

Editorial

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“Translating Doping”

Doping is commonly regarded as cheating, and thus as a serious violation of the moral precepts of sport. Today, however, the subject is not just a matter for ethical consideration, but a serious concern for medical and legal authorities with their focus on where, when and how an alleged doping offence took place. This refocusing of attention has meant that humanistic enquiry into why doping should be prohibited is increasingly obscured and forgotten. Although, it could be argued that there is now more reason than ever to carry out such enquiries, when situations arise where certain actions that are proscribed in ‘prohibited lists’ are not only tolerated but also often rewarded in other areas of everyday life. The ethical gaps in the discourse on the legitimisation of doping point to the continuing importance of humanistic enquiry:

- for one thing, the paradoxical situation arises because the ethical implications of an action are transformed into the medical and legal consequences of an action;
- for another, sport can only be accorded its specific social and economic significance in future if it succeeds in having an acknowledged ethical legitimatisation bestowed upon it.

We began with the common definition of ‘doping’, however, for the *World Anti-doping Agency* (WADA) doping is understood to mean the use of prohibited substances from various groups of active pharmaceutical agents, as well as the use of prohibited methods in competitive sports. WADA’s definition of doping is linked to a negatively construed catalogue of substances and actions and is pragmatically oriented. Critical limits play a key role. Exceeding these limits is proof of criminal behaviour according to sports

law and can lead to the penalization. Doping is, therefore, defined on a legal basis grounded in biomedical knowledge.

With this kind of emphasis predominating, questions of medical ethos, as well as social aspects of doping practice and their heritage, have been somewhat sidelined. This, however, seems short-sighted in light of the fact that doping is becoming not only an issue for elite sport but a more general social problem:

- Empirical studies of the prevalence of doping in Germany and Europe reveal that the number of abusers in commercial fitness clubs as well as clubs that are not covered by the sports system exceeds the number of dopers among competitive elite athletes.
- The process of the diffusion of professional sport across society has now reached a point where adolescents who do not do sport or train take doping substances such as anabolic steroids in order to *increase levels of aggression or improve their appearance*.
- Professionals from all walks of life are looking for *improvement of performance by means of doping substances and techniques*. The often reckless use of certain pharmaceuticals is on the increase in our society.

The complexity of the doping problem raises a number of important questions that need to be addressed. For instance:

- Which actual medical and legal conflict situations arise within the sports system? Which form does the problem of doping take in sport and society? How are boundaries and critical limits discussed and determined in legal and diagnostic respects? What role is played in these discussions by concepts such as those of the human body and our view of the human being in general?
- What is improvement of performance? To what extent can it be defined as "natural" or "artificial"? What cultural, social, ethical and medical components play a role in the definition of improving performance? To what extent can or must gender-specific aspects be taken into consideration? To what extent does "doping" differ from medical therapeutic measures which influence performance?
- Which problems of scientific theory and ethics are related to the issue of doping? According to which criteria are developments in medicine considered to be implementable? Why should doping be banned or judged morally reprehensible at all?
- Are there special criteria for children and adolescents which do not play any role among grown-ups? In which form can adequate information for children and adolescents and/or for educators and teachers be communicated? What instruments on the whole does doping prevention have at its disposal?

International Network of Humanistic Doping Research

To answer such questions cross-disciplinary research approaches may be helpful. The German Federal Ministry of Education and Science recently acknowledged this by giving funding to a sports scientific-philosophical research group at Humboldt University in Berlin. A decision that suggests that there is a burgeoning awareness in relevant funding bodies that the detect-and-punish approach to anti-doping needs to be complemented by humanistic and social sciences approaches.

More details about this programme may be found at:

<http://www2.hu-berlin.de/translating-doping>

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