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Adventure, climbing excellence and the practice of 'bolting'

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In this paper we examine a recent version of an old controversy within climbing ethics. Our organising topic is the 'bolting' of climbing routes, in particular the increasing bolting of routes in those wilderness areas climbing traditionalists have customarily believed should remain bolt-free. The issues this raises extend beyond the ethical, however, encompassing a wider normative field that concerns individual ideals, the values and goals of different climbing practices and communities, as well as various aesthetic and environmental matters. This makes any assessment of the acceptability of bolting a complex affair, requiring not only the identification of relevant considerations and arguments but also some way to evaluate their comparative significance.

Here, though, we limit our discussion somewhat. We begin by explaining what bolting involves and then introduce some of the general issues it raises by considering as a concrete example disagreements about the acceptability of bolting in what has until recently remained a bastion of the bolt-free ethos – Scottish winter climbing. Secondly, we examine the roles of excellence and adventure in arguments for and against bolting respectively, concluding that defensible cases can be made on both sides of the debate. Thirdly, we present a new argument for a presumption towards traditional climbing in the Scottish Mountains, by implication arguing that the use of bolts should be restricted.

1. Bolting

Climbing comprises a multifaceted set of practices or games, each with their own methods, styles, goals and ideals.[1] Our focus is on two such games – those which deploy bolts and those that come into conflict with those which deploy bolts. We begin by ex-

plaining both ‘bolting’ and ‘bolted climbing’.

Bolting is the practice of drilling into the climbing medium permanent metal rungs, which climbers then use to aid and protect their ascent. A climber clips one karabiner from an ‘extender’ (usually a short sling attached to two karabiners) onto each bolt reached and places the rope to which he or she is attached through the second karabiner. The climber is belayed by a partner, so that in the event of a fall the climber drops only the distance above the last bolt clipped plus the same distance below the bolt (if two meters above a bolt, the climber falls four meters in total). Bolted climbing is one form of ‘sport climbing’, this being any form of climbing deploying fixed (pre-placed and/or permanent) protection. Because bolted protection is reliable, bolted climbing is relatively safe. With the element of danger reduced, sport routes facilitate climbing at an increased level of technical difficulty, this typically being one of its constitutive aims. What we shall call ‘traditional’ climbing, in contrast, involves placing one’s own protection (‘natural protection’) to safeguard progression, the second climber on the rope removing it during ascent. Risk is part and parcel of traditional climbing. Not only is the availability of protection often sporadic, the quality of protection is only as good as the climbing medium allows and the climber’s skill in placing it. These two factors increase the likely severity of a fall.

In many countries, bolting is an accepted and commonplace practice.[2] In others, like Britain (perhaps especially Scotland), there remains a default presumption against it. Despite this presumption, recent years have seen the development of sport climbing venues on crags and cliffs in Scotland. While many, if not most, traditionalists now at least tolerate established sport venues, they do oppose expanding the repertoire. A recent development they find especially worrying is the creation of sport venues for win-

ter climbing in Scotland.[3] To give a flavour of some of the issues involved in the debate generally, we concentrate on the Scottish case, paying particular attention to the inadequacy of existing legislation.

One of the key issues concerns what would count as a suitable sport climbing venue. In its most recently drafted *Code of Good Practice* (2004), the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS) accepts 'that there is a place for both sports style and traditional style climbs in the future development of Scottish climbing, both in winter and summer'. (Howett, 2004:13) It suggests nevertheless that bolting be restricted so to ensure that the 'highly regarded ethos of, and future development of, traditional climbing is not diminished by the development of new sport climbing venues'. (Howett, 2004: 13) This seems initially ambiguous between whether the future development of new sport climbing venues is to be restricted on the grounds that it does, in fact, diminish the ethos and development of traditional climbing, or whether it is to be restricted only *if* it were to diminish this highly regarded ethos and development. With respect to the first reading, we can note at least one source of conflict: protagonists of the competing climbing styles sometimes want to climb in the very same area and on the very same cliffs, though traditional climbers typically do not want to climb in areas proliferate in bolts. Mark Colyvan expresses the tension thus: 'the proper care of an oval on which football and cricket must coexist is a difficult matter. Unlike the cricket/football problem, though, sport climbers and traditional climbers can not come to some agreement on a temporal demarcation, as both wish to climb all year around and the removal and replacing of bolts seasonally would not be practical anyway'. (Colyvan 1993:20-1) Given a scarcity of climbing venues within Scotland, we can see that sport climbing does have a damaging effect on the development of traditional climbing, since extensive bolting does, in fact, restrict the space available for the development of further traditional

routes.

In order to alleviate such worries, however, the *Code* presents several criteria which it advises 'should be born in mind by climbers when deciding whether a crag is suitable for the production of sports routes in either summer or winter'. (What it is to 'bear in mind' these criteria is far from obvious – one might of course bear them in mind whilst openly flouting their recommendation.) The criteria focus on the 'character' or 'feel' of the prospective venue, for which a number of determinants are offered. The *Code* tells us that,

> 'The character of a venue is often typified as adventurous (and enhanced) by the wild nature of its surroundings, the imposing nature of the crag, the lack of protection, the seriousness of the approach or descent and the commitment needed from both members of the climbing team'. (Howett 2004: 13)

In contrast,

> 'If the potential quality of the route lies in the technical aspects of the climb rather than the stature or adventurous nature then they may give better quality as sport climbs'. (Howett 2004: 13)

More specifically, the character of a venue depends on the availability of natural protection, the *Code* advising that 'If there is natural protection available then the route has clearly an adventurous nature and should remain bolt free' (Howett 2004: 13). Similarly, 'If the crag has strong natural lines, whether some are well protected and others are not, then the character of the crag can be said to be more adventurous and would be best

remaining bolt free'. (Howett 2004: 13) The *Code* also suggests that 'Some areas may have a strong local or historical anti-bolt ethic and this should be respected' (Howett 2004: 13), and that the 'proximity' of a potential 'sport climb to naturally protected climbs' should not be such as to 'detract from the adventurous nature of the latter' – a criterion which, apparently, will 'determine whether currently unclimbed sections of a partially developed crag would be best left for future [traditional] advances'. (Howett 2004: 13)

These descriptions (the 'wild' and 'imposing' nature of a venue, the presence of 'strong natural lines'), as well as the tone of subsequent advice (that some routes '*may* give better quality as sport climbs', that 'a strong local or historical anti-bolt ethic should be *respected*', that some venues 'would be best remaining bolt free'), leave much to interpretation, indeed much to the interpretation of those with vested interests in precisely these practices. We should not expect an exact science when it comes to deciding on the suitability of a venue for one or other style of climbing. Yet the *Code* is not sufficiently explicit even to guide good Practice in a context most parties would quite reasonably hope to be offered a clear conclusion – the acceptability of bolts in the mountains. It ambivalently declares that 'Under *most* circumstances the placing of bolts is inappropriate on mountain cliffs […] *but there may be exceptions*' (Howett 2004:13, our emphasis). Instructions that explicitly permit exceptions yet fail to clarify what exceptions are acceptable do little – so the proponent of traditional climbing will fear – to protect the traditional ethos and its development.

Furthermore, the criteria offered in the *Code* quite easily permit conflict. On the one hand, the *Code* allows that bolting be permitted on routes lacking natural protection; on the other, it seems to want to restrict bolting to 'low-lying inland crags' – the obvious

thought being that some relatively high-level lines in mountainous areas lack natural protection.[4] Similarly, the *Code* claims that sea-cliffs should generally remain bolt-free; yet some sea-cliffs are not suitable for natural protection and so satisfy one of the Code's criterion for the acceptability of bolting, while also satisfying one criterion for remaining bolt-free. What to do in such circumstances is left open by the *Code* and no further criteria are given to provide practical guidance in these cases.[5]

This lack of specificity in turn gives rise to a further worry, namely that bolting, even on low-lying naturally unprotected crags, leads down a slippery slope to a more pervasive bolting culture. Though we are not wholeheartedly condoning slippery-slope *reasoning*, the recent developments of winter sport venues to which we refer do at least indicate that such worries are not *in practice* unfounded.[6]

So far we have attempted to show that there is a genuine practical conflict between sport climbing and traditional climbing (one which current legislation does little to allay). A full examination of the conflict requires a wide-ranging discussion to which a single paper could not do justice. But having introduced some of the issues, we now consider the role of two values in climbing, excellence and adventure, our aim being twofold: to assess what we believe to be the strongest arguments for and against bolting, and to diagnose perhaps the main source at the heart of the conflict between those on each side of the debate.

2. A perfectionist argument

For many, climbing provides opportunity to escape from the perceived mundanity and petty rules of day to day life. It offers a degree of freedom from the externally imposed

duties and expectations that constrain us in societal life, freedom to pursue our own personal projects in a way unfettered by those constraints. The nature of the projects we do pursue of course shapes and structures how we are able to express such freedom; but given the ethos of freedom which climbing seems to offer, it might in turn be supposed that climbing not only permits individual expression but that it falls beyond the jurisdiction of *any* juridical authority or mandate. As a result, one may be tempted to conclude that if *I* want to bolt routes as part of *my* personal project, that is what *I* am permitted or even entitled to do (or, more interestingly, the issue of permission never even arises). There are a number of obvious worries with such an argument. For one thing, even if one's climbing projects are themselves neither morally perverse nor impermissible with respect to state law, this does not show that they fall outside the jurisdiction of all ethical constraint. The climbing world has its own governing bodies, one role of which is to implement 'rules' that guide and sometimes check practices in such a way that protects the freedoms required for others to pursue their projects. The authority of such bodies may itself be open to dispute; but the issue remains as to whether the practices they rule against are practices one ought not engage in. And insofar as it is plausible to assume that not all climbing practices are acceptable, the question is whether bolting in particular is. To assess this, we need to show that bolting is something climbers have (good enough) reason to do.

We think the strongest pro-bolting argument lies in the suggestion that sport climbing is valuable in virtue of its facilitating the advancing of climbing standards amongst elite climbers. Because sport climbing is pre-protected and relatively safe, it allows climbers to move safely at the limit of their capabilities on routes they would be unable or unwilling to attempt with the less reliable protection traditional climbing affords (the limits in question typically concerning those of technique, strength and endurance).

Climbing harder in turn improves the climber's abilities, fostering the qualities necessary not just to improve their own climbing but also, for those at the top end of the sport, to surpass existing levels of achievement by other climbers. Insofar as technical advances are valuable in their own right, or at least insofar as the kinds of excellence required to make such advances are valuable, the value of sport climbing that makes this possible provides (at least some) reason to allow it. We shall call this the 'perfectionist' argument since it seeks to justify sport climbing by its role in the development of climbing excellence at the elite end of the activity. We develop this argument in the rest of the present section.

An obvious assumption underwriting the argument is that climbing excellence is a valuable or worthwhile aim, at least relative to what is valuable about climbing. While we cannot defend the claim fully here, we find it plausible that, just as the goals of climbing in its various forms are shaped by the climbing community and the climbers that comprise it, the values of climbing are shaped by standards internal to those practices and the climbing community. And one of these values is excellence. Certainly, climbers themselves value improving their own abilities, to which end they challenge themselves with progressively more testing climbs; and those within the climbing community typically regard as admirable those climbers who surpass existing standards of climbing excellence by pushing further the limits of achievement.[7] To this extent, we shall assume that excellence is one value of climbing.

An immediate complication emerges, though. Different climbing games, including sport and traditional climbing, each have their own internal standards by which excellence is measured; and what counts as excellence relative to the standards of one climbing game may not count as valuable by the standards of another. Traditional

climbers, for example, may value the development of standards in traditional climbing yet, if they deride the value of sport climbing, regard its technical advances as valueless. Pro-bolters therefore require an additional assumption if they are to defend the value of bolting in such a way that does not turn solely upon their own pro-bolting preferences (preferences whose value may be in doubt). One way to do this is to show that the advances made through sport climbing are transferable in that they serve to improve the standards of difficulty and excellence achievable on traditional routes. This would demonstrate not only that excellence in sport climbing is valuable with respect to the goals internal to sport climbing, but that such excellence is valuable for traditional climbing too. If they can show this, then even the sport-antagonistic traditionalist, who values developments at the cutting edge of traditional climbing, has reason to value (advances made in) sport climbing. Whether or not these skills are transferable is an empirical matter. With rock climbing, the evidence indicates that they are: not only have standards in traditional climbing advanced in tandem with the progression of standards in sport climbing, the vast majority of the best traditional climbers train on sport routes precisely to develop their technical abilities, power and endurance. With winter climbing, matters are less clear. One view is that winter climbing at the cutting edge requires certain heightened psychological qualities that only experience of leading winter routes traditional style can bring. While any form of climbing requires of the climber a degree of mental control in the face of physical insecurity, the especially insecure terrain and unreliable protection typical of extreme winter climbing requires a level of mental control exceeding that which could be provided through sport climbing. In defence of the perfectionist argument, however, we should note that the plausibility of this objection trades on the assumption that those doing sport routes in order to improve their traditional winter climbing abilities do not already possess, to a suitable degree, the psychological qualities in question. Even if practising winter sport climbs

would not by itself cultivate the skills necessary to succeed at the forefront of traditional winter climbing, by combining the technical benefits of winter sport climbing with their existing experience on hard traditional routes, climbers would improve on the latter. In which case, at least for those already at the cutting edge of traditional winter climbing, the availability of sport routes may well support improvements in traditional climbing after all.

We want to consider two lines of objection to the argument so far, responses to which will serve to constrain its general application. The underlying claim of the perfectionist argument is that sport climbing, in either summer or winter conditions, is *instrumentally* valuable, valuable as a means to improving climbing standards and excellence. A first line of objection is that climbers who create and climb bolted routes, perhaps especially winter sport routes, regard sport climbing as a valuable end in its own right but *not* as a means to the development of standards in traditional climbing. This worry has two aspects. Firstly, one might think that if climbers do not use sport routes as a means to develop their technical ability for traditional climbing, the perfectionist justification for the creation of sport venues, which relies on their being instrumentally valuable, fails. It would fail because the argument goes through only if sport climbing actually has the effect to which it is supposedly a means. (This may be a particularly pressing concern in the present context of Scottish winter climbing, where those currently at the cutting edge of traditional climbing seem reluctant to use winter sport routes as a means.) This raises a number of complications both theoretical and practical, given that the creation of a sport route might prove justified only retrospectively whereas we want to know whether it is now justifiable. Nonetheless, for practical purposes at least, the following line of response to this worry offers a relatively commonsense reply: If bolting is to be acceptable on perfectionist grounds,

those intending to develop sport climbing venues must at least have sufficient reason to believe that such venues will in practice facilitate improved standards at the forefront of traditional climbing. A lot more would need to be said to vindicate this suggestion fully on theoretical grounds. Nevertheless, insofar as it presents a plausible line of response, we now turn to the second aspect of the objection.

The second aspect of the worry is that the actions of somebody who appeals to the perfectionist argument to justify bolting, but who regards sport climbing as an end in its own right and not also as valuable with respect to traditional climbing, would not be justified in bolting. For the perfectionist argument we have presented requires that the justification for sport climbing is grounded just in the advancements it makes possible for traditional climbing. Not only might the motivations of someone who appeals to the perfectionist argument to justify bolts but whose real goal lies elsewhere be somewhat infelicitous, more significantly their actions would not be prospectively justified by the perfectionist argument to which they appeal, since the reasons for which they bolt are not the reasons sanctioned by the perfectionist argument. Together, these two aspects of the overall objection suggest that the perfectionist argument will work only if those who develop sport climbing venues have sufficient reason to believe that such venues will benefit traditional climbers *and* they sincerely intend this effect.

A further objection may be raised, however. Even if sport climbing is instrumentally valuable, in the sense that it serves as *one* means to improvements in standards for traditional climbing, it does not seem to be a *necessary* means. There are, after all, other ways to develop climbing standards – with indoor climbing walls, bouldering, and so on. In which case, the perfectionist argument appears weakened, at the very least

placing the onus on those who favour bolting to provide further argument to demonstrate its acceptability.

The most promising response, we think, is to show that although (outdoor) sport climbing is not the only available means to the advancement of climbing standards, it is nevertheless the best means. Indeed, it is plausible to suppose that climbing on real rock or mixed routes of technical severity similar to or surpassing the standards set at the upper echelon of traditional climbing *is* the most effective form of technical training. Although there may be other ways to develop general strength, for example, the specific kinds of power, endurance and technical skills required for extreme climbing are most effectively developed through climbing itself. Granting that this is so, the perfectionist argument, incorporating the earlier caveats, seems to us defensible. Nonetheless, we should emphasise the limitations of the argument. It does not by itself show that bolting is acceptable. Rather, it provides part of an explanation for why, if bolting is acceptable, it is so. For even if bolting is the best means to developing climbing excellence on traditional routes, the question remains whether that means is itself justifiable. We have been implicitly assuming, for sake of simplicity, that the end of excellence would justify sport climbing instrumentally; yet we have not ruled out the possibility that, despite its instrumental value, other considerations might render it unacceptable. So we think that, while the argument itself is defensible, by itself it yields at best a *prima facie* case for bolting, a fuller assessment of its acceptability requiring consideration of other reasons for and against the practice. In the next section, we introduce a set of arguments against bolting which emerge from considering the role of adventure in climbing.

3. Adventure

It is sometimes suggested, by climbing traditionalists, that in those areas where traditional styles of climbing are the norm, that norm itself supplies a default presumption against bolting. By itself this suggestion is inadequate if intended to justify prohibition; for the very issue just is whether the tradition that norm reflects is a tradition worth defending. To assess this, we need to consider what it is about traditional climbing that is of value and then see how this might form part of an argument against bolting. We focus on one of the central values of traditional climbing – adventure. We first analyse the conception of adventure integral to traditional climbing, and then go on to examine the extent to which bolted climbing lacks adventure before evaluating how this contributes to a case against bolting.

The precise extent to which we think of climbing as adventurous depends on many factors, including not only the nature of the climb itself and the style of ascent deployed, but also its location. Our primary focus is climbing in mountain regions or other remote wilderness areas. In what sense, then, is traditional climbing in such areas to be thought of as adventurous? We begin by distinguishing two relevant components: exploration and risk.

The exploratory nature and value of traditional climbing has two main elements. On the one hand, there remains the possibility to discover new climbing routes, either by discovering cliffs not previously explored or by exploring the potential for new climbs at more established venues. For many, a principal attraction of climbing is being in remote areas, areas where the climber is more likely to be alone – not just far from the madding crowds of other climbers all attempting (sometimes clogging up) the same route, but being able to enjoy the solitude itself. Exploratory climbing of this type serves those who desire remoteness. On the other hand, the process of climbing,

whether pioneering a new route or repeating an established one, can itself be an exploratory process, one that involves route-finding, the assessment of alternative lines, finding suitable placements for protection, and so forth. Again, for many this is a fundamental attraction of climbing.

The other component of adventure comes from the fact that traditional climbing is dangerous (at least potentially) and thus typically involves an element of personal risk. While part of the appeal of traditional climbing is the risk involved, the climber typically seeks to diminish the danger and risk to an 'acceptable level', though without removing it entirely. Climbers do not generally climb under the description *doing something dangerous* but, rather, *overcoming the dangers inherent to the activity*, the aim being to control both the physical danger and one's reactions to it.[8] Although climbers know that injury and death are possibilities, they do not *intend* them, nor climb because it increases their probabilities. Climbing in remote areas is especially committing in that it heightens risk by magnifying the significance -the likely impact and effect- of mistakes. This idea of commitment has both a physical and psychological dimension. Physically, the risks involved in climbing in remote areas are greater, the event of injury typically requiring both greater self-reliance and effort to return safe, the success of self-rescue less assured. The climber of course knows this, their awareness of it adding an important psychological dynamic to the activity: not only can the feeling of risk, occurrent or underlying, be more intense, the degree of focus and mental toughness required to execute the climb is to that extent greater, with the success of achievement in turn more gratifying.

When combined with the kinds of gratification climbers experience upon moving fluently over their medium or else struggling to overcome its obstacles, the exploratory

and risk dimensions of traditional climbing contribute to an aesthetic experience of sorts, at least for those suitably disposed.[9] With bolted climbing, however, certain elements of exploration and risk are either lessened or eradicated entirely, and traditional climbers often remark on how comparatively empty the experience of sport climbing is, even if it sometimes allows for more fluid movement and progression over rock.[10] So in what ways is sport climbing ‘less adventurous’?

On the one hand, there is nothing to stop the sport climber from exploring remote areas and pioneering new (bolted) routes on previously unclimbed lines. Nonetheless, sport climbing is less explorative in two main ways. First, if the bolter climbing a new (previously unbolted) route faces a difficult section from which the traditional climber would retreat, he or she may simply drill a bolt, thereby either removing the obstacle or making it protected and thus safer.[11] Second, once bolts are in place and a bolted route exists, this removes the exploratory element of route-finding, since one just follows the line of metal.[12] One could of course explore ways of linking different bolted routes on the same face, so long as those routes are free of other climbers. Notwithstanding this, not only is this ‘exploration’ constrained by the availability of pre-placed bolts, the prevalence of bolts itself makes the climbing less adventurous by removing both the physical risk and a sense of what climbers often refer to as ‘being out there on the sharp end of the rope’. Although it is possible that those committed to traditional tactics climb a sport line without using the bolts on it, not only would there be a constant reminder of the kind of item to they object, the very presence of bolts, with the added security it offers, changes the nature of both the activity and experience. Climbing in such conditions is less committing, in terms of both the seriousness of the activity and the attitudes thereby required of the climber. For the climber would know that if he or she hits difficulty, reliable protection and/or a pre-established means of escape lie in wait.

In these ways, bolted routes lack the adventure which many think is paramount to climbing itself.

We want now to examine three related arguments against bolting which the appeal to adventure might support. Each is successively less robust in terms of the substantive conclusions they seek to justify, though in turn more defensible. The first argument runs as follows: Climbing is by nature (e.g. essentially) adventurous. If this is the case then climbing is valuable to the extent that it is adventurous. As bolted climbing is not adventurous, it cannot therefore be valuable.[13] There are a number of obvious problems with this argument. One worry is that it relies on the (disputable) assumption that bolted climbing cannot be adventurous in any respect. Under this view, sport 'climbing' is not actually climbing – since if adventure is an essential part of climbing, and if bolted climbing lacks the relevant sense of adventure, then it lacks a feature an activity must have if it is to count as climbing. This position is unsustainable. Insofar as those who use bolts are making movements identical in type to those made by traditional climbers, it is difficult to see why the use of fixed rather than natural protection renders the ascent something other than climbing.

Perhaps, though, we might just remove the problematic first premise, revising the argument as follows: Climbing is valuable to the extent that it is adventurous; bolted climbing is not adventurous; so bolted climbing is not valuable. Even so, the argument is problematic. It is worth drawing attention, firstly, to the phrase in the first premise, 'to the extent that', which is ambiguous. On the one hand, it might mean that climbing is valuable *only if* adventurous; but this is a strong claim, which rules out the possibility that climbing could be a valuable or worthwhile activity in respect of features other than adventure unless it is at the same time adventurous (as we might put it: its being

adventurous would *uniformly* have to serve as both *the* value-providing feature *and* a feature whose presence *enables* any other feature to have value).[14] We find it hard to see how an argument for this could be given. On the other hand, the locution 'to the extent that' might imply that climbing is valuable *in proportion to* the degree of adventure it involves. There is a weaker and stronger version of this claim. The strong version is that the value of climbing is determined *solely* by the degree to which it is adventurous. Yet this is again too strong since it excludes the possibility that climbing is ever valuable in respects other than adventure. Furthermore, it implies that the more adventurous (e.g. dangerous or risky) a climb, the more valuable it is – whereas we would generally expect there to be some rough threshold of danger or risk beyond which the value of a climb diminishes (one only has to think of climbs that turn into (near-)disaster scenarios). The weaker version of the claim is that the more adventurous a climb is the more valuable it is *qua adventure*, at least once possible thresholds at which value diminishes are factored in. This allows that climbing can be valuable in virtue of features other than adventure and that those other features can contribute to its overall value. Note that the second premise of the argument -that bolting is not adventurous- is not something we have argued for; nor are we denying that bolting can be adventurous, or that it can be valuable in further respects. What the anti-bolting argument has to say, though, is that traditional climbing is more valuable than bolted climbing *with respect to adventure*.

These considerations take us on to the third and, to our mind, most plausible of the arguments from adventure against bolting. It runs as follows: Traditional climbing is more adventurous than bolted climbing; so, traditional climbing is more valuable than bolted climbing with respect to adventure. Obviously this relies on the suppressed premise that adventure, or at least adventurous climbing, is valuable. We shall not here

question whether adventure itself is or can be valuable but shall take it for granted. Insofar as climbing is adventurous, then, it is or can be valuable. The phrase 'is valuable' in this context means something like 'is worthwhile' and it should be uncontroversial that traditional climbing is, in respect of adventure, a more worthwhile activity than bolted climbing – in the sense that traditional climbing is generally more conducive to an exploratory experience involving risk, with adventure generally being partly constitutive of the value of traditional climbing. We should nonetheless add a proviso here, that a traditional route is typically more adventurous than a sport route *of similar technical standard*. We are not committed to the view that bolted climbing is never as adventurous as traditional climbing (nor, therefore, that bolted climbing cannot be adventurous in some ways and to some degree); we make the weaker claim that, generally, traditional climbing is more adventurous, and therein valuable with respect to adventure, than bolted climbing.[15]

We find this third argument quite plausible; and few climbers would deny that, in respect of adventure, traditional climbing offers more than bolted climbing. Yet we also acknowledge its limitations. It presents only one way in which traditional climbing is more valuable than sport climbing, with there being many further considerations relevant to a proper assessment of the acceptability of bolting. In the following section we therefore develop a further line of argument in favour of traditional climbing – and, by implication, against bolted routes in the mountains.

4. An argument for the traditional ethos

The argument we advance in this section relies on the idea that valuable activities typically have certain pre-conditions that have to be in place for the valuable activi-

ty to be realisable. Insofar there is a good reason to respect the valuable activity itself there will also be some reason to preserve the relevant pre-conditions. The mode of reasoning that underlies this argument is often found in so-called 'closure-reasoning' in epistemology. We briefly explain the idea behind 'closure-reasoning' and then transfer that idea to the evaluative context.

The idea is that knowledge is closed under known entailment. If you know that *p*, and if you know that *if p then q*, then you know or are in a position to know that *q*. For example, if you know that *it's snowing on the Buchaille Etive Mor* and you know that *if it's snowing on the Buchaille Etive Mor then it's snowing in Glen Coe*, you know or are in a position to know that *it's snowing in Glen Coe*. Most epistemologists accept (some version of) a closure principle; we shall now explore how a similar style of reasoning, in an evaluative context, would support anti-bolting intuitions.

First, let us assume that traditional climbing is valuable and that one way it is so is in virtue of its being adventurous. Now for the value of climbing qua adventure to be realisable, certain conditions must obtain: in particular, there have to be suitably remote traditional climbing venues free from bolts. As an intermediate conclusion, we may say that the relevant realisability conditions for climbing being of value (in virtue of its being adventurous) are themselves valuable. This is the rough analogue of the closure reasoning about knowledge, here applied to the notion of value. The most plausible way in which such conditions are valuable is extrinsically[16] – the value of the mountains being bolt-free depends on the value of adventurous climbing. Now if two valuable courses of action are incompatible with one another in that the realisation of the value of either one excludes the realisation of the value of the oth-

er, the more valuable course of action is the one we have more reason to promote (to protect and/or pursue). In which case, given that on any climbing venue the realisability of the value of traditional climbing *qua its being adventurous* is incompatible with there being sport routes, then assuming that the value of adventure that is part of traditional climbing makes it more valuable than sport climbing, there is a presumption in favour of traditional climbing and thus against sport climbing.

This argument clearly depends on the assumption that the value of adventure that is part of traditional climbing does make it more valuable than sport climbing. Although we have not argued directly for this, it is eminently plausible. For one thing, many sport climbers agree that traditional climbing is a purer and in some sense superior form of climbing to sport climbing. Furthermore, the perfectionist argument *for bolting* that we discussed in the previous section implicitly rests on the claim that the value of sport climbing *derives from* the value of traditional climbing to which it is a means – arguably suggesting that traditional climbing is the ultimately valuable form of climbing. We should add, however, that this reasoning, if defensible, generates only a *prima facie* presumption in favour of traditional climbing, one that may be overridden once other factors about the respective values of the two forms of climbing are factored in. Nevertheless, the argument places the onus on bolters to justify further development of sports venues, for if there is a presumption in favour of traditional climbing in adventurous climbing venues and thereby against sport climbing, the default presumption against bolting remains intact. Much more would need to be said in order to assess the ultimate cogency of the argument. An initial worry with the argument, as it stands, might be that analogous reasoning could be applied in defence of bolting. However, insofar as any such argument would have to show that sport climbing is a more valuable or worthwhile activity

than traditional climbing, we remain sceptical about its prospects.

Our argument has some interesting consequences. If sound, it leads to the elevation of traditional climbing over sports climbing. It would thus call for serious revisions in the *Code of Practice* we criticised earlier; and it may provide the basis for a more instructive and practically informative code which protects the traditional climbing ethos the *Code* claims to represent.[17] Let us stress again, however, that the argument as stated requires further consideration; we leave it in the hope that it presents food for further thought.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed what we regard as the strongest arguments for and against bolting. These arguments focus on the pursuit of two different values –of excellence and of adventure– which underlie sport and traditional climbing respectively. We have shown that, though both arguments are defensible, they do not by themselves conclusively justify or forbid the use of bolts. The considerations in favour of the use of bolts in the second section provided a prima facie case for bolting, though without thereby justifying its use on all climbing venues. In contrast, the argument in the last section is best understood as providing a presumption in favour of traditional climbing at specifically adventurous climbing venues. There are of course other considerations relevant to a full assessment of the acceptability of bolting. Still, we hope that this paper has helped to illuminate the disagreement about bolting by both connecting it to the values underlying the respective activities and identifying some of the arguments that can be advanced on each side.[18]

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[1] See Tejada-Flores 1978 for classic discussion of these different games and the contrasting ideals they represent.
[2] In many continental European countries it is the decision of the first ascencionist whether to place bolts instead of natural protection. For classic discussions of bolting in America (especially Yosemite), see the pieces by Robbins 1978, Harding 1978, Chouinard 1978, Drasdo 1978, each reprinted in Wilson 1978.
[3] We have in mind Beinn Udlaidh (near Crianlarich), a reliable ice climbing venue at an altitude of 850 meters, whose lower tier was bolted in 2004/5 for the purpose of training in relative safety for traditional winter climbing. For heated discussion amongst leading climbers, see for example the online climbing forums www.ukclimbing.com and www.scottishclimbs.com. In what follows, we use the description 'winter climbing' to include those forms of ice and mixed climbing (the latter on a possible combination of snow, ice, rock, frozen turf and the like) involving the use of specialist winter equipment such as ice axes and crampons.
[4] The still contentious bolting in the early 1980's of unprotected lines in between some classic traditional routes at Creag a Bhancair (on Glen Coe's famous Buachaille Etive Mor) gives a concrete example of the kinds of conflict the *Code* leaves open. One explanation for the lack of clarity of the Code might be that it seeks to accommodate (and so legitimate) the continued use of this and other bolted venues.
[5] The bolting of the Arbroath Sea-cliffs was initially regarded as contentious but it has now become a more or less accepted sports climbing venue.
[6] For more on slippery slope arguments, see for example Williams 1995.
[7] Our thought here is analogous to Mill's claim that the only evidence for something being desirable is that people desire it (Mill 1993: 36 / *Utilitarianism* ch.4.3); likewise, the only (or at least best) evidence that climbing excellence is valuable is that climbers value it.
[8] The idea of overcoming dangers by controlling them is a recurring theme in climbing literature. See for example the interviews with Reinhold Messner, Walter Bonatti, Royal Robbins, Votek Kurtyka and Tomo Cesen in O'Connell 1993.
[9] Interestingly, the vast literature on aesthetic experience typically focuses on the experience of the spectator rather than performer. For some recent debate on what it is to have an aesthetic experience, see Carroll 2006 and Iseminger 2006.
[10] In correspondence, the Scottish climber Alastair Robertson suggests that 'Sport climbing is the equivalent of McDonalds compared with Haute Cuisine. It tastes good initially but is quickly forgotten and you are left with a certain emptiness soon afterwards. That said, I quite enjoy going to MacDonald's on occasion and it makes me further appreciate a fine dish!!'
[11] Messner 1978 famously objects to bolting on exactly these grounds, claiming that it involves 'murdering the impossible'. A further consideration relevant in this context is the possibility that future climbers may be able to climb a sports route without bolts, due to which, it is sometimes claimed, bolts should not have been deployed in the first place and/or we have a responsibility to protect potential future climbing lines for future generations. This raises a number of interesting issues that we cannot pursue here.
[12] There are also broadly aesthetic-environmental considerations relevant here – for many climbers, the very sight of metal (or other manmade items) on rock faces detracts from the beauty of the face and thereby spoils the aesthetic experience itself.
[13] Messner (in O'Connell 1993: 22) suggests something like this.
[14] For more on enabling conditions, mainly in the context of normative reasons for action, see Dancy 2004: ch.3.
[15] The rider 'generally' need not be understood purely statistically. See for example Dreier 1990.
[16] In roughly the sense intended by Korsgaard 1983.
[17] This new Code might well render previous bolting venues illegitimate despite its current acceptance. We think that this is a bullet one may have to bite if, as pay-off, a clearer and more precise guide for *future* practise is gained.
[18] We would like to express our gratitude to Mike McNamee, both for giving us the opportunity to develop our thoughts on these issues and for his extremely valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.