



# Cricket and Moral Commendation

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*As evidenced in recent literature in moral philosophy, commending actions on their propensity to develop enduring moral traits is not the province of the virtue theorist alone. For however we understand the moral goals of human beings and the nature of right action we recognize that a temperate, just or beneficent person is more likely to conform to the demands of morality than one lacking in these virtues. If this idea is used as a standard for assessing the worth of activities generally and engaging in sporting activity particularly it becomes clear that the highest level of athletic engagement, that is, professional sports, is often morally problematic. The not uncommon phenomenon of athletic underperformance once a sizable, secure contract has been achieved, the expanding quantity and severity of verbal abuse directed at officials and other athletes, as well as the increasing incidence of on-field violence, raise concern that developing moral virtues is no longer a goal of professional sporting activities.*

*This conclusion, however, is not a result of the concept of sport itself or even the idea of professional sport. Both amateur and professional sport are capable of promoting moral development in their participants by making possession of certain virtues a condition for success in that activity. So the problem lies not in the conceptual details of sporting activity but rather in the formulation or prosecution of the rules and expectations governing the sport in question. The essay argues that not only is sport capable of being a worthwhile activity but that there is a sport that in fact generally meets the conditions for being a worthwhile activity, namely professional cricket. In defending this claim it is shown that it is not an essential feature of professional cricket that garners our moral commendation but rather a complex set of contingent features: the Laws of Cricket, the enforcement of those laws and the historico-social context in which the game is set.*

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of right action we recognize that a temperate, just or beneficent person is more likely to conform to the demands of morality than one lacking in these virtues. If this idea is used as a standard for assessing the worth of activities generally and engaging in sporting activity particularly it becomes clear that the highest level of athletic engagement, that is, professional sports, is often morally problematic. The not uncommon phenomenon of athletic underperformance once a sizable, secure contract has been achieved, the expanding quantity and severity of verbal abuse directed at officials and other athletes, as well as the increasing incidence of on-field violence, raise concern that developing moral virtues is no longer a goal of professional sporting activities. This conclusion, however, is not a result of the concept of sport itself or even the idea of professional sport. Both amateur and professional sport are capable of promoting moral development in their participants by making possession of certain virtues a condition for success in that activity. So the problem lies not in the conceptual details of sporting activity but rather in the formulation or prosecution of the rules and expectations governing the sport in question, and the behaviour of those participating in the sport. In this essay, I argue that not only is sport capable of being a worthwhile activity but that there is a sport that in fact generally meets the conditions for being a worthwhile activity, namely professional cricket. In defending this claim I show that what primarily garners our moral commendation is a complex set of contingent features that are associated with professional cricket: the rules of cricket, the enforcement of those rules and the historico-social context in which the game is set. The case is also supplemented by examining features intrinsic to a particular form of professional cricket, namely Test cricket, that make possession of certain virtuous character traits necessary for success in the sport.

### The Tom Brown Argument

One might advance the argument that what makes professional cricket an activity worthy of moral commendation is its embodiment of the Victorian values one finds in works of fiction such as Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* and the (sanitized) persona of W.G. Grace. Though it is no exaggeration to state that a remnant of these values persist in the modern game, it would require a heroic effort, and more likely an unwillingness to examine the present state of cricket to discover that times have indeed changed. [2] To those well aware of professional cricket's present condition, one might in fact be surprised that cricket is being advanced as a model for worthwhile sporting activity given sordid events in cricket's past including the Bodyline series and recent concerns about match-fixing, sledging and throwing. Nevertheless, professional cricket is a worthwhile activity even when we discount a romanticist interpretation of the game, and accept that cricket does have its problems.

What, however, makes it worthwhile? At the outset of the essay I claimed that cricket, like any other activity should be evaluated on the basis of whether it provides an opportunity for its participants to develop moral virtues – and not just any opportunity, but whether it has a propensity to develop these traits in its participants. This raises at least two important questions. First, we should determine whether our

standard for moral commendation of activities generally is a plausible standard. In answering this question we should be clear that the standard not only offers an adequate means for determining whether an activity is worthwhile but that the standard can reasonably be applied to sporting activities; for it is no good to have a moral standard which makes any form of sporting activity illegitimate or worthless, independent of empirical evidence – at least I will assume this. Once this standard has been defended we can turn to the second question: whether professional cricket meets the standard for being a worthwhile activity.

### **On What is Best for Human Beings**

The reasoning behind the claim that moral commendation attends to those activities that have a tendency to cultivate moral virtues in its participants begins with a fairly innocuous claim.

- (1) If an activity helps human beings achieve what is best for them, then that activity is worthwhile.

What makes the claim innocuous is that the idea of what is best for a human being is left open to the moral philosopher to fill out the appropriate details. So utilitarian, deontologist and virtue theorist alike can each accept this premise though disagreeing about what ultimately is best for human beings and how one theoretically reaches that ultimate point. All that needs to be said to defend the plausibility of (1) is to restrict what is best for human beings to something that would make human beings better-off collectively speaking, understanding this achievement as tending towards the attainment of an optimal state of affairs, and conceive of these optimal states of affairs as long-term goods. [3] It is worth taking each of these restrictions in turn so that truth of the premise is clearly established.

In considering activities or practices that help to secure what is best for human beings, we must ensure that attaining what is best is achieved through moral means, at least if the kind of worth attending to an activity or practice is moral worth. If (1) is restricted to individual human beings, it becomes clear that an individual might be capable of achieving what is best for themselves without engaging in moral activities or practices. Though this is indeed a possibility it is fairly clear that there are few individuals this is true of on a consistent basis and more importantly, it is unlikely that a community or large body of human beings would be better off for the immoral dealings of certain of its members. But even this can be conceded to an objector, since the target of (1) is not individual human beings and their actions, but human beings collectively.

When viewing (1) in terms of a group of human beings, it would appear to be the exception rather than the rule that a group's engaging in immoral practices would produce what is best for humans as a whole. Even if a minority is well-served by a policy of apartheid such a policy does not generally suit the long-term interest of the minority group and certainly produces a sub-optimal state of affairs for those subjected to the discriminatory policy. Once we recognize that we are talking about

a sufficiently large group of human beings in claim (1) it becomes more apparent that moral means are required for the achievement of what is best, and that the worth of achieving this end is dependent upon these means.

This last observation is strengthened when we consider that when talking about what is best for human beings generally speaking, the goods under consideration in claim (1) are not short-term but long-term goods. Though it might produce short-term satisfaction to make good tasting, high-cholesterol, sugary foods and beverages available to a community at low cost, surely this is not a policy that is designed for what might be described as being in the best interests of the community or humanity at large. If we are interested in achieving what is best for human beings, we must generally select goals that have the long-term interests of human beings in mind, and choose means that tend to lead to the achievement of those goals. Since it appears, following the argument above, that the best means for these goals appear to be moral means, then (1) is established.

The next step in the argument is to specify those activities or practices that enable human beings to achieve what is best for them. While there may be several ways in which human beings can achieve what is best, most moral theorists would agree that if an activity generally enables people to cultivate character traits that result in doing what is morally right, then there is something fundamentally sound about that activity in a moral sense. We can express this idea with:

- (2) If an activity promotes the cultivation of a virtuous character then that activity helps human beings achieve what is best for them.

If there are lingering doubts about the truth of (2), consider the following case: suppose we identify a practice or activity that fails to help human beings achieve what is best for them. There are two possible explanations why this might happen. It could be that the activity or practice itself contributes to producing a situation where human beings do not achieve what is best for them, or alternatively, there is some factor extrinsic to the activity or practice that produces this failure. The latter category of explanation is uninteresting, for our purposes, since an extrinsic factor of this sort would appear to get in the way of any attempt to aid human beings in achieving what is best for them. As defined the latter category of explanation finds fault with factors completely outside of the practice or activity in question, in such a way that no blame could be assigned to the activity or practice itself. In this case the activity or practice is stripped of any relevant causal power in determining the (failed) prospects of achieving what is best for human beings, a situation which we would find very surprising. So the best explanation for the failure to secure what is best for human beings, is that there is some aspect of the activity or practice that was insufficient for this goal. The interesting question becomes whether one could engage in an activity that promotes the cultivation of a virtuous character and still discover that the activity failed to help human beings achieve what is best for them. I think we would admit that (2) will not hold for all conceivable cases, but does hold for all but those cases of dire emergency or other highly unusual circumstances. If we recognize that cultivating

virtues such as justice, courage and temperance are relevant for producing an optimal state of affairs for human beings (even on a Hobbesian account of human nature) we should have no difficulty in establishing (2) which makes a stronger claim, that is, that an activity or practice does not merely cultivate one or two virtues in human beings but all of the virtues. If this reasoning is sound then the reader should be willing to admit (2)'s weaker correlate:

- (3) If an activity promotes developing virtuous traits then it promotes the cultivation of a virtuous character.

What makes (3) an important claim, as we will see, is that it makes our job of determining the worth of activities easier. While it would be best to show that for any given activity it promoted the development of a virtuous character, the amount of evidence necessary to support that claim would be in proportion to the number of virtues sufficient for having a virtuous character. Even if such evidence could be obtained, one expects that a single essay on the activity in question would be unlikely to settle the matter. However, since we would admit that possessing some of the virtues is sufficient for developing a virtuous character, if we can accomplish the easier task of showing that an activity tends to cultivate particular virtues, we can show that the activity is relevant to establishing something of great worth. In other words, once (3) is established, following (1) and (2) we can claim

- (4) If an activity promotes developing virtuous traits then that activity is worthwhile.

However, we should pause before settling immediately on this conclusion. While (4) can be conceded, it must follow from a careful interpretation of what (3) amounts to, specifically what is meant by the phrase 'an activity [that] promotes developing virtuous traits'. We certainly don't want stalking to count as an activity that promotes developing virtuous traits, though it may indeed produce the virtue of patience in an individual, since we recognize that it also cultivates undesirable dispositions that are incompatible with the cultivation of a virtuous character. This means that an adequate interpretation of (3) will understand the idea of an activity that develops virtuous traits as one that excludes cases where in developing a trait or set of traits which are morally virtuous, the activity also cultivates moral vices. It appears that rather than offering an interpretation of (3) it would be better to revise it, in such a way that it handles offending cases like stalking while making the promotion of virtues a sufficient condition for cultivating virtuous character. For this purpose I offer

- (3') If an activity promotes developing virtuous traits while ensuring that those participating in the activity do not also promote the possession of moral deficiencies, then the activity promotes the cultivation of a virtuous character.

From (3') and (1) and (2), we can then conclude that an activity is worthwhile so long as it promotes developing virtuous traits in the right way, that is, the way specified in the antecedent of (3').

## The Role of Sport

But enough of our theoretical discussion of virtue, optimal states of affairs and worthwhile activities. The question most readers are interested in is whether any sporting activity is worthwhile in a moral sense, and in particular whether we can say that professional cricket is a legitimate moral endeavour. As we established in the previous section we have a standard that enables us to offer a positive or negative answer to this question: that is, does professional cricket promote developing virtuous traits?

Abstracting away from empirical matters and answering the question from an ideal perspective, we could confidently say that professional cricket, like any sporting activity, promotes developing virtuous traits. For, as we are wont to say, success in sport generally requires developing virtuous traits like temperance, justice, fidelity and courage. Except for the individual with precocious talent, the athlete needs to engage in the discipline of training, a process that cultivates temperance and perhaps even courage. Furthermore in activities involving teams of players, it would seem that success as measured by winning would require members of the team subordinating their own self-interests for the good of the team. But if one generally needs to develop virtuous traits in order to achieve success in an activity then we can say those traits are promoted by that activity. Hence it would appear, at least from an ideal perspective, that sport in general, and cricket in particular is an activity that promotes developing virtuous traits.

Such an argument, however, comes perilously close to being a Tom Brown argument: one that engages in armchair theorizing to advance romantic ideals – that may or may not have some basis in the game – but is short on empirical evidence and long on rhetoric. Surely, no one should be satisfied with that kind of argument when an ample amount of information about how professional cricket is in fact played and governed is available to the theorist. Thus, to have any reasonable justification in answering our question affirmatively we must look at these empirical matters to see whether the standard for legitimacy applies.

It is clear that some have their doubts. Even a writer sympathetic to the sport, Derek Birley, expresses scepticism that the game itself is capable of promoting the development of enduring moral traits:

A ball game, no matter how elaborate, is ethically neutral: any moral qualities it exhibits are those brought to it by the players. The Victorian establishment's view of cricket needs the corrective of Swift's intellectual perception, and beyond this the old Pacific islander's wisdom. [4]

The perception of Swift that Birley mentions in the quotation is the idea that most human diversions imitate fighting, a reference that becomes clearer once we see that Birley uses 'the Pacific islander's wisdom' to extend Swift's observation to make an important value judgment: that human beings love each other more when they are members of factions that engage in socially accepted forms of conflict with other factions. While Birley is correct to claim that ball games in and of themselves are morally neutral activities, [5] and is right to off-set Victorian optimism with observations from

other quarters that have a negative undertone, it is an exaggeration to rest the moral worthiness of sporting activity on the participants themselves.

What Birley misses is a kernel of truth that Tom Brown states in extolling cricket: 'But it's more than a game. It's an institution.' [6] Though in the eighteenth and for most of the nineteenth century, claims that cricket was an institution would seem surprising given the lack of consistent administration over the laws of the game, and failure to have a central body with any abiding disciplinary power, it is no exaggeration to call cricket an institution now. Moral qualities attend to laws, their enforcement and the general administration of an organized sport. Thus, if we are to assess the moral legitimacy of professional cricket we should not look merely at its playing participants but the laws and institutions that govern it.

Earlier I argued for a claim that there is a way in which we could show that an activity was worthwhile, notably

- (4) If an activity promotes developing virtuous traits then that activity is worthwhile.

I also claimed in the context of my 'Tom Brown' argument that

- (5) If one generally needs to develop virtuous traits in order to achieve success in an activity then we can say those traits are promoted by that activity.

Despite identifying some important problems in the Tom Brown argument, those problems are ones independent from the claim made in (5). The problem with that argument was its adoption of an ideal standpoint where evidence from actual cricketing activity was overlooked or ignored to generate a conclusion, from relatively sound theoretical principles like (5). Where my considered argument will depart from the Tom Brown argument then is not in its selection of theoretical principles but in its application and testing of them to the case of cricket. So the crucial question is whether one generally needs to develop virtuous traits in order to achieve success in cricket.

If we look at actual evidence one might respond negatively. Birley himself gives a qualifiedly negative answer by citing the case of Geoffrey Boycott. In response to a claim by Tom Brown's Companion Arthur that cricket teaches discipline and reliance on others in such a way that it is 'an unselfish game', Birley comments

Well, perhaps it ought < to be an unselfish game > , and it very often is. But equally, when played by a technically accomplished but self-centered player it manifestly is not. In modern times Boycott is the obvious example of a player who had claims to being the greatest English batsman of his time, but was renowned amongst his colleagues as a selfish cricketer. No one doubted he was a cricketer, however, and a good one at that. [7]

The example of Boycott is well chosen, for here it appears that we have a cricketer that meets any reasonable standard of individual success but who possessed at least one important moral vice in achieving that success, and perhaps possessed more. But even if we admit Boycott did possess a character flaw, this example by itself does not damage the case that professional cricket does require people to develop virtuous traits in

order to achieve success, for we might qualify what is meant by success in claim (5). No one would dispute that Boycott was an accomplished cricketer who achieved great personal success as a batsman. But one might reasonably dispute that Boycott succeeded in the important sense relevant in (5); that is, as a player whose contributions resulted in the success of his team. If Boycott's individual success failed to translate into team victories then it would appear that Boycott did not really succeed after all.

At first glance this might appear a rather ridiculous statement to claim that Boycott's individual success failed to make an important contribution to his team's success, since Boycott's England teams compiled a fairly good record in the Tests in which he participated:

**Table 1** England's Test Record with Boycott

| Matches | Won | Lost | Drawn |
|---------|-----|------|-------|
| 108     | 35  | 20   | 53    |

Not counting the drawn Tests, this gives Boycott's England team a very respectable 0.571 winning percentage. Boycott's contribution to team success is even more remarkable when you examine his records in all Test matches played:

**Table 2** Boycott's Batting Performance in Matches Won, Drawn or Lost

| Result | Matches | Runs | Average |
|--------|---------|------|---------|
| Won    | 35      | 2950 | 54.63   |
| Drawn  | 53      | 4068 | 52.83   |
| Lost   | 20      | 1096 | 28.10   |

This statistical data, together with the fact that England never lost a match when Boycott hit a century or greater in an innings, appears to indicate that England's fortunes depended a great deal on how well Boycott performed with the bat. Add the fact that Boycott averaged 50 or better in only eight Test matches England lost, or 7 per cent of Test matches that Boycott participated in, makes it look unlikely that Boycott's alleged selfishness hurt England's fortunes in any way.

While the numbers are impressive, we should be hesitant to draw any final conclusion about the relationship of Boycott's batting performances to England success until the matches comprising the data set are examined more carefully. One good reason to proceed with caution is a comparison between matches where Boycott participated and England didn't lose versus those matches where England didn't win.

**Table 3** Boycott's Batting Performance in Matches Won v. Matches Not Won

| Result   | Matches | Runs | Average |
|----------|---------|------|---------|
| Not Lost | 88      | 7018 | 53.57   |
| Not Won  | 73      | 5164 | 44.51   |

Here the contrast between Boycott's performances when not-losing versus those when not-winning are not quite as drastic. In fact, these statistics suggest that while England tended to do better when Boycott had a good day at the crease, matters were not so cut and dry as our original picture seemed to suggest. The very fact that England went on to win 18 or slightly more than half of the matches Boycott was involved in, when he averaged less than 50 runs for the match further clouds the case that England's success depended on Boycott's.

The bottom line of this statistical exercise seems to be two things: first, deeper analysis of the statistics, by examining individual matches, is necessary for us to reach any confident conclusion about Boycott's contributions to England's success. And it may be that having undertaken this examination that we find that we cannot generate a reliable enough picture without appealing to historical accounts or anecdotal evidence about the relevance of a particular Boycott performance to the match. Second, even if the statistical analysis, supplemented or not, shows that England's success did depend on the success of a selfish Boycott, this finding would still be insufficient to refute (5), even if we assume that the majority of Boycott's innings were motivated by selfish ambition. For even on an uncharitable interpretation of Boycott's playing career no one would deny that he possessed some redeeming moral qualities, and in fact any reasonable critic would be forced to admit that Boycott possessed some virtuous traits that were essential to his success (and thereby, perhaps, his team's), for example, industry, honesty and technical discipline.

However, if the Boycott case cannot provide counterevidence to (5) what case reasonably could? One answer would be to provide a case where a participant fails to possess redeeming moral qualities that could be identified as enduring positive moral traits, but still finds personal success that results in team success on a regular basis. Though we might find cases where an individual and his or her team enjoys limited short term success, it is very difficult to find cases in professional cricket corresponding to this more stringent standard, if such cases exist in the sport at all. The reason for this difficulty is that it seems that we could always find some positive moral quality in a successful player that we might reasonably argue corresponds to an enduring moral trait in that person's character. Perhaps the idea that the player is successful in the sense required by (5) establishes by fiat that the player is virtuous in some important moral respect. If this is in fact true, then the proposed standard for locating counterevidence to (5) is inadequate since it assumes what it sets out to prove.

In fact I do not think the proposed standard begs the question since I believe it is possible to provide a case where a participant in an activity, though perhaps not

cricket, does not have redeeming moral qualities of an enduring kind but still finds personal success that results in team success on a regular basis. Perhaps the best case is the Hall of Fame baseball players Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth. Very few people dispute that either Cobb or Ruth were the best players of their generation, or that they continue to be among the best who have ever played the game. Furthermore, it is very clear that without Cobb the Tigers would not have had the success they did, nor would the Yankees have been the dominant team they were without Ruth.

Yet both Cobb and Ruth are individuals for whom it is very difficult to generate rationalizations to explain away their moral vices. Cobb's record of violence on and off the playing field is notorious. By his own admission Cobb claimed, 'I also left a few marks of my own around the league. In staking my claim, people were bound to get hurt.' [8] This is a telling admission, but another Cobb quotation makes an even stronger claim against (5)'s applicability to Major League Baseball, by linking unjust and intemperate behaviour with success:

But I *did* retaliate. That I freely admit. If any player took unfair advantage of me, my one thought was to strike back as quickly and effectively as I could and put the fear of God into him. Let the other fellow fire the first shot, and he needed to be on the *qui vive* from then on. For I went looking for him. And when I found him, he usually regretted his act – and rarely repeated it. I commend this procedure to all young players who are of the aggressive type. The results are most satisfactory. [9]

Ruth, though perhaps a kindlier person (which in comparison with Cobb was no difficult feat), was anything but disciplined, and as one columnist noted 'could commit five of the seven deadly sins before noon and hit three home runs by dinner'. [10]

Along with Ruth's well-documented reputation for womanizing, drunkenness and gluttony off the field was his self-absorbed behaviour on the field manifested in his lack of discipline and industry (which interestingly is cited by Cobb himself as a reason he disliked Ruth) and his general disinterest in his team-mates. In regards to the latter trait Brush Nash and Allan Zullo write:

On the field, Ruth was hardly the team player. Although he and Lou Gehrig were always pictured together smiling with their arms around each other, the truth was that Babe had little use for Gehrig because Lou had refused to hold out with him for more money during contract negotiations. As a result, Babe went long stretches without speaking to Lou. But at least Ruth knew who Gehrig was. Babe didn't even bother to learn the names of many of his teammates. Introduced to one player who'd been on the roster for two years, Ruth thought the player was a rookie. But Babe made sure his teammates knew he was the highest paid player in baseball. He liked to wave his paycheck under their noses and taunt them about how much he was getting compared to them. [11]

Nevertheless in spite of their character flaws, Cobb and Ruth were able to achieve enormous success as ballplayers, both for themselves and their teams. It is not surprising to find Cobb and Ruth's name sprinkled liberally throughout the individual batting records in baseball. What is remarkable is that, at least according to one of the pre-eminent baseball scholars, there has existed no player in the history of baseball

more responsible for producing winning results for their team than Cobb and Ruth. [12] If the case of Cobb and Ruth is not an anomaly it would show that possessing moral virtues was (and perhaps still is) not a requirement for achieving long-term success in baseball. Even worse, as the case of Cobb demonstrates, who admits that malevolent play was crucial to his own success in the game, it might be the case that possessing certain moral vices can incline one towards long-term success in baseball.

Admitting that Cobb and Ruth possessed exceptional talent might incline us to say that failing to possess enduring moral traits is quite unusual and allow us to skirt (5)'s claim that the activity must generally require those traits for success. But this admission would be a mistake. The fact that the institution of Major League Baseball did little to check the behaviour of either player, whether through explicit sanctioning or devising rules or conventions which would make immoral behaviour less conducive to success (for example, ejecting players who intentionally injured their opponent or forbidding entrance to the playing field to an athlete that reported to work intoxicated), indicates that Major League Baseball (at least at the time) had little interest in monitoring its star players, if doing so might impede the success (whether financial or otherwise) of the League.

Further evidence that Major League Baseball fails the standard implicit in (5) and that the cases of Ruth and Cobb is not an anomaly is bountiful. One needs only look at the popular multi-volume series of books published in the 1980s, *The Baseball Hall of Shame*, that record the vast number of cases where players, coaches and administrators display behaviour that is inconsistent with a sport interested in developing positive moral qualities. Among some of the many instances of shameful behaviour include a fistfight in 1932 between an umpire and an unspecified but large number of Chicago White Sox players, Hall of Fame pitcher Juan Marichal's famous bat-swinging assault on Los Angeles Dodgers' catcher John Roseboro, Commissioner of Baseball A.B Chandler's crooked ruling in 1947 on the Leo Durocher-Larry MacPhail case, and Red Sox star Ted Williams' continual use of obscene gestures towards fans throughout his playing career. That these cases represent just a handful of at least hundreds of incidents recorded prior to the 1990s is remarkable. What they appear to show is that even if professional baseball is a worthwhile endeavour, it is very difficult to defend its worth on the grounds that it generally requires its participants to develop virtuous traits in order to succeed in the sport. [13]

### Cricket and Moral Commendation

The contrast between Major League Baseball and professional cricket should be clear. Although books exist detailing the less attractive events in the history of cricket, [14] it is clear that a comparative reading of the history of both sports yields the conclusion that if any of the two sporting activities makes possession of virtuous traits a condition for success, that sport is cricket. But to say that cricket does a better job than baseball of meeting the conditions specified by (5) does not mean that it actually satisfies those conditions.

A better way to judge whether cricket does satisfy (5) is to determine whether the institution of cricket promotes the cultivation of enduring moral traits necessary for long-term success in the sport. The advantage of this proposal is that it does not rest its case with any single individual but judges the cricketing enterprise as a whole, making it much more difficult to offer rationalizations that success just is a sign of a person in possession of noble moral qualities, or that a particularly successful but unsavoury player offers the exception that proves the rule.

One important piece of evidence supporting the case that professional cricket does satisfy (5) is the establishment and continuing enforcement of the directives in the Preamble of the Laws of Cricket and the ICC Code of Conduct. What makes these directives important is not merely that they exist so that somehow the laws and codes themselves make cricket worthy of our moral commendation. The activity of professional cricket, while governed by the laws and codes, is only as good as the participants and how the participants' behaviour is regulated. The importance of the Preamble and Code should instead be seen as clarifying, emphasizing and demonstrating a willingness on the part of cricket administrators to ensure that players and other participants do not conduct themselves improperly. If cricket administrators had not been serious about this, much as Major League Baseball is presently dealing with doping regulations, then they could merely appeal to the pre-existing legislation in the Laws of Cricket, in particular Law 42, and shift the burden of responsibility on local administrators, umpires and captains.

Fortunately for cricket, its governing bodies did not do this. Admittedly the ICC may not have the best record in responding to crises, and may occasionally falter, such as in their dealings with the controversies surrounding the Zimbabwe Cricket Union and the Mugabe administration. Nevertheless the ICC's Code of Conduct, with its establishment of levels of offence and punishments corresponding to those offences, indicates deliberate concern and genuine willingness to both root out unfair play and promote behaviour that is morally commendatory. Furthermore, these new regulations reaffirm the morally commendatory elements that have existed through a large portion of the history of the sport, showing that those responsible for the care of the game are interested in making the development of positive moral characteristics a requirement for success in the game.

By itself, though, the legislative actions of the ICC and other boards of control are not enough to settle the case for cricket. One might in fact be concerned that administrative bodies are appealed to at all in establishing the moral merits of a sport, since they would appear to contribute nothing to the intrinsic features of the game. After all, one could reasonably ask: could not cricket exist without an administrative body? While this might make a member of the MCC indignant it appears that we could answer the question affirmatively. But if features extrinsic to the game of cricket itself appear to be used as evidence for satisfying (5), then there is little reason for thinking that something about the game of cricket itself is morally commendatory. It would appear then that we are either back to the position of Birley – that cricket is fundamentally a morally neutral activity – or the idealism of the Tom Brown argument.

The key to circumnavigating this difficulty is to make clear that the emphasis of the case for (5) is not placed on the purely legislative actions of a regulatory body, but rather the effective enforcement of laws and regulations of that body, a state of affairs that must involve more than the codification and proclamation of a new set of rules but rather a compliance with this legislation on the part of administrators, match officials and players themselves. When we examine the nature of this compliance we discover that the law-making activities of an administration are rooted in practices that are identified with cricket; practices that have their origin in the history and mythology associated with the sport and which are often identified with the label 'it's not cricket'. It is these complex socio-historical features that those involved in the game identify with, which makes laws and codes meaningful and binding. Without such a connection, the laws would lack reasonable grounding and could only be enforced through severe punitive measures.

The importance of codifying the moral ideals in the lore and history of cricket should not be minimized for it is, as we fail to see in the case in several other professional sports, an important avenue for making the possession of virtues necessary for success in sport. To see this more clearly let us return to a comparison between Major League Baseball and cricket. An examination into the history and current practices of Major League Baseball displays a routine unwillingness on the part of players, officials and administrators to either enforce their own codes, or provide means for checking immoderate behaviour when rules are not sufficiently stringent in punishing offenders or those rules are absent altogether.

One particularly notable practice in Major League Baseball is the tradition of dissent, a tradition which not only involves the failure to respect rightful authority in the person of a match official (that is, the umpire) but also weakens respect for the rules of the game. Although the Official Rules of Baseball state: 'Rule 9.02 (a) Any umpire's decision which involves judgment, such as, but not limited to, whether a batted ball is fair or foul, whether a pitch is a strike or a ball, or whether a runner is safe or out, is final. No player, manager, coach or substitute shall object to any such judgment decisions', players, managers and team officials have routinely flouted this law, since the beginning of professional baseball, in ways that a cricketing audience would find extreme. [15] In fact, to the casual baseball fan, it comes as a surprise to find that Rule 9.02 (a) even exists, except as a ban on physically assaulting an umpire.

It is a case like this one, in conjunction with baseball's failure to address the severe doping problem among players and the not unusual number of on-field brawls between players and staff of opposing teams, that indicate something inherently problematic about the institution of Major League Baseball: particularly, that traditions and practices that are in contravention to the rules of the game are tolerated and in some cases encouraged. Thus we see Major League Baseball condoning behaviours we would generally associate with moral vices: lack of respect for rightful authority, failing to live with the consequences of our decisions and mistakes, and responding inappropriately to provocation. On the contrary, when rule violations occur in cricket those rules are generally enforced, to an extent where the dissent,

doping and violence problem in cricket is fairly isolated and limited to less extreme behaviour.

Still the response given may not be enough. One might object that in appealing to the efficacy of how the sport of cricket is administered we are not picking out any inherent or intrinsic features of the game of cricket when arguing for its moral worth, rather we are appealing to human reactions and practices associated with that game. While I am inclined to believe that the institution of cricket cannot be separated from the game as we now know it, it is worth noting that there are features of cricket, particularly Test cricket, that generally make possession of positive moral traits a condition for success in that sport. To make the case for cricket's satisfying claim (5) we must answer the question: what morally commendable traits are required for success in Test cricket?

Quite clearly patience and with it the intellectual virtue of keen concentration are required. The successful batsman and bowler cannot consistently go into all-out attacking mode in playing their innings. In fact, in many circumstances the batsman and bowler must satisfy themselves with slow but steady progress, often assuming defensive postures over after over. The batsman or bowler who fails to cultivate this trait often finds themselves, respectively, quickly out or the recipient of a run-filled over. Fielders must also maintain high levels of concentration and enduring patience in order to be ready to take a catch which may turn an innings.

With patience seemingly in short supply in our times it might be enough to rest our case for cricket on this virtue alone. But to do this would neglect a whole host of other moral traits that the successful Test cricketer must cultivate. Courage is clearly a component of successful batting and close-fielding, particularly when dealing with the short deliveries of the fast bowler, not to mention dealing with pain. We might also include in our list of virtues necessary for success in Test cricket the tendency to respond appropriately to provocation and anger, professionalism understood as performing at one's best no matter how one feels and a determination to overcome short-comings. While this last grouping of moral traits may seem to be present in a majority of sporting activities, the environment created by having to occupy the field for great lengths of time particularly impresses the need for having these traits.

Two final objections should be addressed before the case for cricket is concluded. First, the case for cricket made here shows that virtues must be possessed on the field for success, but fails to give any guarantee that they will carry over into non-cricketing endeavours. If this is so, one might wonder why cricket is judged to be morally worthwhile, since it appears that cricket does not do enough to promote what is best for human beings. Second, if we are to pass (5)'s test in a way that ensures the value of cricket as a moral endeavour, it must be shown that the sport promotes virtues of character without encouraging its participants to develop moral deficiencies. Can this be done in an era where bowling that threatens the batsman with injury, sledging and ball-tampering are avenues many cricketers and teams take to victory?

Responding to the second objection first, it should be seen that any of the alleged ills plaguing the current game of cricket fail to be inherent to success in the game. While fast-bowling may be seen as a component to success in cricket, such bowling need not

intentionally threaten the batsman with injury [16] and in some cases teams may not need fast-bowlers to achieve success. The same can be said for sledging and ball-tampering which are less obviously relevant for achieving victory in cricket. But even if cricket does not promote vice, does it do enough to promote virtue to make cricket morally commendable?

Indeed it does. Even if it cannot ensure that its participants are virtuous in all contexts, we can at least say that cricket builds the basis for a disposition that could be extended to new domains of activity. Admittedly, this does not guarantee that the application of virtuous traits into new domains will occur, but such a guarantee is not what our argument requires. As was argued at the outset of the essay, we need merely promote the cultivation of virtuous traits and character, not guarantee it, to show that an activity is worthwhile. And from what has been said above, it would seem that professional cricket, and especially Test cricket, succeeds in meeting this standard.

## Notes

- [1] Railton, 'Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality'; Norcross, 'Consequentialism and Commitment'; Thomson, 'The Right and the Good'; Frankena, *Ethics*, 63–71.
- [2] This is much the point C.L.R. James made back in 1963 when discussing the decline of cricket following the Bodyline series in his *Beyond a Boundary*.
- [3] As the discussion should make apparent, talk of optimal states of affairs does not commit a person to a consequentialist moral theory, since in the context of claim (1) optimal states are merely a sufficient condition for (moral) worth, and the worth of any activity under consideration in (1) does not actually need to secure this optimal state but make it more likely that it is secured. If this language describing what is best for human beings makes a deontological interpretation of (1) sound strained, the deontologist is free to substitute the somewhat cumbersome 'what is best from the moral standpoint for human beings collectively' for 'an optimal state of affairs'.
- [4] Birley, *A Social History of English Cricket*, 96.
- [5] The claim of Birley's that I am conceding is that ball games are morally neutral so long as we abstract away the role that participants have in our thinking about those games; where we consider the sport in question without thinking how it may influence human activity. Thinking of games and other activities in this sense would allow us to judge something as being morally neutral even if it had the consequence of encouraging compulsiveness and similar negative dispositions. For example, we might believe that a card or video game when considering it in-itself is neither morally good nor bad, but when seen in the context of human participation judge it to be harmful since it has a tendency to absorb competing moral commitments its participants have so that more time can be devoted to the game. As I show later, Birley would be wrong in claiming that ball games are morally neutral when assessed in the context of human participation.
- [6] Hughes, *Tom Brown's School Days*, Part II, Chapter VIII.
- [7] Birley, *A Social History of English Cricket*, 95–6.
- [8] Cobb and Stump, *My Life in Baseball: The True Record*, 124.
- [9] *Ibid.*, 114.
- [10] Plotz, 'The God of the Gridiron'.

- [11] Nash and Zullo, *The Baseball Hall of Shame*, 157–8.
- [12] See James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 340.
- [13] Major League Baseball is not the only sport that fails to require its participants to develop virtuous traits in order to succeed. In his book on NCAA Division I collegiate athletics (the most competitive collegiate sporting competition in the United States), Murray Sperber argues that these sports are not merely failing to connect the development of virtuous characteristics with success in sport, but that higher education in the United States is suffering, in part, because of this sporting activity. See Sperber, *Beer and Circus*.
- [14] Rae, *It's Not Cricket: A History of Skulduggery, Sharp Practice and Downright Cheating in the Noble Game*; Henderson, *The Worst of Cricket: Run Outs to Riots: Malice and Misfortune in the World's Cruellest Game*.
- [15] In addition to the fairly uncommon phenomena of players and managers screaming profanities at umpires, the history of baseball is littered with cases where managers and players assault umpires in benign (kicking dirt on the umpire) and not so benign ways (spitting at or physically accosting the umpire).
- [16] Contrast this with the sport of boxing, where the intent of the participants is to inflict physical harm upon one's opponent in order to achieve victory.
- [17] I am indebted to Mark Discher, Jeremy McKenna and Michael Winter who provided helpful comments on earlier drafts.

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