"The Ethics of Supporting Sports Teams"

Dixon

Strategy

- Dixon argues that supporting sports teams is permissible and even virtuous
- Dixon's thesis depends on certain conditions being met
Two Types of Fans

- **Partisan** Fans: "The 'partisan' is a loyal supporter of a team to which she may have a personal connection or which she may have grown to support by dint of mere familiarity." (441)

- **Purist** Fans: "The 'purist'... supports the team that he thinks exemplifies the highest virtues of the game, but his allegiance is flexible.” (441)

Partisan Fans' Motivations

- Partisan fans have some personal connection to the team they support
  - Players might be friends, family, or neighbors
  - Team might be connected to one's school, community, region, or nation

- Partisan support for professional teams is more complex, since the team may be "local" but the players are not (in most cases)
  - In these cases, proximity and familiarity seem to be the basis for the partisan fans' motivation to support a team
  - The fan "adopts" a professional team; there may be no "family" connection at all
Purist Fans' Motivations

- Purist fans are motivated to support a team because of their admiration of the team's skills and style of play
- Purist fans do not support a team based on "familial," regional, or patriotic grounds
- For the purist, it is about the quality of play
- Purist fans might have a favorite team, but they watch games from a neutral stance
  - "he effectively watches each game as a neutral: his main desire is to see an exciting, skilful (sic) contest in which the better team prevails." (443)

Comparing the Purist and Partisan Fans

- Purist Fans:
  - have the moral high ground, since team selection is based on excellence in play
  - team preference is dynamic and might switch to whichever team is exhibiting the most sporting excellence (especially if the past team fails to exhibit sporting excellence
  - might be seen as the "true fan of the game" since he wants to see great sporting events
- Partisan Fans:
  - will stick with a team regardless of how that team plays (e.g., Cub fans)
  - prefers to see his team win, even if the play is poor
  - might be seen as supporting a superficial attitude of "win at all costs"
On the Other Hand: An Analogy from an Analysis of Love

- While it might first appear that the purist fan is exemplary, Dixon questions that conclusion based on an analogy from an analysis of love

  - When we fall in love, we are at first swept away by the other's good qualities
  - In time, we move beyond these qualities and love the person for how that particular person embodies a set of good traits we value
  - A person in love with another does not "trade up" to a different partner who "scores" higher on the list of valuable traits; the willingness to trade up reveals that one did not really love one's original partner
  - Love endures change; what one loves is the partner's constant personal identity

Love Analogy and Purist Fans

- Based on this love analogy, Dixon concludes that purist fans aren't really fans
  - Purist fans support a team conditionally, based on the team's continued exhibition of sporting excellence
  - If another team comes along that exhibits more sporting excellence, then the purist will "trade up"
Love Analogy and Partisan Fans

• Partisan fans stick with their teams in good times and bad
  • Partisan fans are loyal even when times are hard
  • Partisan fans are "imprinted" on a team and will not change to another team based on that team's alluring and skillful play

The Good, The Bad

• Purist
  • The Good: a high regard for sporting excellence; a disdain for blind, fanatical support for a team
  • The Bad: support for a team is conditional and insubstantial

• Partisan
  • The Good: steadfast allegiance through good and bad play
  • The Bad: blind support for a team that is unworthy of that support, because of cheating, unsporting behavior, or abusive tactics
The Ideal Fan?

- Dixon thinks the ideal fan will be one that has the best qualities of each the Purist and the Partisan
- Dixon calls this fan the "moderate partisan"
  - "The ideal attitude for fans, then, appears to be the tenacious loyalty of the partisan, tempered by the purist's realization that teams that violate the rules or spirit of the game do not deserve our support." (445)
- The moderate partisans employ, among other things, ethical criteria when choosing a team to support

Is Fandom Morally Justifiable?

- First Argument: Fandom is not morally justifiable because some fans (partisan) have hostile attitudes or commit acts of violence in support of their teams and against rival fans/teams.
  - Dixon: being a partisan fan does not entail an attitude of hostility or violence toward others, even though some partisan fans fail to act ethically
  - Ideally, one would be a moderate partisan who, given a reverence for sporting excellence, would be less likely to act unethically
Is Fandom Morally Justifiable?

- Second Argument: Being a fan is fascistoid; it reveres athletic excellence and has contempt for weakness.
  
  - Dixon: if Tannsjo's argument is persuasive, it seems to apply only to the Purist and not the moderate partisan
  
  - Tannsjo's argument applies to the Purist because it is the Purist who is focused on athletic excellence
  
  - Moderate partisans are fans of particular teams and not solely focused on sporting excellence

- Third Argument: Moderate partisan fans are chauvinistic toward their favored teams. Chauvinism stands in opposition to impartiality, which demands that individuals and groups be treated with equal respect.
  
  - Dixon: Impartiality is a constraint on behavior that prevents us from harming those who are not members of our favored group. Partiality itself is not morally objectionable, as long as no one else is harmed. Partiality in sports harms no one.
  
  - In fact, we think holding others in high regard is a moral good. Moderate partisans who hold their teams in high regard, given no negativity toward others, should be seen as acting morally.
Is Fandom Morally Justifiable?

- Fourth Argument: Sport is trivial and insignificant. Even moderate partisanism exhibits a form of tribalism; the splitting of groups into arbitrary factions. Tribalism forms cliques and cliques divide people (sometimes leading to violence against those who are not part of one's group). Such partisan divisions based on such a trivial enterprise is unjustifiable.

- Dixon: (1) Sports are not trivial. They provide entertainment and potentially exhibit sporting virtues. Sports are respectable for similar reasons we think dancing, music, and the arts are respectable.

- (2) The charge of tribalism in sports is too extreme. Lots of human endeavors exhibit partisan relationships, like romantic love. A fan’s dedication to a team can be as virtuous as one's devotion to one's romantic partner. Neither is necessarily blind or empty.

- (3) Moderate partisan fans will not support teams that display morally reprehensible behavior. Moderate partisan fans hold teams to certain standards as a criteria for continuing support of that team. Non-hypocritical fans will hold themselves to similar standards and act in morally justifiable ways.

Moderate Partisan Fans are Justified

- Dixon thinks that moderate partisan fans are justified in their support for sports teams

- He does not think Purist or Partisan fans are justified to the same degree (if at all), since these types of fans do not have checks on their fandom