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Highs and Lows: The Quest for a "Drug-Free" Olympics

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Title: Highs and Lows: The Quest for a "Drug-Free" Olympics

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Abstract. This article analyzes the quest to ensure that Olympic athletes perform without the benefits of performance-enhancing drugs.

While many international political and sports commentators have been addressing the implications of the People's Republic of China being awarded the 2008 Olympic Games, an ongoing and ever intensifying issue is how to prevent Olympic athletes' use of performance-enhancing drugs. Although one might applaud the concerns of Olympic authorities and observers for the health of Olympic athletes, it turns out that health concerns may be only a secondary aspect of the performance-enhancing-drug issue.

Public discourse on performance-enhancing drugs implies that there is such a thing as a natural, drug-free performance state. However, humans are chemically constituted; ingest food and atmospheric substances that are chemically constituted; and think, feel, and behave in a manner that leads to internal, chemical changes.

Moreover, athletes since the beginnings of recorded history have struggled to find and use performance techniques. These techniques have included, but not been limited to, special diets and training and education regimens that have included food, vitamins, meditation, sleep, massed versus distributed practice, exercise of various skills and muscle groups, and focused imagery--all having effects on physiology, anatomy, and, ultimately, performance. The decision to proscribe all non-chemical but not chemical effectors on chemicals would seem arbitrary and bizarre.

Olympic authorities actually allow certain drugs and not others for the purposes of treating disease--thereby often enhancing performance--and to enhance performance. The rationales for proscription vary and include unavailability to all participants; too significant a degree of performance; and, at times, threats to health. These rationales often are conceived and applied inconsistently and even magically--much as the tax structures of many national governments. In fact, drug proscriptions may have much in common with taxes in that they are what must be sacrificed by social participants for a socially constructed common welfare and the privilege of social participation.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, Olympic authorities do not focus on the political, economic, and cultural disparities between national governments that allow the athletes of some countries to consistently outperform those of others. This drug is itself not chemical in nature but both defies the notion of a "natural athlete" and leads to significant physiological, psychological, and anatomical differences bearing on performance. As with the larger illicit drug war that (1) spares the death-philic substances of alcohol and tobacco, (2) poisons environments, (3) imprisons the underprivileged and politically unconnected, and (4) discounts the good that illicit substances may furnish, the Olympic quest for drug-free performance spares accounting for the wretched of the earth. (See DeMares, R. (2000). Human peak experience triggered by encounters with cetaceans. *Anthrozoos*, 13, 89-103; Gerhardt, S. (2001). The myth of self creation. , 329-343; Gilovich, T., & Eibach, R. (2001). The fundamental attribution error where it really counts. *Psychological Inquiry*, 12, 23-26; Hausknecht, M. (July 20,

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