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Is bodybuilding a sport?

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ABSTRACT

Since its beginnings, modern bodybuilding has been accompanied by the background issue of whether it should be considered a sport. The problem, culminating in its provisional acceptance as a sport by the International Olympic Committee, was later retracted. The uncertainty of whether bodybuilding is a sport or not seems to linger. Addressing this issue, Aranyosi (2018) provided an account to determine the status of bodybuilding as a sport that arrives at the negative answer: bodybuilding is not a sport but rather a form of artistic presentation. In this paper, we disagree with Aranyosi. We argue that by the standards he presents in his first argument, bodybuilding should be considered a sport. Further, we argue that his alternative approach on how to evaluate a discipline as more sport- or art-like on a spectrum, is not a valid basis to make such a judgment regarding bodybuilding. Further, even if his spectrum was modified to enable such a judgment, again it would result in bodybuilding being evaluated as a sport. Therefore, we conclude that everyone who accepts Aranyosi's (or any less restrictive) requirements to decide whether bodybuilding is a sport, has to consider bodybuilding as a sport or refrain from making claims about its status.

KEYWORDS Bodybuilding; skill; art-like; demarcation problem

Introduction

In bodybuilding competitions, a panel of judges score entrants' physiques based on pre-established, division-specific (men's bodybuilding, women's bodybuilding, figure, bikini, men's physique, classic bodybuilding, etc.) criteria, against their competitors. Since their emergence, modern bodybuilding competitions have been linked to sports and aesthetics.

Historically, bodybuilding emerged from the vaudeville-style strongman performances of the late 1800's physical culture movement that sometimes

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included physique displays (Heffernan 2022). One of the first recorded bodybuilding competitions in England in 1898 was attached to a weightlifting meet (Chapman 1994), a format that continued for decades even for major events on other continents, like the Mr. America (Fair 2015). Thus, physique competitions have been linked to strength sport since their inception. However, bodybuilding is also closely associated with art. Indeed, Eugen Sandow, a strongman and businessman who rose to fame due to his muscular physique, hosted the 'Great Competition' of 1901, the first pure, large-scale bodybuilding competition. Eugen, the so-called 'father of modern bodybuilding' based scoring on who was the 'best built man', defined as who appeared most athletic and healthy, but also based on aesthetic and artistic views of the body (Chapman 1994). In order to ensure these judging criteria, contestants were scored by Eugen as well as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, physician and author of the Sherlock Holmes novels, and Charles Lawes, amateur athlete and sculptor (Fair 2015).

In the mid to late 1900's, there were efforts to make bodybuilding less 'pageant-like' and independent from other sports. These efforts included removing moral character, the appearance of health, and community involvement from scoring, and putting more focus on muscularity, and proportionality (Fair 2015). Efforts to separate competitive bodybuilding from competitive weightlifting (Fair 1999) resulted, at least in part, in bodybuilding's recognition by the American Athletic Union through 1999 (Fair 2015), and by the International Olympic Committee, albeit temporarily, in 1998 (Liokaftos 2017). Further, bodybuilding was represented at each of the World Games, from 1981 to 2009, after which it was removed for doping violations (Woycke 2016). Therefore, in its modern form, bodybuilding straddles art and sport, with some recognition as a sport, but still infused with aspects reminiscent of aesthetics-driven presentations.

The uncertain status of bodybuilding as a sport cannot be resolved empirically. It requires a normative stance on what sport is, in addition to the empirical assessment of whether bodybuilding meets these criteria. Therefore, the question of whether bodybuilding is a sport falls into the domain of the philosophy of sport.

Aranyosi (2018) offers a very serious argument against bodybuilding's claim to being a sport and in this paper we dispute the claims as presented in his argument. Before Aranyosi, there were discussions on this subject as early as a newspaper article in the New York Times in 1975, asking bodybuilders for their personal opinion on whether bodybuilding is sport or art? (<https://www.nytimes.com/1975/04/13/archives/bodybuilding-is-it-sport-art.html>). These discussions continue today in magazines (e.g. <https://www.frieze.com/article/are-bodybuilders-contemporary-artists>) and on blogs concerned with weight training (e.g. <https://barbend.com/bodybuilding-is-art/>). However, Aranyosi's

work is the first of its kind in philosophy and shortly after publication became a common reference in qualitative empirical research in sport science, psychology and sociology (Karavaglidis and Cogan 2018; Subasi and Okray 2021), as well as work in philosophy of mind concerned with the mental representation of the body (Gallagher 2021), and in studies focusing on bodybuilding practice and culture (Below 2023; Mola and Wuggenig 2022). Examining the credibility of his proposal therefore seems to be a relevant philosophical pursuit.

Aranyosi's strategy, discussed in [section 2](#), is to propose a list of necessary conditions for something to be a sport. He then argues bodybuilding does not meet these criteria and, therefore, is not a sport. Moreover, he proposes an additional argument based on an art-like to sport-like spectrum for physical activities, placing bodybuilding far to the art-like side, comparing it to certain kinds of dance performances which, like bodybuilding (by his argument), are not sport.

As we elaborate on in [Section 3](#), we beg to differ: we argue that bodybuilding, according to the standards in Aranyosi's first argument, should be considered a sport. Further, we argue that the spectrum proposed in his second argument fails to provide a valid basis to draw a meaningful conclusion regarding the question of whether bodybuilding is a sport or not, at least that is preferable over any intuitive answer to this question.

Finally, in [Section 4](#), we conclude that even if one takes Aranyosi's approach (or one more inclusive) for granted to determine what qualifies as a sport, bodybuilding would indeed qualify.

Why Bodybuilding is Supposedly Not a Sport

Aranyosi (2018) provides two arguments for why bodybuilding should not be considered a sport. We call them the *Categorical Argument* and the *Spectrum Argument*. The strategy of the Categorical Argument is to provide a list of necessary conditions for something to be a physical sport and then to show Bodybuilding does not meet these necessary conditions. Consequently, bodybuilding would not be a sport. On the other hand, the strategy of the Spectrum Argument is to claim there is a spectrum between two types of physical activity based on the skill criterion. Sport on one end, art-like performances on the other based on whether they are emblematic of embodied or expressive skill, respectively. Then it is argued that given the above-provided criteria, which are now used as typical features, bodybuilding is more on the art-like performance end and, therefore, should be considered more art-like than sport-like. In the following subsections, we detail these arguments.

The Categorical Argument

In his Categorical Argument, Aranyosi (2018, 402) proposes four necessary criteria for something to be a sport. Importantly, Aranyosi does not provide sufficient criteria for something to be a sport, and thus, we will focus only on what he claims to be necessary. Specifically, he focuses on what he considers physical sports, characterised by the execution of exceptional physical feats, rather than exceptional mental feats (he does not address activities that may be candidates as non-physical sports, such as chess or e-sports). Further, he does not attempt a full-fledged definition (necessary and sufficient conditions) for something to be a sport, siding with philosophers of sport who – while willing to assume important features of sports – remain skeptical of full definitions, such as McBride (1975) and Morgan (1977).

- (1) **Physical Skill:** It is a necessary feature of all physical sports that the goal is to achieve relative excellence in some skillful activity, to become better in a non-trivial task.
- (2) **Activity:** Moreover, skills relevant to physical sports are necessarily active rather than passive (i.e. it seems to imply some sort of motion or force resistance).
- (3) **Judgment by Skill:** Skill in this context involves overcoming some challenge, entailing that there are levels of manifesting the skill, according to which those performers of the skill will be judged and awarded.
- (4) **Ranking:** Sports (at least on the professional level) involve competition, either directly or by rankings (world rank lists, etc.)

Assuming these necessary conditions, Aranyosi claims Bodybuilding does not meet the Physical Skill criterion (1). Further, he argues that even if it would meet this criterion, it would fail the Activity criterion (2) and the Judgment by Skill criterion (3). Why does he think so?

The reason bodybuilding is not a physical skill, as claimed by Aranyosi, is that performance in Bodybuilding is not determined by a skillful activity, but rather only the features of muscularity:

[w]hat is judged in a competition is the general appearance of your body as far as your skeletal muscle system is concerned. This complex is thought to emerge from three component qualities of your muscular system: mass, proportion, definition, and vascularity. (...) What is ultimately evaluated in the competition is not an activity or skillful excellence. (...) (Aranyosi 2018, 403)

The reason why bodybuilding, even if one considered it a skill, is not a sport is because it is also not active:

(..) contrary to what the continuous form of the verb might suggest, being good at posing means being *able to end up* in a good pose, (..). A Pose is a static event, a static appearance of one's body not an activity. (Aranyosi 2018, 404)

Finally, Aranyosi argues that even if posing were a skill and was active, it is not directly or specifically evaluated by the judges, thereby bodybuilding fails the Judgment by Skill criterion:

There is also activity, the argument goes, during competition, namely flexing your muscles and posing. The problem is, again, that, although how well you flex is correlated with how well built you appear to the eyes of the jury, it is not part of the complex quality itself of looking well built. The jury does not grade your flexing abilities per se, but the visual result of the flexing events. (Aranyosi 2018, 404)

The Spectrum Argument

Aranyosi's (2018) second argument against bodybuilding being a sport, is the spectrum argument. His spectrum is defined by the distinction in the type of skill, whereby more sport-like activities and more art-like performances are differentiated by the type of skill on display. 'Embodied skills' he considers more sport-like and 'expressive skills' more art-like. Embodied skills 'involve the body as lived entity and hence induce in both the performer and the audience a kind of active engagement', while expressive skills 'present the body as a body, and hence the motion, at least on the part of the audience, is not lived but admired from a purely spectatorial view' (Aranyosi 2018, 409).

But what is a 'lived body'? The distinction between the 'lived body' and the merely presented body used by Aranyosi stems from Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) and his distinction between the lived body and the body as object. As summed up by Gallagher (1986), this distinction comes down to the idea that:

the body as it is lived and the body as it appears in objective observation are one and the same body. The lived body is the physiological body. The distinction between lived and objective is a perceptual distinction. The objective body is a perceived body; it is the objectification of a body that is also lived. The distinction is explained by Merleau-Ponty in the following way: 'the objective body is not the true version of the phenomenal body, that is, the true version of the body that we live; it is indeed no more than the latter's impoverished image' ([Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962, 109]). [..]From this viewpoint the lived body could be defined as "a certain power of action within the framework of the anatomical apparatus. [ibid] (Gallagher 1986, 140)

Unpacking and dejargonising this distinction, it seems that in the spectrum argument the two types of physical skills are assumed to come in two different forms. On the one hand, embodied skills bring attention to

the feat executed by the body. On the other hand, expressive skills bring attention to the body or its movement as an object of interest itself, to be admired.

In light of this distinction, Aranyosi (2018) presents physically competitive disciplines on a spectrum of being more sport- or more art-like, depending on the degree to which the skill exercised in it is embodied or expressive. Aranyosi uses music performances to illustrate:

Take, for instance, virtuoso instrument playing, like piano. One and the same performance can be enjoyed as a showcase of high technical skill, manifested through the finger motions, and as expressive excellence manifested through the aural effects of those motions. In other words, the sport-like aspect is bodily in nature, whereas the art-like aspect is auditory. (2018, 409)

His prime example to illustrate further is dance, specifically comparing Ballet with Lindy Hop:

classical ballet is closer to the (. . .) [expressive skill] extreme of this spectrum, as it is the artistic expression through bodily motion that it is usually appreciated for, while, say, Lindy Hop dance is closer to the sporty, (. . .) [embodied skill] side of the spectrum. (2018, 409)

Therefore, Aranyosi claims that:

Bodybuilding could, then, also be thought along these lines, placed on this spectrum, and, if I am right, it would clearly occupy a place much closer to the art-like side of performance. (2018, 409)

So that again bodybuilding, rather than being near the sport-like end of the spectrum, would be closer to the art-like end.

Conflict Between Categorical and Spectrum Arguments

To further facilitate understanding Aranyosi's arguments, we bring attention to the relationship between his Categorical and Spectrum Argument. Specifically, he does not clearly state any relationship; i.e. it is unclear whether he considers the latter an extension of the former, such that the Categorical Argument supports the judgment that bodybuilding is not a sport and then the spectrum argument shows what it should rather be considered as, namely Art. Or, if he thinks they are two independent arguments. Be that as it may, supporting both arguments is problematic as they are incompatible.

The categorical argument produces a dichotomous judgment: either something is a sport or not. To be a sport it must at least match the proposed necessary criteria, if it does not match one of these criteria it is categorically judged to not be a sport. The Spectrum argument, on the other hand, does not have a clear cutoff; instead, it assumes a dimensional continuum from more sport- or art-like, and accordingly physical activities

are judged as more like one than the other. However, a judgment cannot be categorical and dimensional (without an intended cutoff) at the same time.

As Aranyosi's arguments are incompatible, and since from his presentation we are unsure of their intended relationship, we will argue against both of them separately.

Precedents for Aranyosi's Criteria

As mentioned in the introduction, our argumentative strategy will be to accept Aranyosi's idea of what constitutes a sport and show that – even by his own standards – bodybuilding would qualify as sport. To do so, some contextualization is first needed. Aranyosi swiftly rejects any attempt to define sports in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions and opts for a list of necessary features only. At least three of his necessary features are well recognized in prior philosophers' debates on the nature of sports, namely 'Physical Skill', 'Judgment by Skill' and 'Ranking'.

These features were first discussed by Suits ([1973] 2007) whose conceptualization of sports was largely in analogy to Games. While he argues that:

to play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by the rules, where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity

(Suits, 1978[2014, 43]), he understands sports as 'games of physical skill' (Suits 1988, 2). Later, Suits revised his definition of sports, stressing they are 'competitive events involving a variety of physical (usually in combination with other) human skills, where the superior participant is judged to have exhibited those skills in a superior way' (Suits 1988, 2).

Traces of Suits' work are also present in Aranyosi's spectrum argument. Aranyosi's spectrum from art-like to sport-like activity is based on the quality of the performance, while Aranyosi differentiates activities in reference to embodiment, the underlying concept is also similar to some of Suits' prior work. The later Suits (1988) proposed that sports may be differentiated into 'refereed games' and 'judged performances'. While in his earlier account Suits ([1973] 2007) defended that all sports are games, in his revised definition only some sports are games, while others are performances. As examples he proposed that soccer, basketball, tennis, and American football are games, while gymnastics, figure skating, or diving are performances. Though in Suits' framework they are all still sports. Thus, the idea that there is a meaningful line to draw between physical performances being more or less sport-like and the examples chosen is a new and unique concept made by Aranyosi.

Why Bodybuilding is a Sport

To argue against Aranyosi's Categorical and Spectrum Argument, we pursue the following strategies. Regarding the Categorical Argument (3.1), for the sake of argument, we accept the presented necessary conditions for something being a sport as valid and argue against the claim that bodybuilding does not meet the Physical Skill criterion, the Activity criterion, and the Judgment by Skill criterion. Regarding the Spectrum Argument (3.2), we argue that the spectrum between art-like physical activity 'expressive skill' and sport-like 'embodied skill' is poorly justified. It fails because the spectrum loses credibility as a tool to judge the sport- or art-likeness of physical disciplines because it places some sports, e.g. Olympic gymnastics, as arguably more art than sport-like, undermining its meaningfulness and, therefore, its usefulness for controversial evaluations like the case of bodybuilding.

Against the Categorical Argument

Per Aranyosi's categorical argument, bodybuilding is not a sport because it fails to meet three of four necessary criteria (all but the Ranking criterion). In what follows, we address each of the supposedly failed criteria showing that, indeed, bodybuilding meets each of them.

The Physical Skill Criterion

The Physical Skill criterion states it is a necessary feature of sports that participants strive to achieve relative excellence in some skillful activity. Bodybuilding supposedly does not meet this criterion because only the 'component qualities of your muscular system: mass, proportion, definition, and vascularity' (Aranyosi 2018, 403) are central in a bodybuilding competition. In Aranyosi's presentation, there is no skill that makes a significant contribution.

Our counterargument is that posing is not a trivial task, it is a physical, skillful activity executed by bodybuilders on stage that is integral to bodybuilding. Famously, in the 1977 documentary *Pumping Iron* (George and Charles 1977), competitive bodybuilders Arnold Schwarzenegger and Franco Columbo attended ballet classes to improve their posing. However, the skillful elements of bodybuilding posing have earlier historical roots. Alfred Montague Woollaston, AKA 'Monte Saldo' (1879—23 February 1949), was an early bodybuilder, weightlifter, and organiser (USAWA 2018). Monte Saldo was recognized by a commission to write the first book on posing (Webster 1992). His book *How to Pose* (Saldo 1914) provides detailed advice on posing for pictures, early physique competitions, and discusses body positioning and 'muscle control' (contracting specific muscles, but not others, to various degrees to highlight aspects of the physique), illustrating the

complexity of posing. The skill of posing remains evident in modern bodybuilding as experienced competitors, coaches, and officials regularly put on paid, live posing workshops, do in-person or remote posing coaching, and sell courses on posing (see e.g. <https://ifbbpro.com.pl/en/posing-seminar/or> <https://wnbfcanada.ca/pages/workshops>). As mentioned by Bob Bell, President of the World Natural Bodybuilding Federation (WNBF), Judge and retired professional Bodybuilder, in pers. comm. (E-mail, 14 February 2023):

It takes years to learn how to pose properly and fully flex all muscle groups to their maximum potential, let alone maintain the most symmetrical physique, to withstand shaking, all while displaying the most aesthetic physique while posing. For athletes who do not spend enough time and effort practicing their posing and having their posing execution evaluated they may find themselves out edged by the competition in the most crucial minutes that an athlete may have been preparing for all year.

To conclude, posing has historically always been viewed as a skilled activity, and today is regularly practiced by competitors, taught by coaches for a monetary value, and influences placings. As a comparison to gymnastics, more challenging moves which novice gymnasts simply cannot perform have a higher baseline score than less challenging moves (FIDE 2022). Thus, only an elite gymnast can perform these moves at all; however, in a competition between elite gymnasts, the winner is determined by how well these moves are executed. Likewise, while a young, first-time physique competitor cannot beat a seasoned professional, no matter how well they pose due to their clearly inferior physique, in a close competition between professionals, placings are influenced by how well the competitors display their physiques.

Activity Criterion

The Activity criterion says skills relevant to physical sports are necessarily active rather than passive (i.e. implying some sort of motion or force resistance). Bodybuilding supposedly does not meet this criterion because the only relevant thing bodybuilders do in competition is pose, and posing is supposedly passive. 'A Pose is a static event, a static appearance of one's body not an activity' (Aranyosi 2018, 404), as Aranyosi puts it. This argument is the most easily refuted, given how commonplace 'static' events are in sport, and that these events, like posing, are clearly active, not passive.

While dynamic muscle actions which include a concentric, eccentric, and isometric phase are the most common form of resistance-training and muscle action in sport, isometric-only actions where – despite the muscle producing force – the muscle-tendon unit remains at a constant length, are by no means passive, regularly occur in sport, and are used in training (Dietz and Peterson 2012). During such training, athletes can exert force (with varying degrees of effort from light to maximal) against an immovable object or training

apparatus or against forces produced by their own body. Specifically, an agonist muscle can contract against the force produced by its antagonists (such as the biceps and triceps), resulting in a fixed joint angle with no visible change in muscle length (hence, isometric). Indeed, isometric muscle actions (the type of contraction that occurs during posing) are not passive and can result in physiological and performance adaptations such as muscle growth, improvements in tendon structure and function, and increases in neuromuscular activation, rate of force development, and maximal force output (Oranchuk et al. 2019). In sport, there are many examples of 'static' active events such as the iron cross in gymnastics, water skiing, the competitive strongman event the Hercules hold, a scrum in rugby, transitions between movement in climbing, acts of balance in gymnastics, and others. Arguably, the element in these examples, which makes them 'Active' per the criterion despite appearing static, is that the athlete is challenged while trying to hold a static position. In each example, the athlete's ability to hold the position well, or how long they can hold it impacts their competitive performance.

Therefore, for Aranyosi's argument to hold that posing is passive, the claim must be that it is not challenging for bodybuilders to hold poses or that if they fail to hold the poses well or long enough, there are no competitive consequences. However, this is not the case. In close competitions, some posing rounds can last nearly an hour, and all of the mandatory poses in each division require isometric contractions of many of the muscles of the body, simultaneously. Bodybuilders sweat on stage due to exertion, and in long rounds fail to maintain poses well, or sometimes at all, and are seen putting their hands on their knees and taking a moment to catch their breath. Further, lapses in posing are often noticed by judges and can impact judging, especially in close competitions. Appealing again to our pers. comm. with Bob Bell (E-mail 14 February 2023), he emphasized that:

posing is an intense, active, and skilled part of our sport and 'can be' the most important aspect of 'natural' bodybuilding outcomes. (...) Depending on how good or bad an athlete's posing is and the quality of the physiques that are in the class, I've seen shows that have and have not been decided solely on perfect posing.

In sum, Aranyosi's assumption that posing is passive is not justifiable.

Judgment by Skill Criterion

The Judgment by Skill criterion says that skill in sport involves overcoming challenges which entail levels of manifesting the skill and accordingly, performers are judged and awarded. Bodybuilding supposedly does not meet this criterion because judges do not grade your posing abilities. Flexing your muscles in a posing presentation, Aranyosi claims, is 'correlated with how well built you appear to the eyes of the jury, it is not part of the complex quality

itself of looking well built'. So, it is not flexing itself that is judged on stage but only 'the visual result of the flexing events' (Aranyosi 2018, 404). This claim is clearly refuted per the division-specific rules of major bodybuilding organisations. At best, one could conclude certain divisions in bodybuilding are more or less sport-like based on the Judgment by Skill criterion, but not the entirety of competitive bodybuilding.

Specifically, certain divisions under the umbrella of competitive bodybuilding, such as men's bodybuilding (IFBB 2021b), women's physique (IFBB 2021c) and classic physique (IFBB 2021a), require competitors to perform a solo posing routine to music. These routines are judged rounds in the International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation (IFBB) which impact placings, with judges directed to 'look for a smooth, artistic, and well-choreographed routine' and are 'reminded that, during this round, they are judging the routine and the physique' (IFBB 2021a, 12; 2021b, 12; 2021c, 12). In other federations, such as the WNBF, these routines are instead used to break ties and can move a competitor up or down a single placing (WNBF 2020b). These specific divisions have arguably more objective judging criteria based purely on competitors' muscularity and proportionality compared to more 'pageant like' divisions that include subjective judging elements of poise, grace, and beauty. For example, the bikini (IFBB 2023), men's physique (IFBB 2021c), and women's figure divisions (WNBF 2020a) place comparatively less emphasis on muscularity than the bodybuilding division, and more emphasis on presentation (Alwan et al. 2019). In these divisions in the IFBB, the judged criteria include 'the athlete's ability to present herself with confidence, poise and grace' (IFBB 2023, 9), or the judges look for 'the contestant with the best stage presence and poise, who can successfully convey his personality to the audience and the athlete's ability to present himself onstage with confidence' (IFBB 2021d, 8–9). In the WNBF, presentations can break ties, where 'judges will assess competitors' ability to seamlessly execute quarter turns, present confidence and poise, and change places with other competitors' (WNBF 2020b, 2). Instead of individual posing routines, these divisions have individual stage walks, where the competitor walks in a specific pattern across the stage, performing predetermined poses in which movement quality can be the predominant judged criterion: 'The judges will be assessing each competitor on how well they display their physique in move. Competitors shall be assessed on whether or not they carry themselves in a graceful manner while walking to and along the stage. The pace, the elegance of moves, gestures, "showmanship," personality, charisma, stage presence and charm, as well as a natural rhythm should play a part in the final placing of each competitor' (IFBB 2023, 14).

Finally, although these divisions have waned in popularity, men's (IFBB 2021c) and women's fitness (IFBB 2019) divisions are explicitly judged not only on the appearance of competitors' physiques but also on their 'fitness

routines' in separate rounds. In the IFBB, much like in the aforementioned divisions, fitness competitors are compared in mandatory poses on stage in the 'assessing round'. However, in the fitness routine round, judges score 'the routine with a view towards tempo, strength, flexibility, style, personality, athletic coordination and overall performance. Judges will also look for competitors who perform strength and flexibility moves, as well as gymnastic moves. The routine may include aerobics, dance, gymnastics or other demonstrations of athletic talent' (IFBB 2019, 7; IFBB 2021c, 7). Further, 'The judges are reminded that, during this round, they are judging ONLY the fitness routine and NOT the physique' (IFBB 2019, 7; IFBB 2021c, 7).

From the herein discussed aspects of judging, Aranyosi's claim that there is no judgment by skill in bodybuilding is not in line with actual judging practice, and therefore wrong.

Against the Spectrum Argument

According to Aranyosi's Spectrum Argument, bodybuilding is less sport-like and more art-like. This is because even if there was skill involved in bodybuilding – which Aranyosi denies for the categorical argument but seems willing to grant in the spectrum argument – the skill primarily serves presentational purposes. Hence, bodybuilding is placed closer to the art-like than the sport-like end of the spectrum. To reiterate, according to Aranyosi, the art- and sport-like sides of this spectrum are divided by whether one's body is used more to *achieve* something in competition (Sport-Like) – via an embodied skill which brings attention to the physical feat executed – or to bring attention to the body or its artistic movement and *present* it via expressive skill (Art-Like). We, however, think the spectrum argument has several problems, making it unfit to support the judgment that bodybuilding is more art than sport.

To accept this vague spectrum which places physical disciplines somewhere between sports and art – notably without providing intervals on the scale or methods to operationalise how to place candidates – we propose that to be plausible this spectrum's judgments must either align with widely held judgments of what is usually considered a sport by society's established sporting organizations or should provide reasons sufficiently well supported to convince readers to revise these existing judgments. At this point, however, one may wonder why these existing judgments should have any sway in this discussion. Simply put, if plausible criteria for what should be considered sport do not align with existing sport-organizational judgments, it calls into question the proposed criteria intended to identify the principal constituents of sport which controversial cases like bodybuilding may not meet.

For example, the fact that skill is essential to sports does *prima facie* not seem to rest on an a priori insight about the nature of sport containing skill,

from where we then deduce what may or may not be sport. Rather, the recognition of skill as central to sport is made in light of considering prototypical instances of what is already commonly judged as sport, and this criterion is then checked to see if it applies to different instances of sport. In this process, induction (X is a feature of S and S is commonly judged sport – X may be a general feature of sport) and deduction (Assuming X is a general feature of sport, and S^* is a sport, X should be present in S^*) play a mutually adjusting role, in the end arriving at an initially plausible result as to what qualifies as sport in light of widely accepted judgments.

To provide another example of this approach in a recent philosophical study one may consider Jefferson's (2022) recent work on whether mental disorders are brain disorders, using a similar approach. Since there is no previous well-defined definition of what a brain disorder exactly is, but a rather wide agreement on what qualifies as paradigmatic cases of brain disorders (e.g. Alzheimer's, Stroke, Chorea Huntington . . .), she starts from these prototypical cases commonly assumed to be brain disorders and assigns plausible criteria for something to be a brain disorder based on the features of these examples.

To come back to the example of sports, we propose there is coherentist reasoning behind our proposal to align Aranyosi's spectrum with common judgment when there is no good reason to overturn it. What we propose is basically a coherentist requirement akin to the idea of the relevance of a reflexive equilibrium well known from ethics and political philosophy and initially proposed by Rawls (1971). Detailing this approach is beyond the scope of our paper, but a comprehensive debate of this method in philosophy can be found in Daniels (2020).

Therefore, in summary, the spectrum could gain credibility if it reliably made predictions in line with what, for all general purposes, is considered sport or art. If it does, we can say that the spectrum itself classifies physical disciplines adequately in most cases and is, by inference to the best explanation, assumed to be a sufficiently sensitive litmus test of judging something to be sport or not. If the spectrum could reliably classify physical activities in this way, we could accept when it provides a revision to what might be controversially considered a sport (or not). Thus, the question is whether Aranyosi provides such support. Notably, Aranyosi justifies the distinction between more art- and more sport-like disciplines based on two types of different skills present at the two ends of the spectrum. Aranyosi demonstrates the distinction through generalisation: certain disciplines seem intuitively more sport-like (Lindy Hop) because they arguably contain more embodied skill, while disciplines he considers more art-like (Ballet) are arguably more about presentation. However, when this approach classifies physical disciplines widely acknowledged as sports as being art-like rather than sport-like, it is problematic. Specifically, if different counterexamples (rather

than Ballet and Lindy Hop) were judged differently than how they would be intuitively placed, this misclassification calls the reliability of the spectrum as a tool to evaluate physical disciplines into question.

One might object that it is questionable whether one needs to place disciplines usually assumed to be sports closer to the sport-like or art-like end of the spectrum at all. Why is it important that sports are closer to the sport-like end? The question itself foreshadows its answer: if a sport is not more sport-like than an artistic performance, the spectrum becomes meaningless in evaluating what is or is not sport.

Consider the example of Olympic Gymnastics, part of the summer Olympic games since 1896. The form of gymnastics initially represented in the Olympics is called 'Artistic Gymnastics', indicating it contains stylistic and competitive elements of performance. Interestingly, the term 'artistic' was introduced to delineate the discipline as a sport, rather than the more mechanical, exercise-like style used in physical education and military training. Artistic gymnasts compete in six events: the floor exercise, pommel horse, rings, vault, parallel bars, and horizontal bar. More pertinent, in 1984 rhythmic gymnastics became a women's Olympic sport. In it, athletes compete in the ribbon, hoop, ball, or clubs event. In rhythmic gymnastics, competitors are scored for both artistic and technical aspects of their routines, as well as stylistic elements of their presentation (Cervin et al. 2017).

Given the artistic elements of both forms of gymnastics, which align with Aranyosi's description of expressive skill, both Olympic sports would sit closer to the art-like side of the spectrum than the majority of established sports and would be closer to the art-like end relative to most physical activities generally, at least as far as we can reason given the vagueness of the spectrum. Further, since rhythmic gymnastics has more emphasis on artistic presentation and creativity than artistic gymnastics, it must be even closer to the art-like side of the spectrum than artistic gymnastics. Yet, both are established sports. These counterexamples demonstrate how the spectrum can fail to intuitively classify sports as being more sport-like, thus lacking the necessary face validity for it to be applied to controversial cases (such as bodybuilding).

The second option, rather than assessing to what degree the spectrum produces outcomes in line with existing societal norms of what is sport (e.g. activities included in the Olympics), is subtly different: it would be to accept Aranyosi's spectrum as a deductive argument, stipulating that embodied skills are associated with sport and presentational skills with art-like presentations. Therefore, any physical discipline could be judged by determining whether it contains primarily expressive or embodied skills. Unfortunately, this is also problematic as the premise that certain skills are associated with sports or art is not self-explanatory. Thus, a reason to accept this association must be provided, but Aranyosi provides only notions from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology (which we previously outlined). Though these

concepts may have merit, mapping them on to a distinction between sports and art-like performances appears to be an *ad hoc* solution in service to Aranyosi's position. Given these issues, we have no reason to credit the spectrum (in its present form) with the power to resolve questions regarding what is and is not sport.

In sum, the spectrum fails as a deductive argument due to a shaky basis for the association between expressive and embodied skills with art and sport, respectively, and also may not align with existing societal norms for which activities are considered sport. Therefore, we propose that the spectrum as presented should be rejected as a tool to settle whether bodybuilding is a sport. A proponent of the spectrum argument who – despite its problems – intends to save it might propose to introduce a threshold on the spectrum. Notably, a threshold is not Aranyosi's idea, but we wish to anticipate this potential approach. Interestingly, to circumvent the above problems by introducing a threshold so that the spectrum would better align with existing norms for what is considered sport, it would then transform from an analysis by degree (i.e. more or less sport- or art-like), to a categorical prediction of whether something is a sport or art-like performance. This threshold does not have to sit in the middle of the spectrum. We may, for example, put it right behind the most artistic physical activity widely regarded as sport. Using the example we chose, one may put the cutoff right behind rhythmic gymnastics, making all physical disciplines that are more art-like than it art, and all disciplines similarly or less art-like than it, sport. Introducing a threshold to the spectrum seemingly upholds its ability to accurately categorise and thus, our argument against the spectrum becomes obsolete. However, this strategy also has problems.

The problem with introducing a threshold to save the spectrum is the price it pays for this credibility. By introducing a threshold to make it align with existing norms for what activities are considered sport, it reverses Aranyosi's evaluation of bodybuilding as an art-like performance. This problem occurs because putting the threshold for what is sufficiently sport-like to be a sport on the spectrum such that it includes gymnastics will also include bodybuilding. Consider again the examples of artistic and rhythmic gymnastics, specifically, rhythmic gymnastics. If the threshold is in line with the degree of embodied skill in rhythmic gymnastics, this would make the spectrum more valid, as it now produces judgements in line with established sport-organisational norms of what activities are considered sport, but arguably also includes bodybuilding as they contain similar amounts of expressive and embodied skill.

In gymnastics what your body *does* is the primary determinant of performance (or at least it is intended to be), while in bodybuilding it is what your body *looks like*. In both cases, the skills seem similarly presentational (and therefore expressive). In rhythmic gymnastics athletes receive a technical

score (judgment of an embodied skill), but also receive an execution score (judgment of an expressive skill). The execution score is evaluated independently from the athleticism of the routine based on the artistic and presentational components of the routine, such as the composition, use of space, body movements and poses, and coordination between music and movement. For example, in the ribbon event, the athletes perform gymnastic-style and dance-style movements while keeping a satin ribbon in constant motion, with athletes being subjectively scored well when they make sweeping, smooth, and flowing movements with the ribbon. Similarly, displaying a muscular, symmetrical, and lean physique can be an engaging artistic spectacle (an expressive skill), which is scored. Likewise, as we argued, how a bodybuilder poses is actually an embodied skill, which is also scored. Bodybuilding, therefore, based on its combination of embodied and expressive skills should be on the more sport-like side of the spectrum if we are willing to use other paradigmatic examples of disciplines widely accepted as sports, such as rhythmic gymnastics, as a threshold for this evaluation.

In conclusion, the initial spectrum presented by Aranyosi is a flawed argument against bodybuilding being a sport. It fails to gain *prima facie* validity from the reliable assessment of sports, as shown by our example of Olympic gymnastics, and is not sufficiently supported by independent arguments to substitute for the lack of this support. Further, even if we create a valid spectrum by introducing a threshold for classification, the options remaining are to accept bodybuilding as a sport due to an arguably similar placing as Olympic gymnastics, or to reject both gymnastics (or at least rhythmic gymnastics) and bodybuilding as sports. Either way, the spectrum is not a convincing argument that bodybuilding is not a sport. Further, if a defender of Aranyosi's spectrum did judge our chosen example of Olympic gymnastics as not sport, for all intents and purposes of whether something is a sport within society and culture, Olympic gymnastics is a sport. Therefore, the burden of proof that bodybuilding is not an example of sport falls on our opponent, rather than us.

Conclusion

Modern competitive bodybuilding was initially practiced by early weightlifters. Since its inception, bodybuilding required not only similar training dedication as other lifting disciplines but also a focus on skillful posing to highlight muscular features. While originating from a sport, whether bodybuilding is a sport or an artform is controversial. We addressed this controversy by engaging with the most prominent argument against bodybuilding as sport, presented by Aranyosi. We argued against this stance, showing by Aranyosi's own standards, that bodybuilding should either be considered sport (categorical argument, spectrum argument, modified version of

spectrum argument) or at least that his arguments provide insufficient justification to claim bodybuilding is not sport (basic spectrum argument). Consequently, everyone subscribing to his, or less requiring standards, should either consider bodybuilding a sport or admit they cannot make a persuasive case as to whether bodybuilding is a sport or not.

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