Sporting Recommendations for Teaching Fair Play: A Logical and Evolutionary Account¹

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue for a cross-disciplinary approach to teaching sport ethics. I call this a logical and evolutionary account because information that emanates from cell biology, anthropology, philosophy and everywhere in between, I claim, is needed in developing effective fair play pedagogies. The gist of the argument is this: We need to teach smarter, not just harder. Teaching smarter, I say, comes from an understanding of human nature and the logic of sport. I discuss animal behavior, emotions, genetic predispositions, human evolution, the structure of games, philosophical idealism, and other factors in producing five recommendations for teaching sport ethics.

KEYWORDS

sport, fair play, education, Olympism, anthropological ethics

The title of this paper provides a clue about my perspective on games and fair play. When I say that I will provide a logical and evolutionary account, I am expressing a conviction that, if we are to get either games or fair play right, we need the resources provided both by reflection (or more specifically philosophy) and empirical measurement (or more specifically anthropology and biology). And when I mention getting these things right, I don't mean "right" in any narrow, academic sense. I mean "right" holistically, pragmatically, in a practical sense.

Practical truths give us two things. They more or less describe the way things actually are in the world and, presumably because of this, also give us clues about how things in day-to-day life actually work. How things actually work is important for those of us involved in education and other practical aspects of Olympism and the fair play movement. While we appreciate knowledge for knowledge's sake, we also want to see how a marriage of philosophy and biology can provide direction for pedagogical intervention, better direction than either one could produce alone. In this effort I will use the work of modern "biological philosophers" – individuals like Corning (2011), Churchland (2011), and Singer (1995). Thus, after briefly discussing fair play and sport from both philosophic and empirical perspectives, I will conclude with four tips for how we, as educators or sport officials, might more effectively promote fair play. If this works, the first part of the paper (the theory about fair play and games) should be connected closely to the second part (practical strategies for better teaching fair play in sport).

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Some individuals who are interested in promoting fair play begin with a list of principles or rules. In point of fact, the UEFA did this two years ago when it adopted eleven key values related to sportsmanship. Interestingly, about half of them have something directly to do with fair play. For instance one tenet speaks to respect for the rules, another one to betting and fixing games, and yet two more about preserving the integrity of the game of football and avoiding the potentially corrupting influences of big business. With Poznan as one of the organizers of the European Championships in football for 2012, I'm sure that those responsible for sponsoring this competition are interested in bringing these eleven key values to life in the year ahead.

The European Fair Play Movement (EPPM) and the Polish Fair Play Club have also supported any number of fair play statements and principles. Among the most visible and well-conceptualized statements was published by the International Fair Play Committee (IFPC). Its new 2010 Manifesto (IFPC, 2010) includes nine statements of belief that reiterate many of the ideas found in its original pamphlet entitled "Fair Play" and published shortly after the IFPC was founded in 1969, then going under the title of The French Committee on Fair Play. It's formula for fair play was simple and powerful then, and I think it still is today. Observe the written and unwritten rules. Respect one's opponent and oneself. Show a sincere desire for one's opponent to be on equal terms with oneself. Be extremely scrupulous regarding the means of winning. Refuse to pursue victory at any price. Appreciate the fact that winning by cheating, an umpire's error, or an unfair stroke of fate is not really to win. Know that acts of good sportsmanship that jeopardize a coveted victory or carry other high costs are ethically more significant and praiseworthy than those that carry lesser consequences. (French Committee 1974).

It is not difficult to agree with these lofty ideals. But all of us know that lists of ideals, proclamations, and manifestoes have limited utility. Many modern biological philosophers argue that we do not think ethically by consulting Kantian rules, Bentham's principles of aggregate utility, or Rawls' notions of justice. Rather we do it in messy ways that combine reason and emotion.

Many of us, I would guess, are involved with grass roots education and activism because we know that an appeal to rules alone is not sufficient, particularly in our modern rough and tumble world of sports where win-at-all-costs attitudes and behaviors seem to have gained ground over the last 30-40 years. And that is why some of us have written with a sense of urgency that something more needs to be done through Olympism or other educative vehicles.

That is why today we need less rhetoric and more action, less posturing and more genuine courage, less cynicism and more hope, less resignation and more creative thinking, less blind optimism and more optimistic realism. Because the social forces of big-money sport are so great, we also need to work smarter, not just harder. That is why, I believe, we need the ammunition provided by both philosophy and biology... and everything in between. If we do not understand human nature and the world of sport in a multi- or cross-disciplinary way, the odds of effectively countering the forces of big business and what some have called the ills of leaky moral thinking grow much, much longer.

Where then did games and fair play come from and when did they first show up?

Traditional answers point to the start of civilization – perhaps to the Ancient Greeks, to Homer and the *Illiad*, to Confucius and Eastern influences, or possibly to other accounts of early civilizations. Biology, however, tells us that this is a mistake. We need to start much, much earlier.

A quick look at the features of fair play will demonstrate the force of this claim. Fair play can be described as having three distinct elements: equality, equity, and reciprocity (Corning 2011). Equality acknowledges the importance of each individual. Thus, it is associated with the emotions of love, fellow feeling, empathy, and sympathy. Typically, equality aims at satisfying the basic needs of each individual – the need for food, shelter, safety, health. Thus, fair play requires that each person be taken seriously, cared for, protected if necessary, and given an equal opportunity to pursue his or her own interests.

Equity emphasizes merit and our common sense judgments that those who work harder and better deserve more, while malingerers or other free-loaders deserve less. Thus equity is related to our sense of justice and produces what we call just deserts. Fair play requires then that each person receive what they have earned by the decisions they have made, the skill they have exhibited, and the effort they have expended.

The third leg of the fair play stool is reciprocity. It focuses on equitable cooperation and is grounded in trust and courage. Why trust? Because the person who makes the first cooperative gesture has to trust that the recipient will return the favor. Why courage? Because there is always a chance that the recipient will defect after receiving our help. Fair play, under the umbrella of reciprocity, thus requires that people respond in kind to good gestures that are sent their way. This is the fair play we see in cooperative, close-knit communities

With the bare bones of fair play (understood as involving equality, equity, and reciprocity) on the table, biology now has something to put under its empirical microscope. Over the past 50 years or so, and particularly during the last 15 years, it has been doing so. The result has been a cascade of surprising and potentially disturbing claims.

The surprise and disturbance can be traced, I believe, to two principle factors. First, biology and anthropology suggest that the full range of sentient life is different more by degree than kind. Of course, Darwin kick-started this idea in the mid 19th century, but new genetic research (e.g., we share over 95% of our genes with chimpanzees), work in neuroscience (the chemical oxytocin promotes empathetic behavior in both animals and humans), and studies of animal behavior (a species of voles are monogamous and both the mother and father are involved in the care of the children) –all of these lines of research and others are providing further evidence for the general validity of claims about the unity of life. But even with the 152 years we have had to digest Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, it is still hard to picture mere animals responding, if only intuitively and automatically, to some of the demands of equality, equity, and reciprocity. It is hard to give up our self-flattering views of human behavior as different in kind from animal reactivity, not different in degree. Reports of impressive animal behavior can be both surprising and disturbing.

The second cause for surprise and possible unease is personal, but is probably also shared by other researchers my age. When many of us 60-somethings were in graduate school, we were raised to believe in cultural hegemony – nurture over nature, the person as plastic or malleable rather than fixed, free choice and brave new worlds over biological determinism, human reason over animal instinct and hard wiring. More recent research suggests that this emphasis on culture was excessive (e.g., Ridley 2003). Human behavior is a blend of nature and nurture, the chosen and constrained, freedom but within unforgiving wall conditions. Biology, in short, suggests that we are not nearly as free as we thought we were and culture, while playing an important role in human development and behavior, is not the principle, free-wheeling driver it was made out to be.

But we are getting ahead of our story. How do biologists know that animals occasionally (if not frequently) exhibit the tenets of fair play? The answer is fairly straightforward. They observe their behavior in natural environments and conduct laboratory experiments that require care, the recognition of merit, and reciprocal “I’ll scratch-your-back-if-you’ll-scratch-mine” interactions.

They see the effect of equality in mothers (and occasionally fathers) caring for each of their offspring, sometimes even to the point of putting their own lives at risk. They observe, for example, egalitarian food sharing (Corning 2011, p. 64). They see equity or a sense for just deserts at work with animals who ostracize (sometimes even kill) free loaders or others who are not pulling their weight (Corning 2011, p. 67). They see reciprocity in zoo animals grooming a fellow creature, and then having that favor consistently returned.

These so-called nice or cooperative behaviors have puzzled evolutionary theorists for decades because one might predict that selfish or competitive behavior would win out over cooperative activity. That is, animals who looked out for themselves and competed successfully for scarce

resources would be more likely to survive, reproduce, and pass on their egoistic genes to future generations than would animals who were nice and, because of that, would consistently be taken advantage of.

But many scholars (see, e.g., Singer 1995) have argued that this is not how it works. Animals that behave in fair ways, that cooperate and can be trusted to return favors, do better than animals that try to go it alone or otherwise behave selfishly. Because cooperative animals do better, they survive and pass on their genes to offspring who are also therefore prone to fair play and cooperation. In Darwinian terms, fair play and cooperative behavior turn out to be adaptive. If this is right, and here is the punch line for us, we have been built and rebuilt over millions of years to favor fairness over injustice, to have strong positive feelings for fair play, to expect fairness in the behavior of others. In short, we are biologically built to be social animals that are genetically tilted, as it were, to be fair ourselves and require fairness from others.

Of course, this is not to say that these inclinations guarantee that humans will always behave fairly. We know better. But our biology inclines us in this direction, and this could have important implications for how we approach fair play pedagogically.

We may gain a glimpse of these implications by looking at four lessons that might be taken from this brief review of the roots of fair play.

1. We want to be good. We are tilted in the direction of cooperation. Being cooperative (playing fairly) can make our lives go better. It can even make us happy. Thus, we might question pedagogical strategies that present fair play as self-denying or as inherently altruistic.
2. Genetic predispositions developed over years of evolution do not guarantee right behavior. Thus, education, training, environmental adjustments, the development of incentives and other interventions are needed. Any pedagogical strategy that does not see fair play as a product of nature and nurture should be questioned.
3. Fair play sentiments are common, every-day companions. Feelings related to equality, equity, and reciprocity infiltrate most everything our ancestors did, as indeed they affect most everything that we do today. Fair play, in other words, is an average, normal, routine, unexceptional, everyday kind of behavior for animals, primitive humans, and brainy hominids like us. Thus, we might question any pedagogical strategy that focuses on unusual events, moral heroes, and exceptional behavior.
4. Fair play has its roots in our intuitive and emotional lives. We **feel** fairness as much or more than we think it. Thus, we might question any pedagogy that relies too strongly on rationality, language, or cognition.

We now need to turn our attention to games. Where did they come from and when did they arrive on the scene? Nobody knows for sure. Much like the roots of fair play, gaming activity is difficult to see through the dense fog of our evolutionary journey. Archeological research indicates that the first game artifacts date back over 7,000 years. I think this estimate is off by at least 20,000 years and probably much more.

I say this because the first game artifacts were probably natural objects that were used in daily life for other functions or were part of the normal surroundings (Carroll 2000). For example, ancient rocks may have served as game artifacts for the strongest men of hunter-gatherer tribes. But when archeologists uncover these rocks, nothing about them announced that they were used in a game. Likewise with an ancient spear. It might have been used for hunting and, after the hunt was over, an implement in a target-oriented game. But in the absence of written game rules or other tell-tale symbols, the spear is seen by archeologists to be a hunting tool, not also a piece of sporting equipment for a popular prehistoric game.

These speculations may be strengthened by looking at a possible genealogy of games. I believe that the parents of games were work and play. Notice first that work and play are common to animal and human life. In other words, animals with less advanced cognitive abilities than our own have

access to both of these forms of behavior. Mice work, bees work, cockroaches work. All animals, if they want to survive, perform certain work functions that allow them to reach reproductive age, produce offspring, and pass on their genes.

Likewise, we see play behavior in many forms of animal life. Cats play with balls of string. Dogs have a typical play stance and love to chase, retrieve, and wrestle. Some biologists think they even see play behavior in fish, insects, and any variety of invertebrates (See, e.g., Burghardt 2005.).

I mention the presence of work and play in animal life because this supports my chronology. Work and play obviously have to predate games if they are to serve as their foundation. In evolutionary terms, the intelligence required for the negotiation of work and play has to be less demanding than the cognition needed for gaming. So, if my scenario is accurate, and if far less intelligent creatures than us were able to work and play, then it would follow that both work and play probably existed on our planet for millions of years before the arrival of games².

But why focus on work and play, and what is their connection to games? Work and games share the feature of instrumentality or, more simply put, problem solving. Work, by definition, requires that we address difficulties or challenges, figure them out, and hopefully, reap the survival benefits that accompany a job well done. Over the millennia, our ancestors were built and rebuilt to become better problem solvers. This involved increased cranial volume, larger brains, and the improved thinking that this allowed. It involved the move to bipedalism and the upright posture and our increasing handiness. It included the harnessing of fire, cooking, and protein rich diets from the consumption of animal muscle. It included the increasing ability to invent and use tools. And because of the considerable survival demands on our hominid ancestors, much time was spent solving important problems. The result is, well, us... the most sophisticated problem-interested and problem-solving creatures who have ever moved across the face of the earth. In short, as I have argued elsewhere (Kretchmar 2005), we are problem-seeking animals through and through.

This may sound odd because, at least in the English language, problems have a negative or pejorative connotation to them. We try to avoid problems, not seek them out. But given our heritage and our resultant human nature, we have to conclude that, on balance, problems are good things. Problems are necessary things. Problems are vitamins for the human psyche. When we fail to realize this, we get into trouble. An old biological wall condition presents itself. We dissipate. We try drugs, cheap entertainment, spectating from the sidelines of life, and any number of other forms of escapism and pleasurable passivity. As we do so, our ancestors locked in our very cells, bones, and physiology whisper to us across the millennia, "In order to stay healthy and happy, you have to move and get your problem-solving hands dirty".

Here is where play comes in. Games would not be needed if survival-related problem solving and simple play activities filled our days. But they do not. And they did not fill up the days of our hunter-gatherer ancestors some 30,000 years ago. I can say this with some degree of assurance because research on current hunter-gatherer societies shows that these individuals enjoy large amounts of leisure time (Brick et al 2001). Hunting and gathering efficiently, in other words, turned out to be a mixed blessing for our Upper Paleolithic ancestors. After the stores were full of food, the shelters were built, the wild animals were scared off, and simple play activities grew wearisome – they still had time on their hands... time but with nothing to do. In a word, they were bored (Kretchmar 2008).

The antidote for the disease of boredom caused by insufficient natural problems, I am speculating, was the invention of desirable, artificial problems, activities that would be experienced as

² Assuming that the arrival of games occurred in the Paleolithic Era along with other elements of culture (e.g., cave paintings), a large gap exists between the onset of play and the invention of games. If we take a conservative approach and reserve play for the first hominids, there is still a 6-7 million year difference between play and games. If we think that invertebrates like cockroaches play, then the gap grows to 300 million years or more. Either way, play behavior shows up long before gaming activity (See Burghardt 2005, Bekoff and Byers 1998).

delightful, as play! These early artificial problems were primitive games, games that probably piggy-backed on everyday skills and abilities, games that undoubtedly had very few rules. It is not difficult to imagine such games. Throwing a pebble, spear, or knife at a target for accuracy. Running from one point to another as fast as possible. Wrestling. Demonstrating one's strength by lifting heavy objects. Most of these activities mimicked work behaviors, and many of them probably carried religious or ritualistic meanings, but in contrast to work, they were constructed and freely chosen.

One prehistoric game might have been called "stones". In fact, that is exactly what it is called today in Scotland and other parts of the world. It is a game for strong people. All that is required is a stone that is not too heavy and not too light. It also requires a rule indicating that no levers or help from friends are permitted in getting this rock off the ground. So hunter-gathers from the village would, in their free time, go to the rock and try to lift it. The game of Stones became very popular and those who were good at it gained notoriety, respect, and sometimes power. But most of those who participated in Stones did so because they enjoyed the challenge it provided. The doing of trying to lift a heavy object was its own reward. This is why the activity has its roots in play. Games, I am speculating, were invented over 30,000 years ago to circumvent boredom and replace it with excitement, interest, and joy.

The intellectual wherewithal required for inventing and playing games is impressive, but that is another story for another day. Suffice it to say that games signaled the advent of something we call culture. This is so because culture is a second world of sorts – for example, a world of music next to the natural world of sounds, a world of art next to the natural world of colors and shapes, a world of fiction next to a world of actual stories. Games are a world of artificial, ideal problems (we make them to suit ourselves) next to the natural world of real and often survival-related problems. Animals do not invent or play games any more than they write poetry, play sonatas, sculpt vases, paint paintings, or participate in any other form of culture. Games like art, music and writing are, I believe, very special things, very human things, in degrees uniquely human things.

One more point needs to be made about games before moving on to the four recommendations for teaching fair play. The simple games invented by our ancestors were tests before they were used in competition (Kretchmar 1975). Lifting a rock, for example, is a test, not a contest. It can be done alone. The score one gets is intelligible whether one beats another person or not. Granted, we might want to find out what the norms for rock lifting are before we can figure out if we are good at it, but norms do not presuppose competition. All that norms require is multiple test scores. In short, no rock lifting activity requires that we try to beat one or more people at the same thing.

It is also true that competitive comparisons of skill or strength require a valid test – that is, a test on which one can do better or worse (Kretchmar 1975). The reason is simple. A supposed test that is absolutely impossible will not allow competitors to show a difference. Everyone will score zero, and every competition will end in a boring tie. Likewise a test that is laughably easy will not allow adversaries to show a difference. Everyone will score a perfect 100... every single time... so, once again, every competition would end in a boring tie. This is why it is analytically true that contests require valid tests. Tests are the more fundamental of the two. Games are, at bottom, tests. Tests, in other words, are basic. Contests are derived and parasitic.

Here then are four brief lessons we might collect from our review of games.

1. Human beings have been built and rebuilt through out the millennia to solve problems. This occurred first in work, later in work and games. Thus, we should remember that people are tilted not only towards fair play but also toward games. We are both fair play-prone and game-prone creatures, biologically, by nature, with or without further shaping by education or culture.
2. Games are closely related to play. Human beings, at some point in their evolutionary history, encountered the mixed blessings of free time and boredom. With nothing that they were required to do, they wondered about things they would **want** to do. This solidified the

connection between games as artificial problems and the intrinsic motivation of play. Games, in short, were made to be interesting and fun.

3. Games are a form of culture. Games are constructed from natural work and play activities that are meaningful to those who will play those games. Games, as artificial and constructed problems, can be crafted to suit us... and importantly, help us to improve culture, or otherwise pursue our ideals.
4. Tests and contests are two different things, and tests are the more important of the two. All competitions are grounded in valid tests.

Practical implications for teaching fair play

All of this talk about the three legs of fair play, the roots of fairness in animal behavior, the fact that fair play is built into human nature, and similar comments about the prehistoric development of gaming behavior and our current status as game-ready, playful creatures may seem far removed from practical lessons that can be used in the gymnasium or classroom. But they are not. They have a great deal to do with something I mentioned earlier – namely, that we need to work smarter, not just harder in our efforts to promote the principles of Olympism and fair play. We need to find pedagogies that would have us swimming downstream, in harmony with human nature, not against it. That is why research on human nature and the insights provided about human nature from biology, evolutionary theory, and philosophy are needed. We want our pedagogies designed to teach ethics not just to sound good in principle, and not just to provide an idealistic vision of better behavior. We want them to work! What follows is a brief sketch then for a fair play pedagogy that is grounded in interdisciplinary facts and speculations about human nature as well as the origins and logic of games.

1. We should present fair play primarily as normal, expected, and self-interested behavior, not as heroic, sacrificial, or altruistic. Regular people, not just moral heroes, act fairly most of the time. We should provide statistics that show that average human beings who are not destined for sainthood act justly with nearly everyone day in and day out. We should also emphasize the fact that this everyday, average, fair-minded behavior is in our students' own self-interest. The overlap between fair play and self-interest is huge.

We can also provide experiences to demonstrate the fact that games that are played fairly are more fun than those that are not. We can construct unfair games, require that our students play them, and allow them to see how they feel. More generally, we can show how the lives of people who act fairly go better, not worse. We need to highlight the fact that it is the odd person, the outlier, who has no feeling for fairness, who is the habitual cheat. Evolution has tilted us in the direction of fair play, and we should take full advantage of that.

I would not eliminate current efforts by the International Fair Play Committee to reward heroic acts of fair play, but I would de-emphasize them. While they can inspire, they more often have an unintended consequence of discouraging fair play. Why? Because they set the bar too high. Most of us... and most of our students... are not saints or moral heroes and never will be. Most fair play is not heroic at all. Fair play, most of the time, gets lived out in the simple decency of playing a game well.

2. We should emphasize fair play in relationship to the test, not the contest. We need to remind our students that the magic in sport comes from the test. After all, we fall in love with the game, even though we may also compete with others in that game. We love football, golf, fencing, not competition in the abstract. So our primary efforts in teaching fair play need to be directed toward respect for the game. We need to help our students understand what our cultural games were designed to test and how violating the letter or spirit of the rules can ruin that test.

We can experiment in the gymnasium with rule violations to demonstrate how using one's hands in football, excessively rough play in basketball, or other variations change our beloved

games in ways that are undesirable. We can do a better job of bringing our students into what I call the subculture of the game – the history, the great plays and players, the evolution of the rules, how to select and care for the equipment, refereeing techniques, memorable stories. Students grow into respecting games. They cannot be talked into it. We know that from our evolutionary past we are built to love problems and to try to solve them. We need to take advantage of that by focusing on respecting the test, the game, complex game problems, the subcultures that develop around those problems.

I would not eliminate efforts to promote fair play that are related more directly to competition, but I would de-emphasize them. Why? Because those who have a deep love and respect for the games they play will be less likely in competitive situations to cheat, use dirty tricks, intimidate, manipulate officials, or engage in other behavior that denigrates the game itself. Loving and respecting the game come first.

3. We need to emphasize reciprocity including appropriate forms of retribution (Singer 1995). We need to show our students that sporting competitions are grounded in cooperative behaviors. More importantly we need to underline the fact that reciprocity is a two-way street. Good acts beget other good acts. Bad acts beget other bad acts. In other words, fairness requires that we teach our students how to play ethical tit for tat, as harsh as it may sound. If an opponent plays by the rules, we do likewise. And after the game – win or lose – we set up another match in the future. However, if our opponent defects, we need to make sure that such behavior is not rewarded. may refuse to finish the game or, after the contest, indicate that we will not play again.

The second leg of the fair play stool (equity) indicates that advantages in sport need to be earned. Anyone who tries to reap rewards without earning them needs to be “outed” and pay a price. A cheat is, in effect, a free-loader. And free-loaders need to be given clear unequivocal messages that such behavior will not be accepted. They want to reap the benefits of cooperation without cooperating themselves.

Our prehistoric ancestors lived better lives because they learned how to cooperate and punish free-loaders via the rules of tit for tat. I have my own students play a version of tit for tat called The Prisoner’s Dilemma. They learn very quickly and convincingly that self protective or win-at-all-cost behaviors are losing strategies. Taking a risk and being nice are the tricks to solving the dilemma. This moral exercise could be adapted for gymnasium use for virtually any age student. Tit for tat, if played correctly, produces positive moral spirals of trust offered and trust returned, good gestures exported, and good gestures returned.

4. We should emphasize repetitions and feedback in relationship to fair play behavior. This, of course, is something that Aristotle recommended many years ago. Even though human nature tilts us in the direction of decency and fair play, we are capable of going the other direction. Egoism, meanness, envy, pettiness, insensitivity, an inability or unwillingness to forgive – the ills that occasionally bedevil most everyone are known to all of us. And when contemporary sporting culture pushes us in the direction of the moral dark side, we are even more likely to fall in line, learn from what we see around us, and behave accordingly. So here is the problem. Negative symbols, signals, and repetitions may be beating out the positive ones.

Thus, we need to structure our classes for repeated ethical decision-making – for ethical reps, for ethical reps with instructive feedback. This is notoriously difficult to do, but if we are to have any chance of reversing current trends, we have to provide the necessary repetitions. As many ethicists have told us, and as our own journey into animal fair play has shown us, good behavior is partly habitual, instinctive, and emotional, not simply rational or cognitive. We cannot simply cajole, reason, or talk our students into fair play. We have to practice them into good sport ethics. We need more repetitions and less talk.

Other implications of our biological-philosophical journey could be drawn out. But there is no space to do so. These four tips however, should provide some indication of how we can teach fair play by paying attention to human nature and aligning our pedagogical strategies with it... not against it.

A critic of this approach might suggest that we are aiming too low by looking at our evolutionary past and taking our primary cues from it. Lost in this discussion, they might say, is the idealism that has inspired many ethicists like Kant or Schiller and the great de Coubertin himself. And lost in this discussion is the altruism, self-sacrifice, and unusually fine acts that are typically featured as highlights in human ethics.

I agree with this criticism, at least in part. What I have provided is more of a starting point than a destination. I believe we do need the inspiration that comes with the highest hopes for the human race, but we also need to be smart about how we pursue them.

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