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Sport, stories, and morality: a Rortyan approach to doping ethics

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ABSTRACT

Stories pervade sport. In elite spectator sport, stories play out in packed stadiums while being broadcast simultaneously to immense TV audiences. These stories, which present controversial goals, great comebacks, underdog victories, or clever instances of cheating among other incidents, can foster moral reflection. This paper explores the relationship between sport, stories, and morality. It discusses Richard Rorty's insistence on narrative as a powerful vehicle to moral change and progress, as one way to understand this relationship. Stories about Justin Gatlin and Therese Johaug – two world-class athletes who tested positive for prohibited substances and served doping bans – are discussed as exemplars of redescriptive narratives: stories that can foster our moral imagination, broaden our conversations and help us to enhance our descriptions and practices of solidarity. In this Rortyan approach, moral progress can occur when the work of narrative redescription joins forces with philosophy's rational struggle for coherence. Building on this conception of progress, the paper concludes with a reflection on narrative redescription as a method in sport ethics.

KEYWORDS Stories; narrative; redescription; Richard Rorty; ethics; doping

Introduction

As Justin Gatlin celebrated a controversial gold medal in the men's 100-m dash at the 2017 World Athletics Championships, the story playing out on TV screens worldwide raised many moral questions about doping, anti-doping, and public condemnation of athletes who have served doping bans. The inescapable contrast in this story between, on the one hand, an emotional Gatlin and comforting popular hero, Usain Bolt, and, on the other hand, a booing crowd, elucidated conflicting moral beliefs in a way highly conducive to reflection and discussion. Ten months earlier, the Norwegian sports community had been shocked by cross-country skier Therese Johaug's positive test for clostebol; this initial shock developed into an intense debate as the media story around her case unfolded, and as,

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eventually, an eighteen-month ban from competition was handed down. Unprecedented in the Norwegian context because of its strong emphasis on the perspective and emotions of an athlete testing positive for doping, the story raised questions previously all but unexplored in this context about the adverse consequences of anti-doping.

'Sport', says Kretchmar (2017) 'is story-friendly'. Sharing structural, semantic, and social similarities with fiction, sport has a comparable potential for 'generating ... powerful stories' (Kretchmar 2017, 57). From a sport ethical point of view, this story-telling feature of sport is significant because stories are morally important. Narrative philosophers have widely discussed the many possible ways in which fictional and non-fictional stories work in our moral universe (e.g. Lindemann Nelson 2001; MacIntyre 1981; Nussbaum 1990, 1995; Ricoeur 1992, 1988; Rorty 1989, 2016; Taylor 1989). In particular, Alisdair MacIntyre's account of foundational narratives as practice communities' sources of moral normativity has informed sport ethics (McNamee 2008; Morgan 1994). Following Morgan (1998) and Roberts (1995, 1997), the present paper takes its inspiration from Richard Rorty.

Focusing on two stories about a particularly contentious moral issue in sport – doping – the present paper suggests one approach to better understand the role of stories in moral thinking about sport. This Rortyan approach starts from the presumption that moral progress is made in search of means to increase one's moral imagination and enhance one's descriptions and practices of solidarity. This project is well served by redescriptive narratives: stories that expose us to the contingency of our beliefs and inform our moral thinking with alternative beliefs, new perspectives, and new questions.

Thus, the central purpose of this paper is to posit the Gatling and Johaug stories as redescriptive sport narratives. In extension, a second purpose is to develop and discuss narrative redescription as a method in sport ethics. Towards these aims, the following section explores the salience of stories in sport and moral thinking and introduces Rorty's approach as one promising way of exploring the moral work of stories in sport. Next, the Gatlin and Johaug stories are introduced and subsequently discussed in light of the Rortyan approach. The paper concludes with a methodological discussion that reflects on the potential of narrative redescription as a method in sport ethics.

Sport, stories and morality

To play sport, notes Howe (2011, 43), 'is to take on the narrative ... of "being a player in this game" or being "a runner/swimmer/climber/etc."' It is to introduce into one's internal narrative of self this additional narrative thread of oneself as doing actions in a certain way, and of perhaps being this way or that'. In playing sport, we do not merely add content to the story we tell

ourselves about ourselves; we play that story out *as* players, runners, swimmers or climbers. In any sport setting, thus, there are people involved in telling stories about themselves from the perspective of a practitioner. In most settings, there are multiple stories, multiple storytellers, and more perspectives.

Particularly in elite spectator sport, the presence and significance of both live and television audiences, media, sport governing bodies, support personnel, sponsors, and so on, make for a rich tapestry of stories told from a wide variety of perspectives. To paraphrase Howe, to watch, cover, or fund a sport event, is to take on the narrative of being a fan, a reporter, or a sponsor involved in the sport. What is more, sport narratives enjoy a particular salience in popular culture. In most cultures, athletes, coaches, teams, and competitions enjoy broad public appeal, and stories of these are told and retold and reinterpreted in a variety of ways by the media, sport governing bodies, fans, and the general public.

The omnipresence and public appeal of narrative in sport is important because stories are morally important. That stories matter in a way central to our understanding of moral life is the unifying idea of 'narrative ethics'. In narrative ethics, stories are seen as necessary means to some moral end and thus matter beyond their widely recognized utility as illustrations or examples to test moral theories or principles. Narrative ethicists have argued that stories are a necessary means to moral education, moral guidance and motivation, moral justification, and making persons morally intelligible.¹ Moreover, narrative ethicists generally hold that stories can play these roles not least because of their unique potential to *move* us. Stories, fictional or non-fictional, told, retold or played out on the sport field, invite us to emotionally engage and form bonds of sympathy and identification with its characters. One philosopher who embraces the ethical utility of this aspect of stories is Richard Rorty. Building on Rorty's work, this paper explores the idea of stories as a means to redescribe ourselves, and our moral beliefs, by increasing our sensitivity to the cruelty, pain, and humiliation experienced by other people.

Rorty and narrative redescription

To Rorty, one of the main values of great storytellers lies in their ability to invite us into the perspective of 'other'. Great fiction exposes audiences to the experiences of people with whom they had previously not concerned themselves, and forms of cruelty they had not previously realized existed. Engaging in the tragic experiences of Twain's Huck or Dickens' Oliver invites readers to redescribe themselves in terms of the suffering they could themselves have endured; engaging in the deeply distressing experiences of Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov or Highsmith's Tom, readers are invited to

redescribe themselves in terms of previously unfamiliar forms of cruelty laying within the realm of human possibilities. Exposure to such redescriptive narratives inclines us to expand the circle of people referred to as 'we' or 'us' and, in turn, our conversations become broader as the perspectives of more people come into consideration. 'That is why', says Rorty (1989, xvi), 'the novel, the movie, and the TV programme have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principle vehicle of moral change and progress'. Because of their peculiar potential for hitting where it hurts the most – by evoking emotion, compassion and identification – stories are powerful vehicles to foster the kind of imagination necessary for accommodating new and unfamiliar perspectives as our own.

Rorty's views on the redescriptive work of narrative reflect his view of moral progress, which, in turn, aligns with his conception of a liberal democratic utopia characterized by an ongoing and pervasive search for better descriptions and better practices of solidarity. In Rorty's utopia 'solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognized by clearing away "prejudice" or burrowing down to previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal to be achieved' (Rorty 1989, xvi). As the true descriptions of solidarity are not 'out there' for humans to uncover, solidarity cannot be described or achieved in a final sense but is always open to redescription.² This insight carries with it the caveat that we can never be fully confident about the status of our descriptions and practices of solidarity, and, thus, the project Rorty promotes becomes a continual search for better descriptions by way of exploring alternatives. In this project, fiction and other kinds of narrative are preferred means as they confront us with alternative descriptions. In Rorty's words, stories help us redefine solidarity by cultivating 'our talent for speaking differently' (Rorty 1989, 7), by confronting us with ever-changing answers to questions such as 'solidarity for whom?' or 'whom have we, hitherto, looked past in our struggle for inclusivity?' or 'what do *these* people care about the most?'

Narrative, thus, can contribute to moral progress insofar as it works to expand our 'we', broaden our conversations by taking into considerations a wider plurality of perspectives and, ultimately, enhance our and our communities' conception and practice of solidarity.³ The following discussion explores ways in which non-fictional sport narratives can serve the redescriptive function Rorty ascribes to fictional narratives. In the following analysis, my interpretation⁴ of the Justin Gatlin story exemplifies the potential of elite spectator sport for embodied, largely non-verbal narratives set in a competitive setting, conveyed to large audiences with the sense of urgency associated with live sport broadcasting. It plays out over a brief, but intense moment. The discussion focuses on the way in which the story facilitated new perspectives and new debates in the international athletics community on the issue of doped athletes. My interpretation of the Therese

Johaug story, on the other hand, relies on the potential for sport narratives to capture the attention of the public over time and facilitate rich and detailed public personal narratives about athlete-celebrities. I discuss how the story unfolded perspectives and arguments more or less unheard of previously in a strict, Norwegian anti-doping culture.

Justin Gatlin: from villain to victim?

At the 2017 World Championships in Athletics in London, the career of one of the most lauded athletes in the history of modern sports ended. On August 5, Jamaican sprinter and world record holder in the 100-m and 200-m sprints, Usain Bolt, participated in his last individual race: the final of the men's 100 m. Acclaimed for his public persona and showmanship in addition to his athletic excellence, Bolt's last shot at an individual gold medal in one of athletics' most prestigious events received massive attention from media and fans worldwide. A 'Lightning Bolt' win was widely anticipated. However, Bolt placed third, and American Justin Gatlin won the race. When the 60,000 spectators inside London Stadium realized that Gatlin had won, many started booing. A sense of strong, collective displeasure grew as Gatlin hushed the crowds. At that moment, Bolt approached Gatlin, who kneeled for Bolt, before the two embraced each other and, at least according to Gatlin, Bolt assured him that the win was well deserved.⁵

Although Bolt failing to win gold in his final race was an anti-climax to many, the reactions of displeasure inside the stadium had another main cause: doping. As Sebastian Coe, president of the International Association for Athletics Federation (IAAF), remarked: 'Sport rarely settles upon the perfect script. [...] I'm hardly going to sit here and tell you I'm eulogistic that somebody that has served two bans in our sport would walk off with one of our glittering prizes'.⁶ In 2001, Justin Gatlin tested positive for amphetamines and was banned from competition for two years for violating anti-doping regulations. Gatlin appealed on the grounds that the positive test was due to medication for attention deficit disorder, and he was allowed an early reinstatement.⁷ Then, in 2006, he tested positive for synthetic testosterone, maintaining that he was the victim of sabotage by a massage therapist. Gatlin was banned from competition for eight years (the World Anti-Doping Code allowed for lifetime bans for second violations, and Gatlin avoided a lifetime ban in exchange for cooperation with anti-doping authorities). Because the circumstances of his first violation indicated no intent of doping, the ban was reduced to four years after appeal.⁸ Thus, Gatlin returned to competition in 2010.

It seems clear that the booing formed part of a powerful historical narrative in global sport culture positioning doping as a major threat to the integrity of sport. This narrative produced and was reproduced by

the creation, expansion, and intensification of anti-doping policy post-1960s (Gleaves and Llewellyn 2014). In this narrative, doping in sport has been described almost exclusively in language highlighting the harms of doping to sport and health and the need to promote and preserve 'clean' sports. Against the backdrop of this historical narrative, the booing can be interpreted as feeding into a subplot where the public narratives of Justin Gatlin and Usain Bolt intertwined in a popular dichotomy between (doped) 'villain' and (clean) 'hero'. The main interest here is the subplot description of Justin Gatlin as a villain, cast by the London crowds, following a report in *The Guardian* 'as the former drugs cheat who would dare to rain on Bolt's farewell parade'.⁹ The news media's coverage of the final suggests that Gatlin was villainized due to a sense that the bans he served were insufficiently severe, that he had not admitted any wrongdoing, that his win might have been 'tainted' by potential long-lasting effects of doping, and that his presence at the race simply did not fit within the narrative of Usain Bolt's retirement.¹⁰

Against this background, I suggest that Justin Gatlin and Usain Bolt played lead roles in an embodied redescriptive narrative. Through a sequence of symbolically charged bodily gestures – Gatlin visibly crying, hushing the crowds, and kneeling for Bolt, Bolt approaching Gatlin with a huge smile and the two embracing each other – the brief but intense and highly publicized scene offered alternatives to the popular description of Gatlin as a villain. First, the sequence of gestures can be interpreted as informing and being informed by an understanding of Gatlin as a victim. In this interpretation, the two athletes' gestures are a reaction to the booing. Gatlin's first reaction is to dismissively hush the crowds, communicating that he perceived their expression of condemnation as misplaced. Inevitably aware of the booing and the public interest in his reaction, Bolt attested to the description of Gatlin as a victim of misplaced condemnation. According to Gatlin, at least, Bolt assured him, as they embraced each other, that 'you don't deserve these boos'.¹¹ Further, the two athletes' actions can be interpreted as communicating a description of Gatlin as redeemed. In this interpretation, the sequence of gestures resembles the literary plot of a 'sinner' asking for forgiveness from a 'ruler' (or anyone with the power to forgive, symbolically or literally, 'on behalf of' a particular community). Gatlin introduced this plot when he kneeled for Bolt. In a scene casting Gatlin as having the 'masses' against him, he turned to the sole person in the arena with the charismatic authority to mitigate the popular response and powerfully suggest an alternative reading of the unfolding events. By approaching and hugging his rival, Bolt validated and advanced the plot introduced by Gatlin. With an inclusive gesture, the popular hero symbolically recognized Gatlin's place in the athletes' community and suggested a redescription of Gatlin as redeemed.

Interestingly, these redescrptions of Gatlin as a victim or redeemed need not contrast directly with the popular description of him as a villain. In the end, one can perceive Gatlin simultaneously as a villain due to his doping violations and victim of exaggerated public expressions of condemnation. However, stories can work to set up alternative descriptions against each other in ways conducive to reflection and discussion. In this particular narrative, as Gatlin and Bolt played out a redescriptive narrative against the backdrop of (and in reaction to) loud booing, there was a clear polarisation of alternative descriptions. Was Gatlin villain or victim? Raising (versions of) this question in the minds of many onlookers, the redescriptive narrative worked to encourage reflection and, as such, make relevant communities 'talk about more things'. Accordingly, in the following days, commentators and experts engaged in a lively debate on Gatlin, Bolt, and the booing. Without a doubt, the popular descriptions steadfastly depicted Gatlin as villain. Opinion pieces in major British newspapers described Gatlin as a 'shameless fraud',¹² a 'super-villain'¹³ and, referring to the main antagonist in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, 'a Voldemort in spikes'.¹⁴ However, these descriptions were challenged by the depth of Gatlin and Bolt's redescriptive narrative. BBC commentator and former sprinter Michael Johnson, for example, argued that 'We didn't educate people about all the drugs cheats. I think we have presented him as a villain. I think we need to do a better job of educating [everyone about] what has been going on'.¹⁵ The problem with singling out Gatlin as a villain, in a sport suffering from a pervasive doping problem, was reflected by Michael Powell of *The New York Times*. In a piece titled 'Justin Gatlin is an athlete of his time; not a villain', Powell provided some nuance to the popular description of Gatlin as a two-time offender ('His first offense was not an offense at all') and argued that the villainization of individual athletes distracted from consideration of the systemic conditions underlying the sport's problem with doping.¹⁶ Similarly, Gatlin's agent and retired hurdles sprinter Renaldo Nehemiah challenged the idea of demanding more from individual athletes than that they play by the rules. Gatlin, Nehemiah argued, has 'done his time. He plays by the rules. The IAAF reinstated him. They said if you come back we should accept that. So, to put a narrative out that it's just Justin Gatlin, and he's the bad guy, it's really not fair. It's inhumane. It's unsportsmanlike'.¹⁷

Whereas these are only small excerpts from a lively debate, they illustrate the way in which the embodied redescriptive narrative stimulated people to reflect and talk about some 'new' aspects of athletes who have served doping bans. Besides saying something general about the significance of stories to morality, the case highlights the moral work of one type of narrative particular to sport. The elite sport competition context – including its immediate aftermath of celebration or disappointment, admiration or indignation – facilitates narratives that are at the same time embodied

(through athletes performing, entertaining, and telling stories with their bodies), non-fictional, and broadcasted live via TV to large audiences. Narratives set in this context have the potential to raise moral questions that can engage entire communities and beyond through bodily movements that transcend language barriers. Furthermore, people commonly consume these narratives with a sense of urgency and intensity relating to the phenomenon of live broadcasting, the social significance of elite sport, and the non-fictional nature of sport narratives: the ending of the story is open, and the reactions to the story do not just comment on the story but inform it. In this vein, people applaud, approve, or boo, discuss, reflect, or question, and their applause, booing, or debates become part of the story, to some degree or other.

Therese Johaug: from pure hero to tragic hero

The following interpretation of Johaug's story is based on the Norwegian media's coverage of events as they unfolded beginning in October 2016, when it was announced that she had delivered a positive doping test, to the announcement of the Court of Arbitration for Sport's final verdict in August 2017. Johaug's positive test was for a clostebol metabolite. According to her testimony, two weeks prior to the test, she had approached the national team doctor with a severely sunburnt lip. The doctor gave her Trofodermin, an over-the-counter product containing clostebol and assured her that the product did not contain any substances on the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)'s prohibited list. Failing to notice a 'doping warning' on the packaging, Johaug used the product for 12 days. A 13-month suspension was issued to Johaug by The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sport; it was appealed by the International Ski Federation, which was subsequently extended to 18 months by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).^{18,19}

Arguably, the dominant narrative in the Norwegian media throughout the judicial process recast Johaug as the hero of a personal tragedy. Johaug's public narrative prior to the case was that of an athletically excellent, charming, and archetypically Norwegian 'Synnøve Solbakken',²⁰ rising to stardom in the national sport. She was a national sport hero, often framed as a particularly 'pure' one. Thus, when the case was made public in October 2016, it represented a dramatic downfall in a hero story. The Norwegian sport community has been described, prior to the Johaug case, as a rather dogmatic anti-doping culture marked by strong anti-doping attitudes in both general and athlete populations, and a somewhat uniform and condemning tone in media reports on doping cases (Breivik, Hanstad, and Loland 2009; Solberg, Hanstad, and Thøring 2010; Sandvik, Strandbu, and Loland 2017). Media narratives of Norwegian athletes in doping cases

prior to Johaug ranged from straightforward villain stories to stories of blunderers, unfortunates, or victims of bad expert advice. Johaug, however, would retain her hero designation as her story played out. As philosopher Hilde Vinje argues, Johaug would be redescribed as a tragic hero.²¹

Besides Johaug's established position as a national sport hero, this redescription was made possible by a certain ambiguity in the case. The story of the actual rule violation – Johaug's use of Trofodermin – balances between the athlete's striking negligence in overlooking a doping warning on the package of a medication and her understandable trust in expert advice. Thus, there is tension in the case between harm brought upon oneself and harm occurring through no fault of one's own. Arguably, this enabled the casting of Johaug as a typically ambiguous tragic hero: good, yet imperfect; unlucky, yet reproachable.

Furthermore, an overwhelming focus on Johaug's emotional turmoil amplified the sense of tragedy. Aligning with Johaug's previously established public narrative, the dominant media narrative during the case focused heavily on her personal story. Here, the role of first-person authorship was prominent. At the press conference, Johaug opened by saying that she was 'devastated [...] despaired and furious to be in this situation' and that there were 'no words to describe how terrible' she had felt since learning of the positive test.²² The bulk of reporting from the Norwegian press conference emphasized and reinforced the focus on her emotional turmoil. For example, according to one report, Johaug 'informed about the case while crying and sobbing', was 'emotional and [in despair]' and 'without make-up', and the presence of her boyfriend at the press conference was considered an expression of 'important support'.²³

Throughout the judicial process, similar observations and descriptions were prominent, alongside numerous stories describing a tough and gloomy existence as Johaug trained and prepared for an uncertain comeback in isolation from her former teammates.^{24,25} A 2017 TV2 documentary,²⁶ which followed Johaug on a private training camp in the Italian Alps, contains scenes presumably shot when the athlete learnt about the final CAS verdict and, later, when she informed her family about it. After her manager takes Johaug aside and informs her about the news, she yells in despair, 'What? 18 months?'. Then the picture shifts to a bird's-eye view of the hotel. In a horror-like scene, the camera zooms out as viewers can hear a tearful Johaug informing her family about the lengthened ban, prompting a heartbreakingly shrill and drawn-out 'No!' from one of her family members. The documentary then fades to black and rolls the credits.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Johaug story is the impression it offered that the perspective and emotions of the athlete in question are relevant and even urgent to a community's approach to a doping case. Redescribing Johaug as the hero of a personal tragedy entails

a redescription of the wider categories 'athletes testing positive for doping' or 'athletes banned for doping': now, these categories were expanded beyond villains or blunderers to involve tragic heroes as well. This redescription contrasted sharply with the descriptions of other athletes involved in doping cases. For example, some commentators and experts have pointed out the contrast in the Norwegian discourse between the attention to Johaug's perspective and the firm course taken against other athletes claiming to consume a prohibited substance by accident or mistake, including Spanish superstar cyclist Alberto Contador²⁷ and little-known Norwegian weightlifter Ruth Kasirye.²⁸ The redescriptive Johaug narrative introduced the notion that some of these athletes are tragic heroes – worthy of compassion and even admiration.

With a basis in the redescription of Johaug as a hero in a personal tragedy, came a thorough debate in Norway about anti-doping policy. The primary example was the proliferation of opinion pieces and expert interviews regarding the principle of strict liability.²⁹ In a debate where prominent lawyers, intellectuals, politicians, cultural celebrities, and sport leaders took part, most contributors framed strict liability as problematic. In the days after the announcement of Johaug's positive test, Thorbjørn Jagland, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and former Prime Minister, linked her case to the possibility that strict liability in anti-doping represents an infringement of human rights.³⁰ Novelist, lawyer, and former Minister of Justice, Anne Holt argued that strict liability rendered full acquittal impossible in doping cases because impunity is insufficient for acquittal in the eyes of all-important sponsors and fans.³¹ Headlines indicating that Johaug had been 'sacrificed' to the anti-doping system in order to catch 'real cheaters', and that this sacrifice is institutionalized through the principle of strict liability were frequent.^{32,33,34} The contrast between these descriptions and previously widespread beliefs in a rather dogmatic anti-doping culture, such as the Norwegian one, is striking.

Again, these are only small excerpts from a debate persisting in the Norwegian media throughout the judicial process and, indeed, afterwards. However, they illustrate how the redescriptive Johaug narrative – casting the athlete as the hero of a personal tragedy – prompted the Norwegian sport community to reflect and talk about aspects of anti-doping previously more or less unquestioned. Arguably, this points to an important feature of the relationship between sport, stories, and morality. Elite athletes are the subject matter of hero narratives. When spectators follow athletes on the pitch or on the track, they watch them perform athletic achievements, but also, as in Johaug's case, they reflect social values the community cares about and display virtues it admires. 'The hero shows us what we ought to be', says Crepeau (1981, 23), 'and we make him a hero because we wish to be what he is'. Because many elite athletes enjoy celebrity status, these hero

narratives are typically rich in detail, with interviews, TV documentaries, and social media appearances adding to a sense among the general public of knowing athletes personally. However, as sport is full of pitfalls, both athletic and moral, our heroes can turn tragic. Paraphrasing Crepeau, the tragic hero shows us that what we wish to be can include tragedy and fallibility. The Johaug story, as narrated in the Norwegian context, is an example of how the tragic hero narrative can encourage us to redescribe ourselves in terms of the missteps that could have been ours, and, thus, make us more compassionate and more forgiving.

Narrative redescription as a method in sport ethics

Gatlin and Johaug represent two different kinds of redescriptive sport narratives that can evoke emotion, compassion and identification to foster our moral imagination, broaden our conversations and help us to enhance our descriptions and practices of solidarity. Drawing on embodied communication, moral nerve and the experienced urgency of sport broadcast in real time, the Gatlin story had the international athletics community debating whether expressions of public condemnation are appropriate in the cases of athletes returning to competition after serving doping bans. Moreover, the story had influential voices commit publicly to a shift in attention from individual athletes such as Gatlin to systemic factors enabling doping. Exemplifying sport's potential for casting tragic hero narratives, the Johaug story invited the Norwegian sport community to engage in and relate to her emotional turmoil. By sensitizing people to the perspective of an athlete involved in a doping case – a perspective not thoroughly addressed previously in the Norwegian context – the story encouraged debate, in particular about whether the principle of strict liability in anti-doping is justified.

Can it be said that society has progressed morally when its conversations about athletes testing positive for doping have broadened in these ways? This question can be answered in the positive by pointing out two ways in which Rorty's liberal democratic purpose, underlining his project of redescription, makes sense as a core purpose also in sport communities, influencing among other things anti-doping policy. First, there is the obvious point that sport is not an isolated phenomenon but exists within society. Thus, if one believes, as Rorty does, that society would benefit by increasing solidarity, one is inclined to think that sport is both an arena contributing to the wider realization of that aim and itself an arena that benefits from becoming more inclusive. Widespread 'sport for all' policies and slogans emphasizing both the social importance of sport and its potential to deliver solidarity and inclusion is a testimony to the impression that a Rortyan-like purpose is already familiar and core to sport communities and pervades sport policy

worldwide. Second and more specific to the topic of athletes testing positive for doping, there seems to be a pragmatic fit between the aim for solidarity and more inclusive communities and the global aspirations of the anti-doping movement. In implementing and enforcing prohibitive and regulative policies in sport worldwide, one seeks to unify a large and diverse population under one flag, so to speak. The success of such a lofty ambition seems far less likely in a context where most consider the policies as products of 'them', than in a world where most consider them as 'our', developed by 'us' and attentive to 'our' perspective.

In line with this core purpose, the present paper has sought to provide a narrative encouraging the replacement of the popularized anti-doping slogan 'protecting clean athletes' with 'protecting all athletes' and the reframing of our conversations within this redescription. Via the story of Gatlin, the paper has argued the notion that at some point after serving a doping ban, it makes sense for an athlete to be reconsidered as 'one of us'. With Johaug's story, the paper has conveyed the idea that some athletes testing positive for doping remains 'one of us' throughout the judicial process and onwards. A more general message in the two stories has been that one way for sport communities to realize solidarity is to take a more inclusive approach towards moral fallibility.

The normative aim of the paper has been to persuade the reader that this would be a promising way forward for sport communities. This entails a conception of narrative redescription as a sport ethical method: a means for sport philosophers to address and enhance their understanding of moral phenomena in sport and, correspondingly, argue for change. The title of Rorty's book *Philosophy as Poetry* entails a recognition of the philosopher's role as narrator of redescriptive narratives – as *a poet*, understood in the broad Rortyan sense as anyone who seeks to 'make things new' (1989, 13). The previous analyses have revolved around how redescriptive sport narratives can morally matter prior to our philosophizing about it. However, the redescriptive Gatlin and Johaug narratives are equally well understood as part and parcel of a redescriptive philosophical narrative. Indeed, the present paper rests upon interpretations, accentuation of some aspects and toning down of others, use of metaphors, backstories, and frames, development of plot and character – in short, narrative techniques employed to create a redescriptive narrative serving a purpose. This narrative is about the salience of stories in sport and in morality, and about the philosophy of Richard Rorty. It casts Justin Gatlin, Usain Bolt, and Therese Johaug as protagonists in redescriptive sport narratives and proceeds by plotting the function of these narratives in our moral universe as moral progress, rather than deterioration, standstill or, simply, change.

However, there is no guarantee for progress through poetry; no guarantee that redescriptive narratives offer *better* descriptions, no guarantee that

'new' is indeed 'better'. According to Burke and Roberts (1997, 101), it lies beyond a Rortyan approach to sport ethics to 'argue for any change beyond and expansion of our willingness and capacity to listen to others. Change will occur only if the sport community is touched by the stories it hears'. In Rorty's philosophy, there are two levels of redescription: one that puts me in full agreement with Burke and Roberts' claim, and one that reveals one way in which the stories we tell can indeed form the basis of arguments for change.³⁵ The former level is the kind associated with Bloom's *strong poet*, the maker of not only new things but radically new things, the poet that fills her stories, in Roberts' (1997, 76) words, with unfamiliar words and sentences, noises and movements 'outside existing language, logic, rationality and orthodoxy'. Arguments for change cannot be rationally pursued in the language of the strong poet before her words achieve a certain degree of common currency. I do not see this level of redescription at work in the present paper. The other level of redescription – a softer one – originates in Rorty's later attempts at reconciling the poet's work of imagination with the philosopher's work of rationality. In *Philosophy as Poetry*, Rorty's insistence on narrative redescription as a means of moral change and progress is not a matter of surrendering rationality entirely to imagination, but a matter of seeing how the two work together:

Rationality is indeed a search for the coherence of our beliefs and desires, but imagination keeps proposing new candidates for belief and new things to desire. It keeps adding new pieces to the puzzle and suggesting that some of the old ones be swept off the table.

(Rorty 2016, 48)

Here, Rorty understands rationality as the attempt 'to make one's web of beliefs as coherent, and as perspicuously structured, as possible' (1998, 171). Ultimately, this pursuit offers direction to his notion of progress. Viewing redescriptive narratives in the context of the search for coherence allows us to consider not only those stories that radically challenge the vocabularies that house our beliefs but also those that operate within our vocabularies to challenge the coherence of our beliefs. This softer kind of narrative redescription exposes us to new perspectives, intuitions, and commitments that, in some way or another, need accounting to achieve coherence.

Having been exposed to the Gatlin and Johaug stories, our beliefs about public condemnation or strict liability enter into a relationship with the perspectives, intuitions and commitments arising from engaging in these athletes' sufferings. To ensure that this relation contains no conflict, some refinement of our prior or newfound beliefs, or both, will often be necessary. Broader conversations entail progress because by 'talking about more things' we challenge the coherence of our webs of beliefs in more ways.

Talking about more things is step one; talking about more things coherently, remains.

Telling stories that encourage sport and anti-doping communities to protect all athletes rather than merely the 'clean', thus, is not to say that all beliefs expressed by all athletes at all times are equally 'right' and worthy of consideration. Rather, it is asking 'what happens to your prior beliefs – about public condemnation, the singling out of individual athletes, or the principle of strict liability – if you consider them alongside these beliefs, expressed by these athletes, through these stories?'. Asking these questions, the narrative philosopher comes well equipped with the capacity of stories to invite emotion and evoke compassion and identification on the one hand, and the persuasive power of argument to point out incoherent beliefs, on the other.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the relationship between sport, stories, and morality. Discussing the stories of Justin Gatlin and Therese Johaug as exemplars of redescriptive narratives, the paper has aimed to show how sport can convey stories that have society look at moral issues in new ways, take into account a wider plurality of perspectives and, ultimately, enhance its conception and practice of solidarity. Finally, the paper has argued that if society considers this imaginative work of narrative – in sport and elsewhere – as joining forces with philosophy's rational strive for coherence, it is on the pathway to moral progress. For sport communities, in the context of anti-doping, progress occurs when a wider conception of solidarity, encompassing all athletes, including those considered 'morally fallible', is brought into equilibrium with other pressing purposes.

Notes

1. For an overview of the various claims narrative ethicists have made about the relationship between stories and morality and a thorough discussion of four of these claims, including Rorty's, but also MacIntyre's, Nussbaum's and Taylor's, see Lindemann-Nelson (2001, 36–68). There are significant differences between Rorty's narrativism and other narrative accounts that have proved useful to the ethics of sport, including MacIntyre's in particular. Further exploration of these differences, both in the context of the topic of the present paper and more generally, is an intriguing topic for future papers. For more general discussions of Rortyan approaches to sport ethics, dealing less explicitly with the role of stories, see Burke and Roberts (1997), Dixon (2001), Morgan (2000, 2004), and Roberts (1995, 1997).
2. The decisive role of redescription in Rorty's project springs out of his anti-essentialist philosophy: rejecting the idea that the truth about ourselves, morality, or anything else is 'out there'. 'The world is out there', Rorty grants

(1989, 5), 'but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false'. As our descriptions are not confined within 'the Real', matters are always open to redescription, and there is always a potential for descriptions better fit for our similarly improvable purposes. Rorty acknowledges that the world contains the states of affairs that allow us to decide among competing descriptions. Some claims, for instance about the colour of a wall, seem simply wrong, and we can point to the world 'out there' in order to show why this is so. However, it does not follow that the world can tell us what to decide. The world 'out there', says Rorty, 'is indifferent to our descriptions of it'. Descriptions of colours and truths about colours emerge simultaneously, as human creations.

3. Not all stories are good or useful to the project of enhancing one's descriptions and practices of solidarity. A merited concern is whether Rorty's anti-foundationalist approach carries sufficient tools to distinguish useful stories from useless or even counterproductive ones. Indeed, Rorty seems to hold that all stories can appear good to someone, somewhere. However, he does not conclude from this that any story can appear good to everyone, everywhere, including Rorty or any other liberal. Rorty's project is not an unguided search for just any story that conveys alternative descriptions to one's own. Rather, it is the search of a liberal guided by the socially and historically contingent perspective of a liberal: a person that loathes cruelty and appraises solidarity, is acutely aware of previous and present cruelties in her own culture and beyond, and adds to this awareness an equally acute strive to uncover or learn about new ones. Thus, Rorty trusts the liberal – in her hermeneutical project of refining her 'final vocabulary' – to distinguish useful stories from useless ones. This is not to say that Rorty's liberal is immune to the influence of bad stories, only that her liberal idiosyncrasies and inclination towards redescription point her in the right direction.
4. I stress that the Gatlin and Johaug stories presented herein are my interpretations. Indeed, both stories are ambiguous and open to various interpretations. An empirical enquiry into Bolt or Gatlin's intentions for doing what they did, or Johaug's emotional turmoil, or the extensive media coverage in both cases, would probably shed light on several, perhaps conflicting storylines rather than *one* story. The rationale for offering these interpretations is to explore how sport stories can enter into the Rortyan liberal's project of enhancing conceptions and practices of solidarity. Whereas I point to some evidence to this effect, I do not intend to say that the cases cannot serve different or even conflicting functions in society.
5. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-4764534/Justin-Gatlin-Usain-Bolt-said-deserved-world-title.html>.
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/general/athletics/justin-gatin-usain-bolt-100m-world-championships-wasnt-in-script-sebastian-coe-a7879191.html>.
7. <https://www.usada.org/u-s-track-athlete-receives-two-year-conditional-suspension-from-u-s-anti-doping-agency-for-inadvertent-violation/>.
8. <https://www.usada.org/arbitration-panel-suspends-gatlin-for-four-years/>.
9. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/dec/19/usain-bolt-justin-gatlin-beat-100m-final>.
10. E.g. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gatlin-spoils-party-for-bolt-hznfln9b7>.
11. Justin Gatlin, cited in: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-4764534/Justin-Gatlin-Usain-Bolt-said-deserved-world-title.html>.

12. <https://www.independent.ie/sport/other-sports/athletics/comment-justin-gatlin-is-the-shameless-fraud-who-plays-the-system-perfectly-36006495.html>.
13. <https://www.theweek.co.uk/87569/gatlin-ruins-bolts-farewell-where-now-for-athletics>.
14. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/sport/justin-gatlins-victory-reminds-us-that-sport-is-not-a-fairytale-88wzgvv8w>.
15. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/athletics/40842008>.
16. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/08/sports/justin-gatlin-doping.html>.
17. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/athletics/40858219>.
18. <https://www.idrettsforbundet.no/Nyhet/dom-i-saken-mellom-antidoping-norge-og-therese-johaug/>.
19. <http://www.tas-cas.org/en/general-information/news-detail/article/cas-decision-in-the-case-of-therese-johaug.html>.
20. *Synnøve Solbakken* is a novel written by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. It portrays the struggle of protagonist Torbjørn, from the shadowy side of the valley, to marry Synnøve, a girl from Solbakken, a place where the sun always shines. In Norwegian culture, the figure of Synnøve Solbakken has come to symbolize a form of archetypically Norwegian femininity centering on rural background, beauty, goodness, and kindness (and, more shallowly, blond hair.)
21. The value of the tragic hero metaphor to shed light on the Johaug story was brought to my attention by Vinje, who understands the Johaug case an example of Aristotle's discussion of beauty in tragedy in *Poetics*, with Johaug as particularly well fit for the role of a tragic hero. Both my use of the term tragic hero and the discussion of the unresolved tension in the story between harm brought upon oneself and harm occurring by no fault of one's own is inspired by Vinje's opinion piece in *Morgenbladet*: <https://morgenbladet.no/ideer/2018/11/skisportens-tragiske-helt>.
22. <https://www.vg.no/sport/langrenn/i/82AnW/johaug-fikk-stoette-fra-kjaeresten-under-pressekonferansen-han-har-vaert-veldig-viktig>.
23. Ibid.
24. <https://www.tv2.no/a/8687296/>.
25. <https://www.aftenposten.no/100Sport/vintersport/langrenn/Hun-var-en-del-av-familien-i-11-ar-Plutselig-er-alt-borte-226807b.html>.
26. https://sumo.tv2.no/programmer/fakta/dokumentarer/therese-johaug-dommen-1184692.html?gclid=Cj0KCQiAxNfBRDwARIsAJIH29Aq9IbssmFD24zMMYhYv3BCVtlhmNsuiQhpzU0BORRAAZdnj4EnbbUaAvcKEALw_wcB.
27. <https://www.dagbladet.no/sport/johaug-saken-har-forandret-folks-syn-pa-doping-i-norge-og-i-sverige-vi-moter-oss-selv-i-doranspsier-estil/65384786?fbclid=IwAR2s wd q h Y T K x Y w q W o x b t y d O E s G - P Z L S 4CPbiZxfBNpS1BTmoopC5g3swfoQ>.
28. <https://www.vg.no/sport/i/o0KdR/vg-sportens-kommentator-hvem-graater-for-flaggaereren>.
29. As codified in the World Anti-Doping Code (2015), the principle of strict liability means that an anti-doping rule violation occurs whenever a prohibited substance, its metabolites, or markers are found in the bodily specimen of an athlete, whether or not the athlete intentionally or unintentionally used a prohibited substance or was negligent or otherwise at fault.

30. <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/RpAq5/Idrettsstjerner-har-ogsaa-krav-pa-rettssikkerhet-Thorbjorn-Jagland>.
31. <https://www.dagsavisen.no/nyemeninger/det-urimelige-ved-therese-johaugs-sak-1.791329>.
32. <https://www.dagensperspektiv.no/2017/johaug-uskyldig-ofret-pa-balet>.
33. <https://www.aftenposten.no/100Sport/vintersport/langrenn/Professor-om-Johaug-saken—Vi-kan-ikke-ofre-uskyldige-for-a-ta-skyldige-73614b.html>.
34. <https://www.abcnyheter.no/nyheter/sport/2017/08/22/195326463/idrettsjurist-johaug-er-blitt-ofret-pa-dopingreglementets-alter>.
35. The significance of this distinction was suggested by an anonymous referee for *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*.

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