

# Handout 4: The Ethical Use of PEDs #2

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## 1. Ethical Questions about Blood Doping

[This handout relies on "Good Competition and Drug-Enhanced Performance" by Robert L. Simon]

This article investigates whether it is morally permissible to use performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). It begins by raising the following questions:

- Q1. Are we ethically justified in condemning athletes when they use performance-enhancing drugs in their efforts to achieve excellence in performance?
- Q2. Should taking PEDs solely for the purpose of enhancing performance be regarded as morally impermissible?
- Q3. Why shouldn't athletes simply be allowed to pursue athletic success by means of taking drugs?

Simon begins answering this question by making a few assumptions:

- A1: PEDs have negative health effects that are serious in nature
- A2: Athletes do not take these drugs for therapeutic reasons
- A3: The use of PEDs does enhance athletic performance.

There are several difficulties associated with defining PEDs. Again, we will ignore these and focus on the ethics of using paradigm cases of substances that clearly count as "PEDs" in certain sports, e.g. steroids, amphetamines, blood doping. In addition, the use of PEDs tends to meet some of the following conditions:

- C1. The user takes the substance because s/he believes it will enhance performance and s/he wouldn't take it otherwise.
- C2. The user believes that taking the substance involves some risk to the user.
- C3. The substance is not prescribed as medication to treat an illness or injury.

## 2. Performance-Enhancing Drugs, Coercion, and the Harm Principle

One way that we might argue for the moral permissibility of taking PEDs is as follows:

### Argument #1: Argument for PED Use from the Harm Principle

P1: The "harm principle" is the principle that it is morally permissible to interfere with the behavior of free, rational, and competent adults *only* in order to prevent harm to others.

P2: When professional athletes take PEDs, they are **not harming others**.

C: Therefore, it is not morally permissible to prevent athletes from taking PEDs.

Think about P2. In a group, list as many reasons as you can why PEDs *do* (or could) cause harm to others.

	Reasons PEDs do cause harm to others
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

**Objection #1: PED use Harms Others (P2 is false because limits the total number of futures)**

[Simon has an argument about coercion on p.8, the one we will consider here is different]

We might think that professional athletes have to make the following choice:

Option #1: Be a clean professional athlete and avoid PEDs, OR

Option #2: Be a dirty professional athlete and take PEDS.

But, if we allow PEDs, the **real choice** is this:

Option #1: Don't be a professional athlete, OR

Option #2: Be a dirty professional athlete and take PEDs.

Many people would find professional athletics that requires heavy drug-use an unacceptable lifestyle or career path. If this is the case, then allowing PEDs harms others by limiting the number of acceptable lifestyles or career paths.

**Objection #2: PED use Harms Others (P2 is false because it physically harms athletes)**

P1: Making PEDs permissible would force some individuals to take PEDs who would not have taken PEDs.

P2: PEDs cause harm as they have serious health consequences.

C: Therefore, making PEDs permissible would harm others (and so violate the harm principle).

**Reply to Objection #2:** Simon asks us to think of the following analogy. Suppose that an athlete decides to undergo a rigorous (and potentially dangerous) heavy weight-lifting program. If you wish to be a professional athlete, it seems that you too must now engage in an equally rigorous (and dangerous) program. So, just as in the case of PEDs where you are forced to take risk your health by taking drugs to stay competitive, in the weightlifting case, you are forced into the rigorous (and potentially dangerous) lifting program to stay competitive.

**CDQ#1:** The above Objection & Reply are ones that we have already considered in reading the article by Brown. **Reply to Objection #2** is basically saying that *training* and *PED use* are analogous (or relevantly similar) in that they both involve the athlete taking a risk to achieving some gain. If you were to reject **Reply to Objection #2**, you might do this by first pointing out ways that *training* and *PED use* are not alike.

	Reasons training and PED use are not alike
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

**Objection #3: Even more Harm to Others (P2 is false as it harms children)**

A third objection is that if PEDs were permissible, this would have negative effects on young people. The general idea is that if star athletes use PEDs, so would young people who are strongly impressed by superstar athletes.

**Reply to Objection #3:** Simon's reply to this objection is similar to the above. The objection simply points out some risk that PEDs pose to others but does not justify why this risk is morally impermissible while the risk posed by rigorous (and potentially dangerous) training is not impermissible.

**CDQ#1A:** In a group, pretend you are working for a successful NBA team and have just discovered that all of the players are using PEDs. You now have the difficult task of explaining to the *owner* of the team that the players are on drugs and the dangers involved. First, look at the **objections** above and pick the *one* objection that you think is most powerful for showing that PED use is *immoral*. You can only focus on one because the owner of the team is *very, very busy*. Next, try to *flesh out* this objection as much as you can in order to convince the owner of the team that the PED use is immoral and so the team should institute a strict drug-testing policy.

**CDQ#2B:** Pretend you are an owner of a successful NBA sports team. You have an associate who has discovered that all of your players are using PEDs. You have just checked your schedule and see that s/he has arranged a meeting with you to talk about this matter. As the owner of the team, you *are pretty sure* that none of your players would ever get caught by the NBA officials due to their lax drug-testing procedures *and* it is probably in your team's best interest to continue to use PEDs. Take a moment to look at **all** of the objections above and consider how you might respond to any objections raised by your associate.

In sum, according to Simon, we are left with three options:

**Option 1:** We should treat the risks of PEDs and the dangerous weight-lifting program alike and say that *both are morally impermissible*. That is, **both** professional athletics and PED use are **morally wrong**.

**Option 2:** We should allow both PEDs and dangerous training activities and leave the choice up to the individual. That is, **both** professional athletics and PED use are **morally acceptable**.

**Option 3:** We need to justify the claim that allowing PEDs *improperly* imposes *risks* on individuals while other forms of risk are acceptable. That is, we need some way to show that PED use is wrong while professional athletics is acceptable.

### 3 Simon's Solution: Drugs and the Ideal of Competitive Sport

Suppose we define "competition" as "a mutual quest for excellence through challenge" and these challenges are presented to individuals within the rules that govern the sport (see p.10-11). Relying on this definition, Simon (p.11) claims that a sports contest is "**a competition between persons**". What this implies then is that a sports contest is not a contest between robots or an event where one individual attempts to overcome another individual. Rather, the **ideal of competitive sport** is to test the dedication, motivation, innate and developed (athletic) abilities of **persons**.

#### Here is Simon's Solution:

P1: Any activity that navigates away from the ideal of competitive sport is wrong.

P2: When PEDs are allowed, we navigate away from the ideal of competitive sport because we are no longer testing the dedication, motivation, innate and developed abilities of **persons**, but are (in part) testing **how the bodies of persons react to drugs**.

C: Therefore, PED is wrong but professional athletics is morally acceptable.

**Objection #1 (P2 is false):** PED use does not change the goal of athletic competition as it still tests the physical and psychological characteristics of competitors. We are still testing the physical-psychological qualities of athletes.

**Objection #2 (P1 is false):** The original goal of competition is flawed. We ought to change it to accommodate PEDs. (Remember that this is Brown's point. Bans on PEDs is just conservatism).

Let's consider **Objection #1**. This objection states that PED use does not navigate away from the goal of competition as we are still testing both (i) the dedication, motivation, innate and developed abilities and (ii) their physical-psychological properties of individuals. That is, not only are we interested in an athlete's ability to respond to physical training and diet, but we are also interested *in how well that athlete's body responds to drugs*. The best athletes are the ones whose psychological and physiological characteristics best respond to training, diet, and drug use.

In response, Simon claims that this objection *misses the point of athletic competition* which is to:

"select those who do run the fastest, swing the hardest, or jump the farthest" but where "the differences in outcome [...] **correlate with difference in ability and motivation**", not in differences relating to **a body's capacity to react to drugs**.

Here is another way of putting Simon's point.

**Test Scenario:** Suppose two bicycle racers: LA and GL. Also suppose that GL and LA are not equal in terms of their athletic abilities. Instead, suppose that GL has more innate ability, trains harder and smarter than LA. But suppose that LA routinely beats GL in races *because he uses PEDs (or because his body reacts better to them)*. It is counterintuitive to say that LA is a better athlete than GL precisely because we think that the point of an athletic competition is not *only to measure overall performance*. Rather, athletic competitions are set up so that *ideally* differences in the outcome (who wins) corresponds to differences in ability, motivation, an training.

Now let's consider **Objection #2**. This objection says that those that contend that the point of an athletic competition is simply to test ability and motivation and not to also test the capacity of individuals to react to PEDs are wrong. That is, the *real goal* of athletic competition should be *pure performance, just the results, and nothing else*.

Simon claims that **Objection #2** is mistaken and self-defeating.

**Test Scenario:** Let's allow for two different kinds of activities.

**First**, we have sporting activities that **do not** allow PEDs (for the reasons mentioned above).  
**Second**, we have activities that **allow** PEDs.

Simon contends that if our primary concern is to test the capacity to shoot hoops, run, or hit a golf ball, then we are just *testing bodies*. If all we care about are testing the *performance of bodies*, we should use *better bodies than our own*, e.g. robotic bodies, animals, etc. But, the reason we would reject this proposal is because we see athletics as a way of *testing persons*. We want to test the mental resolve, the innate ability, the training and developed abilities of individuals, and not performance for performance's sake. From this, Simon concludes that the traditional idea of sport as competition between persons is **better from a moral point of view** (see p.13).

To meet the ideal of sport, we ought to keep PEDs banned.