the endless series of moral deliberations each of us must wrestle with. The conclusion of each finite game, just as each choice we make, matters a great deal. There is a sense of facticity inherent in the finite game’s conclusion, just as the moral choices we make and subsequent actions which ensue from these choices ratify, in a very real way, our virtue. However, as swiftly as those actions either confirm or contradict our fundamental project of authenticity the next choice is thrust upon us and, despite either our regret or our jubilation attached to the outcome of the previous game, we have a moral responsibility to embrace the opportunity to play again.

The immanence of the next finite game presses us back into action, and we must set aside the results of the previous game in order to begin again. We must, as Scott Kretchmar argues, transcend the outcome of previous games and project ourselves into the future in the name of redemption through new opportunities. For infinite players the primary concern lies not with the conclusions or outcomes of finite games – however tempting it is to “rest on one’s laurels” – but with the perpetuation of game-playing itself. This is similar to the tension we experience in our daily lives between the realities of our facticity and the perpetual need to transcend that facticity.

The facticity of previously concluded finite games is seen in the conferring of titles, or possessions, such as ‘winner’ or ‘loser.’ Importantly, these titles are conferred only upon completion of a finite game and only retain their connotation upon the cessation of game-playing, i.e. I won a previous game versus I am a winner. Infinite players understand the impermanence of these titles, and therefore the importance of making moves that facilitate the
continuation of gameplay. In other words, the infinite player learns to embrace the transcendence inherent in the ongoing process of infinite games, while recognizing the legitimacy and meaning, however transitory it may be, of each finite game’s outcome.

Retaining the meaning of winning and losing within each finite game is important for the overall function of competition, and therefore game-playing, as an influential social practice. Although competition in sports has been the subject of much debate, the moral defensibility of sports, as an exemplar of competition, obviously rests on the retention of the competitive framework of sports. As Kretchmar persuasively points out, “traditional attempts to morally defend competition by downplaying the importance of possessing victories, emphasizing shared benefits, and reminding participants that the activity is only a game cannot carry the redemptive load expected of them.” Rather than downplaying the importance of the victory, or the sting of the defeat, the competitor who has chosen authenticity as their fundamental project must embrace the impermanence of the outcome, transcending it while simultaneously recognizing its facticity.

The tension between the facticity and transcendence that occurs in the course of the infinite game, made up of an endless procession of finite ones, mirrors the tension that human beings experience within their own existence and has profound implications for one’s quest for moral excellence. In order to avoid various types of bad faith, Sartre argues that the individual in search of authenticity must recognize and work to coordinate the simultaneity of their facticity and their transcendence. Sartre calls this the “double property” of human being, who is “at once a facticity and a transcendence.”

However, when one has ‘chosen’ the project of bad faith, i.e. the choice of anything other than a fundamental project of authenticity, they seek to deceive themselves, identifying
themselves as either pure transcendence – the being-for-itself, or as pure facticity – the being-in-itself. Unfortunately for these ‘self-deceivers’ – which is itself a logical paradox, for one must know the truth in order to veil one’s self from it – our human condition always presents itself to us as both facticity and transcendence, and simultaneously as neither.

To reject the impermanence of winning or losing, or in other words to identify one’s self as either a winner or a loser based on the outcomes of finite games, would be a rejection of authenticity itself. In sports we are afforded the opportunity to experience this ambiguity between the realities of our facticity – in our experiences of the outcomes of finite games – and also our transcendence – in our ability to surpass those outcomes and redeem ourselves with the beginning of the next finite game, and the simultaneous recognition that each of these games is but one part of an infinite drama unfolding as we go. Conceived of in this way, sports hold a powerful potential to educate the intentional athlete as to the truth of their ontological condition, i.e. their ‘condemnation’ to be free and the irrevocable responsibility to choose for themselves how they will live their lives, thereby clearing the path and paving the way for their pursuit of moral excellence.

To be sure, the choice to act in accordance with one’s fundamental project must be one made continually in each new situation one finds himself – or in other words, a renewed and repeated choice to act in ways that coheres with one’s chosen project. Likewise, sports offer its participants a potent resource for understanding the perpetual nature of these choices by revealing the interminable nature of such practices, i.e. the game, in isolation, may be completed – much like the ‘completeness’ of one’s decisions once they’ve acted upon those choices – however, when understood as a series of games that in theory could go on indefinitely, we gain a better understanding of the inherently perpetual nature of our moral choices.
The punctuated nature of infinite games provides the players of sports the chance to gain a temporary respite between the infinite series of finite games. The momentary pause allows the player to reflect on past “experiments,” as it were. As any good scientist would, the player has the opportunity to break down and analyze the various experiences, evaluating which aspects aided their development, and then adjusting their intentionality and attitude prior to the beginning of the next finite game. The episodic nature of each “checkpoint,” or conclusion of one finite game, is a crucial step in the experimental process of evaluating satisfying and not so satisfying experiences.

f. **Affirmation of the Other:**

As should be clear at this point, the social and intersubjective structure of sports is a major focal point in the argument that sports have the potential to promote moral excellence. Now that we have a much clearer idea of what is entailed in authenticity and civic virtue, the identification of sports as a social practice, in the narrowly MacIntyrean sense, takes on even more importance. Although the previous chapter contains a lengthy discussion of how MacIntyre defined practices in general, the concept of intersubjectivity and its connection to practices, as it relates specifically to sports, necessitates a more explicit discussion of how sports might satisfy the requirements MacIntyre set forth to define practices, and the inherent intersubjectivity that make these activities specifically “social” practices.

While this discussion is certainly not the first to characterize sports as a social practice, in order for these activities to do the moral heavy lifting that proposed herein, their classification as a social practice is essential and must be taken seriously. The “social” aspect of the term relates to the necessarily interpersonal dynamic that is characteristic of all sports. The practice
community establishes, in a dialogue with its other members, the understanding and appreciation for the practice excellences that define that practice’s internal goods. As social practices, the members of a practice community facilitate the attainment of the goods internal to them either directly or indirectly.

While there are many other practices that allow one to experience other people, sports offer a particularly kind of venue where experiencing someone else can be directly encountered in terms of the other’s embodiment. Opponents in many sports are faced with a direct and immediate experience of the subjectivity of the other through physical contact, requiring them to instantaneously react to the physicality of their opponents. There is a sense of dialogue occurring through direct confrontation with the physicality of the opponent. The fluency required to respond effectively to the rapidity of “statements” and “counter-statements” represents an impressive skill. The development of one’s ability to communicate in this way occurs through a series of testing and retesting this skill in real life situations, and lends promise to the view of sports as a moral laboratory. Even in sporting situations where direct physical conflict is not a constitutive element of the game, the move/counter-move structure remains, and opponents must still react to the moves of others, and one’s moral fluency can still be improved.

In the cases of individual or indirect sports, or sports played in situational isolation from other people performing the same test in the same location, the participants of sports practice these activities in conversation with socially-established standards of excellences. In other words, the socially-constructed nature of sports and the goods internal to them subjects each player to a past, present, and future network of other players, whether they are physically present, or not. Both direct and indirect methods of cooperation and their inherently social
nature, provide a useful starting point for any relation of mutual recognition that is itself the
perquisite for the experience of human freedom one needs to live the good life.

Likewise, the practice part of the term, social practice, refers to the experimental process
that all sports share in how they are performed. On this view, sports become moral experiments,
wherein participants have the opportunity to repeatedly practice making moral decisions that
contribute to the player’s overall ability to pursue the project of authenticity and develop civic
virtue, assuming those decisions are intended to contribute to the overall moral health of their
community.

The zero-sum nature of external goods gained through victory in competition does not
preclude the possibility of obtaining non-zero-sum benefits from participating in the social
practice of sports. Whereas the goods obtained from a zero-sum orientation towards sports are
said to be possessed by the winner of a given competition, and are thus narrowly beneficial to
that one winner, the benefits obtained from securing the non-zero-sum, or internal goods, of a
contest are shared with the entire practice community, and beyond.

The practice community, in this sense, includes all those who share in the pursuit of
certain goods internal to that practice and to the attainment of the common good. The
relationship between members of a practice community and the respect they must exhibit to both
other members of the practice community and to the practice itself is an extremely important
point when trying to define and substantiate the moral role of sports within a culture.

As should already be clear, the internal goods of competitive sports are, in part, their
capacity to extend the player’s ability to achieve moral excellence by crystallizing their
understanding of their moral responsibility to other players, and by expanding their horizon of
choice through the experience of intersubjective relations with the other participants of sports.
The extent to which these goods are realized is determined by the extent to which the primary standard of moral excellence – authenticity – is achieved. The concept of authenticity, as a standard of excellence, and as a virtue acquired through participation in sports, that is partially definitive of this social practice, requires players to not only choose authenticity as their fundamental project, but to continuously choose intentional actions that cohere with that originally chosen fundamental project. The virtue of authenticity, as acquired through one’s participation in sports, is possible only due to sports’ intersubjective structure, and therefore plays an essential role in sports’ capacity to promote the development of moral excellence.

Authenticity represents a very specific kind of relationship between moral agents, and is most certainly not possible to attain individually, or isolated from other members of a practice community. Authenticity is constituted only through genuinely mutual, intersubjective recognition between members of a practice community who all share in the struggle to achieve a morally healthy community for all members. Although he is skeptical of existential ethics, MacIntyre provides a useful explanation of relationships in social practices: “Every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it. Now the virtues are those goods by reference to which, whether we like it or not, we define our relationships to those other people with whom we share the kind of purposes and standards which inform practices.”

To better understand the philosophical concept of intersubjectivity, one must start with Edmund Husserl, who originally coined the term in his book, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Rather than the typical perception of interpersonal interaction – where one subject perceives and responds to others in their object-ness, and vice versa – an intersubjective view of the human condition is more dynamic and nuanced, characterized
primarily as a moment of empathy, or what Husserl calls the ‘transcendental theory of experiencing someone else.’

Intersubjectivity is characterized by a person’s realization that they exist simultaneously as both subject and object for both themselves and for others. The experience of other-ness, presented at first as a ‘thereness-for-me’, situates the world, and all the things in it, as existing in large part as something for my consciousness to behold and apprehend. This initial perspective has the effect of individuating the consciousness, causing the ego to succumb to the illusion that it alone ratifies the existence of all other things.

However, the truth of existence is more appropriately understood as “thereness-for-everyone,” as Husserl reminds us. Empathy, or the “transcendental theory of experiencing someone else,” allows the ego to transcend the narrowly construed world of ‘thereness-for-me’, and becomes the occasion for a broader “transcendental theory of the Objective world.”

Transcending a narrow sense of one’s ego through participation in sports typically occurs when the participant directly experiences the other as a subject in and of themselves, adding to the importance of the affirmation of the other when attempting to view one’s participation in sports, in part, as an opportunity to develop their moral excellence.

4. “The Authentic Athlete”:

The following section takes the depiction of the MacIntyrean athlete outlined earlier in this chapter as the point of departure, complementing the earlier synthesis of the ideas, where appropriate, by incorporating the new ideas introduced in this section on authenticity and civic virtue. The aim of this final section is to supplement the previous sketch and offer a more complete picture of the authentic athlete. As it was with the previous depiction, the primary
concern of this section will be to describe those dispositional attributes, value commitments, and sport-specific theories that substantiate and legitimize the authentic athlete’s efforts to develop their specifically existential virtues of authenticity and civic virtue through their participation in sports, and to incorporate their role as an athlete into their narrative identity and quest for the good life. The following depiction of the authentic athlete satisfies two goals.

First, it extends the plausibility that sports contain within them promising resources for promoting virtue ethics in general, and now existential virtue ethics in particular. Secondly, this depiction solidifies the plausibility that sports also contain resources to promote the development of authenticity and inspire the engagement of civic virtue, understood through an existential lens. In other words, the following depiction of the authentic athlete exemplifies the complementary characteristics of how an athlete, viewing their participation through the lens of existential virtue ethics, might include the existential virtues of authenticity and civic virtue into their pursuit of moral excellence in sports.

Although much of how an authentic athlete would behave and what would motivate him was detailed in the prior section on the MacIntyrean athlete, there are several more insights I have uncovered in the preceding sections as they relate to the authentic athlete. To briefly remind the reader of the various qualities, characteristics and dispositions outlined earlier, the depiction of the MacIntyrean athlete involved having an intentionality toward the shared pursuit of common goods; well-developed skills of discerning objects of desires that contribute to the common good from objects that only satisfy personal desires; and fostering relations with other members of the practice community that mutually reinforce each other’s freedom and happiness, and that lead to the proliferation of the practice excellences through shared traditions.
While the authentic athlete will incorporate all of the same qualities and attributes of the MacIntyrean athlete, he will include five additional areas of focus, including an emphasis on making choices that preserve the integrity of the game; choices that preserve the spirit of play; an embrace of the ambiguity inherent in both sports and authenticity; the experience of a heightened sense of authorship in the development of a coherent story; a tendency to courageously experiment with established traditions in order to extend and enhance those sporting traditions; and, finally, he will exhibit civic virtue through respect for his opponents and their role in making possible the game, along with his ability to achieve the game’s internal goods and excellences. Taken together the portrait of the authentic athlete that will result from this discussion represents the final piece of the argument for the plausibility that sports should be considered rich laboratories for the development of authenticity and civic virtue.

a. **Preservation of Game Integrity:**

The primacy and philosophical potency of choice occupies a major focus of the authentic athlete. In particular, the first choice, as described above, allows the authentic athlete to not only formally enter into a proper sporting contest, but also provides occasions to experience his freedom, by choosing to play in accordance with the rules, norms, and expectations that govern his sport. The authentic athlete understands the necessity and value of continuously choosing to preserve the integrity of the game in the face of constant pressure to set aside his commitment to the rules and norms of a sport in favor of using the game to advance his pursuit of sports’ external goods.

The authentic athlete does not overlook the personal freedom he experiences through his choice to preserve the integrity of the game as minor occurrence. He appreciates the opportunity
to assert his agency and deliberately choose for himself his intentionality toward his participation in sports. The moments of choice and the personal freedom required to remain committed to preserving the integrity of his sport provide satisfying and uplifting experiences that the authentic athlete takes pride in. While other athletes often take for granted the moment of the first choice, the authentic athlete revels in the opportunity to affirm his own agency in the world, which aids in keeping him grounded in the present moment during his sporting experiences.

b. Preservation of the Play Spirit:

The authentic athlete understands how crucial the play spirit is to his pursuit of his sport’s internal goods and excellences. He employs what might be referred to as a ‘bi-modal’ intentionality in his sporting practices. Whereas he wants desperately to emerge victorious from the contests he competes in, he tempers his desire to win through the recognition that winning and losing belong to sports in order to facilitate his pursuit of sport’s internal goods and excellences. In other words, although his intention is always to win the game, he understands that not winning a certain contest does not invalidate his efforts, and in fact, preserves his potential to demonstrate and develop his sporting excellences.

The authentic athlete does not confuse his desire to win with the joy he feels when he plays excellently in defeat. His pursuit of the testing and contesting excellences remains his primary aim, and in maintaining that commitment to his pursuit, he simultaneously acts in ways that preserves his spirit of play. The choice to maintain his commitment to his pursuit of his sport’s internal goods and excellences is perhaps even more challenging than his commitment to preserving the integrity of the game.
The temptation to over-emphasize the importance of winning is always looming around the next corner, waiting to intrude upon the play spirit and reduce the authentic athete’s participation in sports to a matter of utility, convenience, or some other impersonal and dispassionate mode of participation. For the authentic athlete, the spirit of play is an essential component of the telos of sports. The authentic athlete emphasizes the role of choice, commitment, and responsibility in his attempts to preserve the spirit of play, and in so doing he enables a meaningful experience of his own personal freedom.

c. **Embracing Ambiguity:**

The authentic athlete embraces the ambiguity inherent in sports, and understands that sports offer opportunities to experiment with how to reconcile seemingly paradoxical concepts, such as freedom and constraint, or facticity and transcendence. Exporting the insights that his embrace of sporting ambiguities has afforded him, the authentic athlete avoids the pitfalls of bad faith. Demonstrating his good faith, or authenticity, through his commitment to the pursuit of sport’s testing and contesting excellences and the preservation of the play spirit, the authentic athlete embraces sport’s conceptual contradictions. Inconsistencies in sports, such as the claim that barriers open up new avenues of possibilities, or the simultaneous imposition of both freedom and constraint, are familiar to the authentic athlete. Through an experiential accumulation of knowledge the authentic athlete understands that, for instance, the freedom to choose for himself what his intentionality towards sports will be remains a practical freedom, whereby he is free to choose, but only from a constrained set of options.

The authentic athlete appreciates sports for enabling a wide array of choices to choose from in the process of deciding how to approach his sport and how best to pursue the practice
excellences. Likewise, he maintains a realistic perspective, understanding that there are also restrictions to his choices in sports. His measured and balanced perspective was learned through his sporting activities, and it translates well to his non-sporting experiences. He understands that his choice of authenticity over bad faith requires him to not only embrace the ambiguity of his lived, human condition, but to also ensure and enhance the practical freedom of others.

The seemingly contradictory poles of subject and object that characterize the structure of the human condition is a difficult concept for some people to reconcile. Having had experience in the area of conceptual inconsistencies, the authentic athlete has first-hand experience with the truth of facticity and transcendence. Whereas, facticity anchors contesting results in historical, unchangeable record books, the beginning of each new contest provides him the opportunity to transcend the previous results.

Through experimentation with these types of experiences in sports the authentic athlete is in a good position to understand that the facticity of his embodied, objectively verified self is continuously confronted by the need to transcend that side of himself in order to establish his ethereal, subjectively affirmed self, and vice versa. Additionally, the authentic athlete is well-equipped to understand that the internal negotiation between the subject and the object, or the being-for-itself and the being-in-itself is an interminable, yet vitally important debate in his unending quest for authenticity. By embracing the ambiguity of sports acts, in that they simultaneously enable and restrict his choice of actions, the authentic athlete has the requisite experience to reconcile both the intersubjectivity of human relations and the absurdity of pursuing something that can never be fully realized.

d. **A Heightened Sense of Authorship:**
In his quest for personal meaning and to live the good life, the authentic athlete’s persistence and investment in his role as athlete grants him a heightened sense of authorship over his own unique story. As a function of the various roles he fills in his community as, for instance, father, husband, son, congregant, and teacher, the authentic athlete develops a coherent narrative, from which he amalgamates his personal identity, or the story he tells himself about himself. In order for a particular social role to find its way into the milieu his long-term identity, that role must be practiced persistently and cohere with the various other roles that unify one’s story.

The authentic athlete has heavily invested himself in the preservation of the game’s integrity and of the play spirit, through which he maintains a commitment to pursuing his sport’s excellences. His actions in and around the social practice of sports infuse his process of personal story formation with a heightened sense of ownership and authorship. His role as athlete has been nurtured over time and his sense of agency in crafting his own story is enhanced the longer he remains committed to the pursuit of his sport’s excellences and the more invested he becomes in his sporting role.

Without the requisite persistence and coherence in a certain social role, the sense of authorship gained by the authentic athlete is difficult to achieve. Although the authentic athlete understands his place in and among his community, the story he crafts about himself is unique to him, and his sense of pride in authorship is palpable.

e. **Experimentation with Practice Excellences:**

The authentic athlete demonstrates courage by experimenting with and extending the practice traditions of his sport. Upon entry into a practice community the new member first adopts the established sets of norms, expectations, traditions, and in general follows the
guidelines set forth by the stewards of the practice. However, once the member achieves a level of competence through remaining persistent in their pursuit of their practice’s internal goods and excellences, a time will come when that member becomes a steward of their practice and is responsible for ensuring the practice’s proliferation and posterity. The authentic athlete has reached that level and invests himself in the continued maintenance of his sport.

Part of that maintenance involves the reasonable and systematic evolution of, for example, how a sport’s standards of excellence are defined; which skills should be practiced and employed; what constitutes acceptable behaviors and practice customs; or, whether old traditions should be renewed or new traditions should be implemented. Having inherited a socially established set of precedents for each of the components listed above, the authentic athlete is certainly not going to make wholesale, sweeping changes, nor would he be allowed to by the other stewards of the practice. However, the courage that he has developed through the course of his involvement in sports prepares him to take some risks in experimenting with various formulations of these established norms and traditions.

Although, relatively speaking, changes in sports occur slowly over time, the authentic athlete does not fear the failure of his attempt to enhance or update certain norms and traditions that he believes would improve the quality of the contests or advance the pursuit of his sport’s excellences, for instance. While his intentions remain motivated by a concern for preserving the integrity of the game and enhancing the pursuit of a sport’s internal goods, the authentic athlete has confidence in not only his knowledge of the game, but in his ability to make changes that will improve the quality of the other member’s experiences. The authentic athlete’s achievement of sporting excellences, such as courage and practical wisdom, qualifies him to propose changes
that will result in the systematic extension of the ability of other athletes to achieve excellence, and to more efficiently recognize the ends and goods involved in a practice.

f. **Demonstration of Civic Virtue:**

Whereas the authentic athlete has developed a behavioral predisposition for embracing the ambiguity of sports, and to actively work toward the achievement of excellences for himself and other athletes, civic virtue is the practical application of his continued choice to pursue the fundamental project of authenticity. As a part of this project, and of his development of civic virtue, the authentic athlete sustains an enduring respect for his opponents and teammates who both enable and attempt to frustrate his efforts as a contesting other. The authentic athlete further demonstrates his civic virtue though his efforts to establish relationships of freely-offered, reciprocal affirmation between himself and his opponents and teammates alike. Civic virtue is sometimes referred to as an ‘ordering’ virtue. In other words, an orientation of the will that inclines the authentic athlete to direct all acts of virtue toward the identification and advancement of the common good.

In sports, the very commitment to a mutual quest for excellence implies the development and application of civic virtue. The care and concern for other members of his practice community not only engenders the acquisition of excellence, but also substantiates his motivations for developing and demonstrating his civic virtue. Through his commitment to ensuring the persistence of mutual, non-exploitative relations between himself and others, and his willingness to instruct others in the most effective ways of establishing fair and equitable relationships with other members of the practice community, the authentic athlete is developing, while simultaneously demonstrating his possession of civic virtue. In his commitment to
developing his evolving understanding of what the common good is, his concern for others becomes even more deeply entrenched, and all other virtues would be filtered through the lens of the common good.

It is possible then to think of civic virtue as a collection of civic virtues, or a whole set of various passions, dispositions, beliefs, and values that serve to support an overarching desire to share in the pursuit of the common good and affect the practice community in positive ways. Civic virtue is simply the outcome of a virtuous athlete’s concerted attempt to pursue the internal goods and standards of excellence, and engage in a shared quest for the common good. Whereas authenticity refers to the choices he makes in each new game, interaction, or experience, the authentic athlete’s engagement in and commitment to the enhancement of his community and the recovery of other member’s moral agency defines his civic virtue. Through a compassion and concern for not only his own wellbeing, and ability to live the good life, but the wellbeing and access to the good life for his community as well, the authentic athlete demonstrates the persistence of his choice to avoid bad faith, ego-driven desires, and exploitative relations. The authentic athlete habituates this compassion through their choice of authenticity as it applies to their intentionality toward their sporting practices.

The authentic athlete, in short, expands his horizon of choice, continually chooses actions that cohere with his project of authenticity, fosters mutual recognition between himself and others, and develops his moral and intellectual virtues through the pursuit of sport’s internal goods and excellences. By achieving these aims the authentic athlete becomes the existentially authentic person.

Through his training, education, experimentation, and teaching other athletes involved in his sporting community, the authentic athlete becomes an integral part of that community. He
contributes to the good of all members of the community by becoming a champion of equality and a formidable opponent against imbalanced distributions of power. He has undergone the transformation from detached, atomized, isolated individual to a civically engaged citizen and productive member of his community.

However, it is very unlikely that the catalyst for this transformation will ever be some disembodied theory offered by a distant theoretician, abstracted from the realities of the playing field. As MacIntyre states succinctly, “The recovery of moral agency depends rather upon what types of practice it is in which we and others find ourselves engaged in, and not on what type of theoretical standpoint we adopt.” 258 The time for theory and theorizing is now at an end. To catalyze your own transformation and jumpstart your development of civic virtue, what you need to do now is find a play-mate, a playground, and to go play a game.

227 Ibid., p. 205.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid., p. 191.
231 Ibid., p. 7.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid., p. 8.
236 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
240 Ibid., p. 205.
241 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 188.


Ibid., p. 128.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 127.

The UOH was first introduced by Simon Rottenberg in his article, “The Baseball Players’ Labor Market,” in the Journal of Political Economy, 64, 242–258. This hypothesis has since been widely used in various ways to discuss potential financial profitability of sports.


Ibid., p. 3.

Ibid., p. 8.

Ibid., p. 32.


Ibid., p. 106.


Ibid., p. 191.


Bibliography


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Education


- 2007-2009 – University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon - Bachelor of Arts, received spring 2009. Major in Philosophy; McNair Scholars Program Member

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