

FOREWORD

The thematic dossier of the new issue *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* addresses key issues which inevitably come to mind when one thinks about relationships between sports, games, conflicts and violence. These issues have been studied for a long time in the social sciences, but studies from the philosophical branch are unfortunately rare. I will contend here that philosophy is at the crossroads of different areas of knowledge and that, given this peculiar status, philosophy can tackle questions which social sciences usually leave aside. In this respect, I will aim to show that all the papers collected in this issue introduce novel perspectives on sport and game studies.

Philosopher Yves Michaud noticed that violence is almost impossible to define from a conceptual perspective.¹ Phenomena of violence are so diverse that it is often difficult to find a commonality between them. Indeed, what are the common points between a violent injury during a football game and the use of violent words by supporters, or between the violence of a wrestling fight and the graphic violence of a video game?

Moreover, this difficulty to define violence deeply resonates with the difficulties in defining sports and games. It is well-known that Wittgenstein renounced to define games: for him, there are only “family resemblances” (*Familienähnlichkeiten*) which eventually make games similar despite their apparent (and often important) disparities.² Sports, which can be minimally defined as competitive games involving physical activity, inherit from this definitional debate. Some activities widely regarded and acknowledged as sportive during the 19th century (such as attending an opera³) are now excluded from what we commonly accept as being sports. Are playing chess or video games sports? During the 1980s, French sociologists of the INSEP (*Institut National du Sport, de l'Expertise et de la Performance* / National Institute of Sports, Expertise and Physical Performance) even renounced to define sport.⁴ For them, sport is merely “what people do when they think they do sport”.⁵

Admittedly, this French conception of sport is broad (if not to say blurry), but it points to important and interesting stakes in sociological debates. Since it is difficult to agree upon an unequivocal definition of sport, the definition *per se* becomes subject to conflicts of personal interests and of scientific authority. In the end, social groups oppose each other regarding the legitimacy of their definitions of sports. Partisans of combat sport will not necessarily regard sports the same way athletes do. From the perspective of combat sport, we may indeed wonder what the sportive purpose of long jump is, as there is no direct opponent, no hurting, no direct physical suffering. Besides, partisans of athletics will often not regard motorsport as a “genuine” kind of sport. For, what is the sportive purpose to drive a race car, as it seems—at least, partially—effortless and as the results of the competition will heavily depend on the technical performances of machines? Numerous examples of the same kind could be mentioned here.

¹ Yves Michaud, *Dictionnaire de la philosophie* (Paris : Albin Michel, 2000).

² See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th Edition (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 66, 67.

³ See Eugène Chapus, *Le Sport à Paris* (Paris : Hachette, 1854).

⁴ Regarding this difficulty to define the concept of sport, see William Morgan, *Ethics in sport* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 2007).

⁵ Paul Irlinger, Catherine Louveau, et Michelle Metoudi, *Les Pratiques Sportives des Français : Usage Sportif du Temps Libéré. Compte-Rendu de Fin d'Etude d'une Recherche Entreprise à l'Initiative du Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports* (Paris : INSEP, 1987).

It is worth noting that these debates are not exclusively theoretical but sometimes prompt political decisions which exclude some practices as “non-sportive”. In these instances, the status of violence often becomes the most decisive matter. A good example is the situation of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) as described by Mathieu Quidu’s contribution (“Moral Crusades Against Combat Sports”). Nowadays in France, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is not regarded as a sport because of the extent of its physical violence. However, as shown by Quidu, the degree of violence is not the real reason of MMA’s definition as a “non-sportive” art. Years before the MMA case, many other sports in France have been accused to promote violence and are now fully legitimated and acknowledged as “genuine” kinds of sports (such as boxing or Muay Thai). In fact, MMA plays the role of a “scapegoat,” in part for social reasons, especially to reject people who enjoy this sport and mainly come from underclasses and immigrant people.

The INSEP’s conception of sport—i.e. sport defined as “what people do when they think they do sport”—also shows that people’s common comprehension of sport often depends on a learning and socialization process. From an anthropological point of view, sport is a cultural product, and each culture defines its own understanding of sport accordingly. People who belong to a specific culture implicitly and gradually learn to recognize what sports should be, even though they are often unable to mention clear cut criteria differentiating sportive arts from non-sportive arts. Fabrice Delsahut’s paper (“Violence in North-American Indian Sports Games”) addresses these anthropological topics regarding the Native American game of “lacrosse”. Delsahut’s study opens with the question: are settlers able to recognize lacrosse as a sport? He shows that this question is inseparable from political matters of conflict and domination. From the perspective of the settlers, the critique of violence in lacrosse is nothing but a means to disqualify Native American culture and to reinforce their own political domination.

However, beyond our observations on the strategies of political and social domination concerning the definition of sports, we may ask whether violence could be regarded as a more pivotal and less relative concept in respect to how people usually comprehend what sports are or are not. According to Norbert Elias, sports are part of a “civilizing process”.⁶ He contends that, since Ancient history, societies tend to become less and less violent over time. Sports, Elias further argues, bear the trace of this historical evolution. Ancient Greeks and ancient Romans tolerated a level of violence in their games which bears no comparison with what we see as our most violent sports today. In Ancient Greece, almost no rules limited the violence of *pankration*. Pankration was nearly a no-holds-barred combat. Rivals were allowed to severely injure or even kill their opponent. Some monuments even represent the champions of *pankration* who literally destroyed their opponents, such as the statue of Acrochorsites who was famous for his ability to break the fingers of his opponents in his hands.⁷ As for the circus games in Ancient Rome, their cruelty is well-known.⁸ Violence in games is already somewhat lessening during the Middle-Ages. For instance, in tournaments the participants’ death will become less and less tolerated. In France, tournaments will be banned after the accidental death of Henri II during a joust in 1559.⁹

Nowadays, sports are much less violent. Even individuals accustomed to our most cruel modern spectacles would certainly be disgusted by pankration or circus games. Mixed

⁶ Norbert Elias et Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1986).

⁷ Christian Habicht, *Pausanias' Guide to Ancient Greece*, Reprint (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 18.

⁸ Paul Veyne & Brian Pearce, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (London: Allen Lane, 1990).

⁹ Thierry Terret, *Histoire du sport* (Paris : PUF, 2007); Raymond Thomas, *Histoire du sport* (Paris: PUF, 1991).

Martial Arts seem violent, but their violence is contained by numerous rules and restrictions, as shown by Robin Delory, Pascal Roland and Olivier Sirost in their paper “Mixed martial arts: Civilizing or decivilizing process?”. MMA has nothing in common with the ancient *pankration*. However, compared to more contemporary forms of sports and games, does MMA provide evidence a civilisation process? Based on a bibliometric analysis of studies about MMA, Delory’s study raises serious doubts on the civilizing process hypothesis and argues that MMA is rather part of a “decivilizing process¹⁰”; rather than pacification, it gives way to a gratuitous “quest for excitement”.

Elise Defrasne’s paper (“The Concealment of Violence in the History of Fencing”) also tackles the question of the historical lessening of violence through sport. Nowadays, fencing is perceived as an educative sport teaching good values to its practitioners. However, Defrasne argues that the fencing community tends to forget and to make forget its violent history in order to achieve its pedagogical aims. Lethal duels are the direct historic ancestors of fencing. Fencers’ locomotory habits are the same as their forebears who learned how to kill their opponents with a sword. Hence, Defrasne’s paper is asking: is it enough to get rid of the lethal aspects of fencing to turn it into a peaceful kind of sport?

In his sociological writings, Elias also aims to explain how sports teach individuals to control their violent drives and aggressive urges. According to Elias, there is a “quest for excitement” which prompts individuals to express their violence even and especially when society tries to pacify itself. The end of violence in modern society implies a psychological price that individuals must pay. Although the human urge of aggression cannot be let free in our modern societies, it is nonetheless ineliminable and must find a way to express itself. Sports have an important social role to play as they channel the violence humans want to inflict on their fellow beings towards acceptable and (more or less) harmless activities.¹¹ Catching someone by the pelvis to make him fall on the ground is forbidden in the current social life. But it is allowed and even encouraged to do so in a rugby stadium. People who cannot help hurting others can vent out their aggressive tendencies in socially-tolerated sportive activities. Given that aggressive tendencies are expressed and contained in sport stadiums, they will constitute a lesser threat to the peace of men’s social coexistence. It is not risky to state that Freud would have probably compared Elias’s thoughts to his theory of “sublimation”.¹² Aristotle’s concept of “catharsis”¹³ also bears strong resemblance with Elias’s theories.

But, according to Elias, sports are more than a simple means to “let off steam”. In stadiums, sportsmen’s aggressiveness is not a merely haphazard phenomenon; sportsmen must obey to rules. Violence in stadiums is regulated. Sports are not like anarchy, but are more similar to liberalism, as people are free to do what they want to as long as they obey to a minimal set of rules.¹⁴ Obviously, some sports are more regulated than others and their effects on players probably differ. But the fact remains that players must show that they are able to be self-disciplined—otherwise they run the risk to be punished by judges and referees. This learning process of self-discipline is central in Elias’ analysis. Sport is an important key in the “civilizing process,” because it teaches players how to control their urges and drives—a capacity of self-control that they are encouraged to maintain even

¹⁰ Raúl Sánchez García et Dominic Malcolm, “Decivilizing, civilizing or informalizing? The international development of Mixed Martial Arts,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45/ 1 (February 24, 2010): 39-58.

¹¹ Georges Vigarello, *Du jeu ancien au show sportif* (Paris : Seuil, 2002).

¹² Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition* (New York: Verso, 2017), 100-101, 189-90.

¹³ Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), 49b-50b.

¹⁴ Raphaël Verchère, *Travail, Ordre et Discipline : la Société Sportive et ses Tensions* (Université Jean-Moulin-Lyon 3, 2012), <http://www.theses.fr/2012LYO30051> (accessed November 30, 2018).

outside of the stadiums. As a result, players would more generally learn to behave like exemplary citizens. In his paper “The Gentle Way. Maximising Efficacy and Minimizing Violence in Judo,” Dario Mazzola offers a vivid illustration of this theory. Although judo appears as a fight-focused practice, Mazzola argues that it can be regarded as a non-violent sport and, perhaps, as non-violent *tout court*.

But under which conditions could martial arts be non-violent? This specific issue is addressed by Rodney Douglas Eadie’s paper “Samurai Culture and Christianity”. René Girard’s thoughts on Christianity are the starting point of Eadie’s contribution. By unveiling the founding murder at the origin of culture through the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the revelation of the scriptures is leaving us with no other alternative than a complete renunciation of violence. However, this renunciation shall not be confused with a mere denial. On the contrary, Girard argues that men must lucidly confront their responsibilities regarding their own violence. In this respect, it is Eadie’s contention that Samurai culture and Christianity might, notwithstanding their differences, supplement each other. According to him, the practice of Martial Arts guided by Christian principles could help societies to live more peacefully and responsibly.

Violence not only occurs in stadiums but also in the grandstands. Therefore, philosophical inquiries into violence in sports and games shall not be solely focused on the players. As shown by hooliganism and soccer stampede disasters, numerous issues are raised by the aggressive behaviour of spectators. The links between sport events and the violence of supporters is complex and have been subject to various studies. In France, notable studies on violence among soccer supporters have been written by Patrick Mignon.¹⁵ But most studies are centered on European or Western phenomena. In “Ultras in the City,” Abderrahim Bourkia addresses the question of violence among supporters with respect to Moroccan soccer. In his novel and thought-provoking paper, Bourkia shows that the violence of “Ultra” phenomena in Morocco obeys to similar sociological principles of group-identification as in Western countries, such as the union of supporters against a hated and stereotypical enemy, violence in stadiums as a continuation of a broader social violence by other means, and the unanimous detestation of the state and its institutions

Another question pertaining to spectators’ attitudes is the aesthetic significance of violence in sport or game shows. What makes violence appealing to large audiences? In “When Violence Became Beautiful,” Boryana Angelova-Igova notices that violence commonly tends to be excluded from sport and games. However, she also observes that, under certain conditions, spectators’ perception of violence can be shaped by aesthetic categories. Violence is constitutive of what an athlete is, as the purpose of sports is always about a “fight” against others, against oneself, against the natural elements. In a similar vein as Norbert Elias, Angelova-Igova shows that violence in sports becomes legitimated when it is framed within specific sets of rules. By the same token, she contends that some commonalities between sport and art exist. Art, like sport, is exploring the possibilities to make beauty with violence (e.g. the Viennese actionist Günter Brus often voluntarily injured himself during his art performances).

Yet, how can sports act as a peacemaker if their violence appeals to spectators? As I aim to show in my contribution, “Was Pierre de Coubertin a pacifist?,” there is a paradoxical relation between violence and sport which can be traced back to the historical origins of modern sports. On the one hand, one of the main concerns of Pierre de Coubertin—the founding founder father of Olympism—was to promote peace by means of sport and the “laying down of arms” during the Olympic Truce. On the other hand, Pierre de Coubertin also promoted sports as a propaedeutic to warfare and as a training for future soldiers in his

¹⁵ See for example Patrick Mignon, “Supporters et hooligans en Grande-Bretagne depuis 1871,” *Vingtième siècle. Revue d’histoire* 26 (1990) : 37-48.

own writings. My study delves into this paradox and is followed by Pierre de Coubertin's paper (never before published in English) "Sports and Warfare" (1912).

It is not entirely clear whether sports might protect us from our own violence or reinforce it. This issue is vividly illustrated by our contemporary debates regarding violence against animals. In his studies on sport, Elias' main focus was violence that humans inflict between themselves and he did not pay much attention to the question of violence towards animals. However, it is worth noting that games involving animals were (horse races are actually the starting point of the modern history of sport¹⁶) and still are extremely common. For some years, the "corrida" and other types of bullfighting are accused of their cruelty towards animals and some states already banned them (from Argentina at the end of the 19th century to the Mexican states of Sonora, Guerrero and Coahuila in the 2010s). But are animals merely treated as objects in corrido contests? In his paper "The Ethical Status of the Bull in Corrida," philosopher Francis Wolff argues that Spanish-style bullfighting is far from being immoral as it places the toreador and the spectators within a specific ethical relation to the bull. Instead of merely defining the bull as an animal which passively endures its suffering, the principles of corrido give the bull the specific moral dignity of an opponent taking part in a fair fight.

A diametrically opposite perspective from Wolff's is introduced by Sam Morris in "Violence Among Beasts". In his study, Morris first observes that games are like a second world. Games give rise to a supra-reality which, exception made for the enjoyments it may bring, is unnecessary and useless. While human beings can take part at the secondary world created by games and give consent to the violence it may entail, this is not at all the case for animals. Morris concludes that it is immoral for men to involve animals in their violent games. In violent games as "corrida," the beasts are rather the human participants and spectators as the tortured animals. I am sure that Wolff's and Morris' divergent perspectives and arguments will give rise to interesting discussions regarding animal ethics.

As mentioned at the beginning of this foreword, it is difficult to accurately define violence as a concept. However, from a phenomenological point of view, we have the tendency to call violence whatever is harming us. In our most intimate and personal understanding, violence is not necessarily caused by another subject. If we endorse this perspective, then violence is foremost something we experience in a first-person point of view in our mind and body. Sports are also about the way in which players personally deal with their own suffering by trying to overcome them. In the French language, we commonly say of great champions who try to overcome their limits that they are hurting themselves (*"ils se font mal"*). We also say of someone who struggles to overcome his own personal and physical limits that he inflicts violence on himself (*"se faire violence"*). Indeed, the aim of some conceptions of sport is trying to reach the limits of body and soul. As stated by Pierre de Coubertin, sport is "a regular and volunteer cult of intensive muscular effort which is prompted by a desire for progress and which does not shy away from risk."¹⁷ In the personal journey of sportsmen, the violence of the training and of surpassing oneself through repeated efforts are topics which cannot be ignored. In addition, we shall also not forget that, for them, the risk of injuries is never far away. In this respect, Bernard Andrieu's paper, "Injuries in Circus Arts: A Philosophical Inquiry," studies the case of circus artists who severely injure themselves during their trainings or live performances. In his analysis, Andrieu distinguishes between two levels of reality of the human body. On the one hand,

¹⁶ Eugène Chapus, *Le Sport à Paris* (Paris : Hachette, 1854) ; Jean-Jules Jusserand, *Les Sports et jeux d'exercice dans l'ancienne France* (Paris : Plon-Nourrit, 1901).

¹⁷ "Le sport est le culte volontaire et habituel de l'exercice musculaire intensif incité par le désir du progrès et ne craignant pas d'aller jusqu'au risque." Pierre de Coubertin, *Pédagogie sportive [1919]* (Paris : Vrin, 1972), 7.

there is the lived body, that is to say, the body we access through our consciousness. On the other hand, there is the living body, that is to say, the body *per se*, which has its own life independently from consciousness. Human consciousness does not have a clear access to the living body, and the living body is irreducible to the lived body. In other words, numerous phenomena occurring in our body remain unconscious. Notwithstanding, Andrieu contends that consciousness can get access to the information of the living body through a process he calls “emersiology”. By means of a set of techniques referred to as “somatechny”, individuals could find a way to sketch what is occurring in the living body. The work of the late Michel Foucault (especially his posthumous book *Confessions of the Flesh*¹⁸) describes techniques of self-health which are implicitly used by circus’ artists when they are injured after trainings of live performances. Those techniques may help in establishing a new relationship to the living body and in recovering from physical injuries. In other words, through Foucault’s techniques, circus artists may achieve a certain control over their own bodies and, thereby, learn to more calmly endure and face the violence entailed by their own art.

The multiple and deep-rooted relations between sports, games, conflict and violence also influenced movies and novels, such as *Rollerball*, *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?*, *The Hunger Games*, *Any Given Sunday*, *Blade Runner*, *Dodgeball*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *Rocky*, *W* etc. In his early career, Stephen King wrote his famous dystopian novel *The Long Walk* (1979) under the pen name of Richard Bachman.¹⁹ In “Stephen King’s Near-Future Critique of Sport and Contemporary Society,” Fred Mason shows that King not only criticized negative trends in contemporary sport (violence, professionalism, media coverage), but also anticipated the most worrisome developments of sports entertainment – such as reality sports – which were only embryonic in the late seventies.

Although the pivotal role of television and the internet regarding sports entertainment is well-known²⁰, academic research rarely tackles the question of the impact of small monitors and computer screens on the relation between sport and violence. Moreover, the current tendency of sports and games to conquer virtual worlds and virtual reality is scarcely explored by philosophers. It is important to note that, nowadays, *ESports* (i.e. competitive or professional video-gaming) are seriously competing with more traditional kinds of sport in terms of media coverage, audience rates and financial profit. It is also interesting to notice that even video games which are not sport simulations can be played as if they were sports and give way to contests and championships in the same vein than more traditional kinds of sport.

I am glad to have edited this thematic dossier for the *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence*. Each paper in this dossier is thoroughly researched and offers novel perspectives on topics which have often been too much neglected by contemporary academia. A fresh mind and philosophical scrutiny are the common qualities of the authors who contributed to this dossier. I hope readers will enjoy this collection of papers and that they will regard it as a valuable resource for understanding the various and complex relations between sports, games, conflict and violence.

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¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Les Aveux de la Chair* (Paris : Gallimard, 2018).

¹⁹ Stephen King, *The Long Walk [1979]* (New York: Gallery Books, 2016).

²⁰ Richard Giulianotti, “The Fate of Hyperreality: Jean Baudrillard and the Sociology of Sport,” in *Sport and Modern Social Theorists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

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