

By Jason Phan. Forthcoming in *Sports, Ethics and Philosophy: Journal of the British Philosophy of Sport Association*.

## **Foreign Talent, Local Glory: Can National Excellence Be Outsourced?**

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### **The Puzzle**

Country A seeks more plumbers and doctors, while country B wants its own Nobel Laureates, Saints and Olympic champions. Suppose both therefore naturalise suitably capable foreigners. If it is morally permissible for A to do so, what about B? Some endorse the approach of A, but express outrage at the conduct of B. This seems strange: may a country naturalise foreigners when they would help it in plumbing, but not when they would contribute to its sporting excellence?

I believe this puzzlement arises due to multiple confusions, and argue against the conduct of B while affirming that of A. My concern is not with *how* foreigners are naturalised, but whether certain aims should be pursued at all. Although the essay focuses on the national pursuit of sporting excellence, the underlying issue extends beyond: similar concerns apply to other meaningful fields of endeavour that members of a community can engage in.

### **Background**

In 2010, the table tennis world was stunned. Eight-time defending champion China had its throne usurped by the tiny nation of Singapore. The dominant Chinese Women's team was upended in a competition second in prestige only to the Olympics. Curiously, although starved of major sporting success, many Singaporeans were dismissive of their team's spectacular triumph. They took issue with the nature of that team: all the players are China-born, naturalised to represent Singapore and secure victories like this.

This is a growing international trend.<sup>1</sup> Notably, there are similar reactions across countries to such successes of their own athletes. Are these attitudes justified? The grounds for complaint have not been convincing. Consider England's victory at the 2010 Twenty20 cricket World Cup, where its team included several pivotal members of South African origin. British journalist Matthew Syed commented: 'Britain is celebrating its recent sporting success, but how much of it is really down to foreign talent?' (Syed 2010). But why should one not reply: 'None. All cricketers in the team were British'? Michael Vaughan, the former England cricket captain, lamented:

We have almost got a 'ship-in' system of looking at talent and a lot of them come over for the money. It's very, very difficult to stop them. I would like to see, in an ideal world, 11 complete Englishmen in the team, but I don't think that's ever going to be the case. ('Michael Vaughan questions presence of South Africans in England team,' 2010).

Vaughan's gripe is with the mercenary motivations of naturalised athletes. While being local-born offers no immunisation against such an outlook on sport and national representation, Vaughan presumably thinks local-born athletes are less susceptible to it. Even so, we may wonder if it is wrong to be fuelled by self-interest in this regard. Are not most immigrants motivated as such – and indeed most undertakings in general?

Vaughan offers no answer but this issue has attracted philosophical attention. The most prominent line of critique is that such mercenary attitudes erode the value of national representation in sport. Iorwerth, Jones and Hardman (2010; 2012) believe international sporting competitions provide a valuable platform for equitable intercultural understanding. In their view, the Olympics is a prime example: 'a stage on which different conceptions of the good are played out in a highly visible, yet democratic manner.' (Iorwerth *et al.* 2012, 272). They argue that athletes who have been naturalised to win medals do not genuinely represent their country's culture, and therefore distort intercultural understanding. Former Ethiopian runner Zenebach Tola, for instance, was made a citizen of Bahrain through an accelerated process and with an alleged bonus of 80,000 euros. Although she now competes as a Bahraini, and has changed her name to fit the culture of her adopted country, Tola (now, Mariam Yusuf Jamal) largely resides in Switzerland. Iorwerth *et al.* think it would be a stretch to claim she represents Bahraini culture.

In the light of this growing trend, they warn:

[A]n important moral value that might emerge through sport – that of genuine national representation and sincere internationalism – is stripped of its normative and virtuous potential by policies and regulations that allow athletes and national governing bodies to sacrifice the more meaningful forms of identity on the altar of personal gain and profit. (*ibid.*, 274)<sup>2</sup>

This argument is supplemented by Walsh and Guilianotti (2007), who consider the mercenary approach pathological in four ways. Firstly, athletes (1) view sport as largely instrumental – the means to achieve other ends, rather than an end in itself as Walsh and Guilianotti think it is. This perspective births (2) an instrumentalist motivation to sporting pursuits. When such motivations dominate the international sporting arena, two problems emerge: (3) richer countries are far better at enticing mercenary athletes to represent them, causing a rich-poor divide in international sport; (4) given how national

representation is devalued at the altar of mammon, spectators lose interest in their respective country's participation and commercial interests in such competitions are harmed – the commercialisation of sport self-destructs. These moral pathologies can be averted, in their view, by cultivating the right mindset towards international sport, seeing it as

(i) competing at one's best against other similarly skilled athletes, (ii) the development of skills, (iii) exhibiting the virtues of sportsmanship and fair play, and (iv) community and national representation. (ibid., 35)

This view fits well with Iorwerth *et al.*'s urging that 'motivations for representing a country should predominantly be based on genuine feelings of cultural solidarity, love and pride' (2012, 277).

Let us take stock. Desirous of their own sporting champions, some countries seek out and naturalise talented foreigners. In this sense, they attempt to outsource national sporting excellence – looking to foreigners to achieve it, albeit by first making them citizens. If the aforementioned critics are right, then the problem with outsourcing national excellence lies in *how* it is done. We could imagine a country agreeing with their arguments and refining its approach accordingly. In response to Iorwerth *et al.*, it would naturalise potential champions at a very young age to ensure sufficient cultural immersion, so as to mould these athletes into proper national representatives. Let us assume these would-be champions will sincerely want to compete for their adopted country 'based on genuine feelings of cultural solidarity, love and pride'. In the same vein, suppose these athletes will not contribute to the aforementioned pathologies: they will treat sport as an end in itself, will themselves originate from rich countries and succeed in winning the interest of spectators.

Nonetheless, the basic motivation of the adopting country is unchanged, and strikes me as deeply misguided. The problem with outsourcing some kinds of national excellence lies not only in *how* it is done, but *that* it is even attempted.

## **A Test**

There are various empirical matters complicating this puzzle and thereby clouding its philosophical core. To sharpen its focus, let us consider the following scenario and make the necessary assumptions:

(I) Imagine you are the leader of Best, a wealthy country flush with remarkable achievements in every field except sports. Your country has little sporting talent although Besties are passionate about sports. In addition, they would very much like to have champion sportspeople to call their own and are willing to support their development. Despite considerable effort to address the mediocre level of local sporting

achievement, there has been no success. The road to glory looks uncertain; at best, a long and arduous one. As the leader of Best, what should you do?

Take a cue from the dramatic rise of the Singapore table tennis team. By strategically scouting for, recruiting and naturalising promising table tennis players from China, it has quickly moved from second-tier competitor to global powerhouse.<sup>3</sup> Let's assume there are would-be champions who can be easily naturalised by Best.

Still, there remains an assortment of empirical concerns. For instance, you would be right to wonder if the talent naturalisation plan is but a short-lived, stopgap measure. Would it be sustainable, addressing the root cause of your country's sporting mediocrity? Additionally, you may sympathise with a prominent group of critics who argue that many such athletes sully the sanctity of citizenship by their mercenary motivation for naturalisation.<sup>4</sup> There are also concerns about the welfare of naturalised athletes along with the familiar political, economic and social issues pertaining to the ethics of immigration. But these are *contingent* worries. What if the athletes are respectful of their new citizenship and integrate splendidly into their respective countries? And if this programme can be made sustainable? When we assume away the contingent worries, we are then able to evaluate if the outsourcing of national excellence is inherently objectionable. If it is, then we may not need to vex about the other issues. Thus, let us add the following assumption:

(II) The outsourcing of national sporting excellence will not involve contingent difficulties.

Not long from now, there could be a host of Besties at the pinnacle of diverse sports, demonstrating unrivalled excellence as citizen representatives of Best. As the leader of the country, you can make this a reality. But should you?

Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, seems to think you should. In response to hostility from some Singaporeans towards their country's talent naturalisation programme, Lee argues:

In the [Singapore] Olympics contingent, there are 25 members, half of whom are new Singaporeans. Why do we need them? Make a single calculation. The Chinese have 1.3 billion people. Singapore has a population of four million [...] If we want to win glory for Singapore and do well not only in sports but in many other areas, we cannot merely depend on the local-born. We need to attract talent from all over [...] Look at the Beijing Olympics. Tao Li, the swimmer, she's done very well. The women's table tennis team [...] they have won an Olympic medal. We welcome foreigners so they can strengthen our team, and we can reduce our constraints. So let us welcome and let us encourage them. (Chia and Koh 2008)

Recognise your limitations and accept help – surely this is sensible?

It depends on what the assistance is for. If the endeavour is worthwhile, then it is prudent and humble to seek help where feasible. If not, the issue of getting help turns irrelevant. I believe a comparison would show the endeavour we are considering to be not worthwhile. Let us suppose there is a reliable method for measuring *per capita* happiness and employ it as a theoretical device. Consider two imaginary countries, Bliss and Gloom.

Bliss has a very high level of *per capita* happiness, far higher than that of its struggling neighbour, Gloom. It happens that most Blisseans are blessed with a naturally happy disposition. In contrast, a tiny proportion of Gloomers enjoy this trait. The leader of Gloom, with support from all Gloomers, wants to raise his country's *per capita* happiness. He therefore scouts for and naturalises a large number of foreigners with naturally happy dispositions. However, let us suppose, the leader knows these naturalised Gloomers will *not* make any difference to the happiness of their fellow citizens. Nonetheless, this gives a huge boost to Gloom's *per capita* happiness level — a level we may suppose is sustainable. Many are critical of this approach. Unfazed by the backlash, Gloom's leader responds:

In Gloom, half of our people are new Gloomers. Why do we need them? Make a single calculation. Most Blisseans have a high level of naturally happy disposition. Few Gloomers were like that. If we want a higher *per capita* happiness level for Gloom and to do well not only there but in many other areas, we cannot merely depend on the local-born. We need to attract talent from all over. Look at the recent happiness survey. We've done very well in our *per capita* happiness level. We welcome foreigners so they can strengthen our people, and we can reduce our constraints. So let us welcome and let us encourage them.

The Gloom method for improving *per capita* happiness is plainly absurd. But why? Is it not a good thing to seek improvement in this area?

### **Introducing the argument**

Not always. The farce began when their leader made an idol of *per capita* happiness and lost sight of why it is worthwhile to pursue excellence in that respect. The worth of this pursuit is found only in the improvement to the Gloomers' quality of life; *per capita* happiness merely tracks that quality level, and fallibly too. Securing a high level of happiness for your countrymen is distinct from amassing very happy people under the name of the country so as to attain a high *per capita* happiness: the citizens' happiness is pursued as an end in the former but seen as a means in the latter in going after the ultimate goal — a certain achievement or national status. This status can be attained without any

positive change in the lives of the people. Such a goal is trivial when pursued as an end in itself; there is no glory in its attainment.

This is an extreme example, occurring only in the laboratory of the mind. But change a few irrelevant details while keeping the fundamental principle, and we get the chase for national sporting success by several countries, exemplified by Singapore's approach in table tennis. I shall argue for this claim by first exploring – and rejecting – three attempts to deny there is a relevant analogy. Building on my explanation of why those attempts fail, I will make the case that there is such a parallel.

I acknowledge one may dispute if there exist *national* excellences. Denying the reality of such excellences is consistent with accepting individual or team excellence. In such a view, talk of national excellence is merely talk of the sum of individual or team excellence within a country. However, nothing interesting is marked out by *that* total of excellence; there is no reason to increase the sum of excellences of one configuration of individuals rather than another — except for instrumental reasons.<sup>5</sup> Adherents of this view would approach related debates with a means-ends perspective: since national excellence is strictly a means, the key issues are what ends it should serve and if it effectively does so.

However, most supporters and critics of outsourcing national excellence base their cases on the pursuit of such excellence being a worthwhile end. They speak not primarily about the tourism dollars or psychological benefits which national glory brings, but how it is good for the country or its representatives to excel. National development and psychological benefits may nonetheless result from national excellence; however they do not make up all its worth and may in fact spring from treating national excellence as an end. It would be too ambitious to first defend an account of the ontology of nations and national pursuits, and show how it rightly characterises what we find in reality. My focus is on this question: *if* there is an adequate account of the ontology of nations and national pursuits, and this accurately describes the nature and pursuits of actual nations, then can national excellence be outsourced?

I shall explore why national excellence is a worthwhile end, and what it means for the use of naturalisation.<sup>6</sup> The instrumentalist view and its implications will also be considered. If national excellence is merely a means, then the concerns surrounding the outsourcing of national excellence would involve the empirical: is that an effective way to secure the specified ends? While this may be an important question, it is not well suited to a philosophical essay, and I shall only highlight a philosophical concern in that regard. In developing my argument, I shall focus on the case of Singapore. This is not intended to single the country out, but to examine in detail the nature of a country's approach and rationale. It provides a holistic context in which my argument can be fleshed out, engaging with the impact of this issue on the diverse aspects of a country. That said, the relevance of the argument extends to every country.

I intend this argument to have broad appeal and have thus tried to avoid controversial political assumptions.<sup>7</sup> At various points I accord a role to the State for ease of comparison and some readers may dispute the legitimacy of the role. However, the same point can be made by replacing State involvement with the unanimous agreement by all members of a community to collectively pursue the relevant end. I shall explain this in greater detail in relation to a later section of the essay (see endnote 8).

### **Does Foreign Talent Benefit Locals?**

#### Proposal 1:

Countries seek to naturalise suitable foreigners as these would-be citizens will better the lives of current citizens. Unlike in the case of Gloom, there is usually good achieved from naturalisation and this is a morally relevant difference. We should ask: what if Gloom's leader has this in mind, believing the naturally happy immigrants will be a positive influence to the other citizens? It seems acceptable to naturalise foreigners for this reason; it is a praiseworthy hallmark of a society to welcome immigrants because they can and desire to make worthwhile contributions to the country.

Even so, naturalisation is sought after by the host country as a matter of expediency. The newcomers are made citizens for circumstantial reasons – for instance, the need to motivate the desired foreigners to contribute to the country. Granting them citizenship, along with its benefits, might attract them to put down roots in the country and have greater vested interests in its success. But such considerations are contingent; it does not *always* happen that such foreigners are required to be naturalised to help the country achieve its goals. It is *logically* possible for them to contribute just as much without being naturalised – if the returns for them are appealing enough even without citizenship, to use an example. Thus, we now have in mind contingent rather than *necessary* naturalisation.

Herein lies the crucial difference. In the original Bliss and Gloom story, it was necessary to naturalise the foreigners to have them secure the increase in *per capital* happiness. The foreigners must be naturalised since it is logically impossible for foreigners to achieve something *as citizens*. Let us be clear about the issue. The endeavour was disturbing because the foreigners were not brought in to help *current* citizens get happier – they were recruited to themselves *be* citizens to achieve a goal as a citizen. The same is true of some naturalisation policies in sports and other fields. Track star Rashid Ramzi was not recruited from Morocco by Bahrain to train current Bahrainis. He was brought in to win Olympic honours as a Bahraini. Likewise for many athletes –

from Singapore's China-born table tennis player Feng Tianwei to Qatar's weightlifter Yani Marchokov, formerly of Bulgaria.

While there is no doubt that foreigners can benefit locals, they do not always need to be naturalised to do so. And when they are to be naturalised, we must distinguish between the contributions they are expected to make (A) to current locals, and (B) as would-be locals. Even if there is no in-principle objection to (A), it does not follow that the same is true of (B). Proposal 1 makes the case for only the former, and we need further argument for the latter. We must beware of being distracted by the incidental good achieved through (B). In naturalising and developing athletes to achieve national success, these athletes usually enjoy significant benefit in and beyond sport. But this is a happy coincidence, since the primary intent is not to so benefit them. Should countries genuinely seek the development of athletes for the sake of sport and general humanitarian ideals, they could simply be their patrons or sponsors. Naturalisation remains by no means logically necessary. We can understand corporations sponsoring athletes, but it would be farcical of a corporation to first make the athlete its employee in order to thereafter celebrate how its employee has attained great heights in some meaningful quest.

I conclude this proposed disanalogy has no force. Incidental good does not make the endeavour in question any less trivial. Perhaps the next proposal would help us see the good of naturalising foreigners for (B): the good they contribute as would-be locals.

### **Can Foreign Talent Achieve National Excellence?**

Proposal 2:

Many countries have enjoyed improvements due to the contributions of foreigners. For instance, Singapore's economic success is partly due to the work of foreign companies and talent. The same should apply across the board, in any area a country is weak in.

This is partly right. There are many worthwhile goals a country could better pursue with external assistance – its local arts scene, political stability, health provision, etc. These goals are similar as they are characterised in terms of their relation to the country rather than the direct actions of its citizens. For instance, when we speak of Singapore's healthcare system, we refer to the way people in and of Singapore are treated in healthcare matters. There is no restriction that this must be achieved by Singaporeans since it is a feature and excellence of a country, not of the citizens. The country is not merely the sum of its citizens as it also includes its *systems*. Things are importantly different when we consider the excellence of the citizens. Clearly we cannot take matters at face value. For example, it is tempting to defend the aforementioned talent



naturalisation programmes by proclaiming ‘It matters not where someone is born, what counts is that she is now our citizen!’ Such a justification is dissatisfying since we could say the same for Gloom, without adequately addressing the complaint about its endeavour.

There is an ambiguity arising when we reflect on national excellence as an end. We may speak, for instance, of the literary excellence of the citizens – by which we refer to the splendid literary work authored by citizens. Only citizens can achieve what makes for their excellence. On the other hand, these achievements could be partly due to the contributions of foreigners: perhaps they helped develop the literary sensibilities of the citizens and paved the way for the citizens’ achievements. This would not remove the citizens’ ownership of the literary excellence for it remains that they authored the work. Those who helped them share accordingly in the credit rather than undermine the citizens’ ownership of the work.

At this point, we have distinguished between two broad pursuits a country may engage in: that of (C) the excellence of its systems and (D) its citizens. Furthermore, the pursuit of citizen excellence admits of two related but distinct elements: (D1) the citizens striving for excellence and (D2) being supported in doing so. I will assume that outsourcing is acceptable for (C) and (D2), and shall now make the case that it cannot work for (D1).

It is good for a country to develop its citizens and help them achieve excellence.<sup>8</sup> This means providing infrastructure, expertise and funding for citizens to develop in areas of excellence. Even if the talents of its citizens are modest, it still is good for the country to have, support and celebrate the pursuit of excellences and the relatively modest successes. Such personal endeavours are constituents of personal wellbeing and it is good for a country to raise the wellbeing of its citizens – even if none of them are have outstanding gifts.

Now and then, a country sees exceptional talent in some of its citizens. Is it justified to devote more resources to develop them compared to the average citizen? I believe so. There is outstanding aesthetic, moral or intellectual value to be achieved when immensely gifted people are aided in their push for excellence. The striking achievements of geniuses like Mozart, Van Gogh and Einstein are valuable, I believe, for their own sake. They also inspire and enrich us as we appreciate their works. Such brilliance is rare. While the best of most countries are far above the average among their fellow citizens, few are truly exceptional at the global level. Your country’s top pianist or sprinter may be a second-tier talent on the international stage. Even so, it remains worthwhile for each country develop their best, for it is surely worthwhile to support its people in meaningful pursuits. Indeed it would be good to do so for everyone; but, alas, resources are limited. Thus each country has to be selective, supporting what is most worthwhile, all things considered.

Two reasons for supporting top local talents are especially compelling, in my view. Firstly, they are likely to contribute significantly to the country, even

if not quite at the level of the world's best. Thus, a good local poet may not produce work worthy of being timeless classics, but it could still meaningfully enrich her community. Given the scarcity of geniuses, it is usually difficult to employ them to do what a good local poet could do – indeed, even geniuses may not provide the depth of local understanding and the distinct flavour of the community. Secondly, it is good to have widespread participation in fair and well-organised international competitions. Let us call one such example the ideal Olympics. With a large international audience and a diverse group of national representatives, it provides a fruitful platform for promoting awareness and appreciation among countries. Nonetheless, we may wonder why a country should send its best talents rather than those most representative of its values and cultures, regardless of talent. One good reason is to attract a large audience and provide them the opportunity to appreciate both superb sporting displays and international diversity. A preponderance of mediocre or average sporting performances would limit audience appeal, and thereby inter-country understanding. Thus, countries have a reason to develop their most outstanding citizens and have them participate in international competitions.

When our fellow citizens do well, we have reason to be proud of them because they embody our country's way of life as a committed member, and demonstrate that it is intricately bound or compatible with their particular excellence. For example, a country that prizes gender equality could have a fitting symbol of excellence in a female citizen – one who is outstandingly successful in a meaningful endeavour despite widespread international discrimination against female participants. The argument of Lowerth *et al.* (2010; 2012) figures crucially here: there is no reason to be proud of them *as your fellow citizens* if they hardly embody your country's way(s) of life. Would this create room to recruit foreigners, immerse them in your country's culture and hope they would become national symbols of excellence that bring glory to your country? We must first consider what their excellence would prove. Would naturalising many wealthy (and subsequently acculturated) foreigners to bump up the average national income be symbolic of your country's commitment to eliminate poverty among its people? No – because this shows no genuine concern about poverty, even if national statistics end up looking better.

We should say the same of the initial proposal. Instead of pursuing those ideals, the people are focused on glorifying their way of life. Thus they seek the means to do so in the form of outsiders better equipped to carry their flag to glory. The problem is not with the reliance on foreigners; it is the goal that disturbs. We can appreciate the good of striving after meaningful ideals, but how is it worthwhile to seek acclaim for one's way of life? Surely the proper attitude is to seek the ideals for their own sake, thereby earning the praise that comes from genuine concern? Yet, if we care about the worthy ends rather than to exalt ourselves or our culture, we would then have no reason to naturalise foreigners

to be national heroes or heroines. Let us not confuse the concern for a meaningful ideal with the thirst for the status of having achieved that ideal.

If ideals and the greatness of achievement are what matters, then why care about a person's citizenship? Why give preferential treatment to those of your country? The reason is similar to why we consider it justified to prioritise, in other areas, the wellbeing of fellow citizens over others. We could think of examples like healthcare, education and security – in these areas, we commonly take our obligations to fellow citizens to exceed our duty to non-citizens. These obligations are arguably born out of being a group: living as a collective to a significant extent by undertaking various commitments to the group.<sup>9</sup> Taken further, it would be the obligations existing among marriage partners that surpass those outside of the marriage – the more significant the bond, the greater the obligation.<sup>10</sup> Because these excellences are those of a country's citizens, the level of excellence is therefore limited by the citizens. Sublime geniuses are few and far between; not every country would have a Mozart or Einstein. But this is no excuse to thirst after foreigners who could boost your citizen achievement level.<sup>11</sup> Once we shift our focus away from why these pursuits matter, we would then trade the wellbeing of people in our community for hollow accolades – a perversion of the original quest.<sup>12</sup>

If one remains sceptical of the possibility of national excellence, then she would see its pursuit as necessarily futile. But what about approaching these very activities as strictly means to good ends? This would take us to the next proposal.

### **Are There Outweighing Goods?**

#### Proposal 3:

What if the pursuit of status symbols fosters national unity and pride? Suppose a country succeeds in forging national unity by working together to break some trivial Guinness world record for its own sake. Moreover, its people take immense pride in their country's standing as the world's best in this area. Perhaps the goods arising from that pursuit would override its intrinsic pointlessness.

It is hard to say this intrinsic pointlessness can never be overridden. In extreme circumstances, a leader may recognise the trivial nature of the pursuit and nonetheless rightly judge it justified – all things considered – to take this path. We should more willingly accept this decision if there is reason to believe the nation's unity and pride would not forever rest upon such a hollow foundation. But under ordinary circumstances, we should not tolerate such national quests: the people of a country should be united for better reasons rather than taking pride in excelling at such trivialities. As such, leaders of a

country should refrain from undertaking such pursuits even if the fruits are national unity and pride.

It would be crucially different, however, if superficial honours are not pursued for their own sake, but as means to valuable outcomes. For example, a country could sponsor an attempt to break the Guinness record for the most number of interlinked hands, not for its own sake, but because it fosters some cohesion among citizens. The endeavour may be trivial in itself yet possess instrumental value. We often engage in such activities and rightly so. For example, pressing a button is meaningless in itself but it would be good to press a button so as to send an encouraging email to a friend. There is no rational link between pressing a button and the good of encouraging a friend, but a causal link suffices.

The quest for Olympic glory could be undertaken for its instrumental value given relevant cause-and-effect relations: when foreign talents are naturalised and properly developed, they can bring about much good for their country. For instance, they can challenge and inspire other local athletes. People of that country may take a stronger interest in them because they are fellow citizens. Many may feel the victories of the naturalised athletes are in some sense their victory as well. Such attention and excitement may encourage locals to be more enthusiastic about sports, leading to more healthy lifestyles. Sporting companies may step up sponsorships for branding purposes in this enlarged market, leading to more local athletes being supported. The companies may expand their operations, thereby creating more jobs. The spinoffs may be considerable.

The constraints may likewise be considerable. Such outcomes are due to there being a causal link between sporting success and citizen behaviour. However, many locals may give attention to and take pride in successes with a mistaken attitude. We therefore need to examine how much of the benefits are wrought of misunderstanding and deception. The citizens should recognise the proper value of such successes – these are aesthetic successes that typically also exemplify moral excellences like discipline and courage. The citizens should be excited for the athletes as persons, not as citizens — just as Americans should be excited at Usain Bolt's excellent performances although he is Jamaican. As citizens, they should take pride in having supported the athletes in various ways.

However, a worry is whether their response is largely due to something else: that their enthusiasm and pride are founded upon nationalistic sporting achievements, as manifested in the triumphs of their specially naturalised fellow citizens. If so, they are as confused as Gloomers would be if they became excited and proud about their country having an outstanding *per capita* happiness level. These countries have not yet earned the right to do so. What these athletes have achieved *as citizens of their new countries* demonstrates only those countries' ability at manipulating citizen achievement level by changing citizenship labels. It is nothing to be proud of. Returning to our example of the naturalised

Singapore table tennis players, we should carefully distinguish between two ways in which Singapore has developed them: (E) they have been developed, as athletes, in pursuing athletic excellence, and (F) they have been developed, as Singaporeans, in pursuing superficial honours. (E) is to Singapore's credit, while (F) is to Singapore's shame if the superficial honours are pursued as ends in themselves, and strictly nothing worth celebrating in itself when treated as merely a means.

These are important distinctions that should be grasped by the people concerned when undertaking the quest for Olympic glory. It is easy to get carried away, resulting in a conflation of (E) and (F). Consider the example of Singaporeans taking enormous pride in their sporting achievement when their table tennis team secured an Olympic silver medal. It is unhelpful when their leaders seem likewise confused and make public statements that conflate the aforementioned distinctions. For instance, Teo Chee Hean, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Singapore National Olympic Council, said this of Singapore's Olympic success:

The achievements of our athletes at this Olympic Games show that Singapore can achieve big things amongst the world's best if we dream big and believe that we can achieve excellence on the world sporting arena. This momentous win has provided an important psychological breakthrough for our athletes to dream even bigger. This is just the beginning to many more years of great sporting feats by Singapore athletes. (Singapore Sports Council 2008)

Teo was referring to the success of the Singapore table tennis team in that statement, and appeared to take the Olympic success as worthy of celebration in itself, not merely as a means. However, the 'big things' achieved seem hollow and Singapore has not yet achieved 'excellence on the world sporting arena' in a worthwhile sense. Such pronouncements are worrying and misleading, although understandable given that a team of Singaporeans achieved that success. Alas, Singaporeans should withhold their celebrations because the feat was not achieved by a team of Singaporeans *in the relevant sense*.

When we consider pursuing frivolous honours as means to good ends, the spinoffs must be weighed against the pitfalls. Should the benefits be based on much misunderstanding and even deception, it would be necessary to explore possibly less beneficial ways which do not involve as much public confusion. Public health and employment are undoubtedly good but alternative ways of realising these should be sought if an approach leads a country to glory in the inane.

## Analogy and Application

None of the three proposed differences are compelling, and I see no better candidate. Thus, I believe there is no relevant difference between Gloom's absurd quest for *per capita* happiness and the chase for national glory undertaken by several countries.

In examining the three proposals, we have uncovered several conceptual distinctions that pave the way for arguing that there is a relevant similarity. In both the examples of Gloom and Singapore, a trivial goal was sought after as an end in itself. The wellbeing of a country's citizens is worth pursuing, and it can be usefully tracked by *per capita* happiness. However, the two are not identical. Gloom focused on maximising the latter without recognising the value of doing so. Singapore's approach to success in table tennis manifests the same error. The wellbeing of citizens – in this case, the development of a country's most talented citizens in a meaningful area – is usefully tracked by citizen achievements. Yet, that is a fallible measure. Fuelling the Singapore table tennis team's rapid ascent to global supremacy is an outlook that prizes citizen achievement as an end in itself. Lost in this chase is the true value of the quest of national sporting excellence. The same indictment applies to several other countries, across diverse sports and beyond. The nature of their pursuits is analogous to Gloom's. Since the latter is objectionably trivial, so are the former.

Indisputably, many naturalised citizens have represented their countries and done them proud. This is consistent with my argument. The problem with naturalising foreigners to win local glory lies not with naturalisation, but its purpose. This may be illustrated through the example of British athlete Mo Farah.

Farah is hailed as one of Britain's greatest distance runners, in the league of its Olympic champion Sebastian Coe. But while Coe is a native, Farah arrived in London as an eight year-old Somali. His immense athletic ability was first spotted in secondary school by his Physical Education teacher. Then began the long years of development. In the 2012 London Olympics, Farah won two gold medals in the 5000m and 10000m athletics events. However, he was not naturalised to win medals for Britain. Widespread strife in his native Somalia led him to become a British citizen – along with his mother and 2 brothers, with assistance from his father's status as a long-term British resident.

In the case of Mo Farah, Britain did not seek to outsource national excellence. The British supported his development over many years, as one of its own people – and therefore have every reason to be proud of his achievements. His glory is also rightly that of his country. There are several other examples that highlight different aspects of this issue. However, a comprehensive survey is too big a task for this paper.

## Solving the Puzzle

The puzzle that confronts us at the start seems perplexing only because it masks an important difference. A country could naturalise doctors and plumbers, or champion athletes and Nobel Prize winners. But what matters is the purpose. Naturalising foreigners for their potential contributions is sensible. However, the country that recruits them to win honours *as its citizens* fails to achieve a valuable outcome, and trivialises itself in being preoccupied with superficial status symbols.

The leader of Best should refuse to go down this path. Genuine glory comes when one does not hanker after it, yet accomplishes meaningful goals as ends in themselves.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Angela Xu, Chelsea Wong, Heath Basurto, the audiences at the National University of Singapore Philosophy Seminar and Nanyang Girls' High School for helpful comments. I am also grateful for the useful and encouraging comments of two anonymous reviewers for this journal.

## NOTES

1. Much work has been done in studying the sociology of this trend. Elliott and Maguire (2008) studied this as a form of labor migration and examined its types, factors and recruitment mechanism. The work of Chiba, Ebihara and Morino (2001) focused on the naturalisation patterns of elite athletes in Japan, and proposed a useful framework for categorising the degree of nationalisation, based on 'blood' (or, origin of birth), culture and nationality. For studies in the context of different sports and countries, see Maguire and Bale (1994), Maguire (1996), and Grainger (2006).
2. This view is linked to a related debate on national representation: whether the focus on nationalism breeds ethnocentrism. Iowerth *et al.* (2010; 2012) endorse the stance of William Morgan (1995; 2003), who argues that all humans interpret the world through particular vantage points that are heavily influenced by their cultural background. In his view, a nationalistic attitude merely acknowledges that one's outlook – and conception of the good life – is tied to such a culturally entrenched view of the world. This is compatible with accepting that other outlooks and ways of life are just as worthy. Morgan coins this attitude 'sincere internationalism': appreciating one's particularism while respecting and learning from diversity.
3. In the 1990s, Singapore decided to proceed with a talent naturalisation programme for its table tennis team. Up till 1997, the country was at best middling in South-East Asian table tennis, winning occasional medals in the backwaters of regional competitions. Then came its spectacular ascent: in 1997, its team won one of the seven gold medals at the bi-annual South-East Asian (SEA) Games — until then, one of its best results ever. In the 1999 SEA Games, the team won all but one of the gold medals. Singapore has since dominated regional table tennis and grown in strength to become a global powerhouse.
4. They include Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympic Committee, who complained: 'The athlete will keep the nationality only for the time of their career then, only God knows what they will do.' ('Rogge condemns mercenary athletes,' 2005)



5. Steve Reynolds (1992) argues it is pernicious to focus on national distinctions in sporting competition, and presumably beyond. He writes: 'The influence, then, of sport upon "national character" is that it perpetuates the myth: the grand lie that the people of different nations are really so different; that the accidental splintering of the world into nations is enduringly correct; and that we are right to seek our identity in the ambiguous credo of patriotism - ambiguous in that it unites us as nations, but divides us as a world.' If he is right, then the pursuits along nationalistic lines are not optimal means for getting ideal ends. But this seems at best a contingent truth and we could wonder about alternative circumstances in which optimal global wellbeing (for example) is most effectively pursued through national divisions.
6. It might be asked how an account of the worth of national excellence can be given without first providing an account of the ontology of a nation and national pursuits. I think it is possible to reflect on the worth of national excellence without having a clear ontological account. Consider the example of Bliss and Gloom: it seems we can meaningfully discuss if national excellence has been achieved in such particular instances without necessarily agreeing on the ontological matters. At the least, we can reach negative conclusions – that national excellence has not been achieved. A useful comparison is our ability to fruitfully discuss applied ethical issues without agreeing on, or even having a clear meta-ethical view. I am inclined to think our views on the worth of national excellence defeasibly shape our account of the ontology of nations and national pursuits. The former is in turn refined by reflections on the latter via the process of reflective equilibrium.
7. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this worry.
8. One may object to the extent of State involvement in citizens' private lives. If so, she may consider the issue in a manner that does not involve the State. For instance, citizens may privately agree to pool resources to support the development of some outstandingly talented fellow-citizen. The State need not figure in this community endeavor. Still, we may agree it is good for the community to engage in this private initiative in support of another member of their community. The *purpose* of providing support is the key issue, not the *method* of doing so.
9. For example, citizens have special obligations towards one another which non-citizens lack: they may include voting, military service, jury duty and paying taxes.

10. My argument is compatible with several accounts of *why* we have additional duties towards our fellow citizens. Take for example Robert Goodin's (1988) Assigned Responsibility model, where these special duties are merely general duties we have to humans across countries, but distributed along national boundaries for efficiency of coordination.
11. Might sport clubs provide a different model for the collective pursuit of excellence? Consider the football club Manchester United. Most of those in its first team did not spend significant time in Manchester prior to joining the club – they were recruited at astronomical costs (presumably) to help the club achieve footballing excellence. While some lament the commercialisation of football, it is rare to encounter complaints that the footballers were brought into the club just to improve the team. Is this consistent with my argument? I believe so. Clubs like Manchester United are formed to achieve footballing excellence, not to develop the footballing ability of the people of Manchester or its club fans. For this reason, we do not expect its players to have significant ties to that region or fan-base to warrant playing for the club. However, if the club is formed to develop people of that region or fans, then I believe my argument applies to it. Otherwise, these clubs are not relevantly analogous to countries. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising a related concern.
12. Here is a related worry which I am unable to explore in this paper: if the reasons for supporting especially gifted people in one's community are for the value of pursuing worthy goals, the excellence of their potential achievements, and the virtue of helping others, then it would often be difficult to justify the support for fellow citizens, rather than significantly more talented foreigners. The reasons just stated are blind to one's citizenship. When the difference in talent is huge, should it not override the additional obligation we have to those of our country? I believe so. This is in line with *moderate* nationalism, where the interests of one's country have high priority over those of others, but not absolute priority. Depending on the circumstances, it is also consistent with *minimal* nationalism where the interests of one's country have priority over those of others, all else being equal. See Audi (2009) for an overview of the varieties of nationalism.

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