

MODERN SPORT AND THE PROBLEM OF OTHERS

Masami Sekine, Kenji Ishigaki*

Okayama University, Okayama, Japan

*Niigata University, Niigata City, Japan

Submitted in September, 2005

The sports issue which we wanted to examine in this paper, by proposing the viewpoint of others, is the way in which sympathies and common understandings are established among athletes. Our discussion of others does not address deontological issues (we should respect our competitors, for instance) or technical issues (how we ensure equality among athletes, for instance). We want to present the following point as our conclusion: "The foundation of sport ethics lies in body-based commonality with others."

Keywords: Sport ethics, others, body.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, our interest is in the so-called "modern sports" that have been widely played throughout the world in modern history. The scale of the dissemination or degree to which a given modern sport is widespread is now comparable only to that of religions. International sports matches and events such as the Olympic Games and World Cups have been organized despite cultural and political differences. We can view the internationalization of sport as an opportunity to promote peace for all humankind, as demonstrated by the Olympic Games. On the other hand, however, it is true that in the context of modern sports the words "fair play" and "sportsmanship" seem to have lost their original meaning. While we think that sport provides us with universal values for humankind, we face growing ethical crises. As a typical example of an ethical crisis in modern sport, we can point to the issue of doping (the use of drugs) (Sekine & Hata, 2004). Morgan pointed out that "the use of some alleged performance enhancing drugs and practices in sports raises a number of surprisingly complex ethical problems" (Morgan, 2003).

A shocking case of doping occurred in the 2004 Olympics held in Athens. The athlete who had won the men's hammer throw was forced to relinquish his gold medal due to a doping violation. Koji Murofushi, who was awarded the gold medal as a result of the man's disqualification, while welcoming the decision, was saddened by the use of drugs by athletes.

Reflecting on this, Cathy Freeman, who won the gold medal in the women's 400 meters at the Sydney Olympics, said in an interview for a Japanese newspaper: "I was disillusioned by doping violations. If someone's

taking drugs, that does not just hurt sport, but also tarnishes the efforts and reputations of athletes who want to compete fairly like us. It will be very sad if people, looking at gold-medalists, start to feel suspicious about their use of drugs. That is part of the reason I retired last year" (Yomiuri Newspaper, August 30th, 2004, original in Japanese).

Doping issues imply that people's universal morality is weak; ethical requirements based on fairness have not resolved the doping problems.

In this study, we will consider the issue of otherness in the context of sport by taking a neutral viewpoint on the universality of human nature. The problem of otherness in the context of sport leads to the clarification of the foundation of sport ethics. To develop our discussion, I will cite and examine Eassom's paper "Sport, Solidarity, and the Expanding Circle" as an important work previously done on this subject.

Moral isolation and others – examination of Eassom's paper

The reason why others remain others is that they are viewed as separate beings from us. The philosophies that take the problem of otherness as their main focus emphasize this tendency. Eassom, referring to this tendency as isolationism, explains that: "One consequence of this isolationism is a withdrawal from the belief that we can make judgements about other cultures and societies, but we can only criticize our own" (Eassom, 1997). Eassom criticizes the attitude by calling it "moral isolationism": Moral isolationism forbids us to hold any opinions on these matters, precisely because we can never understand them. At the extremes of relativism, fundamental-

ist Muslims and radical feminists, for example, argue that “others” can never comprehend their viewpoint for the very reason of their “otherness” (Eassom, 1997).

Eassom’s analysis is very interesting in that it shows us a possibility to understand others by overcoming the cultural differences between them and us. We wonder, however, if athletes, or at least top-level athletes who compete in the Olympic Games, have overcome these types of differences before they participate in the games. It is fair to say that these international sports competitions are only possible because they have overcome differences of the sort. Each athlete attempts to better his or her achievements. In judo, which was developed specifically in our Japanese culture, contestants from various other cultures, such as European and Islamic cultures, now compete with each other; on the other hand, many Japanese athletes now turn to British-born modern sports, including soccer or football, for competition and fulfillment. This takes us back to the starting point – that is, if we look at sport as a phenomenon, we notice that cultural differences have been overcome; the universality of sports has been achieved on the level of the phenomenon. However, has universality also been achieved in the ethical relations between people? In the current situation where the use of drugs has spread so widely, athletes distrust each other. In facing circumstances like this, we start to wonder whether the problems of self and others are more serious at the individual level. This is our issue here.

Sartre examined the relationship between self and others on the level of individuals, and developed his theory in his book “Being and nothingness” (*L’Être et le Néant*) (Sartre, 1959). As is well known, he emphasizes adversarial relations with others and uses the concept of “look” to elaborate on this theme. This type of adversarial relation can be utilized effectively in discussing sports competitions, but not in the ethical contexts under discussion right now.

Compared to moral isolationism, hope still exists in Murofushi and Freeman’s above mentioned embarrassment on doping problems; because embarrassment, distress and criticism of others imply the potential for ethical relationships with others. As long as we take the position of moral isolationism, we cannot expect solidarity or community to be developed. In the cases of Murofushi and Freeman, we can notice that they shared a basic attitude toward solidarity with other athletes or the sports community in general. Presumably, they wished to compete with other athletes in a fair sports world and to compete fairly with other athletes who are human beings just like me.

How is solidarity possible, then? We will attempt to answer that question in the next section.

Solidarity in sports – the possibility of “us” through conversation and its limits

Many theories and interpretations have been proposed regarding ethical attitudes in general. One of the ethical/moral theories traditionally influential in western cultures is the ethics of Kant. The main feature of Kant’s ethics, which is taken to be the best example of this type of ethics, is to consider a human as a “character”. This “character” is inherent universally in all human beings, and comprises what we call the “human essence” (Kant, 1952). Rorty (1989) and Eassom (1997) are skeptical about this line of argument.

When athletes wish to compete fairly with others without the use of drugs, each athlete bears a responsibility to the greater sports community. That is because an act of doping affects not only a single, specific athlete, but also all the athletes in the game in which he or she participates. Certainly an athletes’ desire for (and awareness of the importance of) fair competitions is not an isolated one, but it is doubtful that athletes’ desire to have (awareness of the importance of) fair competitions comes from the “human essence”. If such desire (awareness) does not come from the “human essence” and is not isolated, how is it mutually recognized among athletes? It seems to us that at least some sort of “solidarity” has been achieved.

To continue our discussion, it is very helpful to look at Rorty’s and Eassom’s analyses. Rorty (1989) explains the idea of “solidarity” as follows: “The traditional philosophical way of spelling out what we mean by ‘human solidarity’ is to say that there is something within each of us – our essential humanity, which resonates to the presence of this same thing in other human beings. But that solidarity is not thought of as recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather, it is thought of as the ability to see more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation – the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of ‘us’.”

Given Rorty’s discussion, Eassom attempts to apply the idea of solidarity to the issues of sport: “...it would seem particularly promising to pursue the idea that sport itself might be just one sort of ‘conversation’ that enables the extension of a sense of ‘us’ to enlarge our communities and strengthen our feeling of ‘solidarity’.”

The key notion in Rorty’s and Eassom’s discussions here is “conversation”. While the notion of conversation is applicable to all human beings and may be effective in discussing their activities in general, is it also effective when considering ethical issues in sports? Was it by “conversation” that the hammer thrower, Murofushi, developed the sense of “fellow-competitor” for the athlete

who was disqualified due to a doping violation? Furthermore, is it by “conversation” that spectators develop the sense of “us” (the same human beings) with the athletes they are watching?

The body and others in sports – the origin of “us”

Our discussion in this section and later will center around the following questions: How is the sense or awareness of “us” established among athletes participating in a game? And what are the grounds by which the sense or awareness of “us” is established among these athletes?

Given the reality of games and competitions, it is doubtful that there is a human universality. Eassom and Rorty are right on this point. At least in modern sports, we see the reality to which Kant’s “practical reason” cannot be applied. If so, do we not have to abandon any discussions to establish a human universality? We thus have to seek an origin of “us” that is established among athletes on more specific levels than human universality.

This question will have great significance for our discussion. Eassom stresses the importance of “conversation” in building solidarity among those with various cultural backgrounds, and argues that “conversation” is vital in the establishment of “us”. What we are considering here is the mode of existence of human beings that makes “conversation” possible. Our hypothesis is not that “conversation” establishes solidarity, but that our mode of existence itself, which makes “conversation” possible, can serve as shared ethical ground for solidarity.

A Japanese philosopher, Watsuji (1889–1960), defines ethics as human relations. In his seminal work “Ethics” (Watsuji, 1962) writes that “the place of ethical problems is not in the consciousness of isolated individuals but in the relation between individuals”. What is remarkable in Watsuji’s work is that he explains ethics in terms of relationships. He argues that ethical problems should not be construed as issues of individuals’ subjectivity but as issues of intersubjectivity. We take this point to be fundamentally important. It is not that an individual (subject) extends the range of intersubject (“we”) through conversation; it is rather that “conversation” is possible because humans are naturally intersubjective.

Let us be more specific. In the above mentioned case of Murofushi, was his sense of solidarity built by conversation with his rivals all over the world? Was he bothered by the betrayal of trust, trust that had been established through this conversation? Do athletes not have the potential to strengthen human solidarity simply through participation in the human activity of “throwing a hammer farther” even without conversation with many rivals?

It is true that the mode of existence of humans is subjective, but it is intersubjective at the same time. How is the intersubjectivity possible?

Merleau-Ponty (2000, first published in 1962) proposes the notions of world and perception as important concepts in discussing the relationship between self and others. He explains the way a self interacts with others in the world as follows: “I experience my own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behaviour and a certain world, and I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world; now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world.”

Based on Merleau-Ponty’s line of thought, we will develop my argument in the following fashion.

We all have in our body an immanent invariant (inherent constant) that is common to both self and others. This invariant (constant) gives my body and others commonality. This immanent invariant (inherent constant) establishes a sense of “us”. The recognition of “us” therefore is formed only among physically defined human beings. Though we cannot develop a sense of “us” toward a dog in a pet-shop, we can have a sense of “us” (i.e. “we human beings”) for a foreigner with a totally different cultural background. Generally speaking, when two people perceptually discern one color from another, they establish a sense of “us” as human beings who are able to discern those colors. Perception is different from sensation; the usage of “sensation” is limited to stimuli and responses. Perceptions, on the other hand, constitute the world as the basis of human consciousness. In the world of perception, we live in the same world as others. The recognition of “us” is the experience obtained from perception.

On what level can human activities to participate in sport (including the above mentioned Murofushi’s) prepare the ethical ground, the sense of “us”, then?

The constitution of the world by the body as the origin of ethics

The issue of the body is crucial when we discuss sport ethics. It is wrong to consider only human “consciousness” in discussing the problems of fair play and doping. Our argument thus must take “the body of others” as an important theoretical component.

We must go back to Merleau-Ponty’s discussion in order to examine the origin of “us”. Unlike Sartre’s, Merleau-Ponty’s position on others stresses a reconcilable relationship. The above explained perception serves as the ground for his argument.

Let us illustrate a common experience obtained from perception. To give an example using hammer throwing, perception is to experience the intensity of training or

the difficulty of competition based on the sensations we have after we throw a hammer or we observe the depth of the field. To give an example using tennis, perception is to experience the world of tennis based on the sensations we have when we see a ball's spin or speed or we move around the court. An athlete or player experiences others' worlds based on his (her) own perceptual experiences. By experiencing others' worlds as his (her) own, an athlete or player can imagine and understand her competitors' efforts, pains and fatigue. The common feelings and sense of solidarity among competitors thus become possible through physically obtained perceptual experiences. In sport, it is not the pre-determined human essence but the physically obtained perceptual world that makes solidarity among athletes possible.

The use of drugs destroys this world of perception. If an athlete takes stimulants that changes his or her sensation of the field or tennis court, we can hardly say he or she is considered to be in the same world as other athletes. The deprivation of the perceptual world by the use of drugs means the loss of this common basis for athletes. An athlete without this common basis is no better than a robot or a life form of another species. Those athletes who use drugs fail to be candidates for solidarity.

CONCLUSION

The sports issue, which we wanted to examine in this paper, by proposing the viewpoint of others, is the way in which sympathies and common understandings are established among athletes. Our discussion of others does not address deontological issues (we should respect our competitors, for instance) or technical issues (how we ensure equality among athletes, for instance).

We want to present the following point as our conclusion. The foundation of sport ethics lies in body-based commonality with others. True, it might be too easy an approach to uncritically seek commonality without considering the "otherness" in others, especially since in sport we normally see the adversarial relation, which was explicated by Sartre in terms of "look". But we should notice that a competition couldn't be held if it is impossible for participants in the competition to have common understanding. Murofushi and Freeman's disappointment at the use of drugs was caused by the betrayal of their trust in other athletes. The origin of ethics toward others lies in the physical commonality obtained from perceptual experiences. That is to say, what keeps the athletes who compete with each other in an ethical relationship is thus the physical commonality. In this sense, the problem of others is closely linked to the establishment of the sports world itself.

REFERENCES

- Eassom, S. (1997). Sport, solidarity, and the expanding circle. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 24, 79–98.
- Kant, E. (1952). The critique of practical reason. In R. M. Hutchins (Ed.), *Great books of the western world* (pp. 291–361). Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica. (Original work published in 1788.)
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2000). *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge. (Original work published in 1945.)
- Morgan, L. (2003). Enhancing performance in sports: What is morally permissible? In J. Boxill (Ed.), *Sports ethics* (pp. 182–188). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sartre, J. P. (1959). *Being and nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press. (Original work published in 1943.)
- Sekine, M., & Hata, T. (2004). The crisis of modern sport and the dimension of achievement for its conquest. *International Journal of Sport and Health Science*, 2, 180–186.
- Watsuji, T. (1962). *Rinrigaku*. [Ethics.] Tokyo: Iwanami Syoten.
- Yomiuri Newspaper (2004). August 30th, original in Japanese.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science who awarded the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B), No.16300196, 2004–2006 that made this study possible.

MODERNÍ SPORT A PROBLÉM OSTATNÍCH (Souhrn anglického textu)

Otázka, kterou jsme chtěli v tomto příspěvku zkoumat, se týká způsobu, jakým se mezi atlety utváří soucit a společné porozumění. Naše diskuse o ostatních se neobrací k deontologickým problémům (např. měli bychom respektovat naše soupeře) či technickým problémům (např. jak zajistit rovnost mezi atlety). Následující bod chceme předložit jako svůj závěr: „Základ sportovní etiky leží v tělesně založeném společenství s ostatními.“

Klíčová slova: sportovní etika, ostatní, tělo.

Dr. Masami Sekine



Okayama University
3-1-1 Tsushimanaka
Okayama
7008530 Japan

Education and previous work experience

1996 – Ph.D., University of Tsukuba,
1998 – Associate professor for sport philosophy, Okayama University.

First-line publication

Sekine, M., & Takayuki, H. (2004), The crisis of modern sport and the dimension of achievement for its conquest. *International Journal of Sport and Health Science*, 2, 180–186.
