



Talking about 'Fairness' in Football and Politics: The Case of *Navad*

Hossein Dabbagh^{a,b} and Andrew Edgar^c

^aDepartment of Philosophy, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Doha, Qatar; ^bDepartment of cognitive linguistics, Institute for Cognitive Science Studies, Tehran, Iran; ^cCollege of Engineering, Swansea University, Swansea, UK

ABSTRACT

We argue that sport in general, and association football in particular, are activities that invite spectators and players alike to talk about them. Using a Wittgensteinian approach, we argued more precisely that football, like any sport, may be understood as a form of life, and as such that it enables speakers to talk about it in quite specific ways, not least in the manner in which normative terms, such as fairness and bias, are used. Football thereby creates a metaphorical space, we suggest, in which there is a freedom to explore and play with language, and in particular normative language, even if that language-use is repressed in the wider political society. Using the example of the Iranian television programme *Navad* as a case study, we explore the ways in which talk about fairness in the context of football can develop and sustain a competence in the use of political and moral language-use even when that competence is under-threat elsewhere.

KEYWORDS

Fairness; Football; *Navad*; Wittgenstein; Form of life; Politics

Introduction

Our intention in this paper is to explore the relationship between talk of 'fairness' in the context of an association football match and within political discourse. Using the example of an Iranian television sports programme, *Navad*, we will offer a broadly Wittgensteinian analysis of the various ways in which the concept 'fair' is used in the discussion of individual football matches, the politics of football, and in wider political debate within the public sphere. We will suggest that talk about football (and indeed sport in general) can be important precisely because it offers an opportunity to use and develop competence in concepts such as 'fairness' (and thus more broadly in talk of justice) when that talk is repressed or inhibited in the public sphere.

In order to explore talk about football, we will argue that the constitutive rules of association football, along with the traditions and institutions that surround it, serve as the conditions of possibility of forms of language use. In Wittgensteinian terms, football is a 'form of life', and as such invites quite specific linguistic practices, including those centring upon 'fairness'. That is to say that the nature of talk about football (or indeed any sport), and thus the limits as to what may meaningfully be said of a game, is made possible and constrained by the rules and ethos of the sport. We will suggest that the

rules of association football, in particular, encourages those who talk about the game, be they players or spectators, expert commentators or ordinary fans, to develop a complex and nuanced use of the language of 'fairness' in order to make sense of events within a game and of overall results.

Our discussion will begin, not with Iran, but with Turkey. The recent history of Turkish professional football serves as a case study of the potential relationship between football and the wider polity, and in particular of football as an institutional source of resistance to political repression. In the second section of the paper, we will turn from this focus on the social institutions of football to the manner in which one talks about football. Crucially, our thesis is not a sociological one, concerning the power relationships between sporting and governmental institutions, but rather a thesis in the philosophy of language. We will therefore introduce our primary case study of *Navad*, an Iranian television programme devoted to the analysis and debate of football, which will allow us to explore the ways in which language-use develops around a sport. We are interested in the formation of a linguistic space, within which opinions and arguments, that may be unacceptable within the wider polity, may be articulated with relative safety. In the third section of the paper we will briefly rehearse our understanding of Wittgenstein, and in particular the applicability of his term 'form of life' to football. In the next, core, section of the paper, we will offer a justification of our claim as to the linguistic-political importance of football through an analysis of the use of 'fairness' and related concepts in talk about football. Our intention is neither to reduce the philosophy of language to a merely descriptive exercise, documenting how language is used, nor to reduce it to a purely proscriptive one, determining how language ought to be used, and thus the absolute moral norms that should be asserted (Baz 2012, 8–45). In the concluding remarks, we will address this through the consideration of the problems of relativism and the incommensurability of language-games that are typically associated with Wittgensteinian approaches to the philosophy of language.

Turkish Football

Football and politics are entwined in Turkey, and perhaps all the more so since the installation of Recep Tayyip Erdogan as president and the subsequent increase of political repression.¹ The governance of the game in Turkey is characterised by politically motivated interference by both the sport's governing bodies and by the country's ruling party. For example, the debts of senior clubs have been restructured, through government backed bank interventions, in order to avoid bankruptcy. The bankruptcy of a club would have serious implications in terms of votes for any government seen to have failed to prevent it.

A more radical version of the political funding of clubs is seen in the case of İstanbul Başakşehir F.K. (now Medipol Başakşehir). Runners up in the 2018–19 Süper Lig, Başakşehir is a club largely constructed and financed for political purposes. It was founded in 1990, but only entered the Süper Lig in 2006–07. Significantly, it is situated in a district of İstanbul characterised by its conservative support for President Erdogan, and as such it serves to balance clubs, such as Beşiktaş J.K., in oppositional districts. Its support, in terms of home match attendance, nonetheless remains minimal (at less than 4000). Its success is due to funding, that allows it to buy in the best Turkish players.

The example of Başakşehir indicates how clubs themselves can serve as channels of political support. İstanbul's Beşiktaş holds to a tradition of socialism and anarchism,

expressed in chant and song (significantly inspired by the Marxist poet Nazim Hikmet), and in the unfurling of banners. The banners of the Carsi, the core supporters of Beşiktaş, bear political slogans, for example protesting against racism and defending victims of political oppression, or simply articulating their own anarchist stance (hence twin banners reading 'Carsi is against everything' and 'Carsi is against itself too'). This political expression within the stadium has been linked to direct political activism (not least in the anti-government protests of 2013).

Politics is also present in links between clubs and cultural identity. Hence Amed SK (formally Diyarbakır Büyükşehir Belediyespor) is a focus of Kurdish identity, and is considered to have suffered unfair treatment, including a fine for an unauthorised name change (expressive of Kurdish identity), bans of supporters travelling to certain matches, police raids on club premises, and the arrest of one player on anti-terrorist charges, because of that identification.

Recently there has been increased legal interference with Turkish football. At an extreme, this was manifest in 2011 in the arrest of Fenerbahçe's chairman, along with players, coaches, and referees, on a charge of match-fixing. The accused claimed that they had been framed by the Gulenists, then aligned with the government. When the alliance between the Gulenists and President Erdogan's government collapsed, the convictions were quashed. Similarly, members of Carsi have been prosecuted (albeit unsuccessfully) under anti-terrorist laws, and more broadly legal restraints have been introduced within the game as a whole aimed at the prohibition of the chanting of political slogans, and thus the neutralisation of the political significance of the fans.

The Turkish case, in summary, indicates how the institutions of football can serve as a potential focus of political protest, and that repressive governments can see the need to manage that potential. Football stadia bring together large numbers of people providing opportunities for protest—and for its repression. Clubs can serve to bind their supporters into specific moral and political traditions and histories, as well as into cultural, regional, or ethnic identities. Support and protest can feed into political activism. However, this relatively unexceptional (albeit important) sociological thesis says little about football as an opportunity for debate—which is to say, not merely the expression of existing values, but football as a metaphorical space within which ideas are articulated, challenged and defended. There is, perhaps, a hint of this in the creativity of the Carsi banners and chants. We will argue, nonetheless, that the political and moral importance of football may lie, not just in its institutional position, providing an opportunity for protest, but in the game as something that holds out an invitation for discussion and debate. Football matches are events to be talked about as much as they are events to be played or watched, and it is here, in the invitation to use terms such as 'fairness', 'impartiality', 'bias', and even 'justice', meaningfully, that football demands a reflective moral and political response from its supporters. We will illustrate the importance of this invitation in the example of the Iranian television programme *Navad*.

Navad

Navad is the name of a live TV programme, which broadcast every Monday night from the Iran TV network. ('Navad' is Persian for 'ninety', referencing the standard duration of a football match). The founder, executor and producer of this program is Adel Ferdosipour, and its subject is Persian Gulf Pro League football. *Navad* was founded in 1999 and the first episode of

the programme was released on 23 August 1999. It ceased broadcasting in 2019.² *Navad's* format was based upon the review and analyse of events related to Iranian football, typically broadcasting highlights from the Iranian Premier League, the Hazfi Cup (The Elimination Cup), and excerpts from the first division of the Iranian Football League, accompanied by analysis in the presence of arbitrators, and possibly the analysis of futsal competitions. Parts of the programme were also dedicated to examining football related news. It is these parts that have sparked the most controversy within Iranian social media.

Episodes of *Navad* typically had two analysers, one of whom analysed the technical parts of the matches while the other discussed the unfair decisions and errors of the referees. It may therefore be noted that a concern with the fairness of the outcome of matches (and more widely with the governance of the game) was integral to the programme. The analysers often evaluated different referees' decisions in terms of their fairness. Normally, in each episode, *Navad* invited famous football players for interview. In addition the show had various sections, such as reportage on Iranian football players abroad, 'Navad News' of the latest events concerning football in Iran, and most importantly polls about controversial issues on football and politics in Iran—and sometimes about the prediction of upcoming matches—to which people could contribute via SMS or the *Navad* official app on iOS and Android.³ As an example, in December 2013, *Navad* was scheduled for the occasion of the World Cup finals draw programme. The programme received over 6 million viewers and 400 thousand SMS messages.

Navad has always been a controversial programme for judging and criticizing Iranian football events in terms of being fair, just and impartial. Ferdosipour has been criticized several times by Iran's TV network authorities for addressing political issues on air. For example, after the transfer of 'Paas Tehran' football team from Tehran to Hamedan, Ferdosipour was barred from addressing this matter. Since January 2009, because of openly criticizing the football federation, there was increasing rumour and evidence of political interference in the programme. For instance, it was widely believed that reporters have been encouraged or discouraged from reporting certain subjects.

Despite of all the difficulties, *Navad* did survive for nearly 20 years, attracting people's attention and stimulating the political authorities to react to the challenges it posed. For instance, on Monday, 16 June 2011, the programme started with two Iranian parliament members present in the studio. This was the longest live sport programme in the history of television in Iran. The audience poll conducted during the programme focused on the transfer of teams from city to city, and more than 90% of the 3 million respondents to the poll were opposed to such transfers, perceiving them as unfair. Respondents typically argued that this unfairness was due to the hidden political lobbying in favour of a particular group that lay behind the transfer decisions, and thus that these decisions were not impartial.

Referring to the politics of football, Ferdosipour attacked Iran's government policy on football management. Once, he specifically attacked Ahmadinejad's government on the basis that they do not act 'justly' ('justice' being '*Edālat*' in Persian) vis-à-vis football management and they deceive people by using the concept of justice as a slogan improperly and abusing it. In this show, Ferdosipour argued that justice is misplaced when the government does not care about people's decisions. It may be noted that Ferdosipour's conception of justice and fairness is grounded in the importance of responding to public opinion. We will return to this point below. On the 5th of December 2011, a special episode on football dealership and corruption aired for the first time, which was unprecedented in the history of

the show. The names of many football leaders were cited as defendants in this episode. Other issues discussed have included the racist language used by an Iranian football manager, Firouz Karimi—who called an African football player a cannibal. Iranian social media strongly reacted against him and made him apologize publicly. The question as to whether women should be allowed into football stadia has also been discussed. Iranian women are currently not allowed into football stadia. In one show, Ferdosipour put this question to the audience poll and the majority voted in support of female attendance.

Such controversial cases raised a lot of discussion in Iranian social media. People asked and disputed what is wrong and right, what is fair or just, and what is unfair in different situations with regards to the politics of football. By raising people's awareness, and alerting them to the nature of moral discourse on fairness, impartiality and justice, the programme was fruitful in developing a richer intellectual consciousness in the public sphere, enhancing the levels of moral debate in society.

In summary, we may see *Navad* as having offered an important discursive space within an otherwise politically repressive social climate. At one extreme, *Navad* dealt with the tactical and technical issues that may be found today in almost any television sport coverage (with the BBC's *Match of the Day* being an example). But at the other extreme, *Navad* addressed overtly political issues, including government intervention in the game, corruption, racism, and gender equality. To some degree, these are also the issues that we noted above as characterising Turkish football. Again, football appears to provide an opportunity for political expression within an otherwise politically repressive society. Significantly, the example of *Navad* suggests that football need not be merely an institutional space for political expression and activism, of the kind identified in the Turkey. Rather, in recognising that football is something about which participants and spectators wish to talk, a discursive space is opened, within which normative concepts are used and reflected upon. The systematic focus on unfairness and bias within games (and as such, going beyond routine technical analyses), alongside the extensive use of audience polls, grounded the programme's construction of such a space as a normative one.

Philosophically, despite the importance of *Navad* as a stimulus to moral debate, it might be still be challenged as to the rigour of its use of moral and political language. For example, while the use of audience polls is of utmost importance within a society that may, in terms of its political institutions, have a limited respect for democracy, this may still leave the programme at the mercy of a form of moral relativism—and thus the assumption that moral and political rightness is determined by the majority's answer to a polling question, and nothing more. Put boldly, one may want to ask whether a programme such as *Navad* required a resident philosopher to ensure discursive rigour. We will approach this question of rigour, perhaps somewhat tangentially, by suggesting that the very nature of football—its constitutive rules, its traditions, and its institutions—serve to structure talk about football in interesting and potentially significant ways. In the following sections we will suggest that there is an inherent logic to talk about football that encourages (at least a degree of) philosophical reflection on moral issues.

Sport as a Form of Life

A sport may be understood in terms of its constitutive rules. Such rules determine the objectives of play and the restrictions placed upon players in their pursuit of them, and

govern the significance and value of any movement made by the athlete within the sport. This understanding of sport is broadly in line with Bernard Suits' philosophy of sport, and his definition of playing a game as 'the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles' (1995, 11). Each sport poses its own series of precise physical and mental tests for its participants.⁴ Put otherwise, we would hold that each sport thematises a particular bundle of human capacities by putting them to the test in the pursuit of the sport's objectives. Peter Heinegg summarises this position by seeing the rules of sport as articulating a 'separate universe' that is an imitation of the real one, 'an ersatz Creation with both design and purpose (wholly arbitrary, yet consistent)'. Yet he adds: 'Sport of necessity works with the raw materials of everyday life, its desires, energies, and obstacles, but it detoxifies them, renders them pleasurable' (2003, 55). Below we will suggest that talk about sport similarly works with, and indeed plays with, the raw materials of everyday life.

Beyond this largely formalist account of sport, it may also be argued that as social practices, sports develop distinctive traditions and histories behind them. The rules of the sport do not govern precisely how the sport should be played (no more than does the score of a piece of music governs how it should be performed). Different players, teams, and even geographical regions will bring to a sport their own aesthetic and moral values through which the rules of the sport are interpreted and the style of play shaped. It is thus possible to talk of the different playing styles of, say, Arsenal and Chelsea, just as one can talk of Brazilian, Dutch, or Spanish football as manifestations of quite distinctive national approaches to the game. Such differences are more than the adoption of different tactics, but rather an expression of deeper value commitments as to how the game ought to be played. Fred D'Agostino therefore complements a formalist account of sport, that focuses merely upon the constitutive rules, with an analysis of the 'ethos' within which the sport is played and within which the rules are interpreted (1995).

In Wittgensteinian terms, we would suggest that sports constitute specific, conventional, 'forms of life'. To cite Hanna Pitkin's account of this term—that is never formally defined by Wittgenstein himself (and indeed makes less than ten occurrences in his writings)—a form of life is such that:

Human life as we live and observe it is not just random, continuous flow, but displays recurrent patterns, regularities, characteristic ways of doing and being, of feeling and acting, of speaking and interacting (1972, 132).

Human life has form, and this form is given by the rules and values that govern interaction. Further, it may be suggested (following, for example, Winch 1990, 51–2) that precisely because human social interaction is rule governed, it is meaningful. In many forms of life, constitutive rules and values may often be merely tacitly understood (just as few native speakers of a language could explicate, in any detail, the grammar that governs even simple sentences), and indeed may develop and change without deliberate reflection or conscious decision by the social agents involved (again, just as language develops—and where even conscious attempts to police and regulate language, such as the work of the Académie française, is often seemingly futile).

So, as for any human social practice, sport too is rule-governed, and those constitutive rules will determine the meaning of actions performed within play, e.g. the physical event

of an out-field player's hand touching the ball in soccer is constituted as a foul by the rules of soccer—that is what touching the ball with one's hand means within the game. Each sport may therefore be understood as a form of life.⁵ Yet, we would suggest that sports constitute forms of life that are distinct from many other forms of social life, precisely because they are deliberately constructed to test specific skills. Again, from a formalist perspective, a sport is wholly conventional. No rules for a sport come into existence or survive without conscious scrutiny as to their desirability. Further, players and (especially) officials are explicitly aware of what the rules of the sport are, and how they should be interpreted and applied. Sport is thus not merely a form of life, but a conventional and explicit form of life.

For Wittgenstein, 'the speaking of a language is part of ... a form of life' (1958, §23). Further, '[w]hat has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*' (1958, 226 [italics from the original text]). That is to say that language use is necessarily contextual, and the form of life, as the given of social activity, is the ground that makes possible language use and meaning. Words do not have meaning separately from the social contexts within which they are used, but rather are interwoven with those activities. For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word is then not determined by the object to which it refers. Hence, he offers the example of asking after the meaning of 'I'm afraid', proposing that one cannot answer the question adequately by reference to a state of mind (i.e. the object referred to by 'fear'), but rather by recognising that the question actually being asked is: 'In what sort of context does [the word "fear"] occur?' (1958, 188). The meaning of a given word will change, subtly or otherwise, as it is used in one form of life or another.

Wittgenstein calls 'the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game"' (1958, §7). Language is analogous to a game in so far as both are rule-governed and both entail practice. Just as rules determine the use that one can make of a rook in chess, so rules ('grammar') determine the uses to which one can put a word. A word is also compared, by Wittgenstein, to a tool. Just as a cricket bat might be considered a tool (with its use of hitting and propelling the ball), so a word is a tool to do something through its utterance (1958 §23). As J. L. Austin argues, one does things with words (1962). There are a multiplicity of language-games, for there are a multiplicity of things that one can do with language (Wittgenstein 1958, §24). Analysis of the meaning of a term therefore requires sensitivity to the form of life within which it is used (in order to recognise the manner in which it is interwoven with a given social activity). 'Fairness' may mean different things—be used to do different things, for it is interwoven with different activities—in the form of life that is sport and the form of life that is politics. But further, an awareness of the precise language-game is required, for even within a given form of life one may pursue different language-games, putting a given word to different uses. The confusion of language-games, such that two speakers fail to recognise that they are playing different language-games, is a fundamental source, not merely of a breakdown in communication, but frequently of a breakdown that is not even recognised as such.

We have suggested above that football may be understood as a form of life. As for any form of life, football is also something about which we can talk. A sports match, be it football or any other sport, typically invites spectators and players alike to make sense of it (both during the game and at its completion (Edgar 2016)). The interweaving of language and activity, however, suggests that specific activities will invite specific ways of talking about them. More precisely, we suggest, in the case of sport, the constitutive

rules of the sport, along with its traditions and ethos, are interwoven with the ways in which one speaks of them, effectively becoming part of the grammar that determines meaningful language use. Put otherwise, insofar as the rules of a sport thematise certain physical and mental challenges, and the ethos of the sport may be understood as embodying the value perspectives through which those challenges are met, then when one talks of a sport, one's talk is disciplined by an awareness of those challenges and their ethos. For example, if someone said that they were unlucky in chess, it is unclear what they could mean. The rules of chess are so constructed as to remove the element of luck (in contrast, say, to backgammon or poker). A significant part of the distinctiveness of talk about sport, or any game, lies in sport's property, explicated above, of being a social activity into which one enters in full consciousness of the conventionality of its rules. While backgammon has been so constituted as, quite deliberately, to encourage players to reflect upon their luck (and how they respond to it), chess has been equally deliberately constituted so as to exclude thoughts of luck, and thus stories told of backgammon matches will be fundamentally different in character to those told of chess tournaments. Our following analysis will serve to explicate these claims, and their relevance to *Navad* and Iranian politics.

Talk about Football

We are claiming that sport is not (just) good to play, but also good to discuss. *Navad* illustrates this. It offers analyses, which may be seen as special forms of description or narration of the events of a game, explicating what went well and what went badly, why things happened and why they did not (e.g. why a goal was scored, or why scoring was prevented). In addition, *Navad* asks if referees' decisions have been fair. This latter question might be generalised. Football, and sports matches in general, invite the question as to the fairness or otherwise of the final result. Did the winners deserve their victory? It is in answering this question, which we will suggest below is a question of some subtlety and nuance, that one can both understand the interweaving between the constitutive rules and ethos of a sport into the grammar of the language used to talk about it, but also the consequences that this interweaving has for giving talk about each sport a distinctiveness of its own.

If it is to be answered appropriately, an inquiry into the fairness of the result of a football match must be understood in terms of the form of life that is football. More precisely, it must be understood in terms of the particular language-game within which it is couched.⁶ It is thus necessary to be aware of what the person posing the question is doing with words. We will suggest that the result of a football match may be adjudged unfair on a number of grounds, primarily by appealing to the facts of the game. An appeal to values or the ethos of the game may, however, serve to separate the fairness of the result from the judgement that the winners deserved to win. Yet other language-games may marginalise fairness, either by appealing to luck or fate, or simply by using an appeal to fairness as a (non-contestable) assertion of the speaker's identity.

To justify the claim that a result is unfair perhaps most obviously requires an appeal to the empirically identifiable events of the game. In this usage, a result is fair if it has been achieved in accordance with the rules of the game. This is the focus of debate and analysis on *Navad*. If the match officials are consciously or unconsciously biased towards one

team, e.g. by judging one team's fouls more leniently, then the result may be demonstrated to be unfair. In this football is no different to any other game. If a victory is achieved only through violation of the rules, be this by explicit cheating or inadvertently, its legitimacy is questionable (Skillen 1993). It may be noted that this entails that the television analyst is required to judge the events of the game objectively. That is to say that they are required to put to one side a crucial aspect of the ethos of football, which is to say its partisanship. Football matches are typically watched and judged by spectators who are committed to one side rather than the other. The television analyst is thus an untypical spectator, and as such using a somewhat specialised language-game—one that brackets out partisan values.

A defence of the (un)fairness of a result may yet require an appeal to values as well as to facts. Officials are only human. An honestly made mistake by a referee might give a team a winning advantage, e.g. by awarding a penalty when a foul had not been committed. A normative question is then raised as to the degree of human error that is acceptable in a game before the legitimacy of the result is in doubt, or put more colloquially, the game is 'spoiled'. Similarly, one might ask how many errors can an official make before they are judged to be incompetent. It might, for example, be suggested that part of the (mental) test that football poses to its players concerns their ability to cope, constructively, with erroneous refereeing decisions. The introduction of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) to football (and other sports) suggests a shift in the ethos of the game towards a fundamental intolerance of human error and this entails a small but nonetheless significant shift in the challenge posed, at least to the professional player (Johnson and Taylor 2016).⁷ In the appeal to facts and values, as outlined, a result is fair if the rules have been (largely) complied with, the officials have not been biased, and refereeing errors have been kept within an acceptable margin and did not occur at crucial points in the game.

A subtly different language-game may evoke values in order to distinguish between the fairness and desert. A team can win, abiding by the rules and without bias in officiating, and yet not deserve to win. Such a claim could be justified by appealing to the ethos of the game. Thus, the team may have won, but played negatively or cynically, for example by committing professional fouls, or merely having played without the elegance, inventiveness, and adventure of their opponents.⁸ This example perhaps begins to suggest something of the distinctiveness of football as a form of life, and thus the language-games it supports. Within the traditions of football, and indeed a specific club, certain styles of play may be valued. Commitment to a particular style of play may be expressive of the supporter's sense of identity.

The constitutive rules of football make possible a further response to the question of fairness, and indeed desert, and in such a way as to render talk of fairness and desert meaningless. The rules of (association) football make it peculiarly difficult to score a goal, at least in a game contested with a reasonable degree of competence. Consequently, football matches are frequently won on very narrow margins. Football is here unlike say basketball, netball, or handball. In all those sports, baskets or goals are scored with relative ease. While the winning margin may be narrow, as in football, it is a narrow margin on a large number of scores. In football, the winning goal may be the only goal of the match. This, we suggest, leads to the potential constitution of a fundamentally different ontology for football in comparison to, say, handball. An ontology of luck is set against an ontology of individual responsibility and autonomy.

If one loses a handball match by a single goal, any player on the losing team can potentially identify a play during which they made a mistake, thus allowing the opponents to score the winning goal, or inhibiting their own scoring.⁹ We would suggest that a closely contested handball match nonetheless offers a fair result, on the proviso that play and officiating has respected the rules. The winners deserve to win—indeed they are the architects of their victory. In contrast, a football match may be characterised by a multiplicity of near misses, such as the ball hitting the goal post. The very difficulty of scoring means that an individual player cannot reasonably be made responsible for this failure. While players, paradoxically but understandably, take full credit for their skill in scoring, they rarely take responsibility for missing. That is just bad luck, having tried as best one can to score.

Indeed, to win a football match one does not just need skill, tactical nous, and preparation, but also luck. Football matches may be won against the run of play, which is to say that the losing team may have dominated the game in terms of possession and scoring chances. In these cases, there appears to be no question of the fairness or unfairness of the result. The very language-games that appeal to fairness and even desert seem to be inadequate to capturing what has occurred. Instead, an appeal to luck or destiny may be made. We were not meant to win—it was not our day.

Luck is thus made a key element of football in a way that is absent from many other sports. The constitutive rules of football allow luck a considerable part in the outcome, not merely of games but of whole competitions. Baseball is similar to football in that small margins and lucky plays may decide a match against the run of play, e.g. a team's only hit of the game occurring when the bases are loaded. Baseball mitigates against this element of luck by playing games over series (of 3, 5, or 7 games, depending on the importance of the contest).¹⁰ Football reflects only something of this, where for example crucial cup matches are played over two legs, but thereby only to mitigate against home advantage. We suggest then that football as a form of life embraces and indeed thematises luck, in a way that handball, netball, and baseball avoid, and appeals to supernaturalist qualities such as luck or destiny can undermine the relevance of any talk of a fair result.

A further use of 'fair' returns to the question of identity. We noted above the importance of an analyst remaining neutral and objective. A supporter, however, may assert that a result, or a referee's decision, is unfair, but thereby not appeal to the facts of the game. The apparent judgement of unfairness may merely be an assertion of commitment to a particular club. Almost any crucial decision against the supporter's team would be unfair. We would suggest that this is not necessarily a misuse of 'fair'. Football is a partisan sport, and as noted above, there is something unusual, if not rather dry, about the language-game within which the analyst uses words. The dogmatic and impassioned supporter's use of 'unfair' is merely using the term according to a different grammar and thus in different language-game. Claims that a result is unfair because of the bias of the officials, or even that a win is not deserved because of the style of play, can be subject to reasonable debate. The exasperated 'unfair' at a decision made against your team—simply because it is made against your team—is not open to such debate. It is not a judgement (or conclusion of an argument), but the mere statement of fact—the fact that the speaker supports a given club. A fundamental competence required of the moderator of a programme such as *Navad* is to recognise the differences between

these language-games. Communication breaks down as they become confused. Yet this is not an argument for the simple dismissal of the passionate supporter.

In this context, the following case might be considered: in both Iran and Turkey, as we noted above, clubs have been relocated by government decree. This intervention has been opposed, but here we would argue that such opposition is grounded, not in a clear-cut appeal to liberal conceptions of justice, but rather in football as a form of life, and precisely that aspect of it most urgently expressed in the plea of the committed supporter. The form of life of football is such that supporters experience a deep emotional commitment to their teams, and, as was most vividly illustrated in the example of Amed SK above, team support may be an integral part of the person's sense of personal and communal identity. One does not choose a team, as one might choose a consumer good. One is thrown into support, to use Martin Heidegger's metaphor (1980, §38), or comes to consciousness supporting a club.

Further, such identities frequently have an important geographical quality. The town or city in which the team has its home matters. To move a club thus violates this sense of identity, highlighting a tension between the form of life of football and that of a heavy-handed interventionist politics. This experience of football may be further illuminated through a comparison to American sports. Professional American clubs are commercial franchises. Such franchises can and do move between cities for commercial reasons. For the supporter, this is a known aspect of the (form of life of the) game, and as such, supporters do not have the same emotional grounds upon which to protest. To argue against a move would entail arguing, not against a violation of one's sense of identity, for in effect such claims would be meaningless within the dominant language-game of American sport. One can only contest the rationality of the move as an economic decision. New Yorkers with long memories might, nonetheless, still support the Dodgers baseball team, even if it is now located 6000 miles away in Los Angeles.

Concluding Remarks

It is here that the form of life of football and its attendant language-games become relevant to the wider world of politics. We have argued that football offers both a social and a linguistic space in which to protest. In our analysis of football as a form of life, with its attendant language-games, we have tried to suggest that in talking about football one uses 'fairness' (and the associated language of desert, responsibility, luck, legitimacy and so on). The language-games of sport are, perhaps, more literally games than other language-games. Precisely because sport is itself somewhat isolated from the everyday, non-sporting life, its rules constituting Heinegg's 'ersatz Creation' in which participants have licence to play, so too when one talks about sport, there is a similar potential for playfulness and experimentation. We noted above how, in responding to games, the nature of the sport encouraged the exploration of subtle distinctions that could be made between the fair and the deserving, and that fairness itself could be elaborated and even marginalised through appeal diverse ontological interpretations of the game and expressions of one's identity. In talking about sport, one explores new ways of using words such as 'fairness'. In talking about sport, a competence to use language is kept vital, and this is of particular importance when that language use is being repressed or regulated in the

non-sporting world. To borrow an analogy from Adorno (2006, 89), football provides a space within which the very competence to think and talk critically and creatively about issues of justice and morality may overwinter an ice-age of political repression beyond it. Adel Ferdosipour's criticisms of Ahmadinejad's government and its use of 'justice', noted above, offer an illustration. Ferdosipour brings a more complex and vital understanding of justice to the debate.

Talk about football cannot, however, be seen as a definitive source of political enlightenment, nor even necessarily a source of progressive values. On the one hand, football can be a source of creative language use, and as Pitkin argues (1972, 62), new uses are 'projectable' from one context to another, which is to say that a language use developed within one form of life may be compared to that in others, and indeed adapted to use elsewhere, and hence the language of fairness in football can translate into the fairness of politics, but also the awareness of the reduction of 'fairness' to an un-challengeable assertion of identity in football may be seen to have analogous political forms. On the other hand, communication can break down because of the incommensurability of language-games. As we have noted above, moderators and indeed all those talking of football need to be aware of the dangers of incommensurability. Incommensurability remains a barrier to communication and political change. Thus, Ferdosipour's use and understanding of 'justice' may have no place in an authoritarian language-game, and as such have no meaning to his intended interlocutors. The authoritarian language-game may simply reduce 'fairness' and 'justice' to the necessary, but spurious, qualities of whatever actions and rulings the authorities enact. (At the very least, Carsi activism therefore retains its importance.) Similarly, while defending the rights of women to attend football matches, one may readily imagine the language-game of opponents that have no understanding of 'women's rights'. It is unclear how one can then advocate a change to people whose language uses and forms of life simply offer no space in which to articulate the claim coherently.

The vulnerability of reasonable political debate to break down may further be highlighted by returning to the question of *Navad's* reliance upon opinion polls. As suggested above, such polls merely record the subjective beliefs of respondents. They do not typically ask respondents to justify their beliefs, nor even to explicate their understanding of the words they use or to which they respond. Opinion polls are thus, at best, the beginning of a political debate, not its conclusion. In this light, it may be noted that, while some teams may attract progressive and liberally enlightened supporters (as our examples from Turkey illustrate), others may attract reactionary and extremist support. To follow football, however passionately, does not guarantee that one is politically progressive or even opposed to repressive political regimes (a hope which presumably sustains the ongoing funding of Başakşehir F.K.). What we are therefore suggesting is that while football cannot be understood as a definitive source of political enlightenment, nonetheless, in offering a creative space within which language is explored, learnt, and from which it can be projected, it also offers a space in which conflicting political opinions can be articulated, brought to consciousness, and indeed played with. Such a space is not without its dangers, for football can breed extremism and violence. Yet the more aware participants are of the nuances of language-use and the dangers of communication breaking down, and thus the more philosophically aware moderators such as Ferdosipour are, the better. The closing down of *Navad* illustrates the threat that such playful awareness can pose to repressive regimes.

Notes

1. This discussion draws on the Economist 2019. See also McManus 2018.
2. In March 2019 after almost 20 years, due to a dispute between Ferdosipour and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting authorities, after months of ups and downs, *Navad* officially stopped broadcasting. In the same month, ironically, *Navad* won the best TV show award by people's votes.
3. See *Navad's* official website: <http://90tv.ir/>.
4. Sports may test physical qualities such as strength (be it in running, high jumping, or weightlifting); endurance and stamina (over minutes, hours, or days and weeks); reflexes (as the tennis player or baseball batter reacts to the oncoming ball, or the Formula One driver responds to the speed of their car); co-ordination (be it the balance of the gymnast or ice dancer, or the eye-hand co-ordination of the squash-player and eye-foot co-ordination of the soccer player). Sports will also test mental skills, such as self-discipline (including the ability to cope with pain and exhaustion, but also the mental strength to recover from defeat and even humiliation); strategy (be it the distance runner's response to their competitors, or the quarterback's ability to understand and use the space of the playing field); courage (the bullfighter faces the real possibility of serious injury and death).
5. Peter Winch suggests that 'the philosophies of science, of art, of history, etc., will have the task of elucidating the peculiar natures of those forms of life called "science", "art", etc.' (1990, 41). If so, the philosophy of football would have the task of elucidating the peculiar nature of the form of life called 'football'. This is, presumably, our intention here.
6. We will suggest that more than one language-game can be supported by a given form of life.
7. It may be noted that the very rules of football can be questioned as fair. The rules are not a given, against which judgements of fairness are made. Rules, such as those governing the use of VAR, may be questioned precisely on the grounds of whether or not they serve to constitute a fair challenge for players. An inappropriate rule change may be unfair, insofar as it makes the core challenges of the sport too easy to achieve (e.g. widening the goal in football) or creates an imbalance between players (so that a wider goal biases the game in favour of attackers and against defenders).
8. See Kupfer (1995) on the divergent conceptions of a well-played game. In the 2009 film *Damned United*, Brian Clough, having become manager of Leeds United, berates the Leeds players, telling them that their haul of trophies were worthless, because their negative and brutal style of play had besmirched the 'beautiful' game.
9. A classic example of this came in the 2012 Olympics in a match between Iceland and Hungary. With the game tied, Iceland was awarded a penalty at the very end of normal time. If the penalty was scored Iceland would win, and this would be the last shot of the match. The penalty was missed and Iceland went on to lose, by a single goal, after two periods of extra-time. The rules of the sport thus placed an enormous burden of responsibility on the Icelandic penalty taker. 'If only I had'. But equally, every player in the team must have had at least one shot that might have been taken differently, and would have scored that winning goal.
10. Chad Harbach's otherwise excellent *The Art of Fielding: A Novel* (2012) has to violate this principle for the sake of his story. Needing his underdog heroes to win, they can only do so through a lucky play in a final which is contested over a single game. It is implausible that such underdogs could have ridden their luck through a five or even three match series. But then again, it is implausible that an important baseball competition would be decided in a single game.

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