

The Human, Sports and Disability

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Final Term Paper
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Abstract

The importance of evaluating fairness in sports competitions arises now more than ever as the world marches onward with the help of science and technology. The aim of this paper is to engage in discussion on what exactly is fair when competitions are judged. It will then focus on the issue of disabled persons attempting to participate in 'normal' sports competitions. The paper will consider a significant thought that the future must inevitably answer; to what extent does augmentation to biological anatomy be permissible in sport. Finally, the paper will convey thoughts on present practices in sports competitions and whether they are currently fair or not.

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to gauge the matter of fairness in sports competitions, it is important to establish clear definitions of certain terms. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines sport as

‘An activity involving physical exertion, skill and/or hand-eye coordination as the primary focus of the activity, with elements of competition where rules and patterns of behaviour governing the activity exist formally through organisations.’¹

As for fairness, Dr. Benditt in his chapter *Normality, Disease and Enhancement* elaborates on two aspects of fairness in sports competitions: extrinsic and intrinsic². Extrinsic fairness deals with the environment itself; making the hoop wider for one basketball team would be an extrinsic unfairness. This type of unfairness is easy to identify and eliminate. Intrinsic fairness, however, is far more interesting and harder to define as it deals with the competitor itself. To better understand intrinsic fairness, the subject of human anatomy arises and what perhaps is natural, or normal.

¹ Pink, Brian. (2008) "Defining Sport and Physical Activity, a Conceptual Model.", 138-150.

² Benditt, T. M. (2007) "Normality, Disease and Enhancement." *Establishing Medical Reality: Philosophy and Medicine* pp. 13 - 21.

II. DISCUSSION

i. Defining The Human

From a biological classification standpoint, humans belong to the homo sapiens specie. Part of being characterized into a species indicates a certain range of uniformity in morphology. Ultimately, it is accepted in modern science that the anatomy of homo sapiens is of consistent 'form' with minor variations, the most evident being skin color attributed to adaptation to geographic location³. Christopher Boorse in his paper *Health as a Theoretical Concept* comments on this matter extensively, arguing that the human body can be divided into hierarchical levels. The functions of these levels can then be measured with respect to their *goal and reference class*⁴. The goal here is defined as the evolutionary biological imperative; to survive and to reproduce. The reference class refers to the age and sex of a species. Boorse illustrates that one can plot these measurements of function on a population vs. functional level graph which in turn produces a normal bell curve. Using statistical analysis, the distribution of the curve can then finally paint a picture of what perhaps is normal for the human species, or what perhaps it means to be the natural ideal human. This context will later aid in evaluating fairness in sports competitions.

³ Smith, T. M., P. Tafforeau, D. J. Reid, R. Grun, S. Eggins, M. Boutakiout, and J.-J. Hublin. "From The Cover: Earliest Evidence Of Modern Human Life History In North African Early Homo Sapiens." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2007, 6128-133.

⁴ Boorse, C. (1977) "Health as a Theoretical Concept." <http://philpapers.org/rec/BOOHAA>. Accessed August 15, 2015

ii. Recognizing opposition

This model, though, is not without its objections. Ron Amundson in his paper *Against Normal Function* challenges the very notion of whether normal functioning even exists in humans⁵. He introduces three new aspects: functional mode, level and outcome. He argues that humans, and other species at that, can have varying modes yet similar outcomes which makes it hard to clearly define what truly normal is. Lennart Nordenfelt, on the other hand, argues that the biological imperative is not the wholly goal for humans, rather there are vital goals individualistic for each human. This individualistic approach argues humans have shed the evolutionary biological imperative as the sole goal so this makes it hard to define what normal is when it could be different for different humans⁶. Though this paper acknowledges the challenging views, it will focus on the previous Boorsian model to evaluate intrinsic fairness for human competitors in sports competitions.

ii. On to sorting intrinsic fairness

In order to judge intrinsic fairness in a sports competition, one must answer why exactly we hold these competitions in the first place. Are they merely for money, for spectators, for recreation, for health reasons? Although they may very well be reasons, the major and key reason would instead be to find the performance of the unaided human⁷. Having defined the natural human previously and recognizing that homo sapiens fall under a specific species design when regarding morphology and anatomy, a case can strongly be made against any sort of

⁵ Amundson, R. (2000) "Against Normal Function." <http://www.uhh.hawaii.edu/~ronald/pubs/2000-against-normal-function.pdf>. Accessed August 16, 2015.

⁶ Nordenfelt, L. (1992) "On the notions of disability and handicap". <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2397.1993.tb00011.x/epdf>. Accessed August 16, 2015.

⁷ Benditt, T. M. (2007) "Normality, Disease and Enhancement." *Establishing Medical Reality: Philosophy and Medicine* pp. 13 - 21

biological augmentation. A biological augmentation can ultimately take away from the natural species design of what the mass majority of the population falls under. The problem with training also arises. A competitor with augmented arms in a weightlifting environment may not have to train as strictly as someone with 'normal' arms, which takes away from the competition aspect, which takes away from the sport. It is for that reason that the disabled, if augmented with artificial limbs, would go against natural species design for homo sapiens and thus argued to be ineligible to compete in non disabled sports.

Recall the context of biological augmentation discussed in the paper is of their involvement in sports competitions. Biological augmentations to help aid and cure disability are marvels of human engineering themselves that should undoubtedly be accepted and furthered in progression. Though when in the context of sports competitions, which most often measures the performance of the unaided human, they can be problematic as they go against what it can mean to be a 'normal' or 'natural' human, at a purely biological, anatomical level.

iii. Thoughts on other unnatural aids and current practices

A natural question that can follow is where does one draw the line for what is considered a 'biological augmentation'. Would shoes falls under this category, or cold resistant jackets that perhaps skiers need in order to compete? These wouldn't be considered a biological augmentation because of three main reasons. Firstly, they must not *directly* alter the species design or physiology of a competitor. The anatomy of the competitor remains intact. Secondly, all competitors have equal opportunity towards obtaining them. In the case of running shoes, competitors have equal access towards them whereas an artificial limb wouldn't be. Finally,

these types of items must be about providing a comfort rather than an aid. Consider the case of 'rocket shoes' that are available to all competitors and don't directly alter species design. This would take away from our previously established definition of what it means to have a competition; to find the limits of an unaided human. Traditional shoes and jackets are more about providing a comfort rather than an aid like in the case of 'rocket' shoes'.

Consider biological augmentations of an entirely different class such as drugs or doping. These do not alter the 'normal' biological morphology of humans so controversy and debate can arise as to the legality of them. The topic is beyond the scope of this paper as a whole flurry of questions can arise. Where does one draw the line towards which is a drug, whether it is legal or illegal in certain parts of the world, whether taking supplements such as vitamins are unnatural, if all competitors have access to them does it justify the legality and so forth. Ultimately, in the case of the Olympics for example, the council would be the final rule on such matters. Different organizations of sports competitions may have different rulings regarding different drugs which makes the topic quite hard to discuss.

However, in regards to the measures taken to ensure fairness in current practices, there is little need for change as they are quite rigorous already. In the case of the Olympics, the IOC (International Olympics Committee) conducts tests before, during and after The Games⁸. In addition to the IOC, nations have their own governmental sports bodies that conducts testing athletes registered part of the organization. As for what exactly gets tested, why it should and how often are again beyond the scope of this paper.

⁸ International Olympic Committee (2014) "The Fight Against Doping and Promotion of Athletes." January 7, 2014. Accessed August 16, 2015.

III. CONCLUSION

It can be a challenge to objectively classify what is fair and unfair when it comes to the disabled's participation in sports competitions. Ultimately, we ask ourselves what exactly is the point of sports competitions to begin with. Having defined it as measuring the unaided human's performance level, we then tried to define what it means to be a human being from a biological perspective. Understanding that homo sapiens as a species have a clearly distinct form that is mostly uniform, an argument can be made against augmentations that alter the natural anatomy of the human. When artificial limbs are implanted that are atypical of the mass population, and when in cases they might not require as much effort and training, a case can be made against disabled people's participation in such circumstances.

Here is a short video that I thought you might enjoy. I was not courageous enough to share it in our final class but I thought it was quite on topic. Gets a little cheesy at the end but brings up relevant issues we discussed in our last class. Thanks for the short but memorable term!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bfr053KdD6w>

Bibliography

- ¹ Pink, Brian. (2008) "Defining Sport and Physical Activity, a Conceptual Model.", 138-150.
- ² Benditt, T. M. (2007) "Normality, Disease and Enhancement." Establishing Medical Reality: Philosophy and Medicine pp. 13 - 21.
- ³ Smith, T. M., P. Tafforeau, D. J. Reid, R. Grun, S. Eggins, M. Boutakiout, and J.-J. Hublin. "From The Cover: Earliest Evidence Of Modern Human Life History In North African Early Homo Sapiens." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2007, 6128-133.
- ⁴ Boorse, C. (1977) "Health as a Theoretical Concept." <http://philpapers.org/rec/BOOHAA>. Accessed August 15, 2015
- ⁵ Amundson, R. (2000) "*Against Normal Function*." <http://www.uhh.hawaii.edu/~ronald/pubs/2000-against-normal-function.pdf>. Accessed August 16, 2015.
- ⁶ Nordenfelt, L. (1992) "On the notions of disability and handicap".<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2397.1993.tb00011.x/epdf>. Accessed August 16, 2015.
- ⁷ International Olympic Committee (2014) "The Fight Against Doping and Promotion of Athletes." January 7, 2014. Accessed August 16, 2015.