



The Agon Motif: Redux. A Study of the Contest Element in Sport¹

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ABSTRACT

The contest element of modern sport has its ancient roots in the “agon” of early Greek life. We begin with an overview of the material and historical continuities in the social development of sport, followed by a discussion of our suppositions regarding the original linkage of sport and war in terms of what we call “the agon motif”, and conclude with speculations about residuals of the agon motif in modern sport. We argue it is important to recognize that notwithstanding of the many transitions and transformations in the social development of sport since the agon of Homeric and Hellenic Greek cultures there are notable, long-standing, material and historical continuities in the structure of sport and the ethos of agonal contests. To better depict the relationships between the concepts of sport and contest, we highlight these vestiges of agon. We employ the phrase “the agon motif” to embrace both the concept of “agon” and the concept of “aethlos”. In a structural sense the agon motif refers to the overall properties, processes, and products of agonal competition, including contestants, spectators, battle grounds, sporting venues, festivals and spectacles, prizes and award ceremonies. Whereas, in an ideational sense, the agon motif refers to the ethos of chivalric competition associated with the pursuit of prestige (status-honor) and the active quest to achieve excellence (bodily and moral) through physical prowess in agonal contests wherein individuals place their reputation, moral character, and at times, their very lives at stake. There is a close link to the cult of masculinity and masculine domination in the Western world, since the primary avenues of pursuing the agon motif through war and sport are two of the most highly and rigidly “gendered” activities in the history of humankind. We suggest that the most fundamental dynamic of the agon motif as well as the most enduring residual of the agon motif in modern sport is the pursuit of prestige, honor and excellence through physical prowess. The ethical framework of archaic (heroic) agon represents the epitome of a morality of honor and an ethics of virtue and offers a largely unfamiliar picture from a contemporary viewpoint of winning and losing in sport.

KEYWORDS

agon, war, sport, contest, honor

¹ Paper prepared for presentation at “Homo Movens”: International Symposium on Movement Culture, Leuven, Belgium, 12 June 2009. Previous examinations of various dimensions of the agon motif by the first author include: Loy (1984), Loy & Hesketh (1984), Loy, Andrews & Hesketh (1992), Slowickowski & Loy (1993), Loy (1995), Loy & Hesketh (1995), Chick, Miracle, & Loy (1996), Chick, Loy, & Miracle (1997), Chick & Loy (2001), Loy, Hesketh, & Chick (2003), and Loy (2007).

With reference to Professor Renson's master model of "movement culture"², our assigned task is to explicate the relationship between the concepts of "sport" and "contest". We begin our explication by noting that in his model Professor Renson indicates that sport is linked to play and games in terms of its autotelic dimension with the focus on Homo Ludens; whereas, sport is linked to contest in terms of its agonistic dimension with the focus on Homo Agonizans. His model implies that while play, game, contest and sport are related, they are not synonymous.

Contrarily, Johan Huizinga, in his treatise "Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture" ([1938], 1955)³, views play, game, and contest as part and parcel of the same phenomena. He asserts that: "The agon in Greek life⁴, or the contest anywhere else in the world, bears all the formal characteristics of play" (1955, p. 31). He also contends that: "The contest has all the formal and most of the functional features of a game" (1955, p. 48).

Huizinga is, however, rather ambivalent about the concept of sport. On the one hand, he recognizes that sports are often international contests and points out that "contest means play" and that "there is no sufficient reason to deny any contest whatsoever the character of play" (1955, p. 76). On the other hand, he proclaims that modern sport is virtually devoid of any element of play. To quote him at length on this issue:

"The ability of modern social techniques to stage mass demonstrations with maximum of outward show in the field of athletics does not alter the fact that neither the Olympics nor the organized sports of American Universities nor the loudly trumpeted international contests, have, in the smallest degree, raised sport to the level of a culture-creating activity. However, important it may be for the players or spectators, it remains sterile. The old play-factor has undergone almost complete atrophy" (1955, p. 198).

Given the highly increased commercialization, professionalization, and rationalization of all forms of sport since Huizinga's initial observations over seventy years ago, we hesitate to take issue with him⁵. Nevertheless, we agree with Professor Renson that play, game, sport and contest while related, are not synonymous; and we argue that all forms of contemporary sport possess varying degrees of ludic elements, including at times spontaneous patterns of play (cf. Loy, 1968; Ingham & Loy, 1973; Loy, 1978; Loy & Coakley 2007). We do side, however, with Huizinga in claiming that the contest element of modern sport has its ancient roots in the agon of early Greek life.

A limited ludic lexicon⁶

Sport studies scholars likely agree that the realm of sporting semantics is a linguistic quagmire with everyone speaking their own version of sportugese. But to better inform you of our personal frame of reference we set forth the following definitions of play, game, sport and contest in a limited ludic lexicon.

² See Renson's introduction to this special issue on "The Agon Motif" and also his "Safeguarding Ludodiversity: Chances and Challenges in the Promotion and Protection of Traditional Movement Culture" (Renson 2004)

³ The first author possesses a hardcover copy of the first original Dutch edition of *Homo Ludens* which was purchased in a bookstore in Leuven some years ago.

⁴ A scholarly and aesthetic overview of multiple forms of agon in ancient Greek culture is Kaltsas (2004) who edits a beautiful volume produced by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and the National Archaeological Museum of Athens in conjunction with the Athens Olympic Games. See also Gouldner (1965), Morford & Clark (1976), Pappas (1999), and Zuchora (1983).

⁵ For example, we can't conceive what Huizinga might say about a university football coach receiving a salary of 4.4 million dollars (University of Southern California, 2008), or a university basketball coach receiving a salary of 4.1 million dollars (University of Kentucky, 2009).

⁶ This section of the paper draws heavily upon Loy & Coakley (2007).

1. "Play" is a voluntary, expressive activity, which is uncertain and unproductive; characterized by spontaneity, pretense and non-linearity, which focuses on process rather than product, and which can be initiated and terminated at will;
2. "Games" are playful contests whose outcome is determined by physical skill, strategy or chance, employed singly or in combination⁷;
3. "Sport" is an embodied, structured, goal-oriented, competitive, contest based, ludic physical activity requiring the demonstration of physical prowess;
4. "Ludic" refers to any play-like element of games, sports, or contests;
5. "Physical prowess" denotes the display of athletic ability in terms of varying degrees of skill (accuracy and coordination), strength, speed, and stamina (endurance);
6. "Contest" succinctly defined represents 'a reciprocal competitive activity for non-reciprocal outcomes' (Scarry, 1985). More comprehensively defined, a *contest* is a competitive activity characterized by two or more sides, having agreed-upon-rules, criteria for determining the winner, with a zero-sum outcome wherein the winner(s) takes all;
7. "Agonal contests" are contests involving physical competition and the demonstration of personal prowess;
8. Most contests are not sport, not all agonal contests are sport, but all "sporting contests" are agonal contests that can be classified into three broad categories. First, there are individual sports that we label "self-testing sports" involving solitary struggles against an animate object (e.g., a bull fight); or an inanimate object of nature such as a mountain peak or rock wall; or against an abstract standard (e.g., solo attempts to set a world record in an around-the-world balloon, boat, or plane race). Second, there are team sports involving two sides with two or more participants per side that we refer to as "agonistic games" such as baseball, basketball, football, ice hockey, soccer, volleyball and doubles teams in various racquet sports such as badminton, racquet ball, squash, and tennis. Third, there are sport forms representing struggles for supremacy between two individual opponents that we identify as "sporting matches" (e.g., boxing, fencing, and wrestling). Here we follow Paul Weiss who states:
"It will make for clarity, I think, if 'contest,' taken by itself, is reserved for those cases in which individuals struggle with one another, and if 'game,' particularly in the area of athletics, is reserved for those cases in which there is team play, or where men act as representatives" (1969, p. 100).

We also accept Weiss' premise that:

"Contests, whether they occur by themselves or in games, usually pivot about the performance of individuals demonstrating their relative superiority in five areas -- speed, endurance, strength, accuracy, and coordination" (1969, p. 100)⁸.

The preceding definitions provide the following typology of ludic activities⁹ and the basis of our counter argument to Huizinga that play, games and contest are synonymous.

1. "Non-play contests" (e.g., deadly fights, total wars),
2. "Non-contest play" (e.g., drama, humor, music)¹⁰,
3. "Playful contests" (e.g., charades, puzzles, riddles),

⁷ See Roberts & Sutton-Smith (1962).

⁸ There are a number of notable sport forms that represent multiple contests, as for example, biathlons, triathlons, pentathlons, and decathlons. Perhaps the most complex system of sporting contests is stage races in professional cycling such as the Tour de France comprised of all forms of sporting contests identified above and pivoting about the five areas of physical performance identified by Weiss (1969)

⁹ See Birrell (1978) for a related typology.

¹⁰ There are, of course, competitive forms of these activities as well.

4. "Agonal contests" (e.g., duels, heroic/feudal wars, combat sports),
5. "Non-sport games" (e.g., bridge, checkers, chess),
6. "Agonistic games" (e.g., basketball, ice hockey, soccer),
7. "Self-testing sports" (e.g., solo rock climbs, bull fighting),
8. "Sporting matches" (e.g., boxing, fencing, wrestling).

Admittedly, our definitions and typology of ludic activities may more appropriately apply to contemporary sports characteristic of modern industrial societies; and they likely do not do full justice to the hundreds of different sports, or the continually emerging new sport forms, or the unique traditional folk-sports found in diverse cultures throughout the world.

We also readily acknowledge that sports in the Western world have undergone numerous transitions and many major transformations (Ingham & Loy, 1993) as a consequence of the macro-sociological process of "sportification" and its underlying processes of rationalization, democratization, legitimation, and globalization (Loy & Coakley, 2007). Yet, we argue it is important to recognize that notwithstanding of the many transitions and transformations in the social development of sport since the agon of Homeric and Hellenic Greek cultures there are notable, long-standing, material and historical continuities in the structure of sport and the ethos of agonal contests. To better depict the relationships between the concepts of sport and contest, we highlight these vestiges of agon. We begin with an overview of the material and historical continuities in the social development of sport, followed by a discussion of our suppositions regarding the original linkage of sport and war in terms of what we call the agon motif, and conclude with speculations about residuals of the agon motif in modern sport.

Material and historical continuities in the social development of sport

"While their boundaries have been constantly pressed at the margins, we may glimpse in today's sports some sense of our most ancient humanity" by examining the material culture of sport as evidenced by "the artifacts of the arena, the field, and the court" (Hardy, Loy, & Booth, 2009). Prominent categories of such material sporting artifacts include:

1. "Playing equipment" (e.g., balls, clubs, racquets);
2. "Sporting facilities" (e.g., arenas, courts, fields, pools, rings, rinks, tracks);
3. "Training equipment and sport medicine technology" (e.g., treadmills, heart rate monitors, weight lifting equipment);
4. "Sportswear" (worn by players, coaches, band members, cheer leaders, fans);
5. "Sporting prizes" (e.g., certificates, medals, ribbons, trophies);
6. "Symbolic sporting artifacts" (e.g., colors, flags, mascots, pennants);
7. "Performance measurement technology" (e.g., stop watches, laser beams);
8. "Sporting detritus" (e.g., discarded ticket stubs, betting slips);
9. "Sporting Memorabilia" (collections of any of the above).

These material sporting artifacts significantly reflect historical "continuities of thought, behavior, and meaning in sports that cross temporal or spatial boundaries" (Hardy, Loy, & Booth, 2009).

Stephen Hardy, with reference to Fernand Braudel's (1980) notion of "long duree" and Raymond Williams's (1977) notion of "residual", calls these historical continuities "long residuals" and specifically identifies six long residuals deemed most characteristic of the Western world of sport:

1. "Agon" - the core contest between opposing individuals and/or teams.
2. "Craft" - the skills, practices and technologies required to achieve at the agon.
3. "Gambling" - the wagering on the outcome of agon and what drives much of the passion surrounding sport.

4. "Eros" - the sexual attraction of agonic bodies.
5. "Community" - the ways in which both athletes and spectators create bonds and bridges that simultaneously link and separate groups through shared sporting passions.
6. "Framing" - the tendency to surround the agon with frames of spectacle and festival, each of which contains elements of the other residual practices. (Hardy, Loy, & Booth, 2009).

We wish to slightly modify Hardy's list of six long residuals in two ways. First, we propose adding the long residual of "sporting records" to the list (cf. e.g., Guttmann, 1978). Secondly, we suggest viewing his concept of "framing" as "agon" and his concept of "agon" as "aethlos". Here we follow Thomas F. Scanlon's (1983) etymological analysis of the vocabulary of competition in classical Greek society¹¹. With respect to agon he states:

"Contexts of the word in early Greek epics suggest that it is a term for a contest place together with the necessary elements for competition, spectators, competitors, and prizes" (1983, p. 154).

We think that Scanlon's depiction of "agon" denotes Hardy's notion of "framing" rather well. Moreover, it connotes Huizinga's concept of agon/contest given his premise that: "It is quite impossible to separate the contest as a cultural function from the complex 'play-festival-rite'" (1955, p. 31). In turn, we think that Scanlon is correct in identifying the term "aethlos" as denoting contest *per se*, signifying "strenuous, competitive activity for a goal" (1983, p. 158).

The agon motif

We employ the phrase "the agon motif" to embrace both the concept of "agon" and the concept of "aethlos". In a structural sense the agon motif refers to the overall properties, processes, and products of agonal competition, including contestants, spectators, battle grounds, sporting venues, festivals and spectacles, prizes and award ceremonies. Whereas, in an ideational sense, the agon motif refers to the ethos of chivalric competition associated with the pursuit of prestige (status-honor) and the active quest to achieve excellence (bodily and moral) through physical prowess in agonal contests wherein individuals place their reputation, moral character, and at times, their very lives at stake.

Four basic themes underlie the agon motif:

1. An intense spirit of rivalry and competition;
2. A strong stress on individualism;
3. An extreme emphasis on the personal pursuit of fame, glory, and honor; and
4. The risk of death, fear of failure and communal humiliation.

The essence of what we term "the agon motif" is captured in the following observations of Huizinga (1955, p. 63):

"From the life of childhood right up to the highest achievements of civilization one of the strongest incentives to perfection, both individual and social, is the desire to be praised and honoured for one's excellence. In praising another each praises himself. We want the satisfaction of having done something well. Doing something well means doing it better than others. In order to excel one must prove one's excellence; in order to merit recognition, merit must be made manifest. Competition serves to give proof of superiority."

¹¹ For additional etymological analyses of the vocabulary of competition in Greek society see Cairns (1993), Dickson (1988), Kaltsas (2004), Kirk (1964), Ong (1981), and Rose ([1922] 1985).

Huizinga demonstrates that many diverse forms of competition provide contexts for showing superiority. However, he places, in particular, importance on what we call agonal contests as proving grounds for making merit manifest.

Paradigmatic examples of agonal contests are most evident in archaic ("heroic") societies and archetypal aristocratic warrior societies. Within these agonal social systems,

"war activity offered the most prestigious avenue for displaying prowess but, since it was limited to contests with 'out-group members' or members of another tribe, athletic contests offered an acceptable substitute for displaying prowess between members of the same tribe or 'in-group'" (Morford & Clark, 1976, p. 164).

War and sport as agonal contests

Scanlon (1983, p. 158) well notes that: "Both 'agon' and 'aethlos' have military associations which naturally arise from their apparently similar forms of conflict"; but he contends that they "are ultimately only metaphorically connected, since military strife is not for prizes but for the lives of men". His contention resonates with Elaine Scarry's (1985, p. 88) premises that "war is in its formal structure a contest" and "the central activity of war is injuring". There is little debate that the objective of most forms of warfare is in Scarry's terms to "out-injure" one's opponents. And given the horrors of modern warfare against terrorism there is little doubt that viewing the structure of war as a contest similar to the structure of sport as a contest is troubling to many.

However, military writers recognize that historically there were limited forms of warfare where indeed the aim was to achieve personal fame, glory and honor; and to obtain worthy prizes (both symbolic and material). We cite two typologies of warfare in support of this observation. First, we refer to Sue Mansfield's work "The Gestalts of War" (1982) wherein she identifies four basic modes or cultures of war; namely, the:

1. "Ritual warfare" of horticultural societies;
2. "Political warfare" of peasant-based societies;
3. "Heroic warfare" of aristocratic feudal warrior societies; and
4. "Total warfare" of modern industrial societies.

With respect to "heroic warfare" Mansfield (1982, p. 108) notes that:

"if one accepts that the point of battle is to demonstrate individual prowess and bravery under conditions of extreme physical stress, then the strategy of these aristocratic warriors becomes perfectly logical. The prearranged but uncontrolled and unconcentrated broad-front battle plan was designed to give each warrior a relatively equal chance to display his capabilities and win the prize of honor."

She also recognizes the chivalric nature of what she calls "heroic warfare", pointing out that:

"So long as you are in combat, you do not give or ask for quarter. But once you have subdued such an enemy, you treat him like a gentleman, who has honored you by putting up a good fight. Prisoners in this type of warfare are seldom killed. And the distinction between combatants and noncombatants is maintained" (Keen, 1982, p. 64).

Or as Morris Janowitz (1960, p. 216) states in the case of the modern professional soldier:

"Military honor is both a means and an end. The code of honor specifies how an officer ought to behave, but to be 'honorable' is an objective to be achieved for its own right"¹².

Another typology of warfare is given by Hans Speier (1941) who proposes that three pure types of war are distinguishable:

1. "Absolute war",
2. "Instrumental war", and
3. "Agonistic fighting".

These forms of war are oriented, respectively, toward "annihilation", "advantage", and "glory".

"Absolute war is unrestricted and unregulated war, agonistic fighting is regulated according to norms, and instrumental war may or may not be restricted, according to considerations of expediency" (Speier, 1941, p. 445).

Speier's typology of war is based on "the social definition of the enemy" rather than according to "causes." Moreover, he makes clear that his identified types of war are "ideal-types" in a Weberian sense and, thus, "no actual war ever coincides with one of the pure types" (Speier, 1941, p. 453).

Speier's conception of "agonistic fighting" is nearly identical with Mansfield's notion of "heroic warfare" in terms of both its objectives and chivalric nature. As clearly spelled out by Speier: the agonistic fight, as we know it from ancient Greek culture and, also, from other cultures, is not oriented toward the destruction of the enemy, although his death may, of course, ensue. Nor is it directed toward the acquisition of wealth or other useful ends. It is fought for a prize, i.e., for a symbolic value attached to victory (glory).

"Each agonistic fight is a contest between opponents who delight in measuring their strength according to certain rules of the "game." The opponents participate in a common culture or respect common cultural values even if they are representative of different power structures. It is these common bonds which make the contest possible. These regulations reside in respect for values which none of the opponents can be said to control. The values (customs, laws, codes of honor, etc.) transcend the conflict" (Speier, 1941, p. 451).

More significantly, Speier, with credit accorded Huizinga, emphasizes the play and ritual quality of agonistic war as follows:

"The agonistic fight has the qualities of play, with its freedom, its rules, and its dissociation from useful action. But it is not only, or at least need not be only, a "good" fight -- a playful, vital contest. Certain plays are, as symbolic performances, closely related to religious rites. The agonistic fight, too, may be a sacred play -- a ritual in which use is made of controlled force in order to determine justice, which ordinarily cannot be determined by force. Victory then is a fateful, symbolic revelation of justice, provided that the sacred rules according to which justice has to be sought were meticulously respected. The regulations in agonistic fighting are not rooted in expediency as are the restrictions possibly imposed upon instrumental war. Rather they have the quality of norms" (Speier, 1941, p. 451).

In brief, Mansfield's heroic warfare and Speier's agonistic fighting constitute what we call agonal war. Thus, for sake of simplicity and purposes of discussion here we create a dichotomy between agonal and non-agonal war¹³.

¹² It is interesting to note how many of the mottos and core values of military institutions and units in the United States use the term "honor." For example, the motto of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point is *Duty, Honor, Country*"; while the core values of the U.S Marine Corps are *Honor, Courage, Commitment*.

¹³ The major transformations of the agon motif result from the development of monopolies of organized violence. Three stages of development may be distinguished: (a) monopoly of adult males; (b) monopoly of specialists, the warriors; and (c) monopoly of nation-states (after, SISWO, 1997). Today an *"asymmetric or 'fourth-generation' warfare pits a nation-state against an enemy who is everywhere and no-where; who has no flag, no uniformed army, no capital city, no*

Non-agonal war includes all the other types of war discussed by Manfield and Speier. As indicated in Table 1, agonal and non-agonal war can be clearly distinguished in terms of four sets of features, namely:

1. Goals and objectives,
2. Types of combatants,
3. Means and modes of combat, and
4. Aftermath of battle.

Table 1. Distinguishing features of agonal and non-agonal war

Features	Agonal War	Non-Agonal War
<i>Goals and objectives</i>	Quest for personal fame, glory and honor Acquisition of spoils	Destruction or subjugation of enemy Acquisition of territory
<i>Types of combatants</i>	Aristocratic Warriors Collective agreement or commitment to the cause Bound by honor code to limit lethal impact Individual identity and status displayed	Army of soldiers Command and duty through military hierarchy No limit of lethal impact Total War Impersonal warfare Masked identities
<i>Means and modes</i>	Dependence on personal prowess and skill Individualized weapons Face-to face, hand-to-hand combat Maximize risk to self	Dependence on military arsenal Mechanized weaponry Massed formations, impersonal combat Minimize risk to self
<i>Aftermath of battle</i>	Impermanent impact Limited killing Ransom settlement possible under oath Death anticipated and ritually prepared for	Permanent impact Mass killing Prisoners of war and occupation forces Death not contemplated Occurs due to bad luck

Source: Own studies.

In summary, within aristocratic warrior societies characterized by the agon motif, sport and war constitute agonal contests sharing similar structural features and a similar set of rules as outlined below¹⁴.

Characteristics of agonal contests

Agonal contests constitute:

1. Zero-sum games,
2. Between peers,
3. Restricted to time and place,
4. Having limited objectives,
5. Conducted according to norms and rules of fair play,
6. Requiring physical prowess,

ascertainable geography" (Raban, 2004, p. 25). And perhaps we are beginning see indicates of a fifth-generation warfare pitting drones and robots of one set of opponents against another in a kind of "virtual warfare."

¹⁴ This is especially true in the case of so-called "combat sports" both ancient and modern.

7. Reflecting ritualized violence,
8. Providing tests of moral character and public proof of moral worth, and
9. Offering a means of determining social rank, recognizing excellence, and according honor.

Rules of agonal contests

Alvin Gouldner (1965, pp. 48-49), in his sociological study of the Hellenic world, views Greek society, in general, as a contest system. He notes that fame can be won in a variety of specific contests, including war and athletic competition, but that in all cases agonistic peers comply with a set of agreed upon standards and rules which we paraphrase as follows:

1. The goal of the contest is to win more individual honor and public prestige than other contestants;
2. Honor and prestige are won by means of personal prowess;
3. The amount of honor won and prestige obtained depends upon:
 - a) the importance of the contest to all members of a heroic society;
 - b) the importance of the contest to the particular peer group of participants;
 - c) the status and ability of opposing contestants;
 - d) the degree of difficulty associated with a given form of competition;
 - e) the value of the prizes (symbolic or material) to be gained in victory or lost in defeat; and
 - f) the value of the stakes that the contestants risk and the extent of the risk to which they are subjected.

Vestiges of the agon motif in modern sport

Two major premises underlie our view of the relationship between the agon motif and the contest element of sport. First, we assert that within modern sport vestiges of the structural dimension of the agon motif are reflected in the material and historical continuities of the social development of sport and in the characteristics and rules of agonal contests.

For example, the application of the preceding rules and characteristics of agonal contests is well illustrated in the context of the modern Olympic Games:

1. An Olympic Gold Medal represents one of the most prestigious prizes in all of sport,
2. The status and ability of opposing contestants is amongst the highest in all of sport,
3. The Games are of utmost importance to the contestants because they can establish their relative ranking in the world, and
4. The Games are of importance to nation-states as they held to reflect national character and moral superiority (cf., e.g., Loy, 1981).

Secondly, we contend that within modern sport vestiges of the ideational dimension of the agon motif reflect in varying degrees and kind three enduring residuals of agonal competition:

1. The pursuit of excellence, honor and prestige;
2. Concern with character, heroism, and moral development; and
3. Codes of honor, male bonding, and manliness.

Sport historians may well prove us wrong concerning our suppositions and speculations about these enduring residuals of the agon motif but let us highlight what we mean by each to further our explication of the contest element of modern sport¹⁵.

First among equals: the pursuit of excellence

We suggest that the most fundamental dynamic of the agon motif and, also, the most enduring residual of the agon motif in modern sport is the pursuit of prestige, honor and excellence through physical prowess. It is noteworthy that the study of prestige and honor is a long standing concern of anthropologists and sociologists.

For example,

1. Goode (1978, p. vii) proclaims that: "The foundation of social life rests in part on the universal need for respect, esteem, approval and honor";
2. Speier (1969, p. 97) states: "Honor, implicitly or explicitly paid, is a basic phenomenon of man's social existence";
3. Goldschmidt (1992, p. 31) writes: "The idea of prestige, the recognition of individual merit, is the very soul of the social order"; and
4. Hatch (1989, p. 341) observes: "The topic of social honor -- or prestige, esteem, standing, distinction - is perennial in the social sciences".

Perhaps not surprisingly, social scientists are far from consistent in their definitions of the several concepts of social status. Moreover, they vary in their views as to whether concepts such as esteem, prestige, honor, and distinction represent personal attributes, social qualities, resources or rewards.

Following the lead of Goldschmidt (1992), we argue that prestige and related concepts are sources of motivation as illustrated by examining the origins of pursuit of prestige through physical prowess in agonal contests in the context of the aristocratic ideal in ancient Greece. As Walter Donlan (1980, p. 23) states the case:

"We may sum up the Homeric aristocratic ideal by saying that worth or excellence, arete, was conceived of in the physical sphere almost exclusively, most specifically in terms of prowess as a warrior. The aim of the high-status warrior was public recognition of his ability. The Homeric proto-aristocrat endlessly competed with his fellows for prestige (kydos, time), with the goal of being recognized as "best" (aristos); his greatest fear was failure and its accompanying communal humiliation."

Given the lack of consensus as to the similarities and differences among prestige, distinction, esteem, excellence, and honor we present a heuristic model of status-honor motivation in Table 2, schematically arranging these related concepts in a Maslow-like typology in a hierarchical manner as interrelated but specific sources of motivation.

We cannot, of course, give a full account of our motivational model at this point, but simply highlight each specific source of motivation in terms of the agon motif.

¹⁵ Sport historians could also assist in providing evidence to support our suppositions. No offense intended but to cite a quotation brought to our attention by Professor Renson: "Sociology is history with the hard work left out, history is sociology with the brains left out" (Macrae, 1991, p. 204).

Table 2. A typology of status-honor motivation

Status-Honor	Motivation
Affect Hunger	Desire for Sensual Pleasure
Self-Esteem	Desire for Emotional Security
Prestige	Desire for Social Recognition
Honor	Desire for Earned Respect
Excellence	Desire for Distinction
Legendary Status	Desire for Immortality

Source: Own studies.

Affect hunger (desire for sensual pleasure)

What some call affect hunger (e.g., Goldschmidt, 1992) and others call sensual gratification or sense pleasure (e.g., Campbell, 1984) is likely the primordial basis of all forms of motivation. Infant primates, human and non-human, seek tactile stimulation and satisfaction of hunger and social/emotional response. And humans of all ages seek many types of sensual gratification. One of the great appeals of agonal competition is that it provides a wide variety of sensual pleasures from bodily stimulations to the thrills of victory.

Michael Balint (1959, p. 23) in describing the major characteristic attitudes associated with the excitement of thrills underscores the sensual pleasures often experienced in agonal competition:

“(a) some amount of conscious fear, or at least an awareness of real external danger; (b) a voluntary and intentional exposing of oneself to this external danger and to the fear aroused by it; (c) while having the more or less confident hope that the fear can be tolerated and mastered, the danger will pass, and that one will be able to return unharmed to safety. This mixture of fear, pleasure, and confident hope in the face of external danger is what constitutes the fundamental element of ‘thrills’.”

We note in passing that sensual gratification resulting from thrills is especially characteristic of sports involving what Caillois (1961, p. 23) calls *vertigo* "which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind".

A, sometimes, overlooked aspect of agonal competition is the aesthetic nature of sense pleasure provided athletes and spectators alike. The athlete in many sporting contests like the performing artist "must produce a final, instantaneous and temporal image of the world as embodied in the score without error, with full mastery of highly developed technical means of performance, and with sufficient warmth, spontaneity, and freshness to induce an audience to suspend its awareness of all other worlds but the world framed by the score and created by the performance" (Bensman & Lilienfeld, 1973, p. 61).

Self-esteem (desire for emotional security)

Robert N. Campbell (1984, p. xi) proclaims that: "Virtually all of our human behavior springs from two motives: our desire for self-esteem and/or our desire for sense pleasure". Self-esteem has a large emotional basis as evidenced by the insecurity and anxiety of individuals with low self-esteem. Thus, a search for self-esteem is at the same time a seeking for emotional security. The self-esteem motive is viewed by some as universal to humankind.

For example, Ernest Becker (1971, pp. 67-68) proposes the Principle of Self-Esteem Maintenance, positing that "a person's entire life (is) animated by the artificial symbolism of self-worth; almost all of his time is devoted to the protection, maintenance, and aggrandizement of the symbolic edifice of self-esteem". Becker (1968, pp. 328-29) claims that his proposition is a "universal principle for human action akin to gravitation in the physical

sciences"; and he states that it "explains the most disparate life styles as variations around the single theme of self-esteem maintenance".

Prestige (desire for social recognition)

There are, of course, many cultural avenues open to individuals for establishing and maintaining self-esteem. But from the perspective of biosocial anthropology, Jerome H. Barkow (1975, p. 555) makes a convincing case that: "The major strategy for the maintenance of self-esteem is the pursuit of prestige". Certainly, within the context of sport the pursuit of prestige is a major strategy for the maintenance of self-esteem for athletes and spectators alike¹⁶.

The great desire for public social recognition through prestige processes is clearly evidenced by the plethora of symbolic awards in the sporting world such as medals, prizes, ribbons, trophies, certificates and honorary offices. These symbolic awards are accorded by a variety of ranking systems in nearly all sports at all levels of competition. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any other institutionalized sphere of activity that is so finely differentiated or as strongly stratified as that of modern sport.

On the one hand, sports are often explicitly stratified for the manifest purposes of denoting levels of competition, experience, skill and/or age and gender categories. On the other hand, such forms of stratification implicitly connote status hierarchies and prestige rankings. Five examples are given to illustrate this observation.

First, higher weight classes in boxing, wrestling, and weightlifting are accorded greater prestige than lower ones. Second, the many belt categories in the various martial arts reflect colorful and overt displays of status levels and individual prestige rankings. Third, certain events in track and field such as the 100 meter sprint, decathlon, and 1500 meter run are viewed as more prestigious than other events such as 50 meter walk, hammer throw or steeplechase. Fourth, European soccer divisions and North American inter-collegiate athletic conferences constitute well established prestige hierarchies. Fifth, similarly in the specific American case, divisions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the annual press rankings for nearly all college and university sports clearly denote status rankings - not to mention the annual press "all-sports" rankings for the best in men's and women's collegiate sports.

The pursuit of prestige and desire for social recognition is clearly reflected in the medal count of nations in the Olympic Games, in the achievement of world records in any sport, the most career victories by an individual or team, and the most wins of prestigious events such as the so-called "Grand Slams" of professional golf and tennis.

Admittedly in contemporary professional sports the most finely graded prestige rankings are the annual lists of money winners in bowling, golf and tennis. While these rankings are based on material rewards they nevertheless have symbolic significance. For example, Curtis Strange when he became the first professional golfer to earn one-million dollars in a season in 1988 remarked: "The money is nice, but that's not what I play for ... when I get in contention to win, the money is the farthest thing from my mind. I play for the trophies. If I get those, the money will come" (Staff, 1988, p. 2C). Similarly, in going for the money title on the PGA Senior Tour in 1989, Orville Moody commented: "I'd really like to win the money title (but) it isn't the money. It's just the competition. When you get this close to being No. 1, well, you just want to finish on top" (Hershey, 1989, p. 4C).

In sum, the pursuit of prestige and the desire for social recognition are sources of human motivation, but they also serve as a means of celebrating heroes and as a means of social control. As shown by William J. Goode (1978, pp. 156-171), symbolic awards:

¹⁶ Spectators experience "vicarious success" and can "bask in reflected glory" - the so-called BIRG phenomenon.

1. Sift and evaluate the participants, and thus furnish information about how each individual ranks in his or her area of achievement;
2. Indicate that one's talents are worthy of respect;
3. Provide proof that one has achieved a certain level of performance;
4. Greatly influence the future careers of the individuals who receive them;
5. Are public announcements that attract a far wider audience than just the winners;
6. Give prestige to achievements that seem so outstanding that not honoring them is to deny some supposed values of society;
7. Give prestige primarily to activities that do not pay off very well materially; and last, but not least;
8. Enhance the social identify of both individuals and groups.

Goode's analysis suggests that the processes and products associated with the pursuit of prestige are closely connected to those related to the pursuit of honor¹⁷.

Honor (desire for respect)

Whereas the pursuit of prestige is largely focused on obtaining social recognition from the public-at-large, the pursuit of honor is largely focused on achieving respect from one's immediate sporting and contesting peers. Significant signs of peer respect in the context of team sports are being elected a team captain or selected as the most valuable player (MVP) on the team. Wider peer respect is indicated by being selected as MVP for one's division or national sport; and added respect is garnered by achieving the most MVP awards in a decade or within a specific sport. Given the fact that captaincy and MVP awards are often given by third parties in the sporting world today, rather than by fellow competitors per se, the pursuit of honor in modern sport is only a mere vestige of ancient agon.

Three basic tenets of heroic honor underlie ancient agonal systems:

(a) "the object of all agonal strife was honor"; (b) "honor consisted in being recognized and honored for superiority"; and (c) "an individual could only become honorable by earning honor through personal achievement in contest situations" (Morford & Clark, 1976).

A warrior's honor was his most important possession and the loss of it brought shame to himself, his family and to his clan. A warrior's actions were judged by his peers. Brilliant performances in the practices of warfare, fighting and athletic feats earned one the praise of one's peers whose own experiences in these practices gave them the intuitive standards of their judgments in assessing the merits of a given feat. Within heroic society: "honor is conferred by one's peers and without honor a man is without worth" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 125).

The importance of the peerage then, was its authority over recognition and bestowal of honor which was the objective of all agonal struggle, and the single most prized possession of each warrior-athlete. The drive and desire to possess such honor among one's peers led each individual to do his utmost to conform to the requirements, obligations and expectations underlying the agonal system. As Donlan (1980, p. 4) observes in the context of Homeric warfare:

"The Homeric hero in war was inspired by a single purpose: to win personal glory and honor (time, kydos) for himself by means of valorous deeds performed on the field of battle. Accordingly, the goal of every activity, practically without exception, was the recognition of self by peers as a good warrior."

Similarly, Finley (1965, p. 19) stresses the single mindedness of the heroic warrior in ancient Greece, noting that:

¹⁷ A recently published history of honor in the Western world is Bowman (2007).

“Everything pivoted on a single element of honor and virtue: strength, bravery, physical courage, prowess. Conversely, there was no weakness, no unheroic trait, but one, and that was cowardice and the consequent failure to pursue heroic goals.”

Agonal systems are honor and shame cultures. Within the cultural context of these systems honor and virtue are typically viewed as one and the same. Thus, the pursuit of honor and desire for peer respect is closely connected to the quest for excellence and the desire for distinction and both sets of pursuits and desires serve as primary sources of motivation in agonal systems.

Excellence (desire for distinction)

Philosophers of sport have long noted the import of the quest for excellence and desire for distinction as motivational forces in athletic competition. James W. Keating (1965, p. 429) proclaims that: "The very essence of athletic endeavor lies in the pursuit of excellence through victory in the contest". While Paul Weiss (1969, p. 7) exclaims that: "Young men are attracted to athletics because it offers them the most promising means of becoming excellent". And Hans Lenk (1981, p. 97), himself an Olympic gold medalist, posits that:

"Athletic achievements ... offer flair-full and adventurous opportunities for gaining distinction in a basically conformed society, which nevertheless emphasizes individual values"¹⁸.

Importantly, as Speier (1969, pp. 81-82) points out:

"Honor always attaches to what is held to be excellent"; and "from the fact honor is derived from a concept of excellence it is inevitable that the process of honoring creates hierarchical distinctions".

Similarly, Finley (1965, p. 126) notes:

"It is the nature of honor that it must be exclusive, or at least hierarchic. When everyone attains equal honor, then there is no honor for anyone."

The most outstanding warrior-athletes, who possessed great personal prowess, courage and ambition, desired distinction and sought to be "first among equals" (*primus inter pares*) by achieving the highest forms of excellence, both physical and moral. The "competitive instinct" as Huizinga (1955, p. 50) points out, "is not in the first place a desire for power or the will to dominate. The primary thing is the desire to excel others, to be the first and to be honoured for that". His proclamation is echoed by Young (1984, p. 76), who attests: "In (the) quest for distinction through excellence we find the driving force behind Greek athletics".

The obsession to be first among equals is a predominate theme of both ancient and modern sport. Reflections of the theme in ancient Greek athletics are the inscriptions carved in stone depicting the feats of legendary athletes of the time; as for instance, the inscribed boasts of a pancratiast, who was the champion of all the Panhellenic Games (i.e., Olympic, Pythian, Isthmean, and Nemean Games):

"I won all the contests in which my name was entered, defeating everyone. I issued no challenge nor was there anyone who dared issue a challenge to me. I was never in a tie match, never forfeited a bout, never protested a decision, never walked out of a contest nor entered a contest in order to please a king, nor did I ever win a fight that was started again, but in all contests in which I entered I won the crown right there and in that skamma, and I always qualified in the preliminaries."
(Inscrizioni Agonistiche Greche, 1987, p. 79).

In ancient Greece an Olympic victory was the pinnacle of success in athletic competition. And today, although the Olympic Games have undergone a marked transformation from an ancient, sacred festival to a modern, secular spectacle, they still constitute the most important and prestigious form of multisport competition in the

¹⁸ See also S. Kiesling (1982), *The Shell Game -- Reflections on Rowing the Pursuit of Excellence*.

world; and they provide ready examples of the pursuit of excellence, the desire for distinction and the drive to be first among equals.

The desire of modern Olympians to achieve distinction is illustrated by the following quotations from Olympic champions. Olga Connolly, the discus gold medalist in the 1956 Olympics, expressed her feelings of victory in stating:

“Standing on the top of the Olympic victory stand is like stretching one's body to the top of the world. It is a moment where the individual man or woman gets introduced to the whole planet. It is a moment that is his or hers alone” (Staff, 1984a, p. 11).

Vince Matthews expressed his sentiments about winning the gold medal in the 400-meter race in the 1972 Olympics as follows:

"Twenty years from now, I can look at this medal and say 'I was the best quarter-miler in the world on that day.' If you don't think that's important you don't know what's inside an athlete's soul" (Staff, 1984b, p. 31).

In sum, the modern Olympic athlete, like the Homeric warrior-athlete, adheres to the main tenets of agonal competition, namely: In order to excel one must prove one's excellence by demonstrated superiority of one's physical prowess; involvement in competition serves to give proof of superiority; and engagement in agonal contests is the major form of competition for displaying physical prowess and demonstrating superiority.

We propose that the "quest for excellence" inherent in the agon motif can be conceptualized as a three-step process, namely:

1. “Preparing to be the best” by learning to excel by engaging in youthful play-fighting and athletic activities;
2. “Competing with the best” by testing oneself in the course of competing against one's immediate peers;
3. “Winning against the best” by risking defeat while achieving victory against the best of one's peers.
4. This three-step process leads to a fourth, final outcome stage, namely:
5. *Being the best* by receiving from one's peers that acknowledgment that one is first among equals, the best of the best.

The actions and achievements of athletes, ancient and modern, illustrate what we have labeled as the processes and products of agon, and they offer support for Campbell's (1984, p. xi, p. 304) "First Law of Human Behavior: Each human organism seeks to maintain or increase its sense of its own excellence". But for truly exceptional athletes another motivational principle may be at work; namely, the desire for immortality and quest to be the very best for all-time.

Legendary status-honor (desire for immortality)

Becker (1968, 1971) in his early work held that self-esteem is the dominant motive of humankind and the principle of self-esteem maintenance is the sole law of human motivation. But in his later writings Becker (1973, 1975) proposed the more encompassing principle of "immortality-striving." As summarized by Scimecca (1979, p. 65): "This principle holds that every individual seeks immortality and identifies with an ideology of self-expression which he believes give him immortality".

According to Becker, "fear of death" is the unconscious causal force of immortality-striving. While the universality of Becker's principle may be a moot matter, it seems applicable to the Greek contest system of the Homeric and Hellenic eras. For instance, Alvin Gouldner (1965, p. 366) notes that it is "in the Greek resentment of death that we glimpse a frustrated aim of major magnitude -- the desire for immortality". He further notes that:

“The Greek desire for immortality had commonly to be repressed, for insofar as they traditionally associated immortality with the gods and insofar as they feared that those seeking to emulate the gods will be punished for their hybris, the wish to be immortal could hardly be given open expression. It had to be masked, even from the self, for thoughts were known to the gods” (Gouldner, 1965, p. 367).

The most overt expressions of the desire for immortality occurred in agonal contests as the desire for honor was so great within the Greek contest system that individuals would defy death in efforts to attain long-lasting fame. Outside of the bull ring there are few contest elements in modern sport that even begin to reflect the quest for honor and deep desire for immortality shown by Homeric hero-warriors and Hellenic warrior-athletes. However, exceptional athletes occasionally express their motivation to achieve legendary status and their motivation reveals a degree of desire for immortality. Legendary status is given to those athletes who establish an enduring degree of superiority in their sporting successes; and/or who establish particularly priority through their performance of an original and noteworthy athletic feat.

Most top-class athletes only achieve fleeting fame as their sporting success has a rather short half-life. There are, however, a small minority of elite athletes whose superior performances assure them legendary status. One has only to think of the Olympians of unforgettable achievement, as for example: Jim Thorpe, Paavo Nurmi, Mildred (Babe) Didrikson, Jesse Owens, Fanny Blankers-Koen, Emil Zatopek, Wilma Rudolph, Al Oerter, Bob Beamon, Jackie Joyner, Carl Lewis, Vasily Alekseyev, Teofilo Stevenson, and Michael Phelps. We honor exceptional memorable athletes by making them our folk-heroes; and we give them immortality by casting their statues in bronze, enshrining them in sporting halls of fame, or paying homage by retiring their playing uniform or jersey number (cf. e.g., Staff, 1992, p. 10C).

Athletes like scientists often achieve their legendary status by establishing priority which gives them lasting fame. The scientist who is first to publish a significant scientific discovery wins the trial race for a Nobel Prize; and the athlete who is first to set a remarkable record is listed on the honor roll of sport forever. For example, nearly everyone knows that Sir Roger Bannister was the first man to break the four-minute mile, but who can name all of the runners that have since broken his record many times over? Similarly, the fact that Mt. Everest has been climbed by hundreds of individuals does not detract from Sir Edmund Hilary's honor of being the first individual to scale the highest mountain in the world.

The human need to set records may be in danger of becoming commonplace as evidenced by the nearly yearly publications of expanded editions of the “Guinness Book of World Records.” But given the principle of immortality-striving and the quest for excellence in sport, record setting will likely continue at an unprecedented pace. As Allen Guttmann (1978, p. 55) suggests, record setting “is a uniquely modern form of immortality”. Or as Trippett (1980, p. 88) states: “The obsession with setting records is finally inextricable from the human determination to rise above the past”. The record is significant for immortality striving as it “underscores extraordinary performances, promotes self-comparisons, and links past performances to contemporary and future ones” (Schmitt & Leonard, 1986, p. 1095).

Although record setting is the main means of attaining legendary status and achieving a degree of sporting immortality, an athlete may also acquire long lasting fame by perfecting a unique skill that is named in his or her honor - not unlike a scientific law being named after its discoverer. For example, we have the inventive techniques and skills such as the Fosbury Flop in the high jump; the Axel, Salchow, Lutz and Walley in ice figure skating; and a variety of named moves in gymnastics, including the: Valzez (floor exercise), Shurlock (pommel horse), Koste (rings), Kasamatsu (valuting), Healy Twirl (parallel bars), Stalder (horizontal bars), Korbut (balance beam), and Comaneci (uneven parallel bars).

Yet another way of obtaining legendary status in sport is by outstanding “upsets.” For example, the 1980 U.S. Olympic Ice Hockey Team will always remain famous in the minds of Americans for having upset the heavily

avored Russian team and winning the gold medal. And few Olympians will forget the then anonymous Billy Mills, a Native American U.S. Marine, who at the 1964 Tokyo Games became the first American to win the 10.000 meter run after recovering from a bad stumble in the last lap of the race (cf., Bloom, 1991).

In summary, the striving for immortality is clearly revealed in the world of sport. In one of the few sociological studies of the subject, Raymond L. Schmitt and Wilbert M. Leonard II (1986, pp. 1088-90) conceptualize what they term the "postself" as "the concern of a person with the presentation of his or her self in history". Their analysis shows how "the social world of sport facilitates the postself by providing occasions, settings, and processes through which its participants can be remembered, eulogized, and endeared".

Where the action is: Character contests and moral worth

The pursuit of excellence and the desire for distinction of aristocratic warrior-athletes while overtly demonstrated in the physical sphere of death defying deeds in martial and sporting combat also covertly reflect the quest for *moral excellence* and serve as the foundation for the cult of the hero and the development of heroic/moral careers in the Western world.

The heroic in everyday life

The heroic life stands apart from everyday life. As Mike Featherstone (1992, p. 159) expresses the contrast:

"If everyday life is usually associated with the mundane, taken-for-granted, common-sense routines which sustain and maintain the fabric of our daily lives, then the heroic life points to the opposite qualities. Here we think of extraordinary deeds, virtuosity, courage, endurance, and the capacity to attain distinction."

Sir Maurice Bowra (1957, pp. 20-21) captures the core of the heroic life when, in the course of describing what he calls "the Greek experience," he declares: "The essence of the heroic outlook is 'the pursuit of honor through action'" [marks ours]. By action Bowra had in mind the contests and struggles of physical prowess among peers that the ancient Greeks called *agon*. But his concept of action carries the modern connotations of the term given by Goffman (1967, p. 194) that it "is to be found whenever the individual knowingly takes consequential chances perceived as avoidable". He points out that:

"Ordinarily, action will not be found during the week-day work routine at home or on the job. For here chance-takings tend to be organized out, and such as remain are not obviously voluntary" (Goffman, 1967, pp. 194-195).

With respect to vestiges of *agon* it is interesting that Goffman suggests that action can be found in war and sport. For example, he mentions "the soldier's calling" and cites "commercialized competitive sport" and "non-spectator risky sports" as contexts where action is.

Character and moral careers

Whether ancient or modern, agonal contests such as war and sport are the epitome of risk-taking situations and, thus, represent what Goffman (1967) calls "character contests", or moral games, in which contestants' character and virtues are subjected to social evaluation by both peer groups and third-parties. And in the course of agonal competition participants establish, maintain, and enhance heroic and "moral careers"¹⁹. These expressive careers are comprised:

¹⁹ Erving Goffman first formulated the concept of "moral career" a half-century ago (1959, p. 123; 1961, p. 128).

"of the stages of acquisition or loss of honor and the respect due from other people as one passes through various systems of hazards characteristic of different social worlds" (Harre, Clarke, & De Carlo, 1985, p. 147).

A typology of career stages over the life cycle with a comparison of human careers, moral careers, and heroic careers is given in Table 3²⁰.

Table 3. A typology of career stages over the life cycle

Human careers	Moral careers	Heroic careers
Childhood training	Character Formation	Becoming brave
Career launching	Character Testing	Being brave
Career establishment	Character Confirmation	Bravery in Battle
Career enhancement	Character Distinction	Bravest of the Brave
Career maintenance	Character Maturation	Legendary hero

Source: Own studies.

Although not mutually exclusive in an institutional or organizational context, it remains useful to distinguish between occupational or practical careers, and expressive or moral careers. For example, within professional sports were occupational careers described in terms of skill, training and performance; and we also find moral careers denoting the identity and status reaffirmation by their peers. The relationship between career stages and moral development in the life cycles of agonal contestants is illustrated in Table 4²¹.

Table 4. Moral careers and the life cycles of agonal contestants

Career stages	Career training	Career establishment	Career maintenance	Career enhancement
Prescriptions and Proscriptions	Personal requirements	Social regulations	Agonal standards	Status satisfactions
Activities and accolades	Preparation and training	Contests and combat	Victory and defeat	Fame or shame
Quest for excellence	Becoming the best	Beating the best	Being the best	Best of the best
Peer review	Among ones peers	Between ones peers	Before ones peers	By ones peers
Social stratification	Role differentiation	Role ranking	Role evaluation	Role rewarding
Moral development	Character formation	Character testing	Character confirmation	Character achievement

Source: Own studies.

The key aspect of a moral career, in general, and of a heroic career in particular, is that it develops and displays "character". "It creates in others the idea that a particular person has attributes and attitudes of a certain worth" (Harre, Clarke, & De Carlo, 1985, p. 147). In turn, the most distinctive feature of character is that it is comprised

²⁰ The sequence of career development in the left hand column is adapted from Goldschmidt (1992).

²¹ This table is a modified version of one given by Loy & Hesketh (1984).

of moral attributes (“virtues”) that bear upon the management of “fateful events”. Fateful events are character generating as they entail risk, danger, and acts of valor.

“Attributes of moral character are established only in risk-taking situations: before we are ready to impute to a person a quality of character, he must be seen as voluntarily putting something on the line” (Scott 1968, p. 25).

As Bowra (1957, p. 21) depicts the Homeric warrior-hero: “He courts danger gladly because it gives him the best opportunity of showing what stuff he is made”.

In a contemporary context, Goffman (1967) cites several properties of character (moral attributes or virtues if you will) that bear upon the management of fateful events inherent in agonal competition. These include:

1. “Courage” - “the capacity to envisage immediate danger and yet proceed with the course of action that brings the danger on” (Goffman, 1967, p. 218)²²;
2. “Gameness” - “the capacity to stick to a line of activity and to continue to pour all effort into it regardless of set-backs, pain, or fatigue, and this not because of some brute insensitivity but because of inner will and determination” (Goffman, 1967, pp. 218-219);
3. “Integrity” - “the propensity to resist temptation in situations where there would be much profit and some impunity in departing momentarily from moral standards” (Goffman, 1967, p. 219); and
4. “Composure” - “self-control, self-possession, or poise” (Goffman, 1967, p. 222)²³. Goffman (1967, p. 227) lists a half dozen different dimensions of composure and notes that: “Composure in all its different dimensions has traditionally been associated with the aristocratic ethic”.

More significantly, Goffman (1967, p. 209) acknowledges that “action in our Western culture seems to belong to the cult of masculinity”.

Virtue through violence: Codes of honor and martial masculinity

It is, of course, not surprising that what Bowra and Goffman call “action” is closely linked to the cult of masculinity and masculine domination in the Western world. Since the primary avenues of pursuing the agon motif through “war” and “sport” are two of the most highly and rigidly “gendered” activities in the history of humankind. Even today war and sport remain rather exclusive male enclaves. Women have limited combat roles in the military and females have yet to achieve gender equality in the Olympics in terms of participants, sporting events, or membership in the IOC (see Loy, McLachlan, & Booth, 2009). Historically, war and sport as male preserves is associated with “total institutions” and “fratriarchies.”

Total institutions and fratriarchies

Goffman (1957, p. 44; 1961, p. 203) defines total institutions as those “whose encompassing characteristics go beyond the institutional norm, to the point of effectively barring social intercourse with the outside world”. Examples of total institutions related to agon are military “boot camps”, military academies, military bases, hunting lodges, sport academies, athletic dormitories, and professional football training camps. As Goffman (1961, p. 12) points out: “The total institution is a social hybrid, part residential community, part formal organization; therein lies its special sociological interest”.

²² For contemporary accounts of why courage matters in everyday life see McCain (2004) and Rachels (1993).

²³ Examples from the Olympic Games of the display of character and the moral attributes listed by Goffman are given in Loy (1981).

Total institutions, or what Harre (1979, p. 314) calls “closed institutions”, share two sets of distinguishing features:

1. "Rituals of depersonalization in which in the extreme all traces of a previous moral career of an individual are wiped away"; and
2. "A system of hazards in the course of which reputation can be gained or lost". Although the majority of total institutions are overtly engaged in instrumental activities, they nevertheless provide social contexts for expressive activities related to character display and the development of moral careers. Indeed, as Harre (1979, p. 315) states:

“All things being equal, an institution will develop in such a way that its expressive aspects – that is the apparatus for the development of moral careers – will become more and more dominant in the determination of individual action in that institution.”

Agonal total institutions associated with war and sport are typically comprised of fratriarchies, i.e., fraternal interest groups which are age graded, competitive, peer based, segmentally bonded, and which share a code of honor. Fratriarchies are the epitome of male bonding and comradeship. And agonal fratriarchies, in particular, constitute "brothers-in-arms". Their authority is the rule of the brotherhood and they foster male domination in at least three ways:

“They bring men together, they keep men together, and they put women down. In short, they develop male bonding, maintain sex segregation, and generate an ideology of male supremacy” (Loy, 1995, p.267).

Thus, agonal fratriarchies play a major role in creating cults of masculinity, and in establishing different degrees and forms of masculine domination.

Stages of organized violence and forms of martial masculinity

The monopolization of war and sport by men serves to define masculinity and is often linked to honor. As Leo Braudy (2005, p. 56) points out:

“In theory, honor is an internalized code of personal behavior, whose principles partake of spiritual truth. But it is armed combat that turns this individual honor into a social fact by its display in the presence of others, and it is preeminently in war that men make themselves men in the eyes of other men and in their own.”

In a related manner, but in more stringent terms, Barbara Ehrenreich (1997, p. 129) in her analysis of the 'origins and history of the passions of war' discusses war as ‘a rough male sport’, proclaims the following connection between war and masculinity:

“Men make war for many reasons, but one of the most recurring ones is to establish that they are in fact, "real men." Warfare and aggressive masculinity have been, in other words, mutually reinforcing cultural enterprises. War-making requires warriors, that is, "real men," and the making of warriors requires war. Thus, war becomes a solution to what Margaret Mead termed "the recurrent problem of civilization," which is "to define the male role satisfactorily enough.”

Although Ehrenreich's (1997, p. 129) acknowledges that "there is no compelling biological or 'natural' reason why men have so exclusively starred in the drama of war", she fails to acknowledge that the construction of hegemonic masculinity is

"a social struggle going on in a complex and ideological and political field, in which there is a continuing process of mobilization, marginalization, contestation, resistance, and subordination" (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985, p. 589).

Specifically, with respect to agonal competition we suggest that the emergence and transformation of agon is directly related to stages of organized violence; and, in turn, different types of hegemonic masculinity and ideals of manhood and manliness, are associated with different stages and forms of agon.

Although it is very much a simplification, we propose that there are three basic forms of agon related to the following stages of organized violence:

1. "The Emergence of Agon": first occurring in rank-order societies in which tribal bands of hunter-warriors obtained a monopoly of weapons and organized violence became the proprietary rights of adult males. They insured their monopolistic control of weapons and warfare through a variety of initiation rites and social taboos which excluded women from participation in agonal pursuits.
2. "The Dominance of Agon": resulting from organized violence becoming the monopoly of elite specialists, i.e., warrior-heroes. This stage is associated of with feudal/military agrarian societies.
3. "The Residue of Agon": beginning when relative autonomous warrior elites were forced to yield their monopoly on weapons and control of violence to state organizations. This process began with early state formation and has continued to our contemporary period of late capitalism.

Over the course of the social development of agon there appeared several different forms of agon, major changes in codes of honor, and new constructions of hegemonic martial and athletic masculinities. We schematically summarize the forms of agon and types of masculinity as related to specific social formations in Table 5²⁴.

Table 5. A typology of agon, masculinity, and social formations

Forms of Agon	Types of Masculinity	Social Formations
Archaic Agon	Epic Masculinity	Homeric Warriors and Spartan Soldiers
Feudal Agon	Chivalric Masculinity	Medieval Knights and Feudal Samurai
Tribal Agon	Neo-epic Masculinity	Bedouins & Masai and Plains Indian Warriors
Modern Agon	Neo-chivalric Masculinity	Victorian Sportsmen and WWI Fighter Pilots
Anomalous Agon	Hyper Masculinity	Roman Gladiators
Atavistic Agon	Neo-Hyper Masculinity	"Extreme" Fighters

Source: Own studies.

The decline of agonism

Morford and Clark (1976, p. 187) argue that: "Without adequate avenues for its expression, the agonal lifestyle virtually disappeared in the fifteenth century". They recognize, however, that "the agonal motif reappears from time to time, in some instances manifested by large segments within a society and in other instances manifested by isolated individuals within a nonagonal society". Examples of the remnants of pure agon are the duels among European nobility of the 16th to 19th centuries, the bare knuckle boxing of 19th century pugilists, the warfare of Plains Indian warrior societies of the pre-reservation era, and last but not least, the last great cavalry battles and the first great air battles of World War I.

In large measure the decline of agonism results from the state control of violence and the social determinants associated with early, mature and late capitalism. And it reflects what Norbert Elias (1994) has formulated as

²⁴ We have borrowed the terms epic and chivalric masculinities from Doyle (1989, pp. 27-33).

"the civilizing process"; as for example, the transition from warriors-knights, to couriers, to officers and gentlemen.

With respect to the social development of modern sport, factors undergoing change in the transitional phase of agon to post agon include:

1. Increase in number of avenues for status achievement and pursuit of prestige;
2. Replacement of peers in the evaluation process by non-performing officials and members of the mass media;
3. Reduced value of intrinsic rewards and exponential increase in the value attached to extrinsic rewards;
4. Reduction of risk (especially risk of death) in agonal contests;
5. Reduced role of contesting antagonists in favor of coaches, promoters, sponsors, etc.; and
6. Decline in spontaneity of action regarding schedules, venues, training, etc.

In our post-agonal, post-modern society, only a handful of individuals and groups seek to display agonal drives collectively mobilized within the law. Agonal behavior is only sanctioned for legitimately recognized groups and subcultures, as for example, certain military units and selected sports. For the most part we are left with competitive activities representing "symbolic" agon, or pseudo-agon, staged as ritual agonal contests serving to entertain spectators and perhaps reinforcing certain cultural values. These typically glorify individual violent action, past military victories, and feed spectator/viewer fantasies.

Further, these ritualistic agonal contests are dominated by non-peers who allot praise or blame according to superficial and non-agonal criteria (e.g., the score in a contest). More often than not, the central role played by honor and its enhancement and protection through agonal action has been, over time, replaced by the single minded pursuit of celebrity fame and financial fortune as the dominant theme of agonal strife.

In sum, the post agonal stage is one in which an agonal lifestyle is outside the social nexus of society. For instance, the agonal code of conduct finds expression in the attitudes and behaviors of rebels from society-at-large whose exaggerated and misplaced sense of honor is usually in conflict with the mainstream values of their society. Those who persist in attempting to adhere to such agonal lifestyles include para-military groups, street gangs, and mafia like organizations. These anti-social groups are mostly excluded from society as a whole and may even be part of the criminal fringe.

Ironically, even as traditional agonal values are eclipsed from daily life a number of society's institutions continue to recognize their commercial important, especially the universal appeal of heroic values for the entertainment of a vast public unable to live up to the traditional expectations of agon created for them by movie makers, fiction and comic book writers.

Finally, and perhaps to counteract the boredom and mundane flatness of everyday life in a non-agonal welfare state, a variety of extreme type sports are constantly being spawned in response to a widespread quest for personal achievement and acclaim. These sports range from a multiplicity of 'hi-tec' board sports to X-Games, gladiator contests and extreme fighting, to Red Neck Olympics and so on. These often daring and risk laden pursuits are typically in defiance of institutional control and the state's protective umbrella (e.g., rescue and medivac teams). As a poster advertising extreme outdoor sports equipment reads: "Out here, lawyers don't take care of negligence -- undertakers do!"

To be sure, under highly controlled conditions, some individuals live modified agonal lives as athletes where risk and peer recognition are still important factors. But such specific and bounded recognition has little or no meaning throughout the larger society to the realities of which the individual athlete must return after "playing" at agon.

Further, the athlete's personal life and conduct is also largely unrelated to his sporting conduct. The usual peer bestowed rewards of acknowledged excellence, reputation and personal integrity may mean little to an

individual athlete in contrast to the boundless quantity of external, extrinsic rewards; especially monetary gain so readily available through sport organizations and various secondary institutions such as the media and marketing agencies.

However, when all is said and done, notwithstanding the distortion and attenuation of agonal values and lifestyle, chivalry will not die and we continue to look to agonal virtues as valued residuals from earlier historical eras -- heritages if you will of ideals of courage, character, heroism, masculinity, fair play, and moral worth. As MacIntyre (2007, p. 130) records: "We are what the past has made us, and we cannot eradicate our relationship with the heroic society of the past."

The heroic thread

In MacIntyre's view, the virtues repeatedly cataloged in epic form, provided part of the moral scriptures, so to speak, for much later periods in history, even though the social structures were vastly altered. In his words (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 166):

"The memory of heroic society is present in Western tradition which I am identifying twice over: once as the background to the fifth and fourth century Athenian society and once again in the background of the high middle ages. It is this double presence which makes the moral standpoint of heroic society a necessary starting point for moral reflection within the tradition with which we are concerned".

To this MacIntyre might have added the Victorian tradition which drew on both earlier traditions to become the thrice over memory in laying the foundation for elements of contest and moral practices in sport. And for good measure we add to this lineage of agon, heroism and masculinity, the notion that modern revival of the Olympic Games in a unique and distorted fashion draws upon all three traditions. Let us highlight these four fibers of what we call "the heroic thread".

Classical Greek society

We have said much about the origins of the agon motif in ancient, classical Greek culture. But let us summarize the nature of character and social structure in terms of MacIntyre's analysis of virtues of Homeric and Athenian societies. He notes at the outset of his study of moral theory that: "the exercise of ... heroic virtues ... requires both a particular kind of human being and a particular kind of social structure" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 126). He is speaking, of course, about the Homeric warrior-hero and the social structure of what he calls heroic society. His basic thesis is that "the understanding of heroic society -- whether it ever existed or not -- is thus a necessary part of the understanding of classical society and its successors" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 121).

In outlining the relationships between the virtues of heroic society and fifth and fourth century Athenian society MacIntyre focuses on the central concept of "agon". He acknowledges that there existed different views of the nature of virtue and rival lists of cardinal virtues in classical Greek society, but states "that nonetheless the city-state and the *agon* provide the shared contexts in which the virtues are to be exercised" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 138).

MacIntyre (2007) goes on to set forth his own moral theory in terms of an Aristotelian triad of virtues, practices, and institutions:

1. "A "virtue" is an 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" (p. 191).
2. A "practice" refers to "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized" (p. 187). MacIntyre takes

care to note that: "A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods" (p. 190).

3. "External goods" (e.g., land, money, power) "have always some individual's property and possession" and typically if someone has more external goods, others have less (p. 190). "External goods are therefore characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners" (p. 190). Whereas, "internal goods" like distinction, excellence, honor, arete "are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is good for the whole community who participate in the practice" (pp. 190-191).
4. "Social institutions" are comprised of the social networks and social structures that both enable and constrain practices. MacIntyre points out that: "institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with ... external goods" (p. 194). And because institutions are involved in both acquiring and distributing money and material goods, and because they are structured in terms of power and status, they are subject to corruption. MacIntyre records that without virtues "practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions" (p. 194).

We schematically summarize MacIntyre's triad of heroic social structure in Table 6, as specifically related to agonal competition in heroic societies. And in Table 7 we show what we perceive to be the relationships between character and social structure in agonal systems in general.

Table 6. Social structure of heroic society

VALUED VIRTUES	AGONAL PRACTICES	SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS
Personal qualities shared by all members in defining relationships between peers in the pursuit of excellence. COURAGE	Sets of coherent, complex, socially established cooperative activities that legitimate the quest for excellence. STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE	The social networks that both enable & constrain the agonal practices sustaining the quest for excellence. KINSHIP ORDER
FIDELITY	OBEDIENCE TO RULES	Focus on family and clan SPIRITUAL ORDER
FORTITUDE	GOAL ACHIEVEMENT	Including games & sports associated with festivals and funeral contests ECONOMIC ORDER
GENEROSITY	Obtaining both internal and external goods INTERNAL GOODS	Rank Order and Feudal/Military Agrarian Societies POLITICAL ORDER
JUSTICE	E.g., arête, distinction, honor and prestige EXTERNAL GOODS	Emphasis on community and warrior aristocracies MILITARY ORDER
	E.g., power, privilege, and prosperity	Emphasis on Elite Warrior-Heroes

Source: own studies.

Table 7. Character and social structure of agonal social systems

Heroic Attributes	Structural Attributes	Character Attributes
Heroic Qualities	Virtues	Moral Character
Heroic Actions	Practices	Moral Career
Cultural Hero Systems	Institutions	Moral Order

Source: Own studies.

Feudal society

Maria Ossowska, in her seminal work, “Social Determinants of Moral Ideas” (1972, p. 131), writes that:

“although some historians have cast doubt on the similarities between the ethos of Homer's warriors and the medieval knights, we are entitled to expect analogies because in both cases we are dealing with the way of life of a privileged class whose main activity is fighting.”

Indeed, the primary agonal practice was the same in both Heroic and Feudal societies, namely, warfare; and both societies emphasized sport and hunting as secondary agonal practices.

Importantly, Homeric warriors and medieval knights both ascribed to tough, martial ethical systems which valorized the achievement of virtue through violence with their emphasis on the classic virtues of valor (prowess), loyalty (fidelity), and generosity (largess). Most significantly, in expressing their particular forms of martial masculinity, both Homeric warriors and medieval knights held to ethical systems based on the supreme cardinal virtue of honor.

As eloquently summarized by Michael Ignatieff (1998, p. 117) for aristocratic warrior societies in general:

“As ethical systems, they were primarily concerned with establishing the rules of combat and defining the system of moral etiquette by which warriors judged themselves to be worthy of mutual respect. Warrior's honor implied an idea of war as a moral theater in which one displayed one's manly virtues in public. To fight with honor was to fight without fear, without hesitation, and, by implication without duplicity. The codes acknowledged the moral paradox of combat: that those who fight each other bravely will be bound together in mutual respect; and that if they perish at each other's hand, they will be brothers in death.”

Or in the words of Ossowska (1972, p. 135), “the code of fair play which was binding in a fight between two nobles originated in pride, respect for the adversary due to class solidarity, and an attitude of play.”

The special significance of honor for medieval knights per se is highlighted by Richard W. Kaeuper (2001, pp. 129-130) in his study of “Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe”:

“Prowess and honor are closely linked in the knights' minds, for the practice of the one produces the other ... Honor is the veritable currency of chivalric life, the glittering reward earned by the valorous as a result of their exertions, their hazarding of their bodies. It is worth more than life itself.”

Kaeuper's observations echo Huizinga's view of war as a noble game of honor; and they support Malcolm Vale's characterization of wars as ennobling “because they test a man's worth in conditions of extreme personal danger” (Vale, 1981, p. 30).

Notwithstanding substantial parallels and similarities between Homeric warriors and medieval knights, there were major differences in the nature of their virtues, agonal practices, and the social institutions that both enabled and constrained their agonal practices. Medieval society in general has been typically viewed as comprised of three main social orders or estates:

1. The “oratores” comprised of all members of the clergy;
2. The “laboratories” represented by the variety of laborers; and

3. "Bellatores" or "pugnatores" consisting of all ranks of knightly warriors.

These three social orders strongly influenced, and in turn were strongly influenced by, the promulgation of the unique ethical system of "chivalry" which according to Maurice Keen "essentially was the secular code of honor of a martially oriented aristocracy" (Keen, 1984, p. 252). In addition to emphasizing the classic martial virtues listed above, chivalry stressed non-martial virtues such as chastity, courtesy, faith, humility and piety.

Moreover, chivalry gave new meaning to the key virtue of "loyalty". For a Homeric warrior loyalty meant fidelity to comrades, clan and community; whereas, for a medieval knight loyalty implied faithfulness to three very different claimants: "God, his eternal master; his liege lord, who was his master while on earth; and the mistress of his heart, the lady to whom he had sworn his love" (Baker, 2003, p. 57). Thus, loyalty for a medieval knight brought conflicting demands as he sought to fulfill the obligations of three less than compatible ethical subsystems:

1. An ethic of Christian service to the Church,
2. An ethic of faithful service to a lord, and
3. An amorous ethic of service to a lady.

Strikingly, the amorous ethic of service to a lady was incorporated into the sporting and athletic agonal practices of the tournament (teams of knights) and the joust (single combat) in a twofold manner. On the one hand, in the course of competition in tournaments and jousts, knights could express their courtly love for their chosen lady through attention and adoration. On the other hand, noble women attending these venues acted as judges of knightly behavior.

Martial and sporting masculinities are performative masculinities if you will, and as such they demand an audience, but not just any audience will do. As Braudy (2005, p. 57) points out: "As there is no honor to be gleaned from defeating someone outside the honor system, there is no praise to be cherished from the wrong audience"; and more specifically, he observes that: "A large portion of the audience for ... displays of literary knighthood and chivalry, in life as well as literature, were women". But over time the romance element of the tournament became such an overriding concern that tournaments became increasingly "artificial" and less and less "agonal" (Huizinga, 1954; Vale, 1981, pp. 64-65).

While the tournaments and jousts of the 14th and 15th centuries were largely reflections of symbolic or pseudo-agon, the tournaments and jousts of the 12th and 13th centuries had a close connection with warfare. In fact, many fell little short of actual warfare. For example, Vale (1981, p. 87) reports that: "At a tournament at Neuss in 1241 over eighty knights are said to have died, many of them, apparently suffocated in their armour in the dust and heat."

Such slaughter aside, tournaments and jousts fulfilled a number of important functions: they provided training for battle and an outlet for martial fervor between wars; they offered landless and poor knights the opportunity to gain prestige and to attract the patronage of a wealthy noble; they provided the chance for economic gain through the capture and ransoming of opponents; and they offered great opportunities for social networking in the large gatherings of a host of influential individuals. And "above all, because they drew men together from far afield, they served as points of diffusion for chivalrous culture and for chivalrous standards" (Vale, 1981, p. 100).

The great popularity of tournaments and jousts were a source of concern for both the Church and the Monarchy. Both kings and popes issued official declarations of prohibitions against these agonal practices. Liege lords did not like to see the mass destruction of men and horses in sporting contests as they constituted a depletion of key resources for forthcoming wars. And laymen and high churchmen alike did not approve of either primary or secondary agonal practices as they reflected ancient pagan virtues; promoted pride, pomp and circumstance; and drew inspiration from a pre-Christian past. Accordingly, the individualistic outlook and relative high degree

of autonomy of nomadic knights were a threat to Monarchy and Church alike. But both institutions achieved uneasy truces with knighthood.

With respect to nobility knights ranked lowest on the ladder of social status but through social mobility achieved through success at agonal practices often became members of the higher nobility. Also noteworthy is the fact that:

“As the perception of masculinity developed in relation to war in the Middle Ages, 'knight' was the bridge between the otherwise separable contradictory categories of 'noble' and 'warrior'” (Braudy, 2005, p. 71).

With respect to the Church it co-opted knights as “soldiers of Christ” in “the army of God” for fighting the Crusades and established the religious-martial orders of the Knights Templar, the Knights Hospitalers, the Teutonic Knights, and the Knights of Calatrava. In addition, the Church assumed authority for both the first and final stages of the moral careers of knights. Specifically, it established the policy of Christianizing knighthood by sanctifying the ceremony of knighting and by offering the reward of Christian salvation for martial service to God.

The scales of honor of achievement in agonal practices in Feudal society serve to illustrate the paths of both social mobility and moral careers of knights in action. Maurice Keen (1984, pp. 12-13), citing from the medieval writings of Geoffrey de Charny, outlines achievements and paths of honor as follows:

“Young men at arms who distinguish themselves in the joust deserve praise, he says, but those who distinguish themselves in the tourney deserve higher praise ... These in turn must give way before those who have won honor in war, for war is a graver business and more honourable 'and passes all other manner of arms'. Those who have served with distinction in wars in their own lands are to be honoured, but still more to be honoured are those who have seen service in 'distant and strange countries' ... The best men of all will be those who have advanced from one honour to the next.”

The outstanding exemplar of such a moral career is William Marshall, the knight of knights (Painter 1933; Duby 1985). He was born sometime around 1145 as the fourth son of an English baron of middling rank. He received sponsorship and served his apprenticeship as page and squire under the Count of Tankerville; and as a result of courageous conduct was dubbed a knight at age 18. Following great success at war, tournaments, and jousts alike he attained the rank of Earl and served as a Regent of England before his death in 1219. As expressed by Maurice Keen in his review of the biography of William Marshall by Georges Duby:

“Thus, William built a distinguished reputation, on his loyalty and on his skill and valor in combat, and also on his generosity, for of his own prizes he kept nothing, distributing largess recklessly among his companions” (Keen, 1986, p 39).

In the course of the later Middle Ages the combined results of changing technology of warfare, the increased power of kings and courts, and the efforts of the Church to “modify facets of the heroic cult to suits its own purposes” served to “effectively harness the individual knight's martial capabilities” and, thus, closed the “avenues for the expression of an agonal lifestyle which virtually disappeared in the fifteenth century” (Morford & Clark, 1976, pp. 186-187).

Victorian society

Through rose colored glasses members of Victorian society looked back to both classical Greek society and medieval society for inspiration and ideals of moral character and conduct. As Jenkins' (1981) illustrates in his book “The Victorians and Ancient Greece”, members of Victorian society expressed a reawakened interest in the archaeology, art and literature of ancient Greece. But as he also illustrates, they “adapted their interests in

Hellenic subjects to conform to their own categories of thought culture, and morality" (Morford & McIntosh, 1993, p. 54). Similarly, Turner (1981, p. 8) points out in his study of "The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain": "Across the Western world Victorian authors and readers were determined to find the Greeks as much as possible like themselves and to rationalize away fundamental differences".

Likewise, members of Victorian society adapted medieval notions of honor and chivalry to their own interests; as indicated in Ferguson's (1960) analysis of "The Indian Summer of English Chivalry" and Girouard's (1981) examination of "The Return to Camelot". Once again, however, the Victorians selected only those qualities of chivalry that they admired and then adapted them to their own use. Nowhere did this remodeled code find greater expression than in sport: "Being a sportsman, being a gentleman and being chivalrous were totally overlapping concepts" (Girouard, 1981, p. 238).

The adaptations of the classical Greek and medieval heroic traditions were united in the ideals held by educators in the public schools of England. For example:

"In the formulation of Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby from 1828 to 1842, the goal was 'the body of a Greek and the soul of a Christian knight' -- a manliness that would reinvigorate the depleted national moral stock" (Braudy, 2005, p. 340).

Or as Richard Holt (1989, pp. 89-90) nicely expresses the matter:

"The Victorian public school was the forcing-house of a new kind of masculinity in which the distinguishing characteristics of the male sex were not intellectual or genital but physical and moral".

In a like manner, Mangan (1996, p. 28) writes:

"The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century gentleman was essentially the product of the public school and its obsession with games and the games-fields as the heart of the curriculum, the source of masculine virtue and the instrument of imperial domination".

The importance of the public schools for generating ideals of hegemonic masculinity in Victorian society (see Chandos, 1984; Holt, 1989; Mangan, 1981; Simon & Bradley, 1975) was supported and reinforced by the educational philosophy and games playing of the colleges of the Oxbridge universities as described by Paul R. Deslandes (2005) in his book "Oxbridge Men -British Masculinities and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920".

It is evident in the works just cited that in Victorian society public schools and colleges of Oxbridge universities were very much total or closed institutions housing athletic patriarchies. Moreover, the muscular moral manliness associated with public schools and Oxbridge universities during the Victorian era were viewed as reflections of the emergence of the movement of muscular Christianity. For instance, Sandiford (1983, p. 305) maintains that:

"most of the Victorian educators, in fact, became ardent apostles of the creed known as muscular Christianity, which dominated late Victorian philosophy".

But as Mangan (1996, p. 30) demonstrates there was yet another influential school of thought, the Darwin realists, "who embraced 'muscularity' as a moral ideal but were not greatly exercised if it lacked a religious component". The relative influence of the two schools of "muscularity" is a moot matter, but in combination they promulgated the view that games form character.

Character formation through games playing was directed at developing the "gentleman amateur" As Holt (1989, p. 98) has summarized:

"Amateurs were gentlemen of the middle and upper classes who played sports that were often also enjoyed by the common people -- athletics, rowing, or cricket, for example -- but who played these and other games in a special way".

For example, not only was fair play emphasized in terms of abiding by the rules, but more importantly "abiding by what was generally understood to be the 'spirit of the game'" (Holt, 1989, p. 98), referring to the manner in which the game was played. Further, as Holt points out, "sport had not only to be played in good spirit, it had to be played with style" (Holt, 1989, p. 99). Playing in good spirit and with style reflect the properties of character that Goffman (1967, pp. 218-227) calls "integrity" (and related component of gallantry) and "composure" (and related dimensions of poise, calmness, and dignity).

Although spirit and style could be expressed by amateur gentlemen in the context of all team sports, they were key characteristics of the play of amateur gentlemen in the game of cricket. While cricket was popular with all segments of society, including working-class boys as well as laborers and artisans, middle and upper-class participants in the game maintained their rigid class distinctions in so small part by their special spirit and style of play²⁵. Their display of character on the field did much to foster the ideals of British masculinity and concepts of the proper English gentlemen. As Sandiford (1983, p. 303) stresses:

"Cricket was much more than just another game to the Victorians. They glorified it, indeed, as a perfect system of ethics and morals which embodied all that was most noble in the Anglo-Saxon character. They prized it as a national symbol, perhaps because -- so far as they could tell -- it was an exclusively English creation unsullied by oriental or European influences. In an extremely xenophobic age, the Victorians came to regard cricket as further proof of their cultural supremacy".

He even goes so far as to suggest that:

"The Victorians revived the mediaeval concept of the chivalrous knight and emerged with the notion of the Christian cricketer" (Sandiford, 1983, p. 305).

However, caught-up in a neo-romantic view of adulation for the medieval troubadour's ideal model of chivalrous knight errantly, the Victorians overlooked the simple fact that chivalry was at best only a thin veneer and, in reality, largely unsuccessful in controlling the contentious behavior of the medieval knight. The chivalrous gentlemanly ethos of the Victorians downplayed as vulgar three important aspects of agonal behavior; namely, assertiveness, competitiveness, extreme individualism and self-interest. Instead, they emphasized fair play, unselfishness, modesty, magnanimity in victory and disinterestedness.

The most fundamental difference in the contest element of sport in Victorian society in contrast to agonal competitions in classical Greek and medieval societies were the quite different meanings Victorians attached to the concept of honor. For Homeric warriors and medieval knights virtue or honor was achieved and vindicated through physical violence²⁶. Whereas for the Victorian gentleman, honor was derived from respect due to social rank and the accompanying right to precedence.

Related to the very different meanings attached to the concept of honor in Victorian society in contrast to classical Greek and medieval societies is the fact that the primary avenue for pursuit of the agon motif by Victorian gentlemen was through games and sport, whereas for Homeric warriors and feudal knights it was through dueling and warfare. Therefore,

"in many ways the athlete is both a fraudulent and a paradigmatic version of the warrior, with all the pure moves of combat but little of the fear, chaos, and death" (Braudy, 2005, p. 343).

However, sports were viewed as model of military discipline and an important means for developing young officers for service in the British Empire. In brief, "sport as an instrument of social control was the precursor of

²⁵ See Holt's (1989, p. 107) discussion of how cricket could uniquely combine gentlemen-amateurs and lower-class professionals on the same team but with rigid class distinctions on and off the field.

²⁶As Pitt-Rivers states in his discussion of honour and social status: "The ultimate vindication of honour lies in physical violence" (1974, p. 29).

sport as moralistic imperial masculinity" (Mangan, 1996, p. 33). And the legacy of the Victorian linkage of sport, military and patriotism was to be found in combat in World War I. Braudy (2005, p. 342) points out that

“in the first conscriptions of whole British football teams would go to war together, banded in the same regiment”; and remarks that “the war that finally came was in some way thought to resemble a game, a version perhaps of the ‘great game’ of empire”.

While it may be stretching matters to think in any way of World War I as a game, or “great game”, the legacy of chivalry was found in the first combat fights in the air. Factual examples of air chivalry in World War I are given by Piert Hein Meijering (1988) in his book “Signed with their Honor (Air Chivalry during the Two World Wars)”.

With respect to the British involvement in air combat, the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) attempted to attract the best and the brightest for service in their branch of the military and, thus, typically recruited Victorian gentlemen/sportsmen from the public schools and Oxbridge universities. In their account of the British experience of the war in the air, 1914-1918, Steel and Hart (1997, p. 241) cite the following account of a lieutenant in the RFC who reflects on air chivalry as follows:

“There was undoubtedly a sense of chivalry in the air. We did not feel that we were shooting at men. We did not want to kill men; we were really trying to shoot down the machines. Our enemies were not the men in the machines, our enemies were the machines themselves. It was a case of our machine is better than yours and let's down yours. Almost like a game of ninepins. A game of skill, a game in which we pitted ourselves against them and they pitted themselves against us – each to prove the better man”.

This account supports Meijering's assertion that "there certainly was a strong bond that united the flyers of all nations"; and "like the medieval knights, they belonged to a small, international brotherhood" (Meijering, 1988, p. 23).

But when all is said and done, the influence of Victorian codes of chivalry, honor, and fair play had little impact on conduct in combat in World War I in comparison with their large, initial impact on the revival of the modern Olympic Games.

Olympism - a frail and frayed fiber of the heroic thread

If Victorians looked back and viewed classical Greek and medieval societies through rose colored glasses, then it is fair to say the founding father of the modern Olympic Games, Baron de Coubertin, looked back and viewed classical Greek, medieval and Victorian societies through distorted lenses. He looked back on the ancient Olympic Games as a model but in so doing idealized Greek athletic practices to the extent of ignoring the intense rivalry and aggressive self-assertion that underlay the Greek agonal system.

Similarly overlooked by de Coubertin was the fact that, even very early in the history of the ancient Olympics, the internal rewards of arête, excellence and honor achieved within a peer base agonal structure had already given way to an emphasis on external rewards based on goods and money conferred by a pseudo-agonal spectatorship readily identifying with the ceremonial agon.

De Coubertin also took a long look on what he perceived to be the gentlemanly and chivalrous conduct of Victorian sport. But while the Victorian gentleman saw chivalrous conduct in sport as a means of distancing himself from the worker and eventually the professional, de Coubertin saw in the concept of chivalry a means of protecting the moral purity of sport. For example, in his opening remarks before the 1894 Paris Congress, he said:

“Firstly, it is necessary to preserve the noble and chivalrous character which distinguished athletes in the past, in order that it may continue effectively to play the same admirable part in the education of the modern world as the Greek masters assigned it” (Diem, 1967).

In point of fact, these Greek masters may have been none other than those games' masters who were behind the athleticism of the English public schools that de Coubertin admired so much. An athleticism saddled by the gentlemanly ethic that Gilmour (1981) in his volume “The Idea of the Gentleman in the English Novel” described as the “elevation of respectability and good form over talent, energy and imagination”.

In his model for the modern Olympic Games and his focus on chivalrous conduct de Coubertin even invoked memories of knights jousting before noble ladies; as for example, in stating his gendered rationale that:

“We feel that the Olympic Games must be reserved for men ... we have tried and must continue to try to achieve the following definition: the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism with internationalism as a base, loyalty as a means, art for its setting, and female applause as reward” (Gerber, 1974, pp. 137-138).

Given our outline of de Coubertin's viewpoints, we are led to conclude that Mangan (1996, p. 34) is correct in his depiction of de Coubertin as “a man of aristocratic prejudice, historical misconception and utopian idealism”.

Moreover, given de Coubertin's efforts to perpetuate an anomalous admixture of defunct aristocratic ideology, historical inaccuracies and religious like worship of the chivalrous amateur, it is ironic that today's modern Olympic (professional) athlete has more competitive virtues in common with classical warrior-athlete of the past than the Victorian gentleman/amateur athlete as we highlight in Table 8.

However, we must recognize the elements of moral philosophy providing the foundation underlying the ethical frameworks of agonal competition within classical Greek, medieval and Victorian societies are very different from those of contemporary society, in general, and Olympic competition in particular.

Table 8. Characteristics competitive qualities

VICTORIAN (Amateur Athlete)	MODERN (Professional Athlete)
Altruistic	Ambitious
Larger Cause	Personal Cause
Disinterest	Self-Interest
Magnanimous	Assertive
Non-Contentious	Highly Contentious
Modest	Boastful
Good Form / Fair Play	Personal Success

Source: own studies

In brief, the aristocratic moralities and ethical codes associated with the agonal competition of Homeric warriors, medieval knights and Victorian amateur athletes represent moralities of honor and ethics of virtues; whereas the underlying ethical systems of contemporary sport represent moralities of deliberation and ethics of right action.

On the one hand,

1. "honor moralities exemplify moral orders in which the assessment of persons is the primary moral activity" (Harre, 1984, p. 236); and
2. ethics of virtue ask: "What traits of character make one a good person?" (Rachels, 1993, p. 160).

On the other hand,

1. ethics of right action ask: “What is the right thing to do?” (Rachels, 1993, p. 160); and
2. moralities of deliberation ask: "What should I (you, they) do?" (Harre, 1984, p. 236).

In the context of agonal competition, moralities of honor and ethics of virtues encompass both the spirit and style of play. "We might say that to be a hero or gentleman is not just to live according to the code, but to live up to it" (Harre, 1984, p. 237)²⁷.

The ethical framework of archaic (heroic) agon represents the epitome of a morality of honor and an ethics of virtue and offers a largely unfamiliar picture from a contemporary viewpoint of winning and losing. As MacIntyre (2007, p. 137) illustrates the philosophical importance of ancient agon:

"Consider now the place of agon, the contest, in classical Greek society. The Homeric epics are narratives which recount a series of contests. In the Illiad the character of these contests is gradually transformed until it is acknowledged in the confrontation between Achilles and Priam that to win is also to lose and that in face of death winning and losing no longer divide. This is the first great enunciation of moral truth in Greek culture".

Thus, to conclude with MacIntyre (2007, p. 128), let us accept that:

"our games, like our wars, are descendants of the Homeric agon and yet are as different as they are in key part because the concepts of winning and losing have so different a place in our culture".

Personal postscript

I retired eighteen years ago in December 2000 as Dean of the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. During the first nine years of my retirement I remained semi-active with two or three annual publications and giving invited lectures and seminars in Europe and Asia. But in 2009 I concluded that I had gone by my "professional used by date" and accordingly submitted my last two papers for publication and had no plans for further speaking engagements.

However, I could not turn down an invitation to present a paper at the "Homo Movens" international symposium on movement culture in June 2009 in Belgium. It gave me the opportunity to honor the retirement of my good friend Professor Roland Renson from the Katholic University of Leuven, to reunite with my former coauthors Douglas Booth and Garry Chick, and to interact with such notable scholars as Bart Van Reusel, Richard Holt and Patricia Vertinsky. Most importantly it gave me a last-minute chance to partially replay an intellectual debt to my long-time friend and fellow collaborator Robert Morford.

On the one hand, I am both greatly surprised and greatly honored that my paper is being published ten years after my conference presentation. On the other hand, I am embarrassed that it was/is only a working draft needing revisions and additions, and, thus not in final form for publication. Indeed, I wrote the draft of the paper in a very hurried two-week period prior to the conference in Leuven. Unfortunately, my coauthor contracted cancer and died in Mexico in 2012 and I lost my desire to revise the paper or to pursue the topic of agon any further. But I am sincerely thankful and most appreciative of the efforts of my very good Danish friends Olav Ballisager and Ejgil Jespersen for the belated publication of my "Agon Redux" paper.

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²⁷ As Brandt (1983, p. 28) notes: "A sense of honor is a sense that there are standards that one must live up to, even at the cost of one's personal happiness, even at the cost of one's life."

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